

Evaluation of the Community First Neighbourhood Matched Fund

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Summary

1 Summary

1.1 Introduction

This report presents findings from the evaluation of the Community First Neighbourhood Matched Fund programme. Ipsos MORI and NEF consulting were commissioned to conduct an evaluation of the Community First programme by the Cabinet Office. The same team also evaluated the Community Organisers programme in recognition of the close relationship between the two programmes.

The programme has been evaluated to understand process effectiveness and the social impact achieved. The evaluation included both primary and secondary data collection and analysis. The core aspects were online surveys of Panel members and those leading funded projects, longitudinal community-based case studies, and analysis of management information and secondary data. As such, this report is based on both quantitative and qualitative data.¹

Following this summary the report presents programme information and evaluation findings across the following sections:

- 2** Background and evaluation scope
- 3** Programme assumptions and strategic context
- 4** Methodology and methodological limitations
- 5** Process effectiveness
- 6** Understanding social outcomes
- 7** Key lessons learnt
- 8** Appendices

Community First (CF) was an £80 million programme to fund new and existing community groups. The programme was in two parts, the Neighbourhood Matched Fund and the Endowment Match Challenge. The Endowment Match Challenge is outside of the scope of this evaluation.²

The Community First Neighbourhood Matched Fund was a small grants programme targeting deprived wards. The programme was designed to address four overarching problems:

- 1** The value of community assets and volunteering are not fully or adequately recognised by local communities or traditional grant funding.

¹ Further details of the methodology are available in Appendix 1.

² Throughout this report we refer to Community First (including using the acronym CF) in relation to the Neighbourhood Matched Fund element of the programme only.

- 2 Local communities do not have enough influence over funding decisions affecting their neighbourhood.
- 3 Community groups and projects face barriers to accessing small grant funding.
- 4 Government funding is not leveraged effectively enough to support community groups and projects.

The Community First programme built on the Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which uses the resources, abilities and insights of local residents to address problems, while still offering outside assistance in a support role³. Crucially, the programme took a devolved, light touch approach throughout its design. Its key features were:

- **Decision making was local** – around 600 Community First Panels, made up of local people, set funding priorities and decide which projects should receive funding in their area.
- **Funding was matched** – every £1 provided by the Government needed to be matched by at least the same amount in donations, which could be cash, services, free products or volunteer time.

The expectation was that the promise of matched funding would encourage people to give time, expertise and resources towards projects that address needs in their local area. In this way government funds would have been used with the aim of stimulating local action in neighbourhoods with significant deprivation and low social capital.

The Community First programme was delivered through a combination of central administrative and support functions by the Community Development Foundation (CDF), local decision making by Panels of volunteers, and further support and oversight for each Panel provided by a Panel Partner (typically a local voluntary or community organisation).

Each panel established a Community First Plan including priorities for their area, and then used these priorities to make decisions about projects that applied to receive funding. The programme used an online system, developed by programme delivery partners CDF, for managing all key aspects of programme delivery.

Just under £30 million in grant funding has been made available to Community First Panels across the four years of the programme. Panels identified and recommended projects for funding of up to £2,500 in line with agreed priorities. All grant funding was matched by the community.

³ <http://www.engage.northwestern.edu/ABCD/index.html>

Panels were required to engage the local community in the programme and ensure transparency by updating a dedicated website (and other communications channels where possible).

1.2 Process effectiveness

The Community First programme incorporated three distinct process elements:

1. **Establishing Panels and priorities** – setting up Panels and establishing priorities for funding decisions.
2. **Local reach and decision making** – raising awareness of the funding opportunities, identifying projects for matched funding, receiving and reviewing applications, making funding recommendations.
3. **Programme oversight and central administration** – administrative, support and monitoring mechanisms.

The evaluation findings provide evidence about the effectiveness of these three process elements, with analysis examining how well the programme has delivered its intended outputs, including establishing the Panels and the number and value of matched funding grants made.

1.2.1 Establishing Panels and priorities

The evidence shows that, despite some challenges, the implementation of the Community First programme has worked well at a local level. Panels were established in almost all the local areas selected, and have made £27.2 million in funding recommendations to 17,956 projects. This has yielded £93 million in matched funding, including just over £15.3 million in cash match, and over 5.5 million volunteering hours.⁴

As a result of significant effort locally and support from the Young Foundation and CDF, a large majority of Panels had functioning websites by Year 3 of the programme, and almost all Panels had a signed off Community First Plan – these were key mechanisms for ensuring local transparency and involvement.

Evaluation evidence indicates that the programme successfully delivered funding against local needs. Community First Plans were co-developed with communities – written with the input of experienced individuals based on existing evidence, as well as additional consultation with the community to identify community priorities. There is also good evidence that the priorities outlined in Community First Plans have been addressed through the

⁴ Funding recommendation and matched funding figures are based on total recommendations submitted to CDF at the end of January 2015 and are subject to revision. These figures do not, therefore, necessarily reflect the actual amount of grant funding received by funded projects or the matched resource realised as a result of this – but they represent the most accurate assessment that has been made.



You've got to be confident enough to say 'this is the reason you didn't get it, and you didn't do this and this'. You can point them to the website so they can see what was missing.

Panel member



projects funded. Indeed, the overall progress in making funding recommendations demonstrates the demand for small grants relevant to the priorities set by Panels.

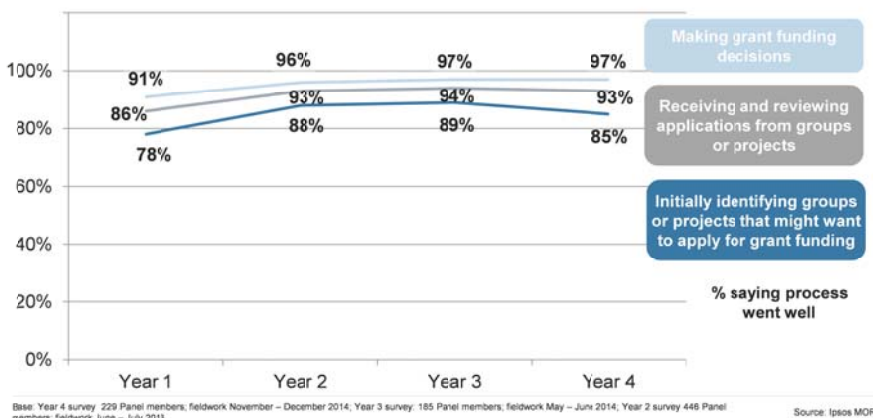
Nine in ten Panel members (91%) said that the applications they received were always or very often relevant to the priorities set. Where project applications did not meet the relevant priorities, Panels were clearly confident about rejecting them on this basis; three in five (60%) said that at some point their Panel had done so.⁵

1.2.2 Local reach and decision making

Panel members were positive about the main processes they were involved with, and this generally improved after Year 1 as Panels became more familiar with the programme and their role. They were especially positive about making funding decisions (see Figure 1.1). Indeed, there was a near-unanimous view that this process had worked well (97% of Panel members said it had done so). Panel members were also very positive about receiving and reviewing applications.

Figure 1.1 – How well the processes worked for each year of the programme

Overall, how well, if at all, did each of the following processes work in Year 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the programme?



Initially identifying projects that could benefit from Community First funding was the aspect seen as most difficult. Although not seen as a major issue, qualitative feedback suggests that some Panels were less clear on how to find and reach suitable projects, particularly beyond those they already knew about. As such, an important way projects were identified was by Panel members leveraging their existing networks. Four in five Panel members (80%) said they had done so in the final year of the programme.⁶

Panels used more approaches in the final year of the programme, providing evidence that they gained experience of how to identify potential projects as the programme progressed (see Figure 1.2). Panels also employed more



We contacted local schools and community centres and found out which groups were using them, and then contacted the groups to see if they were interested in applying

Panel member



⁵ Base: Year 4 Survey, 229 Panel members, September – November 2014

⁶ Base: Year 4 Survey, 229 Panel members, September – November 2014

direct methods including press releases or publicity in local newspapers. Searching for suitable projects on the internet or using local directories increased over time too, with one in five using this approach by Year Four.

Indeed, by the final year, local publicity had become a more significant way to reach potential projects. This was increasingly through Panels' own websites (62% used this approach) – though evidence from the survey of project leaders suggests that Panel websites were most useful once projects had already heard about the programme.⁷

It is clear that many Panels worked hard to promote the programme more widely in their communities; as a result, a large majority of Panel members (88%) said they had received applications from people they did not previously know.⁸

In the longitudinal case studies, some Panel members reflected that the lack of funding for communication activities within the programme was a barrier to reaching beyond their existing networks – a lesson for future programmes.

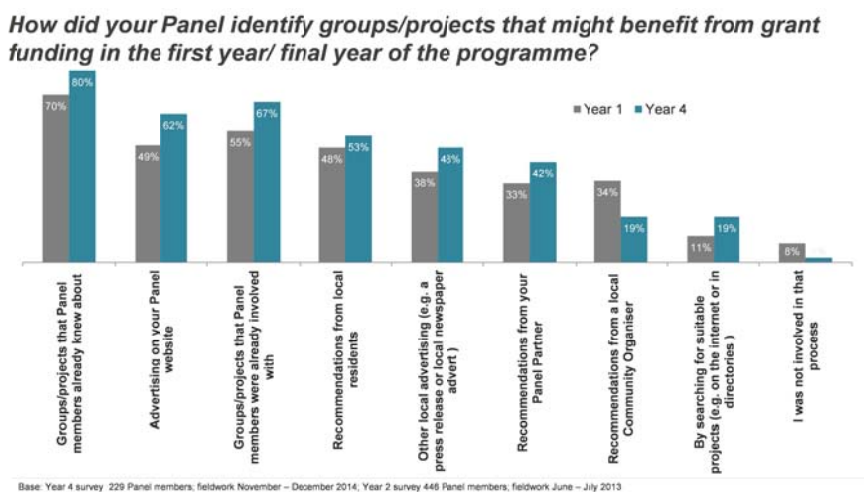


Community First has been a brilliant programme for people in this area because it gives them the help, support and encouragement they need to get involved and take an active part in their community.

Panel member



Figure 1.2 – Methods for identifying groups/projects in Year One and Year Four



Existing experience and networks were crucially important to the success of the programme. Many of those involved have been willing to go beyond what they understood to be the basic requirements of their respective roles. Panel members with community development experience and Panel Partners have in many cases provided a great deal of administrative support and guidance to less experienced Panel members and to projects making funding applications. Leveraging and better recognising existing networks was an important aspect of the rationale for the programme.

⁷ Base: Year 4 survey, 952 Projects, November – December 2014

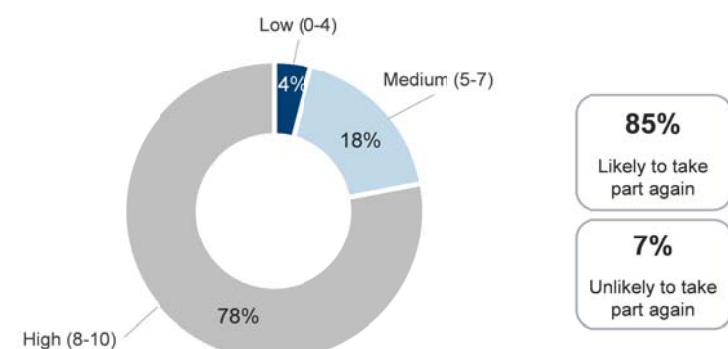
⁸ Base: Year 4 Survey, 229 Panel members, September – November 2014

A large majority of Panel members (78%) found taking part in Community First very worthwhile and even more (85%) said they would get involved if a similar opportunity arose again. Only a small number (7%) said they would be unlikely to do so (see Figure 1.3).

Once awards were made by Panels, all project monitoring was conducted centrally. In a few case studies, Panels members said they would welcome greater responsibility for monitoring the success of the projects funded through the programme. Some ongoing local role for Panels might have provided additional useful feedback to Panel members on the impact of their decisions. However, not all would have welcomed this additional responsibility.

Figure 1.3 – Overall views of taking part (Panel members)

Overall, how worthwhile have you found being a Panel member on your local Community First Panel? Please answer using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'Not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'Completely worthwhile'?



Base: Year 4 survey 229 Panel members; fieldwork September – November 2015

Source: Ipsos MORI

There is evidence that for a minority of the individuals involved, the programme entailed a larger commitment than they had envisaged. Some said that there was not enough support (both locally and centrally) and that this had resulted in them or others feeling overburdened by the programme.

In most communities, experienced individuals were available to provide assistance to Panels and projects. However, administering the programme was more difficult in the absence of good local support. Furthermore, attracting new people to become involved (as Panel members or by applying for funding) was more challenging, particularly as there were no specific mechanisms within the programme to require or encourage this. There were examples of Panels successfully broadening their reach in order to recruit new Panel members and encourage new projects to apply for funding. For example some formed partnerships with schools, community centres and other local organisations.

1.2.3 Oversight, central administration and support

At the core of the programme's design was the use of an online system that allowed for a low cost and light touch approach to central administration when compared with more traditional offline approaches. A key programme



We're really proud that our organisation enabled £80,000 investment into the local area... but we'd have to think really carefully about how we would allocate the staff time against it [in the future].

Panel Partner



assumption was, therefore, that an online administration system would be suitable for this programme and did not present a significant barrier to those with lower levels of digital skills/experience, and in fact might even promote digital inclusion.

The evidence suggests that the online administration system has usually been manageable for those participating in the programme, either due to their own existing skill levels or via support from other programme participants. Of the Panel members who had themselves used the online system, around two thirds (64%) said they found the requirement to complete forms online easy, while around one in five (22%) said they found it difficult.⁹

Support with the online system was often required for both funded projects and Panel members. This support has come from different sources, including CDF, Panel Partners, and Panel members (the latter particularly for projects).

I found (the online administration) really refreshing, most of the time it's worked really well... some people struggled and we've guided them through the process.

Panel Partner

There was also evidence of increased confidence in IT skills linked to involvement with the programme. Fewer than half (46%) of Year Four project leads said they had been highly confident using websites and other IT before applying for Community First funding. In the same survey, the proportion who said they were now highly confident using websites and other IT was almost two thirds (64%).¹⁰ Despite this increase in confidence there were some examples of online administration being difficult for both Panels and projects.

CDF assumed people have PCs at home and some groups don't so have struggled with the paperwork.

Panel member

Where central or local support has been received this was generally viewed positively, including from CDF. However, there were some frustrations among Panels about perceived changes in how specific aspects of the process worked as the programme continued. Specific examples included the nature of the Community First plan and requirements for projects to complete particular forms to access funding. Qualitative feedback suggests there was also a perception in the final year of the programme that CDF became harder to contact as the specific staff involved changed ahead of the end of the programme.

Finally, Panel members and projects felt there was at times a lack of clarity around decision and payment deadlines. This led to added stress,

⁹ Base: Year 2 survey, 220 Panel members, May – July 2013

¹⁰ Base: Year 4 survey, 952 Projects, September – October 2014

particularly for project applicants from smaller groups with no funding reserves to draw on.

“You hear you’ve got the money, you book the hall then... you still haven’t been paid and you cancel the hall and lose your deposit. We’ve had projects that... had to dip into their own money to fund it.”

Panel member

1.3 Understanding social outcomes

The Community First programme was designed to have positive impacts on direct programme participants and the wider community as a result of programme and grant funded activities.

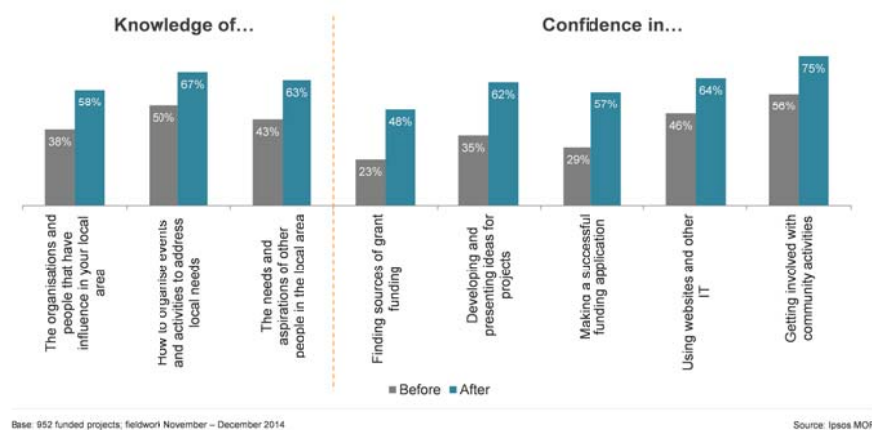
The evaluation findings provide evidence about the extent to which the intended social outcomes have been realised and the key success factors and barriers to doing so.

1.3.1 Individual outcomes – Panel members and funding applicants

The evidence is that both Panel members and project leads applying for funding have experienced improvements in the skills and knowledge needed to effectively self-organise and address local needs (see Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4 – Personal impacts on knowledge and confidence (projects)

Projects answering highly (between 8 and 10) when asked about their knowledge and confidence before and since starting work with the Community First Panel



Panel members often already had relevant skills and experience, but they felt being involved with Community First has benefited them. In particular, there is evidence of increased confidence around making funding decisions and improved knowledge of, and working with, the local community. The programme has also built confidence among successful projects, increasing the number of community groups working together, encouraging them to apply for funding from other sources.

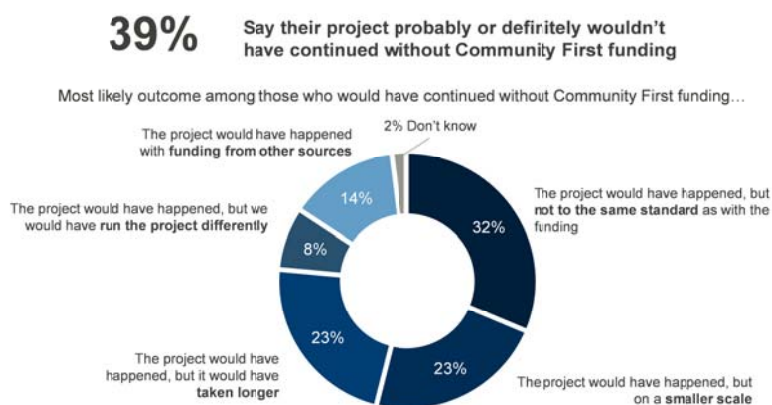
1.3.2 Community outcomes – community activity and impacts on the local community

Community First matched funding also helped to generate new community activity and use of resources. There is evidence of some new groups being formed, as well as the funding allowing organisations to start new activities, or improve or extend their existing activities, for example by involving new people.

Funding has focused predominantly on existing groups, with Community First grants in many cases used to sustain existing activity, especially important during the economic downturn and subsequent recovery over which the programme ran. Overall, 92% of applicants were from existing groups. However, 45% of projects said that the funding helped them begin completely new activities.

Without funding, two in five projects (39%) said their project would not have happened at all; most of the remaining projects would have happened to a lower standard or smaller scale (see Figure 1.5). As such, the programme was an easily accessible way for small community groups to *extend* the local impact of their work, at a time when they felt funding and other local resource opportunities were more difficult to secure.

Figure 1.5 – The importance of securing Community First Funding



Base: Year 4 survey 952 funded projects / 573 funded projects who say they would have continued without CF funding; fieldwork November–December 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI

Many individuals benefited from the activity the programme has encouraged, through a wide range of projects designed to meet local needs and through strengthened community connections. Much of the activity funded by Community First can be categorised as addressing the factors that drive well-being, predominantly around connecting people together and encouraging people to volunteer.

Panel members and projects were broadly positive about the impact in their local area resulting from the programme: 74% of Panel members felt that strong links between groups were more common in their area (69% of projects); 71% of Panel members felt it was more common for people to

have the skills needed to organise activities (63% of projects); and 76% of panel members felt it was more common for new people to get involved (75% of projects).¹¹

1.3.3 Sustainability

A key question for assessing social impact is whether the incremental changes experienced by individual community members and strengthened local networks are enough to catalyse longer term outcomes. But it is also important to remember that the programme was always designed to take an asset-based approach, building on existing activities, organisations and networks.

As such, the programme aimed to recognise and develop these activities, rather than attempting to grow a new local community infrastructure that might be sustained beyond the lifetime of the programme. Any assessment of sustainability must therefore be grounded in the impact Community First had on assets and networks already present in communities.

Programme participants are positive about their future involvement in similar activity, in part reflecting their prior experience and involvement. Indeed 68% of projects leads said they were certain their group would continue working together in some way.¹² They are also positive about the impact the programme has had on key skills, confidence and social capital. However, Panel members, in particular, expressed some concerns about the energy levels and availability of community members to continue these projects in the future.

Despite these concerns, there is good evidence that Community First has helped sustain projects and networks in local communities. Those involved were confident that much of this would continue in future.

1.4 Key findings and lessons learnt

Overall, the evaluation findings indicate that the Community First programme delivered against its intended outputs. Despite initial challenges, which might be expected when attempting something new, it generated positive perceptions among programme participants about its impacts on individuals and the wider community. The light touch, devolved approach adopted by the programme appears to have worked and to have been appropriate in ensuring the majority of the small grants funding available reached community groups and projects and addressed locally determined needs.

¹¹ Base: Year 4 survey, 229 Panel members, September – November 2014 and Year 4 survey, 952 Projects, November – December 2014

¹² Base: Year 4, 952 Projects, November – December 2014

1.4.1 Demand for funding and core programme targets

The success of the programme and the evaluation findings show that, overall, there is demand for small grant funding. However, this demand has varied across local areas; while many Panels had applications for more money than they had available, some struggled to find sufficient groups/projects to allocate all of their funding. As a consequence there was a relatively small shortfall in the amount of recommended funding reaching projects.

The programme largely fulfilled its core targets for the number of operational Panels, Panel websites and Community First Plans. This involved considerable input from individuals and organisations within the programme locally and centrally, including from CDF and via additional support and training provided by The Young Foundation.

1.4.2 Community First processes

Both Panel members and funded projects generally felt the application and decision making requirements and processes worked well, including the online administration system. As would be expected, there are indications that for some the online approach has been a barrier, although it has not possible to measure the extent of this within the scope of the evaluation.

Websites and social media were not always effective channels in raising awareness of the programme in Community First areas. Of much greater importance have been recommendations and existing relationships. Even so, Panel websites have clearly been useful for those seeking information about making applications.

Some of the success of the programme is a reflection of the simple approach adopted by Community First compared with other small grant funding programmes. Core requirements for Panel members and projects alike were simple enough that there were, overall, sufficient programme participants able to fulfil them.

1.4.3 Community assets – the approach

Community First builds on the Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which is based on the principle of identifying and unlocking the existing assets within a community to address need, rather than focussing on tackling deficits through a centrally determined approach. Community First adopts a localised, devolved approach to the ways in which needs are addressed and adapts the typical ABCD approach to work within the programme's light touch administrative system. In particular, the programme does not incorporate an initial asset mapping stage. Rather, the programme utilises the input from Panel members, some of whom have prior experience in community development, and existing evidence about needs in the local community, to set priorities for funding.

The evaluation evidence highlights positive examples of how the programme has benefitted from existing assets, such as local residents involved in community development professionally and as volunteers, or focal points like community centres and associated networks, to identify needs within the community and attract applications from projects to address these. These were a key success factor within the programme as they helped with communication and raising awareness. They also meant that Panel members, as volunteers, were able to attract projects within their available time, skills and knowledge.

1.4.4 Community assets – local people and organisations

Feedback through the evaluation highlights that key individuals and organisations have taken on significant responsibility for administering the programme. While this has often helped to increase programme participants' skills, there is limited evidence that they have passed this on to others in the community.

Support with administration and processes has often come from Panel members with existing community experience, perhaps working in a community development role for the local council, or for the Panel Partner or other community organisation. In many cases support has been provided directly by the local council or voluntary and community sector organisations. To a large extent this can be seen as a positive – Panels have found willing and able people and organisations to help support them without the need for much central programme involvement.

However, it is worth emphasising that the local expertise Panels relied on was in many cases at least partially dependent on public sector funding, either directly through the local authority or indirectly via a local CVS. Support funded in this way was particularly important for establishing some of the Panels, even if they became more self-reliant later in the programme. There is a risk that there will be fewer of these experienced individuals in future, and this could make it difficult to set up similar groups of local people to make funding decisions. More central programme support could help to address this issue.

There is evidence that, in many Community First areas, the longstanding networks of people involved in the project will continue to take on responsibilities and involvement in community development beyond the end of the programme. In this respect the programme can, therefore, be seen to have provided a vehicle for these existing networks to function, and to expand their reach to get more and different people involved.

Some Panel members would have welcomed a greater role in monitoring and oversight of funded projects, in part to help them build longer term relationships with community groups and enable them to see the impact of their funding decisions. The extent to which this responsibility would be

welcomed across Panel members is unclear; certainly it is not the case that all Panels would have wanted additional responsibility.

A risk with this type of programme is that local project activity may be focused on established, pre-conceived ideas of local needs. This risk is increased where there is particularly strong involvement in Panels from members of the community with a track record of community development activity. On this risk however the evidence from the evaluation is fairly positive; the process of capturing local priorities in Community First plans has helped to steer projects towards addressing community needs and allowed local groups to achieve their goals.

1.4.5 Additional activity

A relatively small number of new groups have been created through programme activity. Many Panels did not see this as part of their role, and the availability of existing networks and groups meant it was simply not necessary. It is also worth bearing in mind that creating new groups is a considerable task, requiring significant time, skills, and further central and local support. On this point Community Organisers seem to be beneficial to the Community First programme, particularly encouraging new groups to form and apply for funding.

The evaluation indicates that Community First funding is most effective in leveraging new matched resources when it is used to fund new activities. While generating new activity and resources is an important element of the programme, evidence from Panel members' shows that Community First is perceived as playing a greater role in sustaining and building on existing community activity.

Background and evaluation scope

2 Background and evaluation scope

2.1 Background

Community First (CF) was an £80 million programme to fund new and existing community groups. Community First had two parts, the Neighbourhood Matched Fund and the Endowment Match Challenge. The Endowment Match Challenge is outside of the scope of this evaluation.¹³

The Community First Neighbourhood Matched Fund was a small grants programme targeting deprived wards. It had the following features:

- **Local decision making** – around 600 Community First Panels, made up of local people, set funding priorities and decided which projects should receive funding in their area.
- **Funding was matched** – every £1 provided by the Government had to be matched by at least the same amount in donations, which could be cash, services, free products or volunteer time.

Across the four years of the programme, almost £30 million of funding was made available in some of the most deprived wards in the country. Through the CF programme, government funds were intended to support and stimulate community action in response to local needs in neighbourhoods with significant deprivation and low social capital.

Ipsos MORI and NEF consulting were commissioned by the Cabinet Office to conduct an evaluation of the Community First programme. The same team also evaluated the Community Organisers programme. This report builds on interim findings delivered to the Cabinet Office and published in Spring 2015, and provides a final assessment of the programme.

2.2 Evaluation scope

The programme was evaluated to understand both process effectiveness and the social impact achieved. In summary, the aims of the evaluation were to assess:

- How well the programme has been managed and implemented, how it could be improved, and what lessons can be learned for future work.
- The extent to which the programme has delivered the expected outcomes.

¹³ Throughout this report we refer to Community First (including using the acronym CF) in relation to the Neighbourhood Matched Fund element of the programme only.

- The extent to which outcomes and lessons from the delivery model are sustainable / sustained beyond the lifetime of the programme.
- How the programme compares to other programmes / interventions which sought to improve levels of community action.
- Where there is overlap between the CF and the CO programmes, how well they have worked together to deliver shared outcomes.

During an extensive scoping phase we carefully mapped out the flow of programme activities in order to understand local and central CF processes in detail. The effectiveness of these key activities was then explored through the evaluation research.

Intervention logic models were also developed to articulate the programme inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and anticipated impacts. In addition, the evaluation articulated the theory of change for the programme, which identified the underpinning assumptions and key stakeholders for whom benefits would be realised. This provides a clear analytical framework for our assessment of impacts. The same approach was taken for the Community Organisers programme.

Feedback mechanisms were used throughout the programme to ensure the evaluation highlighted key issues to the Cabinet Office and Community Development Foundation (CDF), the programme delivery partner. In this way, lessons learnt from the programme were fed back while both the evaluation and programme delivery were ongoing.

Section 3 of this report sets out more detail on the strategic context and programme design.

Programme assumptions and strategic context

3 Programme assumptions and strategic context

3.1 Programme context

Devolving decision-making away from central government and into the hands of individuals and communities was a core tenant of the previous Coalition Government's ambitions for community empowerment. The Community First programme aimed to deliver positive outcomes by stimulating local action in neighbourhoods with significant deprivation and low social capital. This formed a key part of the mechanisms to achieve the Coalition Government's intention to:

Take a range of measures to encourage charitable giving and philanthropy...and support the creation of neighbourhood groups across the UK, especially in the most deprived areas.¹⁴

The programme was designed to address the four overarching problems listed below (outlined in greater detail in Section 3.3):

- 1** The value of community assets and volunteering are not fully or adequately recognised by local communities or traditional grant funding.
- 2** Local communities do not have enough influence over funding decisions affecting their neighbourhood.
- 3** Community groups and projects face barriers to accessing small grants funding.
- 4** Government funding is not leveraged effectively enough to support community groups and projects.

The Community First programme built on the Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) approach pioneered by John McKnight and John Kretzmann of the ABCD Institute at Northwestern University in Chicago. The ABCD approach uses the resources, abilities and insights of local residents to address problems, while still offering outside assistance in a support role.¹⁵

The programme also drew on previous small grant programmes in the UK, such as Grassroots Grants.¹⁶ However, there were a number of key

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-coalition-documentation>

¹⁵ <http://www.engage.northwestern.edu/ABCD/index.html>

¹⁶ <http://cdf.org.uk/content/funding-programmes/previous-programmes/grassroots-grants>
(Accessed 29.07.14)

differences around central grant administration, decision making mechanisms, and the criteria for accepting funding applications, including the intention to build sustainable capacity through the matched funding aspect of the CF programme. As such, the CF programme was innovative in its approach and is not directly comparable to previous small grants schemes.

The programme aimed to tackle the barriers community groups and projects face to accessing small grant funding. Overall funding for the voluntary sector remains largely stable.¹⁷ However, there has been a decrease in government funding for voluntary organisations both centrally and locally since 2009/10, alongside a move away from grant funding to a contract model.¹⁸

3.2 Summary of programme design

The Community First programme was delivered through a combination of central administrative and support functions delivered by CDF, and local decision making by Panels of volunteers. The Panels set funding priorities and decided which projects should receive funding in their area. There was a requirement that all grant funding had to be matched; in the form of cash, in kind contributions, or through volunteer time associated with the group or project applying.

The programme involved three key stages: establishing Panels and priorities local outreach and decision making, and grant funded activity. These are depicted in the process diagram presented in Appendix 8.2.

The programme used an online system for managing and coordinating programme delivery, including Panel registration; submission of Panel priorities and Community First Plans¹⁹; funding recommendations; grant administration; and feedback from programme participants. The online system was developed by programme delivery partners CDF.

3.2.1 Selecting eligible wards

Economic deprivation and proxy measures of low social capital were used to select the wards eligible for funding as part of the Community First programme. The 30% most deprived Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in England were identified from the 2011 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). This pool of potentially eligible LSOAs was reduced by selecting those with a 10% increase in benefit claimants between May 2009 and May 2010, using Job Centre Plus data. Ward eligibility for the programme was based on wards with multiple eligible LSOAs.

¹⁷ <http://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac15/economy/>

¹⁸ <http://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac15/government/>

¹⁹ Panels were required to create a Community First Plan by the end of year two of the programme, setting out greater detail on the funding priorities against which grants would be allocated, ideally based on additional consultation with the community.

Due to the significant change in approach to funding communities adopted as part of the Community First programme, the Cabinet Office decided that all Top Tier Local Authorities should have at least one Community First Panel. All of the first 50 Big Local areas²⁰ were deemed ineligible for funding to avoid duplication.

Funding was allocated at a ward level based on the number of eligible LSOAs, with each worth £16,955 across the duration of the programme. Where wards contained multiple selected LSOAs the total funds available were scaled up accordingly. A full list of eligible wards and their funding allocation is available via the CDF website.²¹

3.2.2 Establishing Community First Panels

CDF accepted applications from potential Panels between October 2011 and May 2012. This followed a letter from the Minister for Civil Society to local authority Leaders and Chief Executives highlighting the programme; targeted follow-up by the OCS Local Intelligence team²²; and awareness-raising work CDF conducted via its website and with membership organisations.

At the point of registration, all potential Panels submitted a Terms of Reference and provided contact details for their members. They were also required to supply the name and email address of their nominated Panel Partner.

The Panel Partner was required to be a local registered charity or voluntary organisation, preferably operating within the ward where the Panel was based. The Panel Partner initially verified that the Panel was representative of the community in the ward and that the Panel members satisfied the eligibility criteria. Beyond this, their primary function was to provide support to the Panel to ensure accountability and transparency. The Panel Partner also held funds to cover any expenses incurred by the Panel.

The Community First Panel's role involved:

- Identifying and recommending projects for funding of up to £2,500 per year in line with agreed priorities.
- Referring successful projects to CDF and supplying them with management information including contact details for the organisation, the timeframe and recommended amount of funding, and a breakdown of the volunteer hours and amount to be matched by the community.

²⁰ <http://www.localtrust.org.uk/> (Accessed 20.05.15)

²¹ <http://cdf.org.uk/neighbourhoodmatchedfund> (Accessed 20.05.15)

²² The OCS Local Intelligence Team provides detailed local knowledge, acting as a connector between Whitehall and local areas.

- Engaging the local community in the programme and ensuring transparency of Panel activity through a dedicated website (and other channels where possible).

A key stage in the programme process was Panels establishing priorities for each ward. These priorities were used as a basis for making decisions about funding in Years One and Two, and were replaced with a more detailed Community First Plan for the remainder of the programme. This plan was to be submitted before the start of Year Three of the programme (by 31st March 2013).

3.2.3 Grant funded project activity

CDF were responsible for checking that all funded projects met some basic criteria, but decisions about funding recommendations were taken at the local level by Panels. The eligibility criteria for groups receiving funds were that they must:

- Be a not-for-profit, third sector voluntary or community group;
- Be connected with and/or meet the needs of the local community;
- Have a bank account with 2 signatories or nominate an organisation which has a bank account with 2 signatories to hold funds on their behalf;
- Have a governing document that has as a minimum the name, aim/purpose, objectives, a dissolution clause for the organisation, a list of Trustees/Committee members, and Trustees/Committee member signatures;
- Provide evidence of significant community participation in their application through the group's matched element to the project; and
- Show that their project is in line with the priorities identified for the ward.

Once approved, Panels notified CDF of the decision by completing the 'Funding Recommendation Form' via the online administration system. CDF then contacted the projects directly with a 'Funding Acceptance Form'. This was returned to CDF with details of the organisation's bank or those of the nominated fund-holder. CDF then entered into a grant relationship with the funded organisation.

Once the project was complete, the project leads were required to return a 'Monitoring Form' to CDF. All project interaction with CDF and completion of forms was carried out using the online administration system.

3.3 Rationale and logic model

The delivery mechanisms used by the Community First programme were informed by the problems the programme sought to address.²³ These are summarised in the table below and are specific to the Community First programme.²⁴

Table 3.1 – Programme rationale

Problems	Mechanisms
The value of community assets and volunteering are not fully or adequately recognised by local communities or traditional grant funding	Use a matched funding approach to encourage more community activity by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising the value of volunteer hours • Acknowledging the value of additional financial and in-kind resources
Local communities do not have enough influence over funding decisions affecting their neighbourhood	Adopt a bottom-up funding model by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilising a demand-led approach • Involving local people in priority-setting and decision-making through Panels • Ensuring Panels are transparent and accountable
Community groups and projects face barriers to accessing small grant funding	Support community groups and projects to overcome barriers by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling community groups and projects to gain experience in accessing small grant funding • Raising awareness of other opportunities by operating at a local level • Developing local support networks to help build capacity and encourage sustainability
Government funding is not leveraged effectively enough to support community groups and projects	Explore new approaches to small grant funding through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirement for matched funding to unlock additional benefit • Light-touch, low-cost online grant administration process • Involving local people in funding decisions

The programme logic model (Figure 3.1) was developed following interviews with programme stakeholders and participants during the scoping phase of the evaluation in late 2012 and early 2013. It makes explicit the expectations around what the programme would deliver. Each

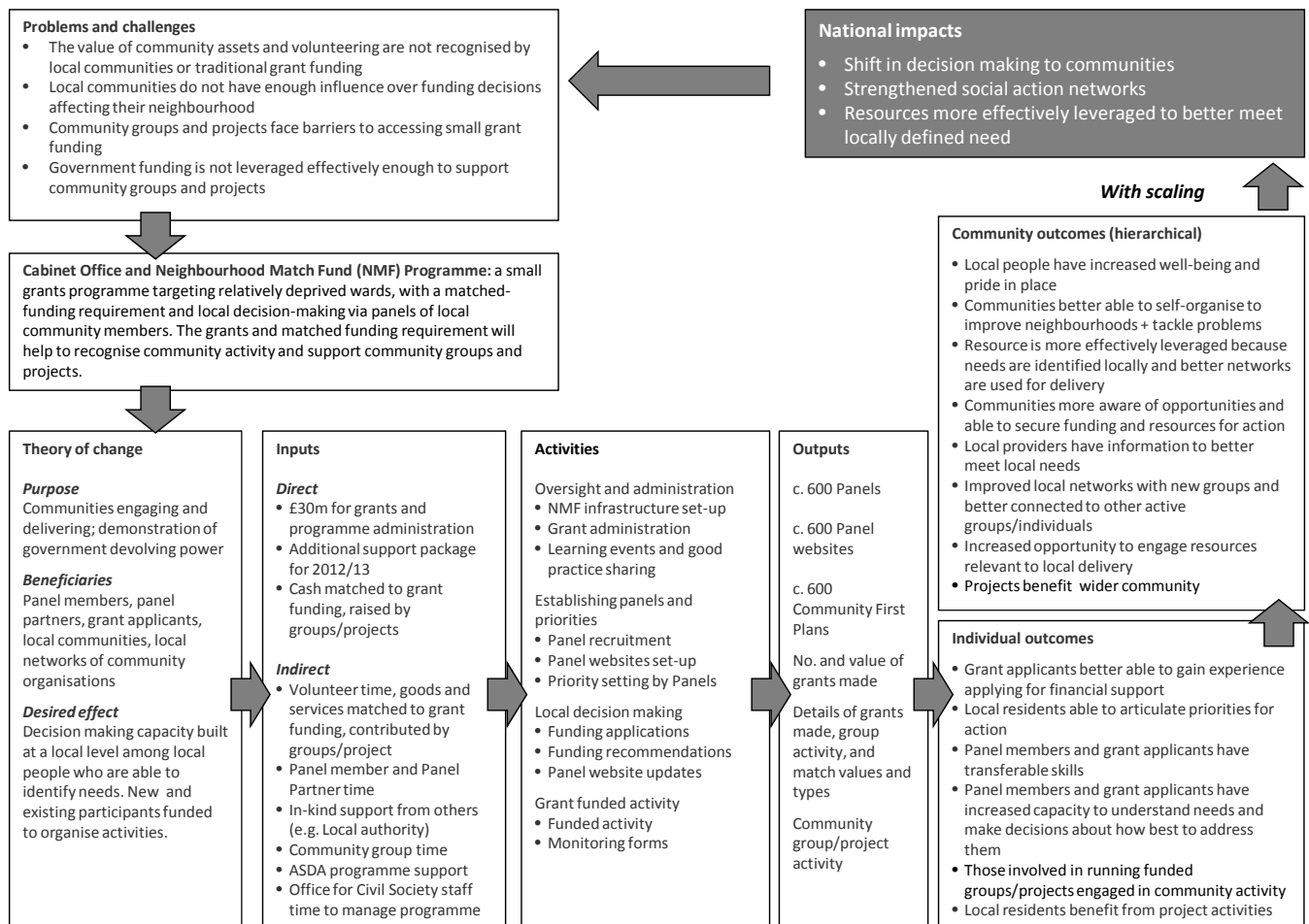
²³ See subsequent logic model (Figure 3.1) – top left hand box 'Problems and challenges'

²⁴ It should be recognised that these are aspects of a wider need to strengthen civil society so that people are supported to come together in their local area to improve their own lives, and so that power is transferred to local communities.

causal link in the logic model is underpinned by an assumption about how the programme activities will lead to the anticipated outputs and outcomes, and in turn how these will lead to anticipated impacts.

The assumptions underpinning the logic model are appended to this document. The logic model enabled us to create a set of evaluation questions, which are explored in the remainder of the report.

Figure 3.1 – Logic model diagram



Source: Ipsos MORI Policy & Evaluation Unit and nef consulting

3.4 Final programme status

For the programme as a whole, Panels made 17,956 project recommendations, totalling £27,205,062 in funding recommendations. These funding recommendations have been matched by a total of £93 million in contributions from projects, including £15.3 million in cash match and over 5.5 million volunteering hours.

The following table presents high level figures for funding allocations, recommendations and matched resources across each year of the programme.

Table 3.2 – Programme funding allocation and recommendation figures for Years One to Four

	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year Four*	Total
Total funding allocation	£3,693,000	£8,588,000	£7,386,000	£9,883,000	£29,550,000
Total funding recommendations	£3,689,820	£7,679,779	£6,877,909	£8,957,554	£27,205,062
Total grant funding paid	£3,688,812	£5,590,267	£6,336,386	£8,716,007	£24,331,472
Total matched funding value	£12,748,760	£30,141,208	£25,789,857	£24,285,983	£92,965,808

Source: Programme administrative information

**Year Four figures are near-final, based on the most up to date available at the time of writing.*

Methodology and methodological limitations

4 Methodology and methodological limitations

The evaluation included both primary and secondary data collection and analysis. The core aspects were online surveys of Panel members and project leads, longitudinal community-based case studies, and ongoing analysis of management information and secondary data.

4.1 Case studies

In total, 11 longitudinal case studies were undertaken with Panels across the country, (including five where there was overlap with the CO programme).

The case study selection criteria ensured we visited a mix of Panels by location, local characteristics and experience. These criteria included:

- Region – covering Panels in each of the English regions;
- Location type – covering rural, urban and suburban areas;
- Success – speaking to Panels who have been successful or not in carrying out their Panel function, based on funding recommendations, completion of Community First Plan, and absence of a functioning website; and
- Panel characteristics – hearing from Panels with a range of different characteristics in terms of membership, Terms of Reference, priorities, and decision-making approaches.

The case studies allowed us to explore the dynamic of the programme ‘on the ground’ and involved in-depth interviews with Panel members, observation of Panel meetings, and interviews or mini-group discussions with people involved in projects as project leads or volunteers. We discussed programme participants’ reasons for getting involved, their experiences of the programme, how it could be improved from their perspective, and their perceptions of the impact of the programme on them, others involved, and the wider community.

The research team followed up with their case studies via telephone interviews to find out what has changed for the participants.²⁵

²⁵ Timings of follow ups were dependent on specific circumstances and availability in each case study area.

4.2 Online surveys

Online surveys were the main method of primary quantitative data collection for the evaluation. This approach allowed large numbers of programme participants to be included in the evaluation, although there were limitations to the survey approach.

The most important of these limitations was the self-selecting nature of participation – data was only collected for the Panel members and funding recipients who were willing to take part and had the ability to do so. In addition, for both surveys the profile of the target audience overall was unknown, which, in conjunction with the self-selecting nature of participation, means survey results cannot be described as representative of the target audience, despite the relatively large numbers taking part. As the profile of each target audience is unknown, all data is unweighted. It should also be noted that survey results are subject to sampling tolerances.

Surveys with Panel members (primarily Panel leads registered with CDF at the start of the programme, but also additional Panel members contacted via the Panel lead) and project leads (main contact for each funded project as identified to CDF by the Panel) were scheduled as follows:

- Post-Year Two surveys – June/July 2013
- Post-Year Three surveys – May/June 2014
- Post-Year Four surveys – October-December 2014 (as the final year of the programme was drawing to a close)

The Panel member questionnaire covered slightly different topics each year of the evaluation. There was a particular focus on reducing the burden in terms of survey length for the post-Year Three and post-Year Four surveys, thereby helping to increase the participation rate. The survey with project leads remained largely consistent across the evaluation, reflecting the fact that each contact was only likely to complete the survey once.

4.2.1 Surveys of Panel members

The online Panel surveys were designed to assess both the process effectiveness and the social impacts of the programme. Panel members were asked about their background in community work; about the make-up of the Panel and whether it tapped into existing social networks or new ones; how they managed applications for funding; what support they received from CDF and gave to projects; as well as questions covering the impact on Panel members' skills and knowledge and impacts on the wider community.

A limitation particular to the Panel survey was that contact details were only available for a single Panel member – the Panel lead. To ensure that as

many Panel members as possible were given the opportunity to take part, at the start of each survey Panel leads were given seven additional survey links each and asked to forward these on to other panel members. In the event, the number of responses from non-Panel leads were relatively low, and due to the total number of Panel members being unknown, it was not possible to calculate a response rate for individual Panel members.

Table 4.1 – Panel member surveys response figures

	Post-Year Two survey	Post-Year Three survey	Post-Year Four survey
Panel leads emailed invitation to take part	593	593	591
Responses overall	446	185	229
Responses from Panel leads	228	113	169
Responses from other Panel members	218	72	60
Number of Panels that responded	267	132	176
Proportion of Panels that responded	45%	22%	30%

Source: Ipsos MORI

4.2.2 Surveys of funded projects

An online survey was sent to funded projects. The survey asked questions about how project leads first found out about Community First, the nature of their group and the project or activity they received funding for, and elements of the funding application process. Finally, it asked about their perceptions of the personal and community impacts of the programme.

The first survey was with projects funded from a Panel recommendation in Year Two of the programme, the second with projects funded in Year Three and the final survey with projects funded in Year Four. The first two were completed after the end of the funding year. The final survey was conducted with most of the projects funded in 2014, with fieldwork carried out before the official end of the programme to ensure sufficient engagement among projects.

Table 4.2 – Project member surveys response figures

	Post-Year Two survey	Post-Year Three survey	Post-Year Four survey
Funded projects emailed invitation to take part	3,878	2,811	2,761
Responses overall	2,127	1,044	953
Response rate	55%	37%	35%

Source: Ipsos MORI

4.3 Secondary data

Secondary data generated within the programme was used to understand programme implementation and progress, particularly around the nature of the projects funded. Analysis by OCS of project descriptions is included in Section 6.3. OCS also analysed Panel websites, allowing for an assessment of how many Panels were meeting the requirement to have a functioning website.

In addition, OCS used text mining software to analyse short descriptions of around 16,000 of the funded projects.²⁶ They also conducted analysis of ward level data from large scale social surveys to compare responses from people living in Community First areas with those from people living in comparably deprived non-Community First areas.²⁷

4.4 Further methodological considerations

The programme was designed to deliver a devolved approach to generating local change, focusing on locally-identified need. This presented a challenge for the evaluation in measuring the impact of the programme – both in terms of quantifying any impacts and in attributing these to the Community First programme.

While the selection criteria for all Community First Panels focused on areas of significant deprivation and low social capital, there was a great deal of diversity between communities. This meant that there were large variations in the local needs Panels identified, and the types of projects/groups that applied for funding.

Furthermore, the variation across areas and between projects meant that identifying and conducting research with the ultimate beneficiaries of the

²⁶ <https://coanalysis.blog.gov.uk/2015/07/03/community-first-helping-people-to-live-fulfilling-and-good-lives-1/>

²⁷ <https://coanalysis.blog.gov.uk/2015/07/03/community-first-helping-people-to-live-fulfilling-and-good-lives-2/>

programme – local people engaged by the funded activities – would be extremely complex, prohibitively resource intensive and ultimately considered beyond the scope of this evaluation. Similarly, the complexities meant it was not possible to design an evaluation approach with an effective counterfactual, which would have allowed us to measure with more confidence what would have happened in the absence of the CF programme.

However, the types of projects funded can be categorised into broader cross-cutting themes, such as activities to improve social capital, connectedness, and health and well-being. It was therefore possible to ask programme participants about perceived impacts in these broader areas, as well as to explore secondary data analysis using national datasets.

A further difficulty in measuring impact is the absence of directly comparable programmes that can be used to estimate the scale of impact resulting directly from Community First. The light touch and matched funding elements of Community First set it apart from previous programmes of this type.

It is also reasonable to expect some impacts, particularly those relating to local communities, will take some time to be fully realised and evident.

With these limitations, and the evaluation methodology in mind, the assessment of impact uses self-reported measures to understand changes in individuals' knowledge, confidence and ability to self-organise or seek funding. We use programme participants' perceptions and experiences to infer the wider changes for their communities.

Process effectiveness

5 Process effectiveness

In this section we present findings from the Community First programme process evaluation, focusing on three distinct elements:

1. **Establishing Panels and priorities** – setting up Panels and establishing priorities for funding decisions.
2. **Local reach and decision making** – raising awareness of the funding opportunities, identifying projects for matched funding, receiving and reviewing applications, making funding recommendations.
3. **Oversight, central administration and support** – central oversight, administrative and monitoring mechanisms, and the local and central support Panels and projects received with undertaking programme processes.

The evaluation findings provide evidence about the effectiveness of key programme processes. Our analysis also looks at how well the programme delivered the intended outputs, including establishing local Panels and the number and value of matched funding grants made.²⁸ Evidence around the social impact of the CF programme is considered in Chapter 6 of this report.

The relevant evaluation framework questions are appended to this document, along with an assessment of the extent of the evidence collected for each.

5.1 Summary

5.1.1 Establishing Panels and priorities

The evidence collected shows that, despite some challenges, the implementation of the Community First programme generally worked well at a local level. A large majority of Panels had working websites and almost all Panels had signed off Community First Plans. In the final year of the programme, 574 of the original 594 Panels were signed off to allocate funding.

Panel websites played a role when grant applicants required additional information, having heard about the programme from another source. However, there is limited evidence that Panel websites increased awareness of the programme among organisations that could apply for funding.

²⁸ Further details on the Community First programme outputs and the broader logic model and assumptions underpinning the programme are included in section 2 of this report.

Community First Plans were usually written with the input of experienced individuals, drawing on relevant existing data. In some cases Plans were refined through additional consultation with local people.

There is good evidence that the priorities set were addressed through the projects funded. The overall progress in making funding recommendations demonstrates the demand for grants relevant to the priorities set by Panels.

5.1.2 Local outreach and decision making

Local decision making generally worked well. Panel members were positive about the main processes they were involved with – in particular reviewing applications and making grant funding recommendations.

Identifying projects that could benefit from CF funding was seen as relatively more challenging, and seems to have mostly happened through existing networks. However, this did not prevent most Panels from allocating funding to sufficient projects that met local priorities. Panels were also positive about the quality of the funding applications they received and their relevance to local needs.

Despite there being no specific mechanisms within the programme to encourage applications from new groups or those outside Panel members' networks, a large majority of Panel members said that they had received applications from groups not previously known to the Panel.

5.1.3 Oversight, central administration and support

At the core of the programme's design was the use of an online administration system to allow for a (relatively) low cost and light touch approach to central administration. The evidence suggests that the online administration system was manageable for those participating in the programme, either because of their existing IT skills or through sometimes extensive support from other programme participants. Despite this there were some examples of online administration being difficult for both Panels and projects.

Where Panels received central support this was generally viewed positively, whether from the central CDF programme team or the Young Foundation. However, there were some frustrations with perceived changes in expectations or emphasis around how the central programme requirements were communicated.

Projects were also supported in a range of ways by those inside and outside the programme, including Panel members, Panel Partners, CDF, and local community and voluntary organisations.

Overall, existing experience and networks have been crucial to the success of the programme. Many of those involved were willing to go beyond the basic requirements of their respective roles. The reliance on experienced individuals means that administering the programme has been more difficult in the absence of local support.

5.2 Overall programme outputs

Since the programme began, 17,956 project recommendations have been made by Panels, totalling £27,205,062 in funding recommendations. This has realised £93 million in matched funding, including just over £15.3 million in cash match, and over 5.5 million volunteering hours.

Table 5.1 – Funding figures for Years 1-4

	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year Four	Total
Revised grant funding budget	£3,693,000	£8,588,000	£7,386,000	£9,883,000	£29,550,000
Number of project recommendations	2,645	5,145	4,560	5,606	17,956
Total grant funding amount recommended	£3,689,820	£7,679,779	£6,877,909	£8,957,554	£27,205,062
Total grant funding amount paid	£3,688,812	£5,590,267	£6,336,386	£8,716,007	£24,331,472
Total matched funding value	£12,748,760	£30,141,208	£25,789,857	£24,285,983	£92,965,808
Cash match value	£2,598,329	£5,585,206	£3,264,493	£3,892,433	£15,340,461
In kind match value	£1,971,367	£5,656,812	£4,813,348	£3,786,384	£16,227,911
Value of matched volunteer hours (at £11.09 per hour)	£8,179,064	£18,899,190	£17,712,016	£16,607,166	£61,397,436

Source: Programme administration information

There are gaps between the funding available through the programme, the funding allocated by Panels, and the amount paid to projects. Some of the reasons for this are explored later in this chapter. In summary, a large majority of the available funding was allocated to projects, with 92% of the total awarded by local Panels. Some shortfall is to be expected given the devolved approach, with Panels in a minority of areas unable to find enough projects that met the locally agreed priorities.

Evaluation evidence also suggests that the gap between the recommendations and the amount paid is simply because not all projects claimed their funding. In some cases the project did not go ahead, while in others the project failed to claim the money even though the activity did happen. Again, some under-claim is to be expected given the very local, small-scale nature of many the projects funded.

5.3 Establishing Panels and priorities

The Community First programme set out to establish 600 Panels of between four and eight local volunteers who would take responsibility for setting funding priorities and making funding decisions. As part of this the programme expected each Panel to establish and maintain a website to communicate the work of the Panel to the community, helping to ensure transparency and encouraging local accountability.

The other key output for Panels was a Community First Plan at the end of Year Two. This was intended to encourage Panels to consult further with their communities before finalising the local priorities they would use to make funding decisions for the remainder of the programme.

In total 594 Panels were established at the outset of the programme. At the halfway point of the programme, and six months after the deadline for their submission, 118 Panels had not completed their Community First Plans and 225 did not have a website. As a result, OCS commissioned the Young Foundation to develop a package of additional support for Panels identified as failing or finding it difficult to meet the programme requirements.

Overall, 574 Panels were signed off to continue to allocate funding in Year Four. Those not signed off had either not completed a key programme requirement (i.e. having a finalised Community First Plan and functioning website) or, in a small number of cases, lost contact with the programme.

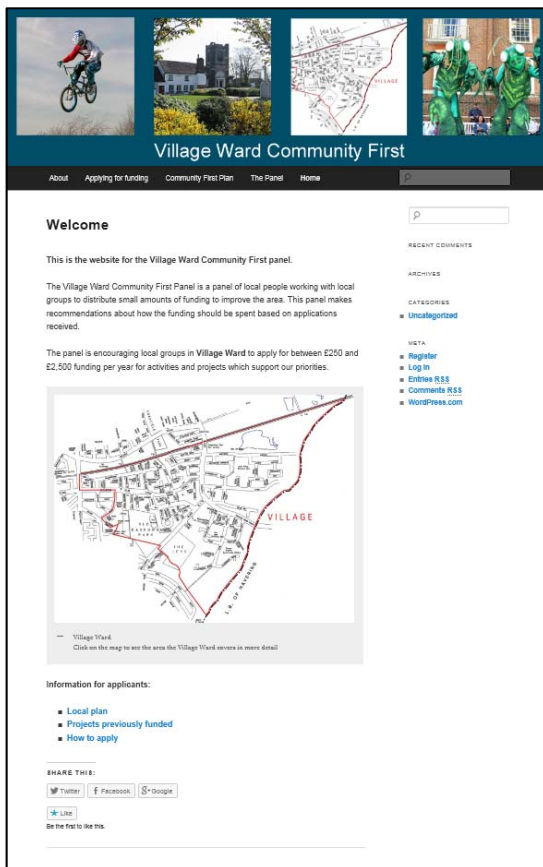
With support, the majority of Panels were able to set up websites and finalise their Community First Plans. The improvement in these figures is, of course, based on work by Panel members and others in local communities. However, it is also clear that concerted effort from the CDF programme team and the Young Foundation has proven effective in supporting Panels who had initially struggled to create websites or draft Community First Plans.

The local priorities set were useful in ensuring funding met local needs. Nine in ten Panel members (91%) said that the applications they received were always or very often relevant to the priorities set. Where project applications did not meet the relevant priorities, Panels were confident about rejecting them on this basis; three in five (60%) said that at some point their Panel had done so.²⁹

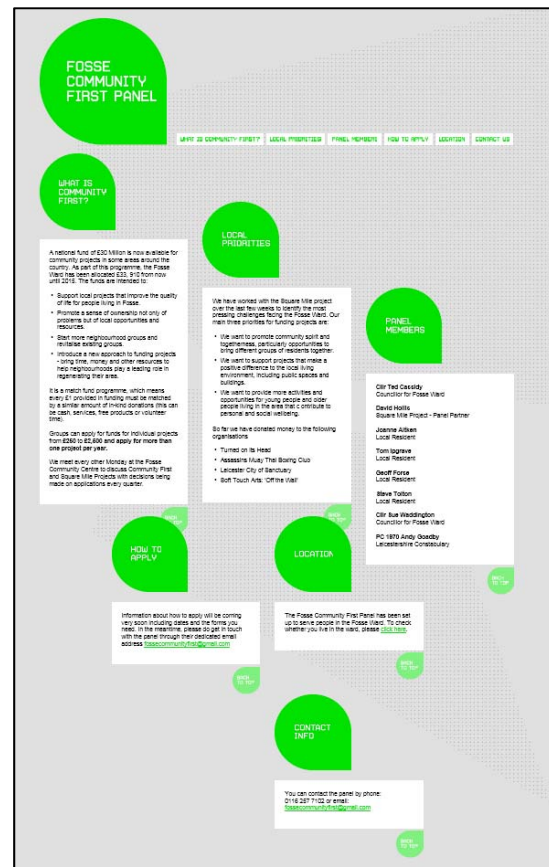
Figures 5.1 and 5.2 are examples (with links) of Community First Panel websites and Community First Plans, although the style, content and quality of these differed between Panels.

²⁹ Base: Year 4 Survey, 229 Panel members, September – November 2014

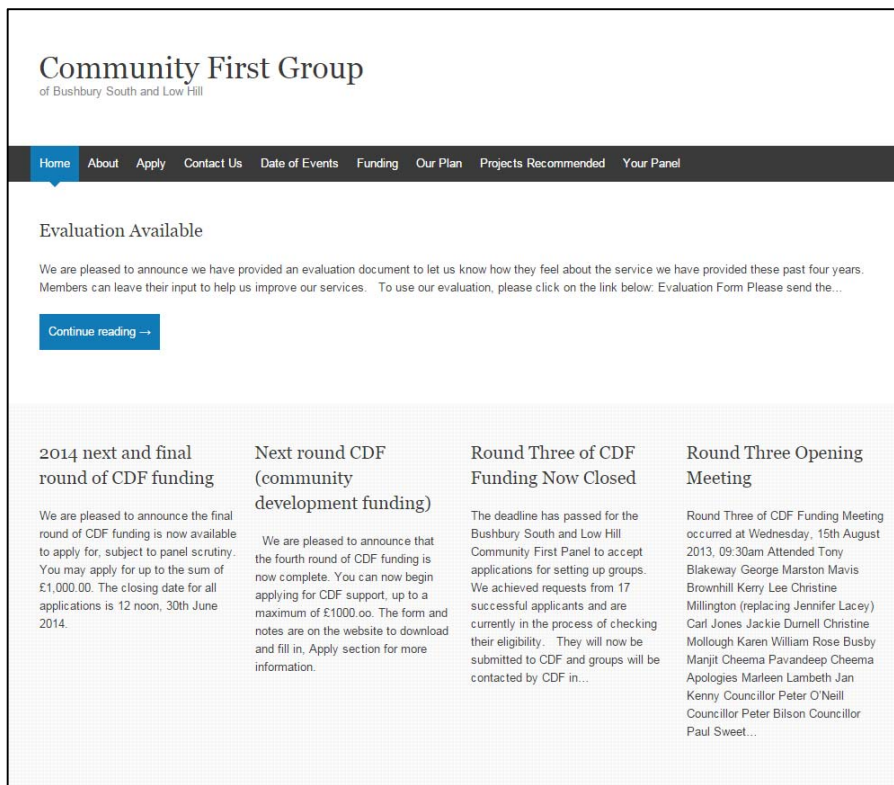
Figure 5.1 – Example Panel websites



<http://villagewardcommunityfirst.wordpress.com/> (accessed 29/05/15)

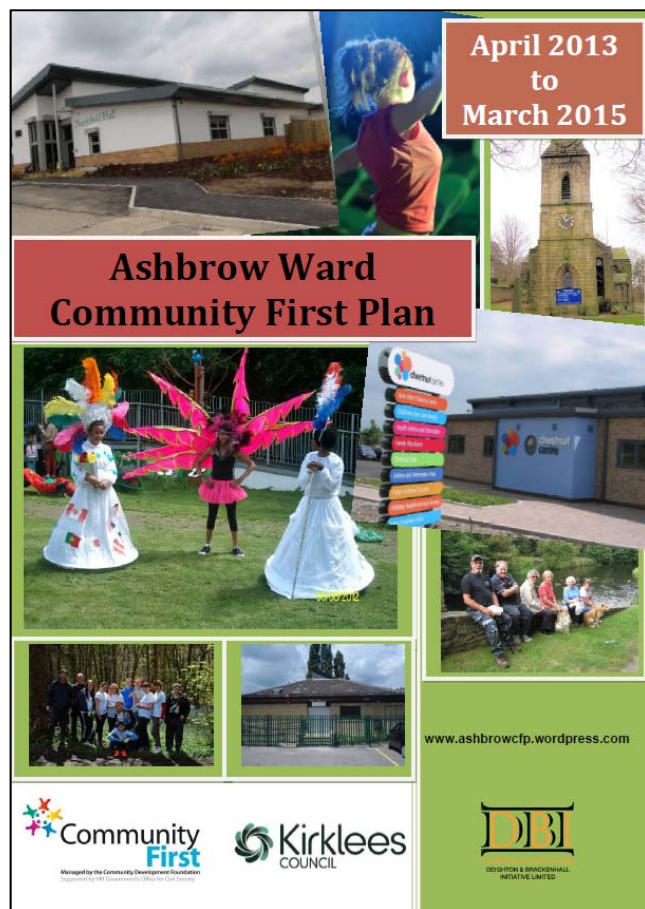


<http://squaremilecommunity.co.uk/> (accessed 29/05/15)



<http://bushburysouthlowhillcommunityfirst.wordpress.com/> (accessed 28/05/15)

Figure 5.2 – Example Community First Plans



continuingly reducing public sector budgets, the importance of community and voluntary organisations contributions to resilient and successful communities will be even more valuable.

Consultation & Community Engagement

All of our Panel members are active volunteers within at least one or more local community organisations operating within the ward. This provides extensive knowledge of local needs and issues and a unique reach into the community allowing a range of organisations to directly, and indirectly influence the Panel.

The ward councillors organise a regular Ashbrow Ward Forum that encourages local residents to come along and raise issues of concern, share news on local activities, consult on key local issues and to disseminate relevant information of interest to local residents. Guest speakers are often in attendance from various agencies providing both information and being accountable for local issues. The Ashbrow Community First Panel provides regular updates on activity to this forum as a means of broadening accountability locally.

Additionally, there are a range of other neighbourhood forums that meet within the ward on a regular basis and a number of thematic forums/ meetings that consider specific issues for example young people, crime & community safety.

Given the plethora of forums, meetings and networks locally, and the good and sustained working relationships between community organisations, services and agencies, fostered through long term partnership working, and the Panels direct links and engagement with the majority of these, it was not felt necessary, cost or resource effective, to establish specific community first consultation events to establish needs and priorities as the panel are confident that they have a good understanding and will use established mechanisms to continually check and remain accountable.

What the Panel has done to date/ funded

At the time of writing this Plan the Panel has awarded 18 community organisations a grant totalling more than £35,000 over the last 2 years. The funding has been allocated across the ward and against the Strategic Priorities identified ensuring beneficiaries come from all walks of life and reflect the diverse needs of the ward. In particular, a number of groups have accessed the funding that have previously not received funding support and in some cases were not very well known locally.

The Panel has established a website that shows the balance of funding available, the groups that have been funded, how to apply for funding support and the criteria and priorities. As groups deliver their projects it is hoped to feature examples on the website.

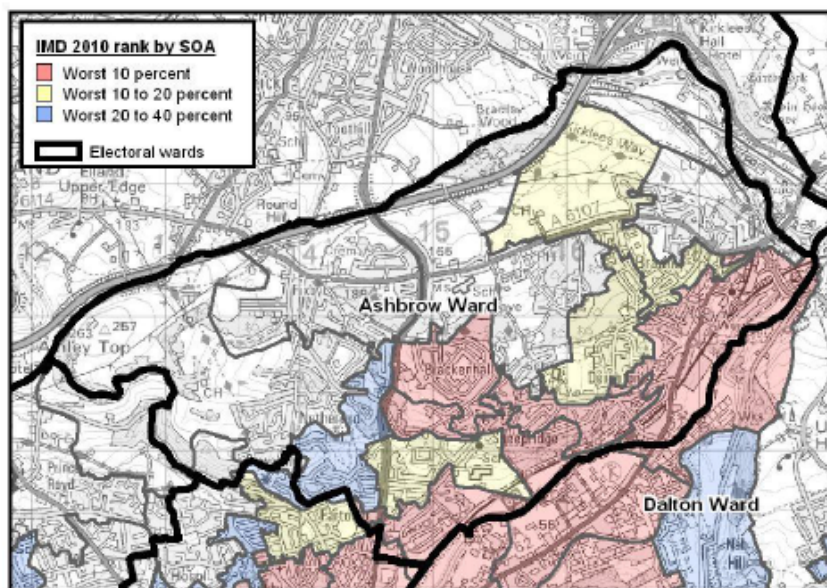
Additionally, the panel has promoted the funding at various events, through local newsletters and other media to raise awareness and encourage take up from local community organisations particularly those that are not often aware of support available.

F:\Community First Panel\Community First Plan\Ashbrow ward Community First Plan (Draft).doc

9

Needs And Issues Within The Ward

The map below highlights the most deprived areas within the ward as measured by the national Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The map shows that large parts of the ward are within the most deprived 10% in the country.



<https://ashbrowcfp.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/ashbrow-ward-community-first-plan-web.pdf> (document accessed 29/05/15)

5.3.1 Characteristics of Panel members

Panels were made up of between four and eight local people with a willingness to get involved in decisions about small grant funding. The composition of Panels was not mandated by the central programme team. Even so, there was an expectation that Panels would include a range of local people, including some with relevant skills and experience, but also those who had not been involved in similar decisions previously.

The post-Year Three survey of Panel members collected basic information about the make-up of Panels, along with the characteristics of individual Panel members themselves. These findings are not representative of all Panel members, but they do provide a good indication of the types of people involved in the programme, particularly skewed towards those who are likely to be Panel leads.³⁰

Most said their Panel had between four and eight members (87%) at the time, with only a small number of Panels with more than eight (13%) and none with fewer than four as per the guidelines set out by CDF.³¹

Panel members surveyed were from a mixture of backgrounds, with a good balance of men and women (44% and 56% respectively), though only one in twenty Panel members was from an ethnic minority background (6%). The profile is older and better educated than the general adult population, with more than four in five (83%) aged over 45, and 51% educated to degree level or higher.³² Nine in ten (91%) Panel members felt that their Panel had worked well together as a group.³³ Those who felt their group did not work well together cited disagreements between Panel members or a lack of commitment that made it hard to build a sense of shared ownership over decisions.

In almost all cases (95%), Panel members said that at least some of the individuals involved in their Panel knew each other before Community First, as would be expected given the programme was designed to work through existing networks. Most had been involved in community or voluntary work with other Panel members before Community First (78%). A significant

³⁰ This is because there was no full list of Panel members collated as part of the programme, so we cannot be sure that all Panel members were given an opportunity to take part. Instead, the survey was administered via an email to Panel leads (the main contacts for the Panel), along with secondary contacts where available. Panel leads were asked to forward invitations to other Panel members.

³¹ Base: Year 3 Panel survey – 185 Panel members; fieldwork May – June 2014,

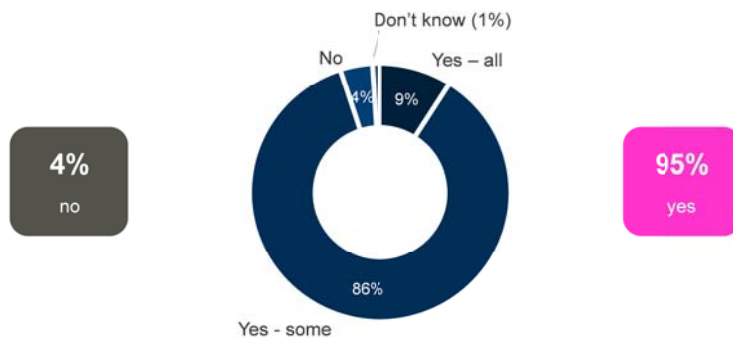
³² Base: Year 3 Panel survey – 185 Panel members; fieldwork May – June 2014

³³ Base: Year 4 Panel survey – 229 Panel members; fieldwork November – December 2014

minority of Panel members (15%) were involved alongside people they had not previously volunteered or done community work with.³⁴

Figure 5.3 – How well Panel members knew each other previously

Did Panel members know each other before they got involved in the Community First programme?



Base: 185 Panel members; post-Year Three survey; fieldwork May - June 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI

A large majority of Panel members were already active in their communities in the last two or three years: nine in ten Year Three Panel survey respondents had attended a community meeting (92%) and voted in the last council election (89%). Seven in ten (72%) had done local voluntary work in the same period. Most had been living or working in the area for at least 10 years (72%).³⁵

Taken together across the evaluation, the evidence shows that Panel members – and particularly Panel leads – were usually those with significant prior experience of community involvement. Indeed, they had often been responsible for leading community groups and activities.

I already had experience chairing a local funding panel. I knew that Panel could do the job well and that it was unlikely other people would be found willing and able to do the job, in the given timeframe in the area. I was not willing for our area to lose the opportunity of funding.

Panel member

The reasons Panel members give for taking part in the programme reflected this, often pointing to their understanding of the needs of the area, and highlighting current or previous paid roles in the community (including those who were local charity employees, councillors, and active volunteers).

³⁴ Base: Year 3 Panel survey – 185 Panel members (176 who knew some or all of their Panel before CF); fieldwork May – June 2014,

³⁵ Base: Year 3 Panel survey – 185 Panel members; fieldwork May – June 2014

I was already actively involved in a group of local residents who were looking to be a 'catalyst' for positive change in the area, and Community First seemed to be a natural step as part of this

Panel member

I have worked as a volunteer for 22 years and when I was asked to join the Panel I felt that I had the knowledge and experience and could bring something to the table

Panel member

Many Panels remained relatively stable in terms of membership across the programme. In the post-Year Three survey, around two thirds of Panels (64%) had taken on no more than two new members since the start of the programme.³⁶ However, there were some examples of Panels successfully broadening their reach in order to recruit new Panel members.

From the case studies, it was clear that a key success factor was an individual (or in fewer cases more than one person) willing to take responsibility for ensuring the Panel fulfilled its responsibilities. This was usually either the Panel lead or the Panel Partner. In some cases – but not all – they did this as part of a paid role working for a community organisation, local voluntary sector umbrella group or the council.

These key individuals and organisations acted as focal points for Community First, often managing the administrative aspects of the programme. Additional roles they played where Panels worked well included taking steps to reach beyond existing networks, and providing support to other Panel members and projects.

In most communities, experienced individuals were available to provide assistance to Panels and projects. However, administering the programme was more difficult in the absence of good local support.

Furthermore, attracting new people to become involved (as Panel members or by applying for funding) was more challenging in these circumstances, particularly as there were no specific mechanisms within the programme to encourage this. This is considered in more detail in Chapter 7.

³⁶ Base: Year 3 Panel survey – 185 Panel members; fieldwork May – June 2014

5.3.2 Panel websites

Panels were required to create a website to record and share information about grants awarded and post regular updates about how projects have used the money. This was intended to help increase transparency, so that local people could find out more about Panels and how they were allocating money on behalf of the community.

As described above, almost all Panels had a functioning website by the final year of the programme. While many Panels found this requirement straightforward, qualitative feedback suggests that those with limited online skills did find this a barrier when establishing their Panel.

None of us had ever set up a website before so it was a bit of a struggle.

Panel member

One specific issue was the closing down on the 30th April 2013 of the recommended free website provider, Posterous. Panels had to transfer their content to a new provider; meaning for many there was a period where they did not have a functioning website.

In order for the websites to be effective as a transparency mechanism, they needed to be a source of information for the public and potential projects. Survey feedback from Panel members points to Panel websites being widely used to publicise their priorities and activities, and the Community First programme more generally.

(Projects) found out by promotion via our website as well as communication from other panel members.

Panel member

We have a website showing all the criteria for applying to the Panel and nearly all groups (who applied) have fitted into these.

Panel member

However, there is limited evidence that Panel websites were a successful tool for raising awareness about Panel activities among those who did not previously know about the programme. They were more useful for projects that had heard about the available funding elsewhere and were looking for further information before applying.³⁷ The proportion of projects that had used the Panel website to find out more increased slightly between the first and final years of the programme (from 41% to 46%).³⁸

³⁷ Base: 697 funded projects that looked for further information, post year three survey; fieldwork May/June 2014.

³⁸ Base: Year 1 survey 1382 Projects sought further information about CF, June – July 2013; Year 4 survey, 571 Projects sought further information about CF, September- October 2014



I would like to see the whole issue of the web sites done differently. There must be some way of a generic web site maintained by CDF that has buttons for each Panel. This could lead to panels being able to manage their own sections. Setting up our own website was very onerous.

Panel member



5.3.3 Community First Plans

Community First Panels were required to create a Plan that set out what they would do to improve their local area. Panels then funded projects or activities that complemented the priorities laid out in the Community First Plan. The Plans helped ensure Panels made a proper assessment of local needs, including reviewing existing evidence and consulting with local people. As such, they represented an important aspect of the programme design.

Guidance and advice was made available to Panels by CDF to help them set priorities and develop their plans (including, for example, on participatory budgeting).³⁹ CDF also ran workshops on the need for a plan with around half of all Panels.

The vast majority of Panels (574) had a signed-off plan by the final year of the programme. For many Panels writing their Community First Plan was one of the most challenging aspects of the programme. Fewer than half (45%) said they found developing their Community First Plan easy.⁴⁰ These results were reflected in the significant number of Panels that had not submitted their Community First Plan by the 31st March 2013 deadline (361 Panels had submitted their CF Plan by the deadline). Concerted effort from CDF, the Young Foundation and Panel members ensured that most were eventually able to meet this requirement.

Around half of Panel members (53%) said they had consulted their community when setting priorities and writing their Community First Plan. Methods included face-to-face public meetings, collecting written responses, or carrying out an online consultation (an example of a survey run by a Panel to consult with the community is shown in Figure 5.4). Most (58%) also said they used an existing priorities document (such as a Community Plan, Neighbourhood Plan or Parish Plan).⁴¹

A large majority of Panel members (88%) felt their Community First Plan was important in communicating priorities to the local community.⁴² Even so, there is some evidence that a minority of Panel members were unclear about the purpose of the document and found the process challenging or perceived it to be unnecessarily bureaucratic. Others were frustrated about delays in the sign-off process, which they felt held up the allocation of funds in the early years of the programme.

³⁹ <http://cdf.org.uk/content/funding-programmes/community-first/panel-member-area>

⁴⁰ Base: 446 valid responses from Panel members taking part in the post-Year Two Panel survey in June/July 2013.

⁴¹ Base: Year 3 Panel survey – 185 Panel members; fieldwork May – June 2014

⁴² Base: Year 3 Panel survey – 185 Panel members; fieldwork May – June 2014

Figure 5.4 – Example Panel community survey

3. What would make your neighbourhood a better place to live? Please put as many suggestions as you like. If you need more space, continue on another piece of paper and fix it to this.

4. Which of these could you do with your friends and neighbours as part of a group with a grant of up to £2,500?

ABOUT YOU
We will use this information only to ensure that our survey includes the views of as many people as possible in the local community.

What is your age group? Please circle one.

Under 18	18-24	25-44	45-64	Over 64
----------	-------	-------	-------	---------

Please circle one. Are you :-

Female	Male
--------	------

What is your postcode? At home At work

Are you a :-

Tenant	Leaseholder	Owner	Other
--------	-------------	-------	-------

Please circle one

What is your ethnic origin? Please state :-

Optional - If you would like to find out more about Community First from us, please tell us your name, address, telephone and/or email.

WHY WE ARE DOING THIS SURVEY
We would very much appreciate your help to make sure that the grants we have to give out are spent where they are needed. The survey on the next pages asks you to tell us how the money should be spent to improve your neighbourhood. We would like to make sure that we include as many residents' views as possible.

- Would you please do the short survey on pages 3 and 4 to let us know about your own ideas and what your priorities are?
- When you have done it, please take it round to your local library and put it in the box marked 'COMMUNITY FIRST.' You can tear off and keep pages 1 and 2 for information if you like.
- You can do the survey on-line if you prefer. Please go to the website for your ward and follow the SURVEY link.
- Our volunteers will also be visiting your ward in the next weeks to meet residents face-to-face to find out your views.
- If you would like us to come and meet your group, please contact us at the address at the foot of the page.

LOCAL LIBRARIES
Enfield Lock Ward
Ordinance Road Library, 645 Hertford Road, EN3 6ND
Enfield Island Village Library, Unit 44-46 Island Centre Way, EN3 6GS
Enfield Highway Ward
Enfield Highway Library, 258 Hertford Road EN3 5BN
Ponders End Ward
Ponders End Library, College Court, High Street EN3 4EY
Lower Edmonton Ward and Edmonton Green Ward
Edmonton Green Library, 35-44 South Mail, Edmonton Green N9 0TN

THANK YOU
FOR YOUR TIME AND YOUR HELP WITH OUR SURVEY
Funded by the ENFIELD RESIDENTS PRIORITY FUND
Printed and published by Ponders End Community Development Trust.
COMMUNITY FIRST SURVEY OFFICE, Unit 1, Vincent House,
2e Nags Head Road, Ponders End, Enfield Middlesex EN3 7FN
Telephone: 020 8443 3858 Email: roomhirecedt@btconnect.com

ENFIELD Lock
FUNDING by ERPF
SURVEY
for the
Community First Programme
EDMONTON GREEN, LOWER EDMONTON, PONDERS END, ENFIELD HIGHWAY and ENFIELD LOCK WARDS
Community First is a four-year programme funded by government, set up to help improve living conditions in about 600 wards around the UK, including these five Wards in Enfield.
Each Ward has been allocated some grant funding. Each one has a Community Panel of local people. Its job is to give grants to groups of people to carry out plans and ideas helping to improve their area. For information about Community First in Enfield, please see the website for your Ward.
www.enfieldlock.wordpress.com
www.enfieldhighway.wordpress.com
www.pondersend.wordpress.com
www.loweredmonton.wordpress.com
www.edmontongreen.wordpress.com
GRANTS FOR GROUPS from COMMUNITY FIRST
If you would like to find out about grants available in the Community First Programme, please look at the website for your ward where you can download the application form and guidance notes. You will also find the Current Priorities for grants in your ward. Grants can be between £250 and £2,500 per group per year. Your group will need to provide an equal amount of match funding, which can be in cash, in resources or in volunteer time. Please note that we cannot award Community First grants to individuals.
p.t.o.

1. First of all, please tell us what you think about your neighbourhood. Please tick one box in each row.

My Neighbourhood ...	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Not Sure
Is clean, tidy and well kept				
Is a safe place to live				
Has interesting things for children to do				
Has interesting things for young people				
Has interesting things for adults to do				
Has a good range of shops				
Has places to meet, relax and enjoy life				
Has good schools				
Is a place where I am happy to live				
Other comments you would like to make				

2. Is there something you especially need help with? Please tick any box if it applies to you.

- ☐ Access to advice, information and guidance
- ☐ Personal and family health
- ☐ Finding work and/or training
- ☐ Dealing with anti-social behaviour
- ☐ Access to places to meet and/or socialise
- ☐ Other issues - please state what they are.

<http://enfieldlock.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/cfa5commsurveyform20131.pdf> (site accessed 01/07/14)

Two examples from the longitudinal case studies highlight the different approaches taken to developing Community First Plans:

1 Insourcing

In one case study area the Community First Plan was based on a third party publication that utilised a desk review of existing social data about the ward, primary research and a co-design processes to make recommendations for commissioning of early intervention services. Work to use the existing evidence to develop the Plan was carried out by the Panel lead, with support from the Panel Partner. The in-depth and participative nature of the research conducted suggests that the Panel was effective in selecting priorities that addressed the needs of their community.

2 Outsourcing

In another case study the Panel used a local research organisation to prepare evidence for their Community First Plan. Panel members had significant professional experience in community development, and felt it was important to have a more rigorous assessment of local needs. They did not think it was a good use of volunteer time to undertake the research or consultation required to identify the priorities for the area. In their view, this was a set of skills they did not have as a Panel.

Programme guidance encouraged Panels to use previous plans to inform or even act as their Community First Plans, provided these were recent and allowed them to make funding decisions within the programme. Being able to draw on an existing evidence base helped reduce the workload for many Panels, especially where the existing evidence had already been published in documents like local area plans.

We already had a local area plan and our local community network draft plan. We just needed the impetus to merge these and consult wider in the community to confirm we were on the right track.

Panel member

Significant public consultation was undertaken previously by various agencies, and we were able to refer to this during a community workshop to agree the priorities.

Panel member

Reliance on existing evidence and previous experience means there were risks around Panels not addressing the new or hidden needs in the local community. However, overall, there is good evidence that Panels took a balanced approach that recognised the value of previous work, while also conducting some consultation themselves.

Community members actively engaged in developing a meaningful local area action plan. However, this led to tension with the Council who have their own plan (that incidentally the community could not really influence).

Panel member

Where Panels did not have access to existing local plans or similar resources, some Panels found this aspect of the programme difficult. This was particularly the case if they did not benefit from additional support from experienced individuals or organisations. Barriers included the time demands, lack of experience in conducting consultation activities like surveys or public events, and practical issues, such as finding venues for workshops or ensuring the right insurance cover was in place.

There is... only patchy research on parts of the local area.

Panel member

It was time consuming researching all the relevant information and talking to as many organisations involved in the local area as possible and then completing community surveys.

Panel member

Some Panels also found it difficult to narrow down an extensive list of potential priorities to something meaningful and manageable. Reaching agreement between different Panel members was also a challenge in a few cases. Additionally, some Panel members questioned whether they could set the priorities they wanted given the relatively small amounts of funding made available for the area.

It was fairly easy because: (1) the area has some obvious priorities that need addressing - around health, education, ASB; and (2) the panel had very similar views on what the priorities should be.

Panel member

5.4 Local decision making

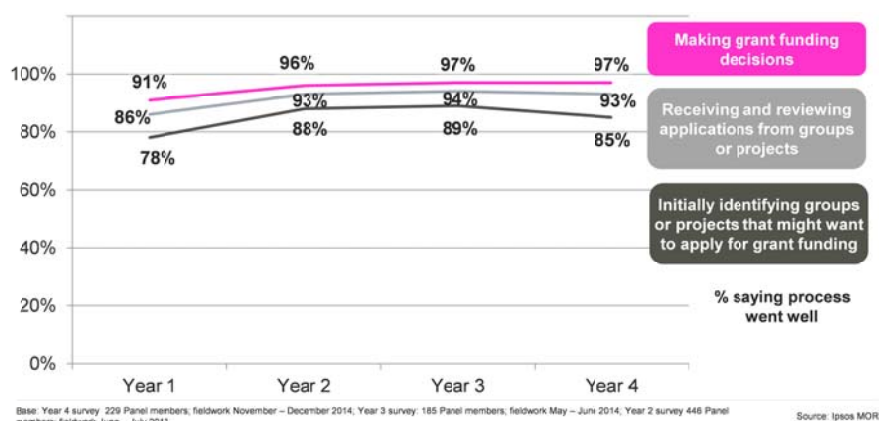
A devolved, bottom-up approach to funding decisions was at the heart of the rationale behind the Community First programme. Overall, the local decision making process involved three key stages:

- 1** Identifying groups or projects who could benefit from funding
- 2** Receiving applications from groups and projects, including providing support
- 3** Reviewing applications and making funding decisions

Panel members were asked for their views on processes related to allocating funding locally. By Year Four there was a near-unanimous view that the process of making grant funding decisions had worked well (97% of Panel members said it had done so). Panel members were also very positive about receiving and reviewing applications. Initially identifying projects for funding was the aspect of the programme seen as most difficult by Panel members, even if a large majority thought it went well.

Figure 5.5 – How well the processes worked for each year of the programme

Overall, how well, if at all, did each of the following processes work in Year 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the programme?



5.4.1 Identifying groups or projects that could benefit from funding

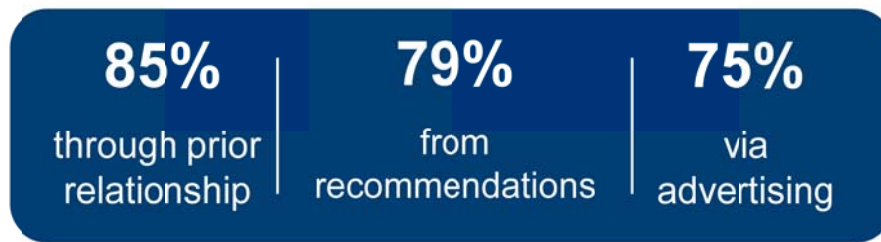
One of the main ways Panel members reached projects was by leveraging their existing networks. The role of networks in identifying groups grew in importance throughout the programme (as shown in Figure 5.8). A large majority of Panel members (85%) said they had used their networks in the final year.⁴³ Of course, by the end of the programme, many Panel members' existing networks will have been expanded through their participation in Community First itself.

Furthermore, most Panel members said they had identified groups or projects from those they were already aware of or involved with (80% and 67% respectively). Similarly, more than three quarters (77%) had gone back to those who have previously applied.⁴⁴ The survey findings and secondary evidence from CDF management information confirms that many projects or individuals working across projects have received multiple funding recommendations over the course of the programme.

⁴³ Base: Year 4 Survey, 229 Panel members, September – November 2014

⁴⁴ Base: Year 4 Survey, 229 Panel members, September – November 2014

Figure 5.6 – Overall methods Panel members used to identify groups/projects⁴⁵



The case studies suggest that Panels took two main approaches to identifying potential projects. Some focused their efforts on the community groups and projects they knew about, and had no difficulty identifying sufficient projects that met the priorities without taking additional steps. Other Panels were conscious of ensuring the programme had a broad reach, accepting that strong personal networks in the community carried risks as well as benefits.

We are very connected to the local area, and we know what's going on. This is a strength and a weakness. If you're not careful you just end up selecting the usual suspects all the time. It should be about getting new things off the ground.

Panel lead

Overall, it is clear that many Panels have worked hard to promote the programme beyond their existing networks. By the Year Four Panel survey a large majority (88%) of Panel members said they had received applications from people they did not previously know.⁴⁶

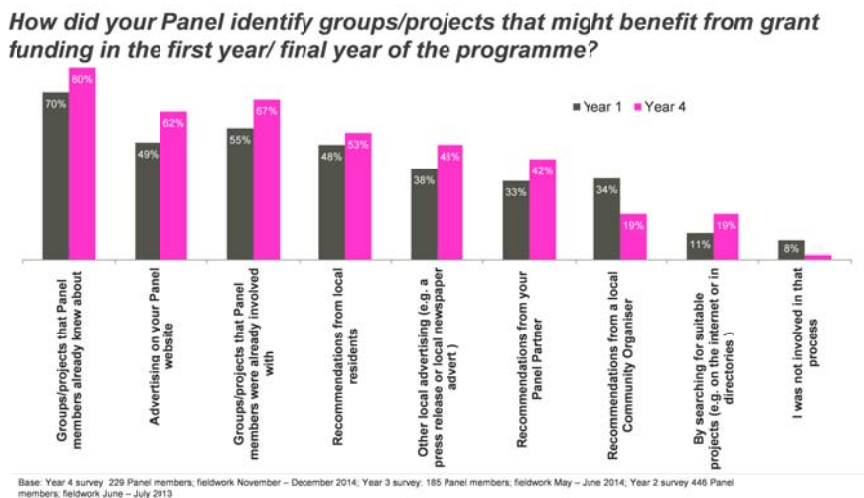
Linked to this, by the final year advertising had become a more significant way to reach potential projects. This was increasingly through Panels' own websites (62% used this approach) – even if very few projects (6%) said that they had first found out about Community First via a Panel website.⁴⁷ The increasing use of Panel websites is likely to reflect the additional support within the programme from CDF and the Young Foundation to encourage and enable Panels to use their websites more.

⁴⁵ Base: Year 3 Panel survey – 185 Panel members; fieldwork May – June 2014. This includes some duplication of Panels.

⁴⁶ Base: Year 4 Survey, 229 Panel members, September – November 2014

⁴⁷ Base: Year 4 survey, 952 Projects, November – December 2014

Figure 5.7 – Methods for identifying groups/projects – Year One and Year Four



Over the course of the programme, Panels also began to use more direct methods including press releases and adverts in local newspapers. There is evidence of increased proactivity over the four years of the programme, including Panels searching for suitable projects on the internet or using local directories. By the final year one in five Panel members said they used these approaches. Some Panels had become effective at encouraging funded projects from earlier years to 'showcase' the value of the funding through presentations and community events.

Awareness has risen in the community. There have been opportunities to showcase the effects of successful funding bids.

Panel member

This worked better after we made our initial awards as recipients were often the best advertising we had and they spread the word to other groups.

Panel member

It enables other groups, who need help, to see they can apply and what they can apply for.

Panel member

Where there was overlap with the Community Organisers programme there is evidence that this encouraged new groups to form and apply for funding. Throughout the programme, Community Organisers had a consistent role in identifying new projects. Community Organisers played a role according to one in five (19%) Panel members in Year Four of the programme – fewer than in Year One when it was around one in three (34%).

Having been inundated with applications, this was not a problem.

Panel member

Where they relied on existing networks or returning applicants this either reflected Panels having sufficient applications, or feeling they lacked the skills or confidence to be more proactive. The programme did not have a specific mechanism for encouraging Panels to identify groups that had not received grant funding before, or to encourage new groups to form around local needs. This goes some way to contextualising the high proportion of funded projects delivered by existing groups (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6).

Many Panel members reflected that the lack of funding for communication activities within the programme was a further barrier to reaching beyond their existing networks. It follows that the process Panels were most likely to have wanted additional support with was around identifying groups or projects for funding; more than one in three Panel members (35%) felt they would have liked external support on this aspect.⁴⁸



We contacted local schools and community centres and found out which groups were using them and then contacted the groups to see if they were interested in applying.

Panel member



We publicised the fund in local libraries, local websites that are aimed at the local community and also local voluntary agencies. However, the general community still did not know about the fund and we did not receive many applications from local groups that could have made a difference to their local community.

Panel member

I don't think that we will spend all of our money this year. It will be a shame to have to return any of the fund. Therefore I think we need better advertising to be able to reach the necessary people that need the funding.

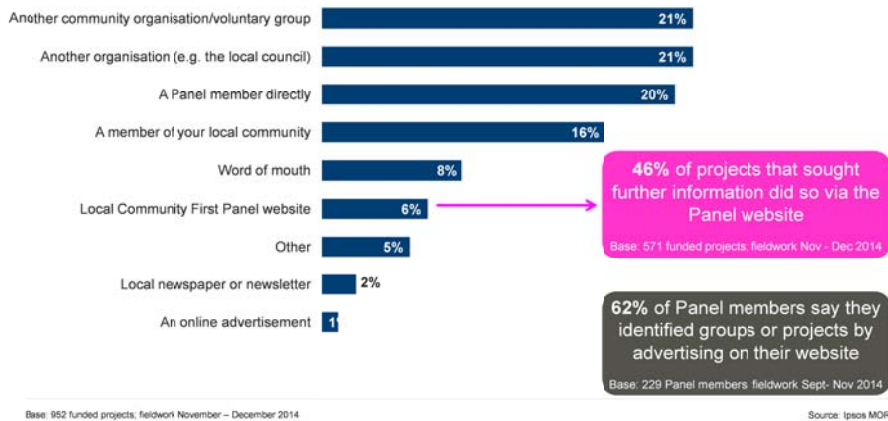
Panel member

According to the Year Four projects surveyed, the main ways they found out about Community First were through community groups and other organisations, Panel members, and individuals in their community.

⁴⁸ Base: Year Three survey, 185 Panel members, fieldwork May – June 2014

Figure 5.8 – Sources of initial information about Community First (projects)

How did you find out about Community First?



Overall, the findings point to some key success factors that helped to raise awareness and extend the reach of the programme in local communities:

- The good use of existing networks, often driven by an individual or organisation with a desire to seek out new groups through their wider network, or by searching for them proactively (e.g. online).
- Connections to local media were particularly helpful to raise the profile of the programme among local people and organisations.
- Using the experiences of other funded projects to attract further applications has often been effective. This also has the benefit of helping to strengthen local networks.

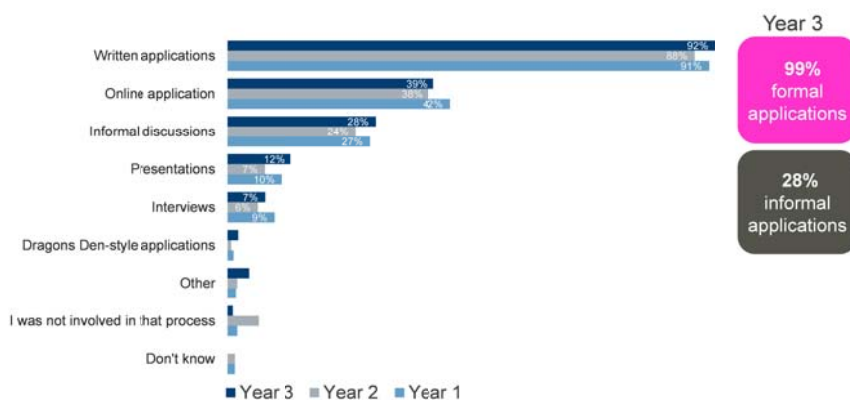
5.4.2 Receiving applications from groups and projects

Almost all Panel members surveyed after Year Three said their Panel accepted funding applications through formal means, most commonly via written applications (92% in the post-Year Three survey). Almost three in ten (28%) said they accepted some applications through more informal discussions.

Overall, this suggests general reliance on written applications, with a minority of Panels using additional presentations, interviews and Dragons Den-style applications to aid their decisions.

Figure 5.9 – Application process

How did groups/projects apply for funding?



Base: Year 3 survey 185 Panel members; fieldwork May – June 2014 / Year 2 survey 446 Panel members; fieldwork June – July 2013

Source: Ipsos MORI

5.4.3 Reviewing applications and making funding decisions

Three quarters (75%) of Panel members said their Panel had a clear set of formal decision making criteria when assessing funding applications, with 54% of Panels having always applied these and 21% sometimes doing so.⁴⁹ Survey findings and case studies indicate the criteria usually focused on their agreed priorities, but also other factors, such as the level of the match, overlap with other funded projects, and whether those who benefitted were all from the relevant ward. One in four Panel members (24%) said their Panel did not use formal criteria. Even without formal criteria in place, evaluation evidence suggests that Panels made good decisions, taking seriously their responsibilities for recommending grant funding.

The quality of applications varies but local knowledge by the Panel of the group is useful to understand exactly what it is they do.

Panel member

⁴⁹ Base: Year Three survey, 185 Panel members, fieldwork May – June 2014

We set up a very clear scoring process which focuses the mind very well on the necessary criteria.

Panel member

For example, in one case study Panel members considered each application against a set of agreed criteria, including whether the beneficiaries were entirely within the ward and whether alternative funding was available. They rejected one application on the grounds that lower cost options could have similar benefit but for a greater number of people. A similar approach was seen in other case studies.

Each application is scored on different aspects i.e. is it specific to the ward, does it meet any of the priorities.

Panel member

We quickly settled into a scoring system that assessed applicants both on our priorities and how well they fit with key Community First priorities (such as match funding and involving local people in volunteering).

Panel member

Qualitative evidence also suggests that Panels tried to allocate funding in a way which best fits the 'spirit of the programme'. In some cases this had meant passing over requests from bigger organisations who had applied to multiple Panels in a given area in favour of projects seen to be more genuinely local.

Some of the projects have been bidding to lots of different panels – I haven't seen much value in that to be honest.... People got wise to the bids and started to get greedy (asking for maximum funding amounts)... But we got on to them!

Panel Partner

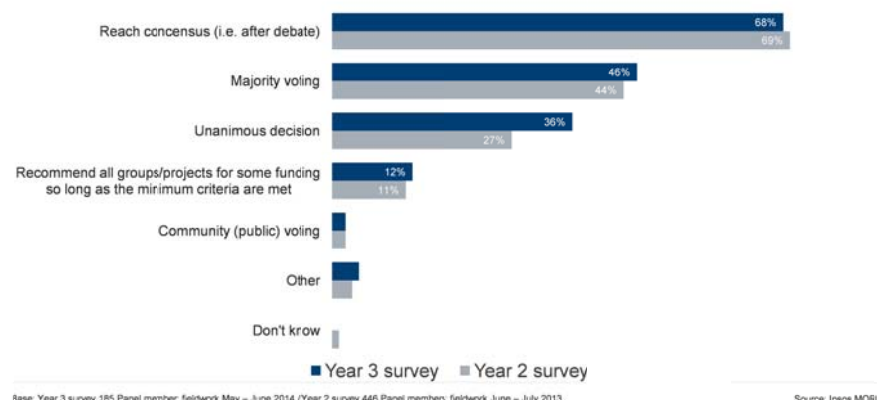
(Our website) generated a few applications from groups from outside the area. Some of these applications did not recognise how the application process and priorities differ between areas and wanted general organisations costs / continuation funding without demonstrating local knowledge.

Panel member

Most decisions were made by reaching consensus after discussion, as shown in Figure 5.10. This was followed by voting (either unanimous or majority); in many cases as a last resort. A small proportion of Panel members said they had used more innovative methods such as public voting to inform their decisions.

Figure 5.10 – Making funding decisions

In which of the following ways does your Panel make funding recommendation decisions?



We circulate applications prior to meetings and then debate them at Panel meetings. We have grown as a Panel and are not afraid to challenge/query.

Panel member

When asked during the post-Year Three and Four surveys, Panel members described some of the ways they had changed their approach as the programme progressed. In some cases this had meant introducing new processes, for example incorporating more face to face time with projects to assess their suitability for funding. In other cases Panels moved in a different direction, removing face to face presentations because they felt these benefited organisations with experience of applying for funding in their local community, at the expense of newer or smaller community groups. Elsewhere, the changes focussed on the criteria used to decide on applications, for example focusing more on the impact the project was expected to have.

We have become much more process driven, such as using an agreed criteria scoring sheet. We felt this was much more objective and fair and protected us much more as a Panel as we were getting increasingly more challenging questions regarding funding rejection decisions.

Panel member

We did used to have people come in to present, in the first year. But the problem was it was unfair. We did used to say no questions just pitch, but a panel member would invariably ask a question, they couldn't help it, and the person had answered it so that's unfair on the three just gone.

Panel member

Seven in ten Panel members (70%) said they awarded 'about the amount of money they expected' to in Year Three. Six percent say they awarded more than expected and 12% less.⁵⁰ Insufficient applications was the main reason for lower than expected allocations.

Limited number of groups within the area with no new start-ups this year. Most groups are silvered haired and younger members do not want the hassle maintaining an organisation.

Panel member

Several factors were important in influencing whether a Panel had enough projects to fund. First, strong existing networks and reasonable numbers of groups active in the community played a role, with more established projects applying for funding. Second, the extent to which the Panel successfully raised awareness of the funding more widely (e.g. through the local press or social media) was also important. Third, a determined, often well-connected and entrepreneurial individual committed to broadening the reach of the programme could also make a real difference.

We contacted local schools and community centres and found out which groups were using them and then contacted the groups to see if they were interested in applying

Panel lead

In both surveys and case studies, a few Panel members suggested greater flexibility around the maximum funding that could be allocated. This was seen as a way to ensure they could use more of their funding allocation even if insufficient applications had been made. Based on the evaluation evidence, there is a case for further support for Panels on how they could actively manage their relationships with known groups to encourage applications, alongside guidance on how to encourage new projects or groups to apply.

I feel the low grant amount ceiling is probably preventative for some organisations to staff and deliver anything significantly worthwhile. Given an underspend I did enquire if a larger sum could be made available per grant.

Panel member

⁵⁰ Base: 185 valid responses from Panel members taking part in the post year three Panel survey in May/June 2014.

Some Panels were careful about staggering how funding was released, not wanting to allocate all available funds too early in the year. There were also examples of Panels recommending projects for reduced amounts to enable them to fund more groups overall.

We did not have enough available money to grant the full amounts to applications so we reduced the amounts awarded to enable the panel to award something to most of the applicants.

Panel member

5.5 Oversight, central administration and support

Overall programme administration was provided by a centralised delivery partner, CDF. The Community First model involved a relatively small centralised management fee in recognition of the increased local responsibility for programme administration. One of the key assumptions underpinning the Community First approach was that a light touch model could be effective, proportionate and appropriate for a small grant funding process. This light touch model sought to devolve much of the administrative and decision making functions to the Panel of local volunteers, supported by a Panel Partner, also volunteering their time.

Alongside this, the programme logic model assumed that participants already had, or would be supported to develop, the necessary skills to use an online programme administration system. There was also an assumption that there would be sufficient support provided from the programme centrally, and by Panel Partners and others locally, to enable Panels to carry out their decision making role.

5.5.1 Online administration

During the post-Year Two survey Panel members were asked if they had used the online administration system, and how easy they found the online forms, including providing the information required.

Broadly speaking the results were positive, with half (49%) of Panel members surveyed having used the system and around two thirds of these (64%) saying they found the requirement to complete forms online easy and a similar proportion (61%) saying that providing the information was easy.⁵¹

It was much easier than other funding applications I've done

Project lead

⁵¹ Base: Year 2 survey, 220 Panel members, May – July 2013

I found (the online administration) really refreshing, most of the time it's worked really well... some people struggled and we've guided them through the process.

Panel Partner

For both these measures, though, this does leave around one in five of those who have used the system (22% and 18% respectively) saying they found it difficult. As such, support with the online system was often required for both funded projects and Panel members. This came from a range of sources, including CDF, Panel Partners, and Panel members (the latter particularly for projects).

Evidence from the qualitative research suggests some Panels worried that the transactional nature of the online approach makes it harder for people to ask for help if they needed it. Some were concerned that there might be applicants who simply gave up if they could not work out how to apply, without ever approaching the Panel for help.

The online systems marginalise many people in our community who don't have access to computers/internet. We did offer support to some groups, but this was cumbersome, very time consuming and I think it widens inequalities as some groups were put off as they didn't have confidence to send/receive e-mails. Others had to travel to libraries etc. to access computers which cost them money and took a long time

Panel member

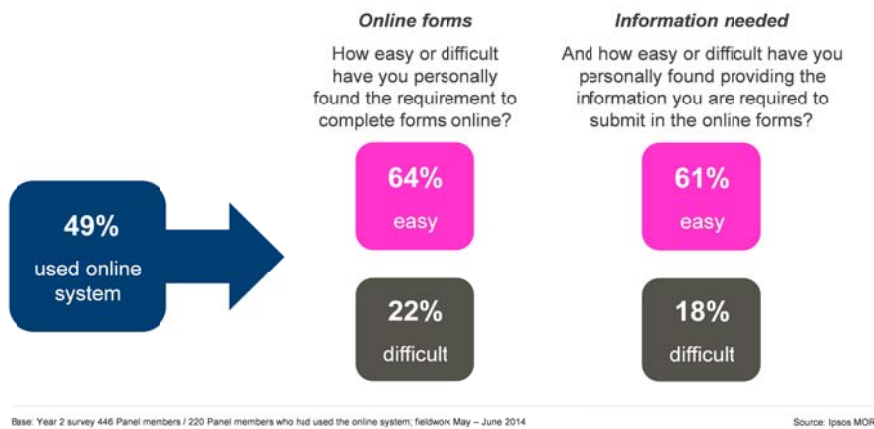
(The project) asked if they could have (the monitoring form) in hard copy, because they're an older group, so sometimes just having something they can write in is quite nice.

Panel member

Despite these difficulties, there is evidence of increased confidence among those who had lower levels of IT skills at the outset of the programme. Almost two thirds of project leads (64%) said they were highly confident using websites and other IT after applying, compared with fewer than half (46%) who rated their skills highly before doing so.⁵²

⁵² Base: Year 4 survey, 952 Projects, September- October 2014

Figure 5.11 – Use of online administration system (Panel members)

Panel experiences of using the Community First online administration system...

While online administration was undoubtedly a barrier for some groups, the majority of Panels and projects were able to work with the system. Completing forms and submitting documents was generally the responsibility of one or two key individuals. This was usually a person with substantial experience with online administration – often the Panel lead or someone from the Panel Partner organisation.

The case study and survey evidence suggests that flexibility in the use of the online approach would benefit some programme participants, especially those from older age groups and in circumstances where IT skills and access to a computer and/or the internet are more likely to be limited. However, this would have increased the burden on the central programme team, and therefore administration costs.

5.5.2 Guidance and support

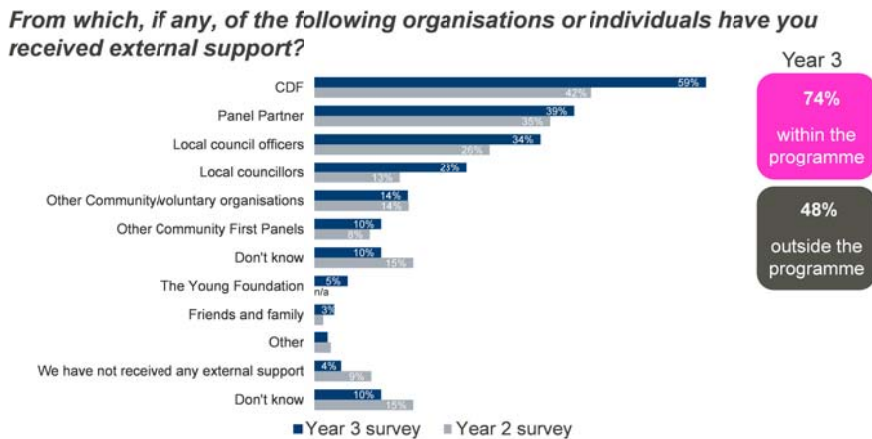
Support for Panels with online administration

Findings from Panel member surveys show that where external support was received for online administration, this was predominantly from within the programme (74%). The most common source of support was CDF (59% of Panel members at the end of Year Three had received support from CDF at some point during the programme, up from 42% at the end of Year Two). From the post-Year Two survey, a large majority of those who had received support from CDF were satisfied (77%).⁵³

The results also show the extensive support received from outside the programme. Around half (48%) of Panel members at the end of Year Three say they had received support from sources such as the local council or other community/voluntary organisations.

⁵³ Base: 187 valid responses from Panel members taking part in the post-Year Two Panel survey in June/July 2013. N.B. This question was not included in the post-Year Three survey to allow space for new questions.

Figure 5.12 – Sources of external support (Panel members)



Base: Year 3 survey 185 Panel member; fieldwork May – June 2014 / Year 2 survey 446 Panel members; fieldwork June – July 2013

Source: Ipsos MORI

Support for projects

Projects were asked whether they received support with different aspects of the programme, including developing the idea for their project, applying, and identifying the matched element. Projects were fairly evenly split on whether or not they received support with each aspect (see Table 5.2).

Panel members were consistently the most common source of support for projects. Almost all projects (99%) that received support from a Panel member said it was very or fairly useful.⁵⁴ Projects also received support from a range of other sources both inside and outside the programme.

⁵⁴ Base: Year 4 Project survey – 295 funded projects; fieldwork November- December 2014

Table 5.2 – Sources of support with key aspects (projects)

	Developing the project idea	Completing online forms	Application writing	Identifying matched part of application	Other support
Panel members	18%	14%	15%	18%	9%
CDF	5%	8%	4%	5%	3%
The Panel Partner	5%	6%	4%	5%	3%
Another community/voluntary organisation	19%	10%	13%	15%	11%
Local council	13%	4%	7%	8%	7%
Friend/ family	8%	6%	6%	4%	6%
A Community Organiser	8%	6%	7%	7%	5%
Another source	7%	4%	5%	7%	5%
We did not receive any support with this aspect	38%	48%	47%	39%	49%
Don't know	1%	2%	2%	3%	10%

Table presents column percentages (multiple responses were allowed).

Source: post-Year Four Project survey; Ipsos MORI

Base: All valid responses, 902 funded project members involved in the application process

Projects pointed to a number of aspects of the programme with which they would have liked more support. These included help with completing forms and navigating the online systems.

We would have liked more help with finding the forms and guidance notes on applying for the grant in the first instance. The website was really hard to navigate and we could not find names or links to applications forms or Panel members easily.

Project

We need more support to write things and complete forms and to learn how to complete forms on computer. We need help with printing and photocopying. We are grateful to the Panel Partner who helped us a lot.

Project

The case studies show that Panel members often played a role in helping projects develop or refine project ideas and applications. This ranged from basic guidance on how to communicate their ideas, to Panel leads completing the online form for projects or pointing them in the direction of someone in the community who could help (e.g. where they have no access to the internet).

We tend to sign-post support. We'll say 'give Tony a ring', he fills in forms for a living.

Panel member

Case study example – the importance of support

A funded project leader, a woman in her 80s, said that the Panel lead had approached her to encourage her group to apply for the funding. The Panel lead had also helped her to complete the application form. This was an existing group that was struggling to maintain activities with dwindling membership.

Since first applying the group has gone on to receive funding in multiple Community First years and the feedback from the project lead was very positive about what even a small sum (£500) had enabled them to do and how this had also helped to sustain the group.

The Panel lead felt the group would not have applied without significant support. This was in part due to difficulties the project lead had faced in completing the online application form.

She was having all this trouble was "forget it, I don't want the money".... so I think if I hadn't have been there to say come on Mary it's fine, we can sort this out...she would have just said I don't want it, it's too much, and she'd have just forgot it.

Panel member

The survey results support this, with the vast majority (95%) of Panel members saying their panel offered support to grant applicants, split relatively equally between those who offered it all the time and those who offered it on request (47% and 48% respectively).

We work with groups lacking expertise in writing applications so that their application is likely to be successful.

Panel member

While many projects did need support, it is important to recognise that, overall, the process was seen as relatively straightforward, at least by those who successfully applied for funding. Around half (47%) of Year Three projects said they did not receive any support with writing their funding application. Two thirds (64%) of projects in the final year said the application process was easy, with 12% saying it was difficult.⁵⁵ The case study evidence suggests that many projects had no problems with the application process, particularly existing groups with previous experience applying for funding.

I thought the forms were really straightforward. Having applied for funding before it was relatively easy.

Project

Support from central programme administration

The central administrative function, delivered by CDF, interacted with both Panels (about their activities and funding decisions), and projects (about funding acceptance and payment). The survey results and case studies point to generally positive experiences of support provided by CDF, as discussed above. However, some Panels and projects reported issues with how quickly they were helped.

We had full support from our CDF contact.

Project

My experience with CDF has generally been fine. We haven't had to contact them that often and they can be hard to get hold of. When you get to speak to someone they are usually helpful.

Panel member

I found dealing with the CDF central office slow, confusing and frustrating.

Project

This is likely to reflect the limited central programme resource available to deal with specific queries. There is some evidence from the case studies and surveys that CDF was perceived to be less responsive in the final year

⁵⁵ Base: Year 4 Project survey – 902 funded projects; fieldwork November – December 2014

due to changes in staffing as the programme came to an end. This caused frustration for some of those involved with the programme locally.

More generally, there were concerns among Panels about perceived changes to central processes, even though they acknowledged that it was reasonable that these would change over the course of the programme. The changes cited by Panels were often relatively minor (e.g. amendments to forms, particular requirements being emphasised more strongly – especially around funding communications activities such as newsletters). This resulted in some frustrations around how processes and changes to processes were communicated, irrespective of whether amendments were perceived as increasing or decreasing the burden on Panels and projects.

The rules from CDF keep changing and we had at one stage tried to keep to the rules as written by CDF – now CDF say just spend the money.

Panel member

In particular, Panel members and projects felt there was at times a lack of clarity around decision and payment deadlines. This led to added stress, mainly for project applicants from smaller groups with no funding reserves to draw on.

I was told all the money had to be spent by the end of April. But I had delays... so I was then told I had until the end of December. But in the summer CDF emailed me saying I had to get the monitoring information in and all the money should be spent by June or I'd be liable and would never be able to claim again... That whole process was pretty stressful to be honest.

Project

You hear you've got the money, you book the hall then... you still haven't been paid and you cancel the hall and lose your deposit. We've had projects that... had to dip into their own money to fund it.

Panel member

Qualitative feedback also suggests there was a perception in the final year of the programme that CDF became harder to contact as they reduced the size of their operation ahead of the end of the programme.

Support from The Young Foundation

Both the programme delivery team at CDF and the early evaluation feedback highlighted that a number of Panels were struggling to meet core requirements of the programme. In particular, there were issues around Panel websites and Community First Plans. In response to this, OCS

commissioned a package of more intensive support for these Panels. The support provided by The Young Foundation included:

- Bringing Community First panels together to learn from each other (including developing online resources)
- Helping panels to hear about good practice, including practice from outside the Community First Programme
- Supporting panels to develop their own websites or blogs
- Providing further intensive support to those panels who most needed it

In total, The Young Foundation supported around 125 Panels in some way, for example through Panel members attending events or accessing online resources. More specifically, around 80 Panels were given more intensive support with developing their Community First websites.

The evaluation approach does not allow this aspect of the programme to be evaluated in detail.⁵⁶ However, feedback from those who received support was positive, and the increase in Panels meeting key requirements suggests that this support was useful in many cases. The introduction of this additional support was a welcome response to the early evaluation and other evidence that a minority of Panels were struggling to fulfil their role within the programme.

5.5.3 The importance of key individuals – Panel Partners

Panel Partners were the second most common source of support cited by Panel members. The Year Four survey – and the case study evidence – demonstrates that in most cases, Panel Partners went beyond their core responsibilities of ensuring their local group was not acting fraudulently and dealing with expenses.⁵⁷

Their role varied from Panel to Panel, though most Panel Partners had attended meetings (73%), and indeed helped organise or run them (57% and 52%). Similar numbers had helped with applicant assessments (49%) and technical support around the Panel website (47%).⁵⁸

⁵⁶ In part this is because the work carried out by The Young Foundation was commissioned after the evaluation approach had been finalised, and was therefore not a specific focus for evaluation research activities.

⁵⁷ The crucial role of key Panel members (often the Panel lead) in making the programme work locally is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

⁵⁸ Base: Year Four survey, 229 Panel members, fieldwork November – December 2014

The Panel Partner has provided a great deal of support at no expense to the panel. They provided almost all the administrative support the panel has needed, except for the website which has been managed by a Panel member.

Panel member

Panel Partners consist of more mature and experienced members. They also seem to be more enthusiastic and unbiased.

Panel member

I have also personally learnt a great deal around community development and regeneration from the Panel Partner which will help me progress in my career.

Panel member

It would not and could not have happened without them.

Panel member

Those who were dissatisfied with Panel Partner support had Partners who sporadically attended meetings or were disconnected from the community.

No relationship to ward. Process orientated, get applications and get some grants out. Job done.

Panel member

Our Panel Partner was Asda which was not in (our town) so they had little interest in our Panel.

Panel member

There was also a risk that decision making by local people could be undermined by too prominent a role for Panel Partners. In a small number of cases there were examples of the process (and decisions) being dominated by the Panel Partner. There was a difficult tension here, given the need for Panels to keep on top of administration in order to allocate funding locally.

It became more of what the Panel Partner wanted. Sometimes felt the decision was already made and it became very hard if there was a difference of opinion.

Panel member

There is evidence from both the quantitative and qualitative evaluation data that for a minority of Panel Partners (and Panel members) the programme entailed a larger commitment than they had envisaged. Some felt there was a lack of adequate support (both locally and centrally) that had resulted in them or others becoming overburdened by the programme. For Panel Partners taking on the role as part of their day job the pressures had sometimes been felt by their organisation or employer.

I got it in the neck from my wife saying 'what are you doing filling the form in?' It cost me a few lattes and bottles of wine... I think I've got MUG written across my forehead

Panel Partner

We think being able to fund projects in the local community is incredibly worthwhile, and that's been our priority. But we've spent more time than expected on supporting the process.

Panel Partner

There was a lot expected from the Panel which nobody envisaged. The idea is very good and has been welcome and we all feel proud to have been part of this because it has benefited the community but we would not do it again.

Panel member

5.5.4 Transparency and scrutiny

Transparency and scrutiny around how funding was allocated and spent was delivered through a number of mechanisms designed to be proportionate with the light touch model for the programme. The key mechanisms were:

- Eligibility criteria for Panel members including not having been convicted of fraud, been declared bankrupt or held senior posts in organisations that have gone into administration.
- Requirement for Panels to submit Terms of Reference to CDF outlining details of the Panel membership, aims, conduct and values, Panel processes and contacts, signed by all Panel members.
- Requirement for all Panels to secure the support of a Panel Partner and for this organisation to submit a validation form confirming the Panel was representative of the community and satisfied the eligibility criteria for membership.
- Responsibility for holding of expenses funds to rest with the Panel Partner.
- Priority setting and funding decision making to rest with Panel members, with administration of funding release to reside with CDF.
- Requirement for funded projects to submit a monitoring form to CDF upon completion of their project, setting out their achievements, challenges faced, the people who took part and the final costs of the project, including any unspent funds.
- Requirements for funded projects to submit information and updates about their project to their Panel, and for Panels to publish these via their website.

This approach is not without its risks, but these were carefully considered by the Cabinet Office and CDF, and the approach agreed following extensive discussions.

There is evidence that many Panels (and other programme participants) publicised their activities and the local impact of Community First on their websites and via social media. Facebook, in particular, has been used by Panels to publish their decisions, as well as wider activities and related community news and events (see Figure 5.14). However, there is much less evidence that this has been effective in reaching the wider community, and

many of the websites were not kept up to date (including some of the examples linked to below).

Panel members often being those with strong existing local networks served as an additional mechanism for transparency. Qualitative evidence suggests that the proximity of decision-making to grant recipients meant Panel members had to be particularly clear about how they reached their decisions.

When you're dealing with local people, it's not like you're sitting in Whitehall. These are local people; they would probably have invited me to the event. And the same is true when they get awarded the money... if people slap you on the back or shake your hand, (you have to say) it's not me, it's 12 other people. Otherwise you leave yourself open to criticism that '(he) just picked his mates'

Panel member

Figure 5.13 – Example Panel websites and Facebook pages showcasing funded projects

Projects



Funded Group	Recommended Amount	Paid Amount	ID No	Disposition	Final actual spend
Sneinton Hermitage Community Centre	550.00	0.00	10099.01	Pending	0.00
Sneinton Hermitage Community Centre	550.00	0.00	10100.01	Pending	0.00
Ageing in Great Britain c.i.c.	2,268.08	2,268.08	4391.01	Approved	0.00
Greenway	2,000.00	2,000.00	4523.01	Approved	0.00
The SEND Project	1,740.00	1,740.00	4610.01	Approved	0.00
Sneinton Festival Group 2012	1,328.00	1,328.00	4750.01	Approved	0.00

<http://dalescommunityfirstpanel.wordpress.com/category/funded-projects/> (site accessed 29/05/15)

The projects that we have funded so far are:

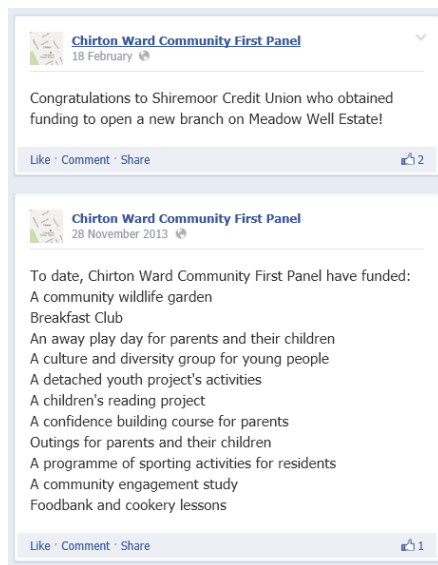
- ⊗ **Young at Heart** – £1,500 to help run monthly get-togethers for older residents.
- ⊗ **Newsome Unites** – £345 for Jubilee activities at Eddle sheltered housing.
- ⊗ **Newsome LEP** – £870 towards the Newsome Jubilee in and around St. John's Church.
- ⊗ **The Welcome Centre** – £2,500 to provide essentials for local people who are in crisis.
- ⊗ **Community Cards** – £1,000 to help create new cards from old and support participants.
- ⊗ **Newsome Scouts** – £1,500 towards creating a new meeting room at the Scout Hall.
- ⊗ **Longley and Lowerhouses Community Church** – £1,500 for a community cooker and pans.
- ⊗ **Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (Stirley Farm)** – £970 for the Newsome Bee Wise roadshow.
- ⊗ **Messy Monkeys** – £2,076 for children's craft activity sessions in Lowerhouses.
- ⊗ **Streetbikes** – £1,320 for cycling sessions for children and adults, plus bike mechanic sessions.
- ⊗ **Worth Unlimited** – £2,500 for running a Friday night youth club for children aged up to 16.
- ⊗ **Newsome Timebanking** – £2,500 to help tackle loneliness and isolation of vulnerable people.
- ⊗ **Growing Newsome** – £2,500 to help people grow and share their own food together.
- ⊗ **Parents Around Lowerhouses** – £624 for equipment to help volunteers run the group.
- ⊗ **Longley and Lowerhouses Welcome Pack** – £2,410 to create a welcome pack and training.
- ⊗ **Berry Brow Carnival Committee** – £500 for community activities at the 2013 Carnival.
- ⊗ **One Good Turn** – £1,976 to support volunteers in providing free items for local people in need.
- ⊗ **United Response** – £1,500 for Remembering Newsome, helping people live well with dementia.
- ⊗ **The Reading Circle** – £1,150 for a virtual reading and creative writing group for isolated people.
- ⊗ **Worth Unlimited** – £2,500 to open a drop-in cafe and run cooking activities in Lowerhouses.
- ⊗ **Streetbikes** – £1,500 for community cycling activities and 55 bikes + helmets to give away.
- ⊗ **Newsome Bowling Club** – £2,305 for equipment to set up a community-owned bowling club.
- ⊗ **Parents Around Lowerhouses** – £1,000 for a planting project outside Lowerhouses School.
- ⊗ **Talkthru** – £2,500 for a Counselling Support service and Baby Equipment Recycling Project.
- ⊗ **Newsome Panthers** – £1,544 for improvements to the community playing fields at Hall Bower.

If you have an idea for a project that you'd like us to fund, visit our **How to apply** page for more details.

Other funds that we have spent:

- ⊗ **Year one expenses** – £63 for promotional materials.
- ⊗ **Year two expenses** – £509 for community research, hall hire and promotional materials.
- ⊗ **Community Plan** – £2,000 to help create our Community Plan for the Newsome Ward.

<http://newsomecommunityfirst.wordpress.com/2013/11/01/list-of-projects-weve-funded/> (site accessed 29/05/15)



<https://www.facebook.com/#!/ChirtonWard?fref=ts>
(site accessed 29/05/15)



<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Community-First-Easton-and-Lawrence-Hill-Panel/592862327410403#!/pages/Community-First-Easton-and-Lawrence-Hill-Panel/592862327410403>

(site accessed 29/05/15)

Within the programme there were two main scrutiny mechanisms: the monitoring form submitted by projects at the end of their funded activity, and the information projects were asked to provide to Panels to publish on their websites.

One of the challenges of the programme was around encouraging those involved – both Panels and projects – to return their completed monitoring forms to CDF, when they were often already giving significant time to community activity locally. Two thirds (66%) of completed projects that responded to the post-Year Three survey had submitted their monitoring form to CDF, and just fewer than half (47%) had provided evidence to the Panel for their website.⁵⁹

Projects did not provide evidence to the Panel for their website for a number of reasons. Around half of projects who had not still intended to do so (46%), while eight percent said the nature of the project meant they were unable to. However, a third (33%), said they were not aware of this requirement.

We could not access our project on the website to complete the online evaluation form and despite emails to request help to do this, nothing was forthcoming

Project

⁵⁹ It has not been possible to verify this finding against the CDF management information.

The Panel has never requested photos and as far as I can see the web page is not updated with this kind of media

Project

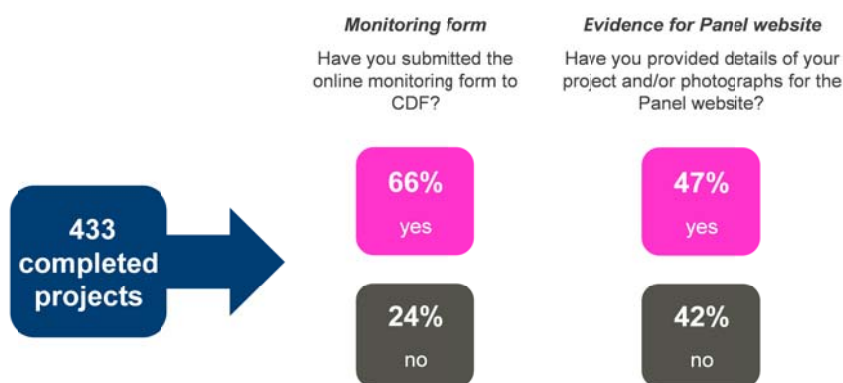
Panels also raised concerns about the difficulty of encouraging funded projects to provide information about how their project went and its impact. This was seen as a particular challenge given the programme stipulated that the monitoring form must be sent to CDF rather than the Panel (although CDF guidance did state that projects should send evidence of their activities to the Panel for their website).

We've put things on the website... but there's no onus on the group to do that, no onus on us only with CDF. Once it's gone it's gone.

Panel member

Figure 5.14 – Project monitoring and evidence

Projects fulfilling monitoring requirements...



There are a number of examples of Panels opening themselves up to further scrutiny, such as through publication of minutes of meetings, in addition to publicising funding decisions and participating in local evaluations by organisations such as the local council.

Case studies also highlighted an appetite among some Panels for a more formal monitoring and scrutiny role with individual funded projects, particularly to identify what projects/groups were achieving with Community First funding to inform decision-making. While in a small number of case studies Panels had taken a more engaged approach with projects, there was no requirement for them to do so.

Understanding social outcomes

6 Understanding social outcomes

In this section of the report we present findings from the Community First social impact assessment. The outcomes are assessed based on the intervention logic model and theory of change, both of which are explained in greater detail in the Evaluation Design Document.

For each of the main programme beneficiaries we describe the evidence about whether or not they have experienced the anticipated outcomes, as well as reflecting on how well the programme has addressed the four overarching problems identified in the programme rationale.⁶⁰

Issues NMF programme sought to address

- The value of community assets and volunteering are not fully or adequately recognised by local communities or traditional grant funding.
- Local communities do not have enough influence over funding decisions affecting their neighbourhood.
- Community groups and projects face barriers to accessing small grant funding.
- Government funding is not leveraged effectively enough to support community groups and projects.

The Neighbourhood Matched Fund element of the Community First programme aimed to be an efficient way of helping frontline community groups to access grant funding. The desired effect was to build decision making capacity at a local level among people who understand community needs. Beyond this, the programme aimed to fund both new and existing groups to organise activities that benefited the community and better addressed local needs.

The programme sought to deliver these aims through a light touch grant funding approach, with decision making devolved to Panels of local volunteers, supported by a Panel Partner organisation. Alongside the key processes relating to this design (discussed in Section 5), the programme involved three main beneficiary groups:

⁶⁰ Further details on the programme rationale are presented in Chapter 3.

- **Panel members** – the volunteers who have taken responsibility for setting priorities and making funding decisions, as well as providing support in many cases to funding applicants.
- **Funding applicants** – the project members who made applications for Community First funding.
- **Wider community** – the local residents who were beneficiaries of the funded activity (either as contributors or direct beneficiaries) and the broader local community that benefitted from activity supported or promoted by the programme.

6.1 Summary

The evaluation findings show positive impacts for individuals participating in the programme, and positive perceptions of the wider impacts on communities. The findings show that the funding helped to support existing groups and networks in communities, many of which will continue beyond the lifetime of the programme.

Those involved did express some doubts about the ongoing sustainability of these positive impacts without continued funding. Across the programme, there were concerns about the future of wider local networks of engaged individuals and organisations, and therefore their ability to continue to support effective local decision making and accountability.

6.1.1 Individual outcomes – Panel members and project leads

The evidence shows both Panel members and those successful in applying for funding have experienced improvements in skills and knowledge needed to self-organise effectively and address local needs. While the programme itself has been important in facilitating these outcomes, additional local support and advice from experienced Panel members and Panel Partners also played a crucial role.

Panel members often had relevant skills and experience, but they felt that being involved with Community First has benefited them. In particular, there is evidence of increased confidence around making funding decisions and improved knowledge of, and working with, the local community. The programme also increased confidence among successful project leads, increasing the number of community groups working together, and encouraging them to apply for funding from other sources.

6.1.2 Community outcomes – community activity and impacts on the local community

Community First matched funding also helped to generate new activity and use of resources. This includes evidence of some new groups forming, as well as organisations starting new activities, or improving/ extending their

existing activities, for example by involving new people or purchasing assets.

Funding has focused predominantly on existing groups, with Community First grants in some cases used to sustain existing activity. However, much of the activity was new, with the matched funding often coming from new sources.

The current funding environment offered Community First a clear role for local organisations, with significant demand for this type of small grant funding in Community First neighbourhoods. For many small community groups, Community First was an easily accessible way of *extending* the local impact of their work, at a time when funding and other local resource opportunities were highly competitive.

Many individuals benefited from funded activities, through a wide range of projects designed to meet local needs and through increased community connections. Panel members and project leads were in agreement about the impact on local networks, and increasingly felt that higher level outcomes – such as pride in neighbourhood and trust in other people – were being realised, at least to some extent. Overall, Panel members and projects were positive about the impact in their local area as a result of the programme.

6.1.3 Sustainability

A key question for assessing social impact is whether the incremental changes experienced by individual community members and strengthened local networks are enough to catalyse longer term outcomes. Despite some positive indications about the impact Community First has had on individuals and communities, there are a number of factors which are likely to affect the sustainability of these outcomes after the end of the programme.

Programme participants were positive about their future involvement in similar activity, with most Panels saying they were likely to continue working together. They were also positive about the impact the programme has had on key skills, confidence and social capital locally.

However, there were concerns about the energy levels and availability of community members to continue these projects in the future – and the long term sustainability of the impact of the programme – without further funding. While Community First funding was welcomed, particularly by funded projects, they felt there was a clear need for continued small grants funding. Project leads reported that the competition for small grants was increasing, and some Panel members felt that greater amounts of funding per individual grant would be more effective in addressing needs.

6.2 Individual outcomes

6.2.1 Panel members

Community First Panels relied on local community volunteers to take responsibility for setting priorities and make funding decisions. Panel members were expected to help publicise Community First and attract local people and community groups to apply. These applications could come from existing or new groups, and may have been one-off, ad hoc activities (e.g. a street party) or more ongoing (e.g. an IT skills training club). Through Panel members' responsibility for setting priorities, attracting applicants, and making funding decisions, the following outcomes were expected to be realised:

- Local residents able to articulate priorities for action.
- Panel members with increased capacity to understand local needs and make decisions about how best to address them.
- Panel members develop transferrable listening, decision making and administrative skills.

Panel members were generally positive about their skills and knowledge prior to their involvement with Community First, reflecting their age, education and level of experience of community work (see Section 5.3 for more on Panel members' backgrounds). Even so, there is evidence that they have experienced improvements in skills and knowledge through taking part in the programme.

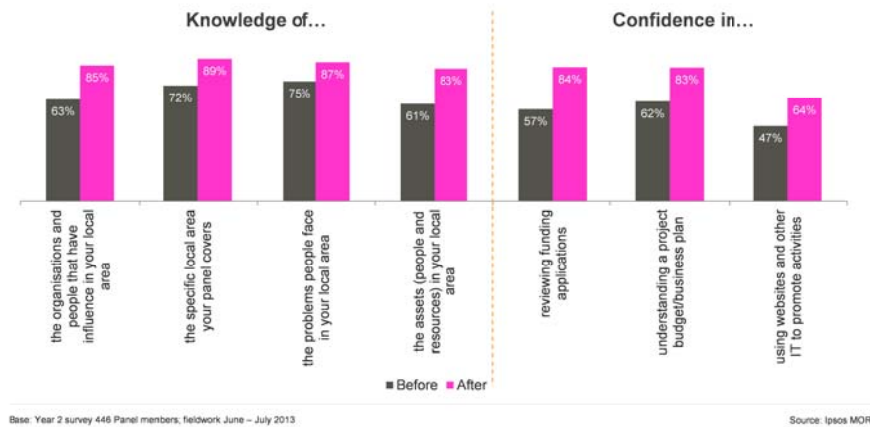
As part of the post-Year Two survey, Panel members were asked to think about their knowledge and confidence in relevant areas prior to involvement in Community First and to gauge the change over time at that point (see Figure 6.1). Between half and three quarters of Panel members felt they had a high level of knowledge and confidence before taking part in the programme.⁶¹ Fewer than one in ten reported a low degree of confidence or knowledge in any of the areas (see Figure 6.1).⁶² Similarly, three quarters (75%) of Panel members stated they had a *high* degree of knowledge about the problems people faced in their local area, compared to three percent who stated they had a *low* degree of knowledge.

⁶¹ Respondents answering 8 to 10 on a 0 to 10 scale where, for knowledge aspects, 0 is 'Nothing at all' and 10 is 'A great deal' and where, for confidence aspects, 0 is 'Not at all confident' and 10 is 'Extremely confident'.

⁶² Respondents answering 0 to 4 on a 0 to 10 scale where, for knowledge aspects, 0 is 'Nothing at all' and 10 is 'A great deal' and where, for confidence aspects, 0 is 'Not at all confident' and 10 is 'Extremely confident'.

Figure 6.1 – Panel members' assessment of knowledge and skills

Panels answering between 8 and 10 when asked about their knowledge and confidence before and since starting work with the Community First Panel.



Panel members were least positive about their skills for using websites and IT to promote activities. Just under half said they were *highly* confident before the programme (47%, compared with 10% who said they had a low degree of confidence).

Across all seven areas of skills and confidence, Panel members were more positive after the first two years of the programme. The greatest uplift was for reviewing funding applications, with the proportion of Panel members saying they have a high degree of confidence rising by 27 percentage points. Confidence in using websites and other IT to promote activities remained the lowest, but had risen to 64%, up 17 percentage points.

Table 6.1 – Confidence in using websites and other IT to promote activities

	Prior to involvement in CF	Post-Year Two	Percentage point change
Low (0-4)	10%	4%	-6 ppt
Medium (5-7)	37%	27%	-10 ppt
High (8-10)	47%	64%	+17 ppt

Table presents column percentages.

Both sets of responses collected during the post-Year Two Panel survey.

Source: Ipsos MORI

Base: 446 Panel members; all valid responses

This suggests that Panel members felt their involvement benefited them in a range of relevant areas. From the case studies and surveys, one of the strongest themes around impact on Panel members was on their confidence to input into the decision making process. This included their

ability to contribute to discussions and their confidence to challenge projects to justify their funding applications.

I have become more confident about asking questions and speaking out. It was quite difficult to do initially (even though I still did so) but it did become easier.

Panel member

We have developed our skills so that some of the members are more critical friends when considering the applications and we are not afraid to challenge elements positively.

Panel member

Some Panel members also pointed to the impact the decision making process had had on their awareness of, and relationships with, relevant local organisations and people. In some cases this had encouraged them to be more proactive in seeking out new projects, helping to strengthen local networks.

We offer more help with applications, we have been able to build up a database of groups, we have developed partnerships with local and county councils, other funders and community organisations.

Panel member

We have realised that we need to be more proactive in networking and making the community aware of our programme.

Panel member

Experienced Panel members and Panel Partners played an important role in facilitating key processes such as attracting funding applications and online administration. There is evidence through the case studies that these skills have been transferred to other Panel members. It is likely that this has contributed to increased confidence and knowledge of Panel members and helped to strengthen the capabilities of local networks.

I have worked with some of the other Panellists to help them get to grips with the decision making process. It's something I've done before with the council, but I think there is real value in spreading that knowledge a bit wider.

Panel member

There were a few times where we would help each other out on the Panel. Not everyone has done this kind of thing before, so it's good to share what we each know.

Panel member

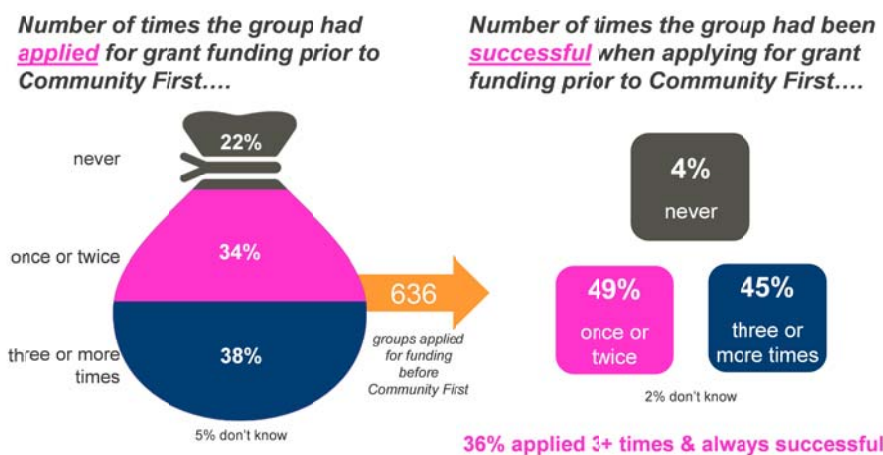
6.2.2 Funded projects

Community First assumed that there were individuals and groups willing to apply for funding and who had the ability to do so, including explaining how their project met local needs and securing the matched funding element. Through this process applicants should have gained experience of applying for grant funding, including increased knowledge and skills in relevant areas. In this way, the programme was intended to generate positive outcomes for individuals to help address the problem of community groups and projects facing barriers to accessing small grant funding.

Around one in five (22%) of funded projects surveyed in Year Four, that existed prior to applying for Community First funding had not previously applied for funding. Of those projects that had prior experience, the vast majority (96%) had been successful at least once. More than a third of projects (38%) had previously applied three or more times and been successful each time.

This shows that there was a significant level of experience of making funding applications, which provides important context when interpreting findings around knowledge and skill levels.

Figure 6.2 – Prior funding application experience



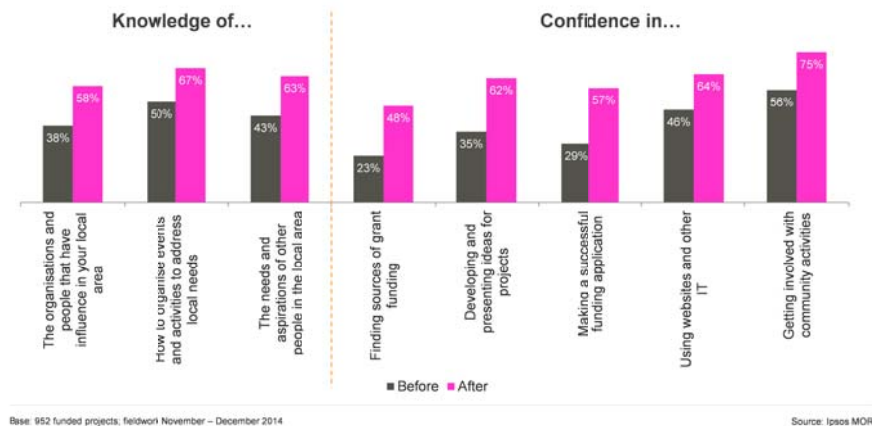
Base: Year 4: 876/636 pre-existing funded projects; fieldwork November – December 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI

As part of the post-Year Four project survey, project leads were asked to rate their knowledge of the local area and confidence around funding applications before and after applying for Community First funding. As with similar questions for Panel members, there was a significant uplift across all aspects in those saying they had a *high* degree (8-10) of knowledge or confidence.

Figure 6.3 – Projects' assessment of key knowledge and confidence

Projects answering between 8 and 10 when asked about their knowledge and confidence before and since starting work with the Community First Panel.



In particular, confidence in the following fundraising related activities increased⁶³:

- **Making successful funding applications:** 57% of project leads felt highly confident in making successful applications since applying, up by 28 percentage points.
- **Finding sources of grant funding:** 48% of project leads felt highly confident in finding new funding since applying, up by 25 percentage points.
- **Developing and presenting ideas for projects:** 62% of project leads felt highly confident in developing and presenting their ideas, up by 27 percentage points.

In the post-Year Four project survey, funded projects were asked specifically about whether their experience of applying for Community First had encouraged them to apply for funding from other sources; 89% said it had. This suggests that Community First has had a positive impact on their confidence and skills in this area. This is similar to findings for previous years.

It has given me confidence in putting a bid together. Also, being successful with Community First boosts morale and gives encouragement to apply for funding.

Project

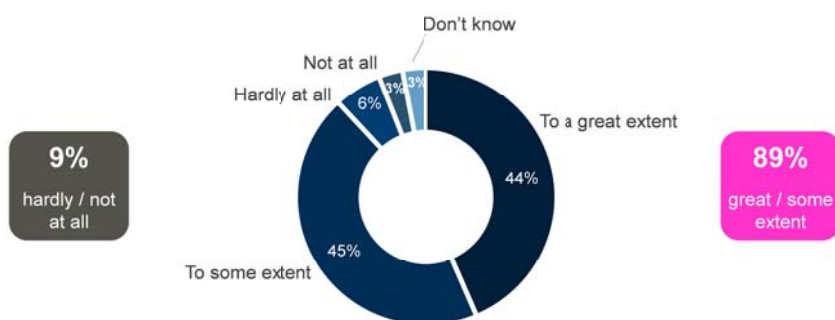
It has given me the confidence to apply even though I knew little to nothing about funding.

Project

⁶³ These are retrospective self-assessments of confidence and knowledge in these areas.

Figure 6.4 – Encouraging other funding applications

To what extent has your experience of applying for Community First funding encouraged you to apply for funding from other sources?



Base: 952 funded projects; fieldwork November – December 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI

Some feedback also points to the importance of key design elements of Community First, including the simplicity of the process (particularly the application forms), and the speed with which decisions could be made. The important role support from the Panel played is clear too. Making the process simple and accessible gave projects a positive experience that impacted on their likelihood to repeat the process.

I find the questions on the form clear and easy to follow. Also after applying you do not have to wait long before knowing whether the application has been successful or not.

Project

It was much easier than other funding applications I've done.

Project

Community First is grass roots level funding which makes a real difference in the community. The forms are accessible enough for local groups to fill them in without been put off and the support I received from the Panel Partner gave me the confidence to complete the form and encouraged me to apply for other funding sources, knowing that you can actually speak to the funders and that they are there to support you.

Project member

The programme had additional practical outcomes for projects. For example, the process has given them some resources to draw on, such as being able to use the Community First application as a template in the future. The requirement to articulate the purpose and impact of their project against local priorities has helped some to reflect on their activities and, they believe, will help them to present a stronger case in the future.

I had not previously applied for a grant online before. I learned to scan and cope with an online application. Previously it was done by post. It saves time online and I find it easier.

Project

It is a comprehensive form that helps me to reflect a lot more on the work I do...this then empowers me with the confidence to apply for funding for other projects we run.

Project

The smaller, “local” nature of Community First was a positive for some funded projects, not least as they felt they had a greater chance of being successful than with larger (and more complex) grant programmes or trusts.

It helps you realise how smaller local funding is easier to access than national funding.

Project

In the past we have been unsuccessful when applying to large trusts. Being successful on this occasion gave me the confidence to apply to (another smaller) fund.

Project

Many projects pointed to their success with Community First making it easier to succeed with future grant applications. Being able to gain external funding and relevant experience helped them to demonstrate success and impact, thereby making it easier to be successful with funding applications in the future. This seems to have been important given a challenging funding environment for small community groups.

We have been turned down for other funds because we did not have experience of managing a grant fund...Community First has given us that chance and we can demonstrate our ability to manage grant funds.

Project

We find that money attracts money. If one grant funder makes an initial grant then we find that other funders are more willing to give.

Project

The funding environment is getting more and more difficult and competition is high, we therefore have looked more to local funding agencies who understand local needs and interests.

Project

A key aim of the programme is to create better local networks, at an individual and organisational level. When asked about their awareness of

other local activities and actors, post-Year Four project members reported the following:

- Before the programme, 38% had a high level of knowledge of other activities and actors, after this increased to 58%.
- After the programme, 63% of project leads felt confident that they understood the needs and aspirations of other local people in the area, up from 43%.
- In turn, the proportion of project leads that felt highly confident they could organise local activity to address local needs increased from 50% to 67%.
- Finally, the numbers of project leads who felt highly confident getting involved in local activities increased from 56% to 75%.

In summary, there was been an increase in the skills and capacity of local project leaders; their perceptions of their ability to articulate their work and bring in finance increased, as had their local understanding.

While there were increased skills for new groups, it is worth noting that existing groups had a similar experience. For example, when asked about their confidence in making a successful funding application, those from new groups (post-Year Three) who rated themselves as highly confident increased from 21% to 43% after the application process, whereas those from existing groups increased from 31% to 60%. This suggests that the programme helped to improve the skills and confidence of a range of organisations and projects.

The evaluation evidence shows that projects were very positive about the potential for longer term impact on their group by giving them greater confidence and tools to apply for funding.

Case study example

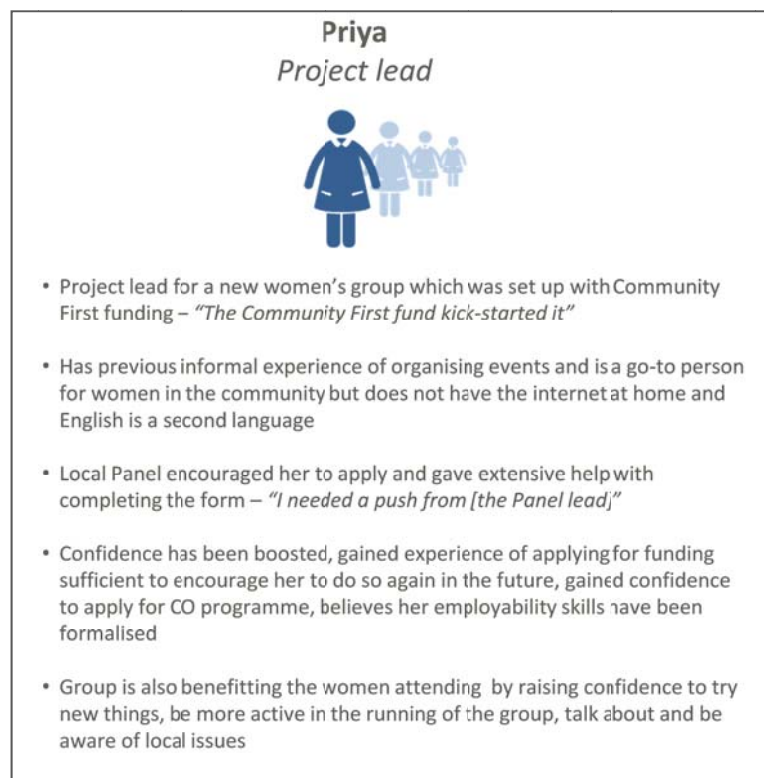
In one small village there were over 20 community organisations, many of which had survived for years by raising funds directly through their members. Several were reaching the point of needing small amounts of capital investment to replenish equipment or repair buildings. These projects were in much need of funding, but most had not considered applying for grants previously.

The availability of Community First funding and the work of Panel members encouraged many of these groups to apply. Some needed help to develop their ideas and complete the application process, while others were able to do so without difficulty.

Overall, the funding has strengthened local groups significantly, and encouraged them to continue meeting needs in their community. Several have applied for further Community First funding, or made applications to other grant providers.

In some cases, there are examples of further impacts for project leads, particularly around their engagement with local networks. Through applying for Community First funding, “Priya” was given the confidence to apply for the Community Organisers programme. This enabled her to build on her previous experience in the community.

Figure 6.5 – Case study illustration



6.3 Community outcomes

A key aim of the evaluation was to understand the extent to which Community First benefited local communities. As we have seen, there is evidence of positive outcomes for both Panel members and project leads. The nature of these – increased ability and confidence to continue involvement in community activity – means there may have also been additional benefits for the wider community. For example, involvement in a Community First Panel increased the confidence of many Panel members in key skills such as decision making, which may also have been beneficial to the community if further decision making opportunities arose.

However, outcomes for the wider community are not limited to those that follow from individual outcomes. The programme logic assumed that funded projects are themselves beneficial in addressing community needs, and that matched funding helps to generate new community activity, either through new activities, groups or people involved.

6.3.1 Generating and strengthening community activity

A key assumption underpinning the logic model of Community First was that new social activity (and new people taking part) is a stepping stone to broader impact. The programme aimed to generate new social activity in four ways:

1. Encouraging people to get involved
2. Generating new activities and projects
3. Encouraging new groups to form
4. Generating additional resources and assets

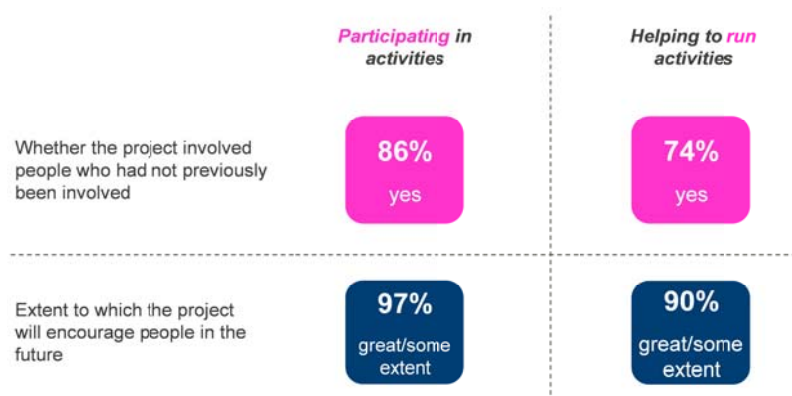
Encouraging new people

There is strong evidence that Community First encouraged new people to get involved in community activity. Post-Year Four Project survey results show that nearly nine in ten (86%) projects said their activity involved people who had not been involved in similar activities before, and around three quarters (74%) that there were people helping to run it who had not been involved in running similar activities before.⁶⁴ On both counts projects were positive about future prospects too – 97% thought their project would encourage new people to get involved in the future, and 90% that it would encourage people to get involved in running that type of activity.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Base: Year 4 survey, 952 funded projects; fieldwork November – December 2014

⁶⁵ Base: Year 4 survey, 952 funded projects; fieldwork November – December 2014

Figure 6.6 – Results of receiving funding

Encouraging new people to get involved...

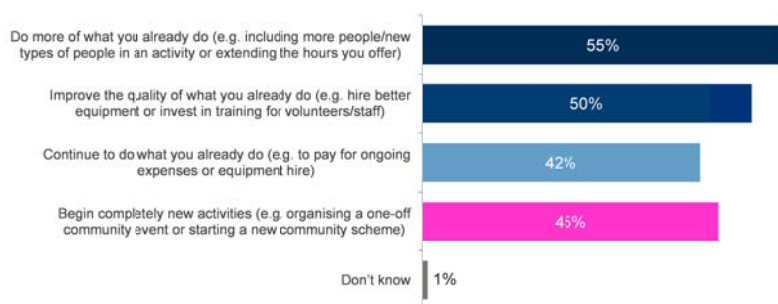
Base: Year 4 survey 952 funded projects; fieldwork November – December 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI

Generating new activity

Projects were asked what the funding helped them to do, and the findings indicate that the funding had a positive effect, by helping groups to either do more, do it better or do new things. Over half said it helped them do more of what they already did and improve the quality of what they did (55% and 50% respectively); and 45% that it helped them begin completely new activities.⁶⁶

Figure 6.7 – Results of receiving funding

Which of the following have the funding and matched resources helped you to do (or will help you to do) through the project?

Base: Year 4 survey 952 funded projects; fieldwork November – December 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI

These findings highlight how difficult it is to draw a simple distinction between 'new' and 'existing' activity. Funding was often used, at least in part, to help groups continue doing what they had already been doing, although many projects said the funding enabled them to extend their activities in some way.

⁶⁶ Base: Year 4 survey, 952 funded projects; fieldwork November – December 2014

Case study example

One case study project highlighted how a simple distinction between existing and new activity might not be possible. They had never previously applied for grant funding and had managed to stay active through small donations from those running the group and direct beneficiaries. Community First funding was clearly very helpful in helping them to expand into a new activity, but had also been helpful in making the group more sustainable for the future by giving it a much needed boost to general funding.

Funded projects were also asked a series of questions to better understand Community First's impact in generating new community activity. Over two thirds (68%) of projects were of an ongoing rather than one-off nature. Overall 45% said that Community First helped them to begin completely new activities; 7% of the groups running these activities were set up as a result of the programme, while 92% already existed.⁶⁷

Using these three questions to categorise projects, just under half (45%) delivered a new activity as a result of Community First (i.e. they had not done that type of thing before without Community First funding). Overall, one in twenty projects (5%) can be classified as being a new activity run by a new group.

Figure 6.8 – Categorising funded projects



Projects were asked what would have happened had they not received Community First funding. Around two in five (39%) funded projects believed their project would not have continued without Community First funding without some form of compromise. Of those who believed the project would

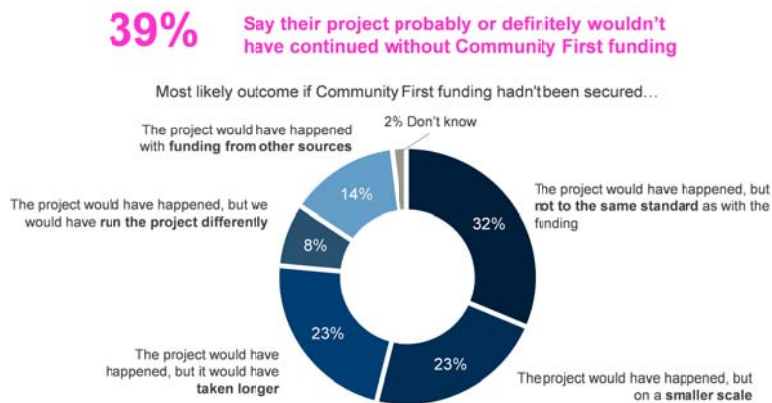
⁶⁷ Base: Year 4 survey, 952 funded projects; fieldwork November – December 2014

have continued, there is mixed opinion about whether the result would have been a reduction in the standard, scale or pace of their activity.⁶⁸

Around one in seven (14%) said they would have found funding from other sources, highlighting the perceived lack of funding for community projects.

Figure 6.9 – Importance of securing Community First funding

The importance of securing Community First funding.....



Base: Year 4 survey 952 funded projects / 573 funded projects who say they would have continued with CF funding; fieldwork November – December 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI

Encouraging new groups

Community First did less to encourage completely new groups to form – as this was not a distinct aim of the programme. A large majority (92%) of funded projects already existed prior to applying for Community First funding. For many Panels, the lack of strong drivers to help facilitate new groups meant that had not been an area of focus, or necessary to carry out their core responsibilities. In addition, some Panels indicated that they were looking for a “track record” from groups, to demonstrate that projects would actually happen, which may have discouraged new groups from applying. The involvement of experienced individuals and organisations with existing networks meant that often there were sufficient funding applications from established groups and projects that met local priorities.

That funded groups tended to be existing rather than new may also reflect the priorities Panels set. These priorities were often based on a well-established understanding of needs in the local area and it is reasonable, given case study feedback, to assume that community groups had already been created to meet these needs in many neighbourhoods.

Generating additional resources and assets

Matched funding is a defining characteristic of the Community First programme and a key way to generate new community activity. By the end, the programme had seen 17,956 project recommendations, totalling £27.2

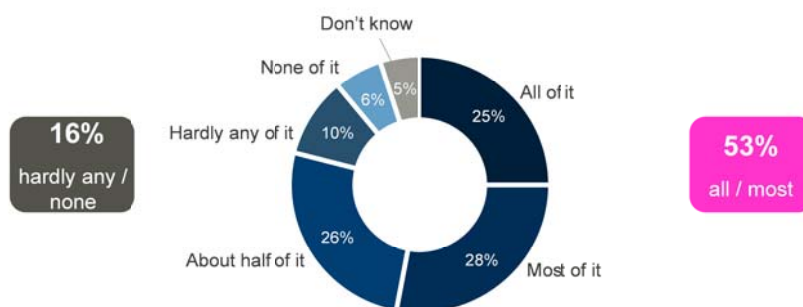
⁶⁸ Base: Year 4 survey, 952 funded projects; fieldwork November – December 2014

million in funding, yielding over three times this amount in matched funding (£93 million) across the 594 panels. This matched element included £15.3 million in cash match, and just over than 5.5 million volunteering hours. This highlights the significant impact of the Community First programme, across a huge range of local communities through a wide variety of projects.

The post-Year Four survey asked funded projects to estimate the proportion of their matched element was new. Over half of projects said their match was all or mostly new resources and other assets. An overarching objective for the programme was to recognise the value of community assets and volunteering, which this matched element, new or existing, can be seen as achieving.

Figure 6.10 – Community First generating matched funding

How much, if any, of the matched funding element of your application was new?



Base: Year 4 survey 952 funded projects, fieldwork November – December 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI

Effectively leveraging resources/assets

The evaluation findings also point to where the programme funding had been most effectively used to increase community activity and leverage community resources against government funding

To understand this better, funded projects that responded to the post-Year Four survey can be split into two groups and compared – those who had carried out a similar type of activity without previous Community First funding and those had not.

Community First funding has been most important in supporting projects where the group had not done something similar before. These projects are more likely to say the project would not have gone ahead without Community First funding. Conversely, projects where something similar had been carried out before were more likely to say they would have found funding from elsewhere or to have carried out the activities in a different way (such as taking longer) had the grant not been available. This likely reflects their prior experience in finding funding or delivering projects with limited access to funds.

Table 6.2 – Perceptions of what would have happened without Community First by whether the project had done something similar before receiving funding

	Have done this type of thing before without CF	Have <u>not</u> done this type of thing before without CF	Overall
Project wouldn't have happened without CF	31%	47%	39%
Project would have continued without CF but with some changes/compromises	51%	40%	46%
Project would have found funding from somewhere else	17%	12%	14%
Don't know	1%	1%	1%

Table presents column percentages.

Source: Ipsos MORI

Base: 952 funded projects; all valid responses

It is also possible to look at results for how much of the matched funding element was new by whether the project had done something similar before without Community First funding or not.

Breaking down survey results in this way indicates that Community First funding is most effective in leveraging new matched resources when it is used to fund new activities. This is regardless of whether the group carrying out the project was new or not.

Table 6.3 – Proportion of new match funding by whether the project had done something similar before receiving funding

	Have done this type of thing before without CF	Have <u>not</u> done this type of thing before without CF	Overall
All or most of the matched element was new	46%	61%	53%
About half of the matched element was new	27%	24%	26%
Hardly any or none of the matched element was new	22%	11%	16%
Don't know	5%	4%	5%

Table presents column percentages.

Source: Ipsos MORI

Base: 952 funded projects; all valid responses

The programme's light touch approach and the wider community action and funding landscape means it is difficult, without significant additional investment, to see how a large number of new groups could be generated through a programme of this type. What these results show, though, is that it may be possible for similar programmes to more effectively leverage new resources/assets by focusing on funding new activity, even where this comes from existing groups (taking a more prescriptive approach to funding criteria than Community First did).

6.3.2 Local community outcomes

Types of projects

Projects were asked to categorise themselves by type of activity involved and their main focus. Post-Year Four, two thirds (67%) of projects said they were working to connect people together, with just over half (57%) working to encourage people to get involved.

A large proportion of projects worked to help members of the community improve aspects of their life, predominantly around health and well-being (66%) and education and skills (51%). The number of well-being projects has increased since the post-Year Three project survey (from 62% to 66%), although helping people to learn went down slightly (from 49% to 43%).

Project activities typically covered four of the 'five ways to well-being' – Connect (to new people and activities), Give (through time, skills and

money), Be Active (taking part) and Keep Learning.⁶⁹ The ‘five ways to well-being’ are a set of simple things people can do in their everyday lives which can help to improve well-being. The fifth way to well-being, Take Notice, focuses on “being aware of the world around you and what you are feeling”, something that is at the heart of Community First. This too highlights the potential impacts the funded activities are likely to have for wider community, specifically their direct beneficiaries.

Figure 6.11 – Project focus

Projects are working to...



In the following areas...



Base: 652 funded projects; fieldwork November – December 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI

Given the nature of the funded activities (generally small scale and greatly varying in their aims, methods and beneficiaries) the evaluation is not able to quantify the extent of any impact on the community. The majority of the evidence for community impact has been gathered from programme participants, with some secondary analysis on the typology of activities and the common outcomes that may occur as a result (such as participation, trust and wellbeing outcomes). As Table 6.4 illustrates, the programme provided matched funding to a huge range of projects, with different outcomes for those involved and the wider community.

⁶⁹ <http://www.fivewaystowell-being.org/>

Table 6.4 – Example project descriptions

	Aims	Total grant funding	Total match funding	People involved in delivery
Gardening classes	To provide gardening craft sessions to the community at a Community Centre, including tutor hours, publicity, materials and equipment. Aim is to encourage families and young people to take part in gardening, flower arranging, planting, and producing hanging baskets throughout the community.	£1,300	£2,395	4
Ad-hoc community event (building a carnival float)	Each year [this area] has a carnival and this year [we] want to enter a float. This will mean holding workshops to prepare things for and dress the float and the hiring of things such as a PA on the float.	£750	£776	70
Sports team	Purchase equipment to assist with the training of the cricket club as suggested by ECB coaches - this involves videoing (with parental/carers permission) batting and bowling actions which is then used to enable young people to see and respond to their own playing style and enable them to make adjustment to improve their technique	£800	£810	5
Drop-in centre	The [project] will provide day services and activities for unemployed and socially isolated residents living in and around the city. The project will run for 4 weeks, offering 2-3 hour sessions per week. The project will aim to offer a central place, with a warm and welcoming atmosphere where people can come and go during the day to meet others, share a meal and drink, get practical support if needed, advocacy, information and signposting about other services in the city.	£2,440	£3,122	18

Source: Programme administrative data

The Cabinet Office used text mining analytical approaches to explore project descriptions, in order to determine what types of project Panels allocated funding to. This was carried out on 16,136 project descriptions, with a cluster model generated around 40 sets of key words for a sample of 9,000, and then applied to the remaining descriptions. The aim was to provide a broad picture of the types of projects funded, rather than complete accuracy in terms of how each description is categorised.

As Table 6.5 highlights, a huge range of projects were funded, with the most common those that support activities for young people, focus on community facilities, help families, and put on one-off community events. But beyond this, there were many projects with very different aims.

While it is not possible to capture the specific impact of each project on the end beneficiaries in local communities around the country, this should not be understood as a lack of impact. Many of these projects will have had substantial benefits for end beneficiaries, and this is supported by evidence from the case studies and surveys. This is discussed in more detail below.

Table 6.5 – Cluster analysis of project descriptions

	No. of projects	% of projects
Projects, clubs and activities for young people - including supporting Brownies, Guides, and Scouts	1,391	8.6%
Community Assets: facilities and equipment	1,116	6.9%
Activities to support parents, children and families e.g. play sessions, improving play areas, parent drug programmes	1,114	6.9%
Community events, festivals, carnivals, parades, family fun days, street parties and celebrations	1,104	6.8%
Employment support e.g. jobs search, training, computer/ internet access and volunteer placement	1,039	6.4%
Health and Well-being activities mainly for older vulnerable people e.g. drop-ins, fitness, exercise, bowling, social activities	910	5.6%
Supporting local allotments and gardens - community projects to grow food, fruits and vegetables	763	4.7%
Youth projects, clubs and activities for young people - including supporting Brownies, Guides, and Scouts	687	4.3%
Trips and outings, lunch clubs and social activities particularly for the elderly	679	4.2%
Resident, neighbour engagement and consultation events to develop and improve areas	673	4.2%
Community music, choirs, film, theatre, drama; workshops and performances	644	4.0%
Community sport particularly projects to support football, cricket and rugby teams	622	3.9%
Information, advice and support services for vulnerable groups particularly money, debt and benefits	620	3.8%
Community training, courses and sessions to learn life skills - arts, craft, cookery, sewing, knitting etc	508	3.1%
Food education and cooking skills and emergency food provision through foodbanks	429	2.7%
Community arts projects - workshops and exhibits	417	2.6%
Out of school and summer holiday schemes for young people	393	2.4%
Clean and improve area planting by flowers, trees, shrubs and hanging baskets	388	2.4%
Parks and Community Gardens - improving green spaces and engagement with greenspaces	375	2.3%
Projects and schemes to reduce anti-social behaviour	358	2.2%
Library projects e.g. bookshares, heritage and history - research, stories, exhibits and photographs	335	2.1%
Classes and activities to support the health and well-being of women	327	2.0%
Dance clubs, classes and competitions particularly for children	306	1.9%
Christmas markets and decorations, and events to bring residents together	287	1.8%
Environmental projects particularly litter picks to clean area and recycling. Cycle rides and schemes.	265	1.6%
Activities to support carers and disabled people	206	1.3%
Crime and Safety; Neighbourhood Watch and resident groups; newsletters, news and information	169	1.0%
No description of project provided	11	0.1%

Source: Cabinet Office cluster analysis using text mining

Base: 16,136 project descriptions

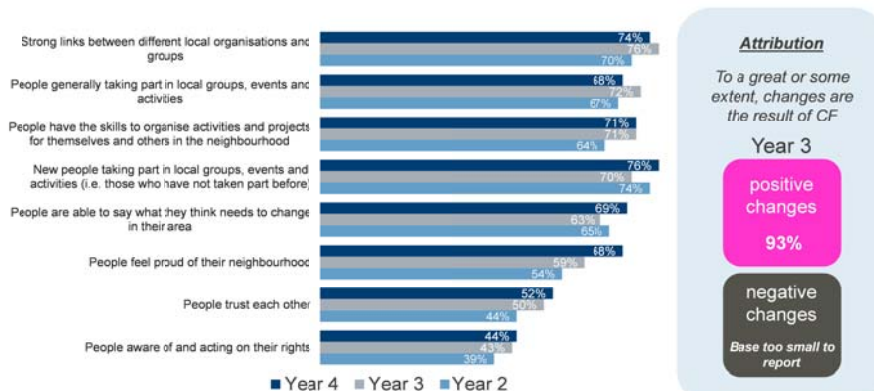
Cohesion and involvement

Both Panel and project leads were asked whether community outcomes were now more or less common since the beginning of the Community First programme. They were then asked if these positive outcomes (any aspects more common) or negative outcomes (any aspects less common) were the result of the programme.

Broadly speaking, both groups were positive about these outcomes, although they were more likely to say that these outcomes have become 'a bit more common' than 'much more common'.

Figure 6.12 – Outcomes for the local community (Panel members)

Panel members saying elements are more common in the local area...



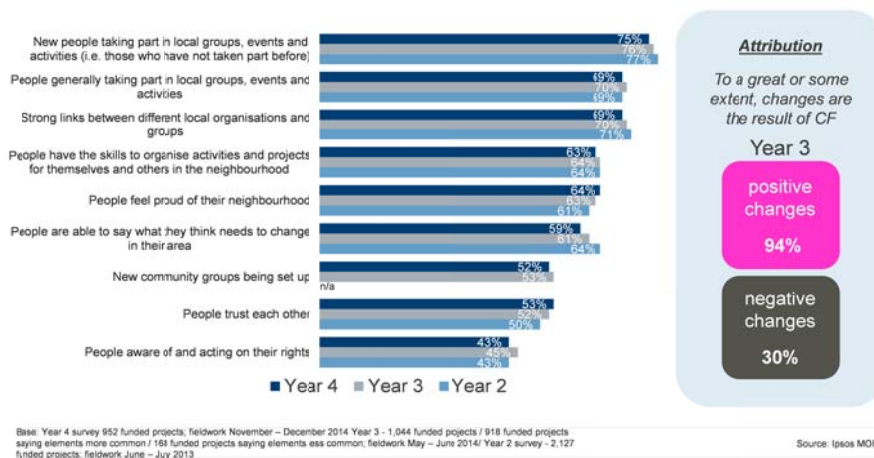
Base: Year 4 – 229 Panels / 206 Panel members saying elements more common; fieldwork September – November 2014. Year 3 – 185 Panel members / 168 Panel members saying elements more common; fieldwork May – June 2014. Year 2 survey – 448 Panel members; fieldwork June – July 2013

Source: Ipsos MORi

Panel members were positive about outcomes where they were more likely to have direct knowledge and experience through the programme. From the post-Year Four survey results, Panel members were most positive about strong links between different local organisations and groups (74% saying this is more common). They were also positive about people taking part in community activities, including new people, and having the skills to organise these activities. These are encouraging findings given the importance of strengthening local networks to the programme logic model.

Higher level outcomes – like people feeling proud of their neighbourhood and trusting each other – were perceived as relatively less common by Panel members, but increasingly so as the programme went on. In particular, 68% of Panel members said that people feeling proud of their neighbourhood was more common by the end of the programme.

Figure 6.13 – Outcomes for the local community (projects)

Project members saying elements are more common in the local area...

Projects most strongly felt that new people taking part was more common in their local area reflecting their experience of what they had achieved (as discussed earlier). They also highlighted the role in improving local networks and people having skills to organise activities. As with Panel members, projects were most likely to think they have seen positive outcomes where they have some direct knowledge and experience.

Social capital, quality of life and well-being

Community First additionally aims to have positive impacts on higher level outcomes, including quality of life measures. Ascertaining whether relatively small community investments affect the quality of life of community members is difficult. Socio-economic conditions, networks, existing well-being and numerous other factors influence these outcomes.

Perhaps reflecting this, Panel members and projects generally felt less able to say whether broader well-being outcomes were more or less common since Community First began. This is often because they felt unable to give a view. Having said that, on some measures – like people feeling proud of their neighbourhood and trusting each other – there was an increasing perception that they had become more common as the programme went on. In particular, 68% of Panel members said that people feeling proud of their neighbourhood was more common by the end of the programme.

Both Panel members and projects thought Community First had played a role in the positives outcomes they feel have happened in their local area. While this is not a categorical measure of attribution, over nine in ten Panel members and projects say positive changes resulted from the Community First programme, at least to some extent.

In addition, OCS used national well-being data assembled by ONS to analyse Community First outcomes. This allowed comparisons between people who responded to the survey living in Community First areas with

those living in comparably deprived non-project areas before (2010-11) and during (2012-2014) the programme. This analysis highlighted the following findings:

- Community First areas started with significantly lower well-being and after three years have caught up. The observed differences were relatively small, but this is often the case for this type of analysis.
- The proportion of people volunteering in Community First areas was significantly higher than in comparator areas by the end of the programme (82% compared with 66%). The volunteering rate started off lower in 2010-11, reaching similar levels in 2012-13 and ended up higher in 2013-14.

More details of these findings can be found on the OCS website.⁷⁰

6.4 Sustainability

A key question for assessing social impact is whether the incremental changes experienced by individual community members and strengthened local networks are enough to catalyse longer term outcomes. But it is also important to remember that the programme was always designed to take an asset-based approach, building on existing activities, organisations and networks.

The evaluation shows that most projects said that their project would have happened without Community First funding, either through alternative funding or in a different way. For a large majority of Panels, those involved knew each other and had often worked together in the community in the past.

As such, the programme aimed to recognise and develop these activities, rather than attempting to grow a new local community infrastructure that might be sustained beyond the lifetime of the programme. Any assessment of sustainability must therefore be grounded in the impact Community First had on assets and networks already present in communities.

Overall, those involved were positive about the important role that Community First funding has played in local communities. There is evidence that the funding has helped to support organisations and activities that were already embedded in communities, and encouraged some new organisations to develop within the community. Local networks have also been strengthened, particularly through Panel members' interactions with each other and with projects. In many areas this was seen as having the

⁷⁰ <https://coanalysis.blog.gov.uk/2015/07/03/community-first-helping-people-to-live-fulfilling-and-good-lives-2/>

potential to lead to longer term impacts for individuals and groups who had participated.

Case study example

In one case study Community First funding was sustaining important social action. In the words of one panel member: “we have a wealth of community spirit and the skills to do things... we just don't have a wealth of cash.” The groups in their community were well connected, well known and well used, but they did not have access to finance. For them Community First did not generate significant additional community level change. Rather, the funding available prevented negative change from occurring, as a result of community groups being unable to continue.

Building networks and local influence

Many Panel members felt that there would be ongoing impact because local networks had been strengthened by the programme. This was a recurring theme in the longitudinal case studies and in survey responses.

Community First is great programme and it has allowed small groups to apply for funding that may not have meet the criteria that larger funders require. It has allowed smaller projects to get off the ground and forged links with in the community with groups working together.

Panel member

Community First has provided a vital resource to enable individual and community empowerment in developing social cohesion in this area. I'm sure the members of the Panel will continue to encourage and support local community based initiatives but without financial resources this support will be limited.

Panel member

Reflecting this, a large majority of Panel members (78%) found taking part in Community First very worthwhile and even more (85%) said they would get involved if a similar opportunity arose again. Only a small number (7%) said they would be unlikely to do so.⁷¹ This highlights the value these local leaders placed on the programme.

Similarly, much of the feedback from funded groups was positive about the impact even small amounts of funding had had on maintaining, building or

⁷¹ Base: Year 4 Survey, 229 Panel members, September – November 2014

generating their activities, and this has the potential to be a legacy for the programme.

Community First is particularly useful for ‘pumping and priming’, that is, giving money to groups/ organisations so they can try things out and see if they work, before they apply for larger funding grants

Panel member

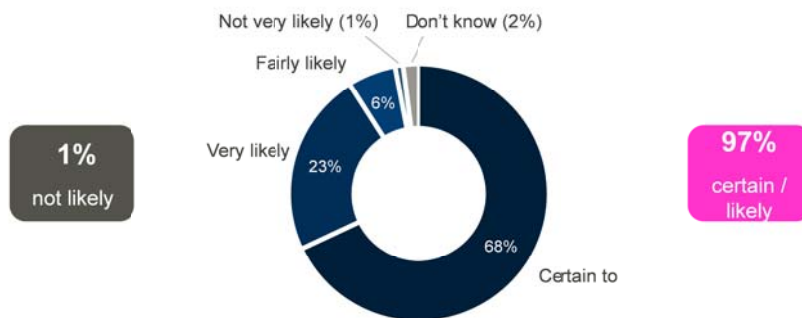
As detailed in section 6.3.2, a huge variety of project types was funded, including one-off events, supporting ongoing activities, and investment in community assets. The sustainability of individual projects will vary depending on their activities, and the change they sought to effect. For example, improvements to community assets like buildings may have long term sustainability in delivering wellbeing outcomes for those that continue to use it. A one off event, such as a parade, is likely to have shorter term sustainability, unless it is able to catalyse further community action or connections.

Due to the breadth of the projects funded, it is not possible to analyse the likely sustainability of all funded activities. However, there is clear evidence that most funded groups planned to continue. A large majority of projects said their group was certain or likely to continue working together after the funded project ended. This includes 68% (post-Year Four) who said they were certain to, and 23% who thought this was very likely. Most groups existed prior to receiving Community First funding and the programme has helped sustain them.

Among groups that were newly-formed to apply for grants through the programme confidence that they will keep working together is lower, with 41% saying they were certain to, and a further 20% that this was very likely. Even so, this suggests that many newly formed projects will be sustained in some form.

Figure 6.14 – Projects working together in the future

How likely, if at all, is your group to continue working together after the end of the project?



Base: Year 4 survey 952 funded projects, fieldwork November – December 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI

There were also some positive indications about what individuals and communities could go on to do, to some extent encouraged by the Community First programme, particularly with the increased skills and confidence they reported. Feedback about the future pointed to many Panel members and projects continuing their active roles in the community outside of Community First.

In my area the people who sit on the Panel know each other. So therefore we are in touch with each other and this would continue in the future.

Panel member

Panel members are also involved in ward level community meetings which happen with or without the Community First programme.

Panel member

We are a local voluntary group who have been around for a number of years and are grateful to the helping hand funding gives us, but we will still be able to survive after the programme finishes because of our dedicated volunteers who like to put back into our community.

Project

External challenges: availability of funding

Despite evidence of the impact in local communities, Panel members expressed concerns about what would happen when it ended. Some saw a need for a longer term approach to local small grant funding, or posed the question about what would replace the programme. Others could see negative impacts for the community if sources of funding for community groups were not secured.

The area has benefitted hugely and loss of Community First money will (result in the) loss of community activities in the area.

Project

Our greatest problem is always finding sufficient funding to maintain our activities for young people in an area of real need. Without Community First our effectiveness will be substantially reduced.

Project

The area will be much the worse, when and if (Community First) ends...we can no longer anticipate the State or local council's being able to have the financial resources to fund all the services necessary. Hence the importance of support for voluntary services.

Project

Whether there would be funding available locally is something specifically identified by some Panel members. For example, when asked during the post-Year Three survey about the future for their local area after Community First ended, 27% mentioned the need for more funding in their open, unprompted responses.

Despite these concerns, there is good evidence that Community First has helped sustain projects and networks in local communities. Those involved were confident that much of this would continue in future.

Key lessons learnt

7 Key lessons learnt

In this section we present a short summary of the key lessons learnt from the evaluation of the Community First Neighbourhood Matched Fund programme.

7.1 Lessons learnt

Overall the evaluation provides positive feedback about the effectiveness of key processes and evidence that individual Panel members and projects experienced the intended outcomes, as did communities to some extent. There were both opportunities and challenges associated with the light touch approach to central programme administration.

The programme largely fulfilled its core targets for the number of operational Panels, Panel websites and Community First Plans. This required considerable effort from individuals and organisations within the programme, including locally, from delivery partners CDF, and additional support and guidance provided by The Young Foundation.

The approach generally worked well locally, with most Panels finding the programme processes straightforward. However, without tailored support a minority of Panels would not have functioned. Introducing additional assistance for these struggling Panels in response to early feedback was a positive step for the programme.

However, this also suggests that the level of resource available for central programme management – which was much lower than previous small grants programmes – was too low to allow for more than a transactional approach to grant administration. This was based on the original proposal by CDF when they bid to deliver the programme.

Some of the success of the programme was a reflection of the simple approach adopted by Community First compared with other small grant funding programmes. Core requirements for Panel members and projects alike were simple enough that there were, overall, sufficiently suitably qualified participants able to fulfil them.

Both Panel members and funded projects generally felt the application and decision making requirements and processes worked well, including the online administration system. As might be expected, for some the online approach has been a barrier, although it is not possible to measure the extent of this.

There was demand for Community First funding. Over £27 million in funding has been allocated to projects, yielding £93 million in matched funding. These figures do show a shortfall in the amount of funding reaching

projects. Some Community First Panels struggled to find sufficient groups/projects to allocate all of their funding, and some projects did not claim money they had been awarded. A gap is to be expected given the locally devolved nature of the programme design. It is not possible to benchmark this against other programmes (because Community First is so different to centrally administered small grants funding schemes), but the overall level does not seem disproportionately high, and the evaluation evidence is that the programme generally worked well at a local level.

There are positive examples of how the programme has benefitted from existing assets, such as local residents involved in community development professionally and as volunteers, or focal points like community centres and associated networks, to identify needs within the community and attract applications from projects to address these.

This contribution from key local people and organisations has also been vital to make the programme work well. They often took on significant responsibility for administering the programme, as well as bringing to bear their experience and expertise. In many cases support has been provided directly by the local council or voluntary and community sector organisations. To a large extent this can also be seen as a positive – Panels found willing and able people and organisations to help support them without the need for much central programme involvement.

This provides clear evidence supporting the principles of Asset Based Community Development – i.e. that there are assets in local neighbourhoods, sometimes untapped, around which to build and strengthen the communities. However, a minority of Panels found it hard to access good local support. They relied on assistance from CDF and The Young Foundation; without this it is likely that more Panels would not have continued.

Relying on existing local networks brings risks that the focus of the programme may be on established ideas of local needs. Even so, the evaluation evidence suggests that funding has predominantly been used to address locally recognised and defined needs.

Much of the activity funded by Community First can be categorised as addressing the elements that drive well-being, predominantly around connecting people together and encouraging people to volunteer. The range of projects shows how varied needs are in local communities, and how well local decision making can flex to provide funding to very different types of activities.

The evidence suggests that websites and social media were not particularly effective channels in raising awareness of the programme in Community First areas. Of much greater importance have been recommendations and existing relationships.

In many Community First areas, the longstanding networks of people who have benefitted the project will continue to take on responsibilities and involvement in their community beyond the end of the programme. In this respect the programme can, therefore, be seen to have provided a vehicle for these existing networks to sustain and develop.

Some Panel members would have welcomed a greater role in monitoring and oversight of funded projects, in part to help them build longer term relationships with community groups and enable them to see the impact of their funding decisions. However, the extent to which this responsibility would have been welcomed across all Panel members is unclear.

While the programme encouraged additional activity, involvement and use of resources, a relatively small number of new groups have been created through programme activity. Many Panels did not see this as part of their role, and the availability of existing networks and groups meant it was simply not necessary to make this a focus. In any case, seeking to support new groups to form would be a considerable task, requiring significant time and skills, and further support and guidance from the central programme and local networks. The Community Organisers programme has been shown to be beneficial to the Community First programme, including fostering new groups to form and apply for funding.

The evaluation findings point to programme funding being used most effectively when groups focus on types of activity they not done before Community First (this has not been a prescriptive approach taken across the programme). These types of projects were most likely to feel that without Community First funding their activity would not have happened. Conversely, where a project had carried out something similar before they were more likely to say they would have found funding from elsewhere, or would have found a way to make the project happen without funding.

Community First funding was most effective in leveraging new matched resources when used to fund new activities. While generating new activity and resources is an important element of the programme, it can also be seen to be playing an important role in sustaining exiting activity and resources that might otherwise have been vulnerable given the wider funding landscape.

7.2 Implications for future small grants programmes

The light touch, devolved approach adopted by the programme appears to have worked and to be appropriate for ensuring the majority of the small grants funding available reached community groups and projects that address locally determined needs. There are a number of implications for any future programmes designed to distribute small grants using local decision making:

- Central support for Panels** – the programme was delivered with lower levels of central resources relative to previous programmes, based on the original proposal from the delivery partners. The evidence suggests the level of resource was too low to cover the more substantial support required by some Panels, and envisaged in the original programme design. The online approach reduced administrative costs, but large numbers of Panel and project queries meant the central programme team were unable to provide proactive capacity building support to Panels. The design of future programmes should carefully consider the level of management fee, trading off the need to keep administration simple and cost effective with the amount of support central teams can provide. Responsibility for setting an appropriate level of central resource should be shared between delivery partners and government.
- Value of grants** – there is significant demand for small grants in deprived communities around England. The upper limit of £2,500 per project was appropriate, with sufficient applications (and often too many applications) to allow Panels to fund a wide range of projects run by many different types of organisation.
- Local decision making** – distributing public money using panels of local people is a good model for small grant funding. These were set up in almost all of the 600 areas, and decision-making and other processes have worked well. Panel members were aware of their responsibilities and took these seriously, with decisions generally based on relevant local priorities and clear criteria.
- Keep the process simple** – securing funding through Community First was a relatively easy process, and allowed groups with no previous experience of grant applications to have success. Ensuring that the level of burden for grant applicants is proportionate will encourage more organisations to access small amounts of funding.
- Online administration** – using an online process was successful in reducing the administration costs relative to other previous small grants programmes, and for most participants was straightforward. This approach did bring challenges for some people, but with adequate local support there is little evidence that it was a significant barrier for large numbers of projects or Panel members.
- Communications** – allocating some money for communications (both locally and centrally) would help similar programmes to have wider impacts. Without being able to spend on communications it was challenging for Panels to reach beyond existing local networks, which will be important if future programmes aim to encourage applications from new groups.

Appendices

8 Appendices

8.1 Programme logic model assumptions

8.1.1 Activities to Outputs assumptions

- A 'light-touch' model for NMF is effective, proportionate and appropriate for a small grant funding process
- Panels will benefit from the support of a Panel Partner
- A central online system is appropriate for efficiently administering the NMF programme
- Programme participants will already have, or be supported to develop, the necessary skills to use an online programme administration system
- Local people will be aware of the opportunities to become a Panel member
- A Panel of 4-8 people is able to engage with and involve the wider community
- Effective decision making is more likely via a Panel of 4-8 people
- Panel members already have, or will develop, the necessary skills to set appropriate priorities and make funding decisions
- The level of central programme support is sufficient to allow Panels to discharge their responsibilities
- Matched resource can be meaningfully quantified

8.1.2 Outputs to Outcomes assumptions

- Panels comprise of people with relevant skills and abilities
- Local people are best placed to identify and address need in their community
- Geography is a good basis for decision making about funding community activity
- New people will want to become involved in community activity / projects
- Matched resources will generate new social activity

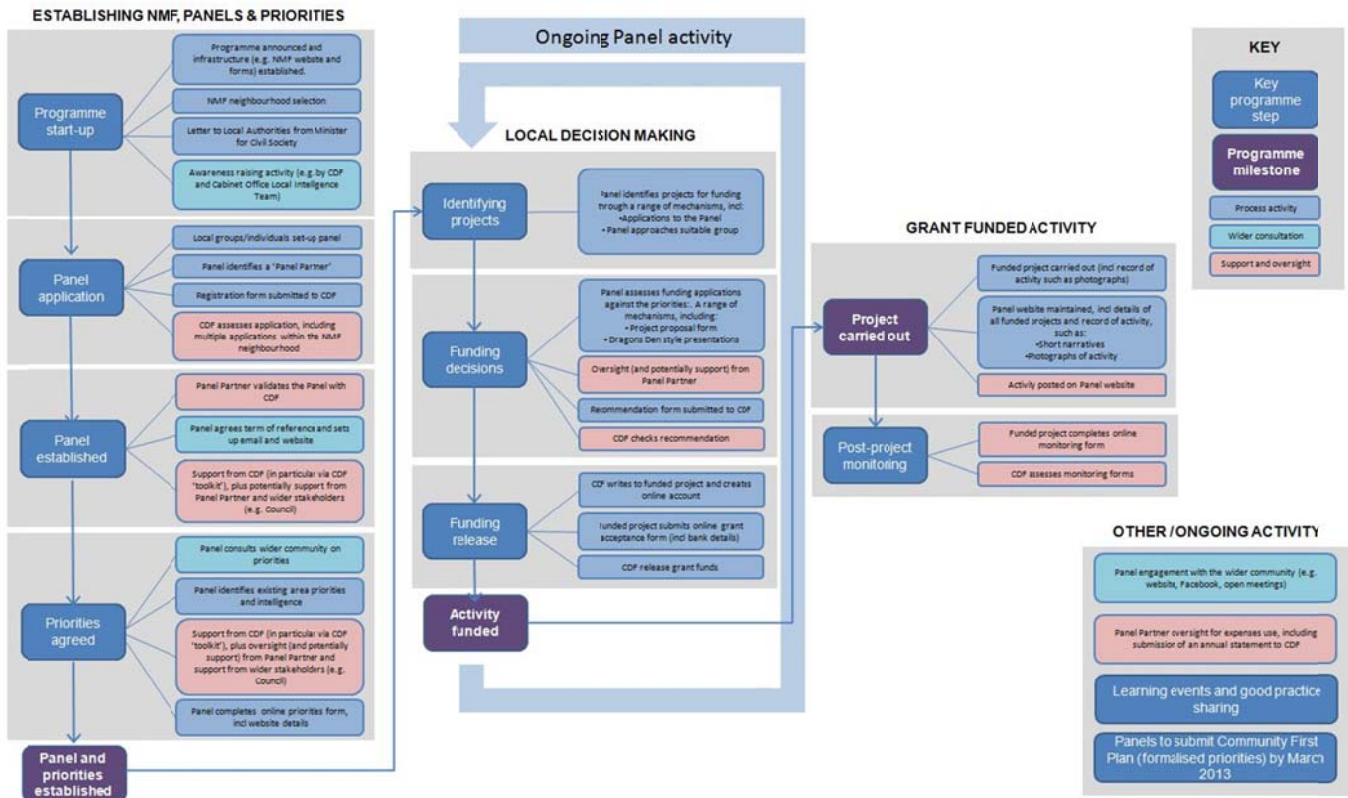
- There are individuals willing to devote time to becoming Panel members, Panel Partners or to apply for funding in their local community
- Panels have sufficient awareness of other grant funding activity to avoid significant duplication
- Funded groups/projects are beneficial in addressing community need
- Projects deliver the activities they say they will
- Local transparency will lead to better outcomes from funding
- Increased community activity leads to well-being outcomes

8.1.3 Outcomes to Impacts assumptions

- Strengthened networks of active projects/groups increases community resilience and leads to social and economic outcomes
- Local communities will want and demand decision making responsibility, and those currently holding responsibility will be willing and able to give it up
- Small grants, matched by group/project activity, are an effective way to meet locally defined need

8.2 Programme process diagram

Figure 8.1 – Illustration of the delivery process for the Community First programme



Source: Ipsos MORI Policy & Evaluation Unit

8.3 Research framework questions

The table below outlines the key evaluation research questions, alongside an assessment of how well they were answered through the evaluation activities.

In some cases, the initial questions became less relevant to programme delivery. In others feedback was provided to OCS in other ways, for example through management information.

Overall, the evaluation answered almost all of the key questions well, with some specific research questions proving more difficult within the scope of the data collection.

Table 8.1 – Community First programme process framework

Key programme processes	Research questions	Extent of evidence collected
Oversight and administration (1) How effective are the programme administrative and governance mechanisms in ensuring the programme is transparent and effective? (1.1) What effect has the area selection criteria had on the programme aim to focus on areas with significant deprivation and low social capital? (1.2) Does the programme provide sufficient support mechanisms for panels and funded projects/groups? (1.3) What role and impact do key stakeholders (e.g. OCS/Minister, CDF, Local Authorities, existing community/non-profit organisations) have on the management and delivery of the NMF programme? (1.4)	How effective is the programme infrastructure, and in particular the online administration mechanism? What are the strengths and weaknesses?	Good evidence
	How effective is the programme communication strategy? To what extent has the programme been promoted simply and transparently?	Good evidence
	What involvement do key stakeholders (e.g. OCS/Minister, CDF, Local Authorities, existing community/non-profit organisations) have in raising awareness of the programme and in promoting panel membership?	Some evidence
	What impact has the requirement for Community First Panels to be present in all local authority areas had on the objective for the programme to focus on areas with significant deprivation and low social capital?	Good evidence
	What degree of duplication of other grant funding is there within the areas the programme is operating in?	Some evidence
	What effect has the geographical selection process had on the ability of the programme to engage with other programmes (for example, and in particular, Community Organisers)?	Some evidence
	How many panel applications and funding recommendations have been made in each area and what does this indicate about the effectiveness of the geographical selection process?	Good evidence
	What impact has the geographical selection process had on the constitution of panels?	Some evidence
	Does the programme ensure sufficient due diligence? How effective is the role of a Panel Partner in providing oversight of panel activities?	Good evidence
	What support do panels and funded organisations need, and is the programme effective at providing these? What other sources and types of support are panels and funded organisations able to access?	Good evidence
	Does the programme provide sufficient mechanisms and support for networking between NMF neighbourhoods? How effective are the peer-to-peer learning events in facilitating this aim and in ensuring learning and best practice are shared between panels?	Some evidence

Key programme processes	Research questions	Extent of evidence collected
	In what respects is the programme a more or less efficient/effective approach compared to other grant programmes? What benchmarks, if any, exist?	Limited evidence
Establishing Panels and priorities (2) What are the attributes of successful and unsuccessful panel? (2.1) How effective have panels been in ensuring priorities address needs in their community? (2.2) How effective have Panels been in raising awareness of NMF and social action more generally within their community? (2.3)	How do panel members find out about the programme?	Good evidence
	What prior experience of small grant (or other) funding programmes and/or community activity do panel members have?	Goode evidence
	Do all Panels have a website? Are Panel websites regularly updated? What is the quality of the information provided on the website?	Good evidence
	How do Panels identify a suitable Panel Partner?	Some evidence
	What are the attributes of successful/unsuccessful Panel Partner?	Some evidence
	How do panels agree their 'Terms of Reference' and what form do these take?	Good evidence
	What methods do panels use to identify local issues/need and to consult with the wider community when agreeing funding priorities?	Good evidence
	How do panels ensure decisions represent the desires of the local community?	Good evidence
	To what extent does a devolved decision making model ensure local communities have greater influence on decision making?	Good evidence
	What are the attributes of successful/unsuccessful panels?	Good evidence
	How effective are panels in raising awareness of funding opportunities and social action in the local area?	Some evidence
	To what extent does panel membership change over time and what impact does this have on the effectiveness of the programme?	Good evidence
Local decision making (3) To what extent has the programme encouraged new projects/groups to apply for grant funding? (3.1) How effective have panels been in ensuring funding decisions address needs in their community? (3.2)	How many panels have submitted a Community First Plan by 31st March 2013?	Good evidence
	What methods are funding applicants required to use when applying for funding and how appropriate are these to encouraging applications?	Good evidence
	What models of decision making do panels use and how well do these work?	Good evidence
	What proportion of applications and/or funding recommendations leverage new resources?	Good evidence
Grant funded activity (4) To what extent do the scrutiny mechanisms ensure funded projects/groups demonstrate the impact of funded activity? (4.1)	How successful are panels in ensuring all available grants are allocated? What are the barriers to doing so?	Good evidence
	What proportion of allocated grants are not collected by funded projects/groups? What are the reasons for this?	Good evidence
	Do funded groups/projects provide sufficient evidence to the programme and their community about their funded activity (e.g. information/pictures for the Panel website)?	Good evidence
	Do funded projects/groups complete the online monitoring form and submit this to CDF? How effective is the form as an assessment of the success of a funded project/group?	Some evidence

Table 8.2 – Community First programme outcomes framework

Key anticipated outcomes	Research questions	Extent of evidence collected
Individual Outcomes – Panel members (5) Improved understanding of local issues, confidence to make decisions, develop technical skills, improved listening and communication skills (5.1)	To what extent do panel members have a (better) understanding of local issues, actors and networks?	Good evidence
	To what extent do panel members have confidence in their ability to make decisions on behalf of the community?	Good evidence
	To what extent have the panel members developed technical skills required for managing and facilitating panel activities and decisions (e.g. reading comprehension, financial literacy, and IT skills)?	Good evidence
	To what extent have the panel members developed/ improved listening and communication skills needed to collectively make decisions and support applicants?	Good evidence
Individual Outcomes – Grant applicants (6) Improved ability to apply for funding, awareness of other local activities, increase skills and capacity (6.1)	To what extent do grant applicants feel better placed to seek and apply for funding?	Good evidence
	To what extent does the local grant panel make grant applicants feel that their activities are a local priority?	Some evidence
	To what extent does participation in the programme raise grant applicants' awareness of other local activities and actors?	Some evidence
	To what extent has participation in the programme increased the skills and capacity of grant applicants to develop and present their ideas for local activity?	Good evidence
Individual Outcomes – local residents (7) Local residents increase quality of life, and pride in local area (7.1)	To what extent do local residents have Increased quality of life, positive feelings about the local area; pride in place? (Through more positive activities happening locally, reflecting locally-defined priorities, that they feel they have good neighbours. Positive association of identity and place; rising well-being levels).	Some evidence
Community Outcomes (8) Increased community connectivity and community commitment from local people, improve capability of the community to self-organise (8.1)	To what extent has the programme increased local community members' positive perceptions of their area?	Some evidence
	To what extent are there increased and strengthened social networks present in the local community? (Evidence of increased connections between individuals and organisations within and between different parts of the community)	Some evidence
	To what extent is there a greater commitment from local community members to contribute to their local community? (Increased commitment to take action, and a belief in one's own ability to enact change in where you live)	Some evidence
	To what extent is there a visible increase in the volume of community members contributing to the local community? (The number of projects, evidence of the number of people, families involved such as visuals relating to the involvement of the community)	Some evidence
	Advocate for better services coming from authorities, evidence of assets coming into use, take-up of localism powers, new social enterprises starting. (Further examples including take up or activity linked to new community rights, neighbourhood plans, or community budgets)	Limited evidence

Key anticipated outcomes	Research questions	Extent of evidence collected
Regional / national outcomes (9) Strengthened social action networks, shift in decision making to communities and resources more effectively leveraged to meet community need (9.1)	To what extent has government made different policy and funding decisions? (New policies announced, implemented; change in funding priorities; additional funding for community engagement activities)	Limited evidence
	To what extent have panel members and grantees continued to self-organise and contribute to the local community beyond the lifetime of the programme	Good evidence

8.4 Community First and Community Organisers potential overlap maps

Figure 8.2 – North East

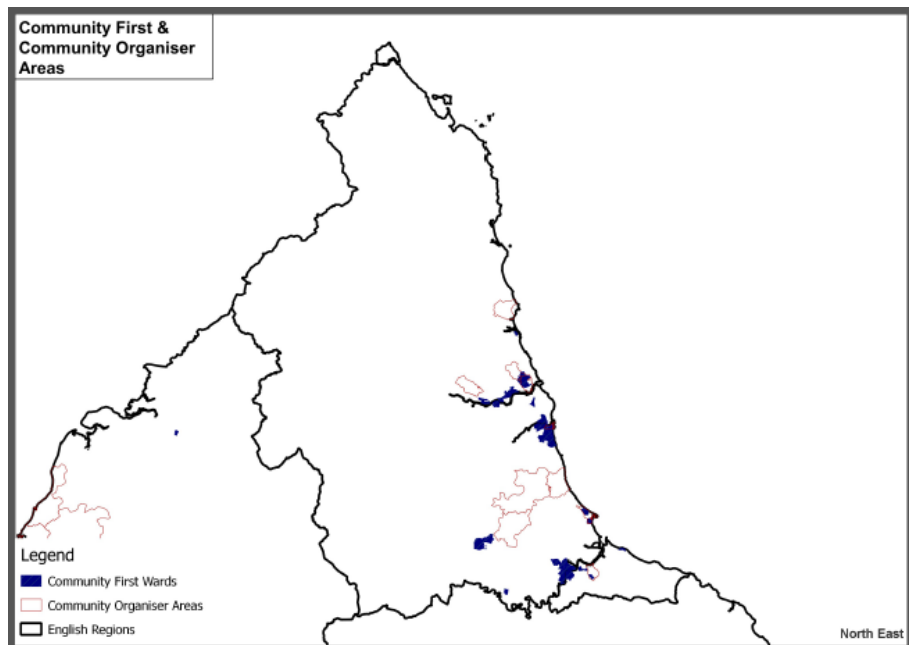


Figure 8.3 – Yorkshire and the Humber

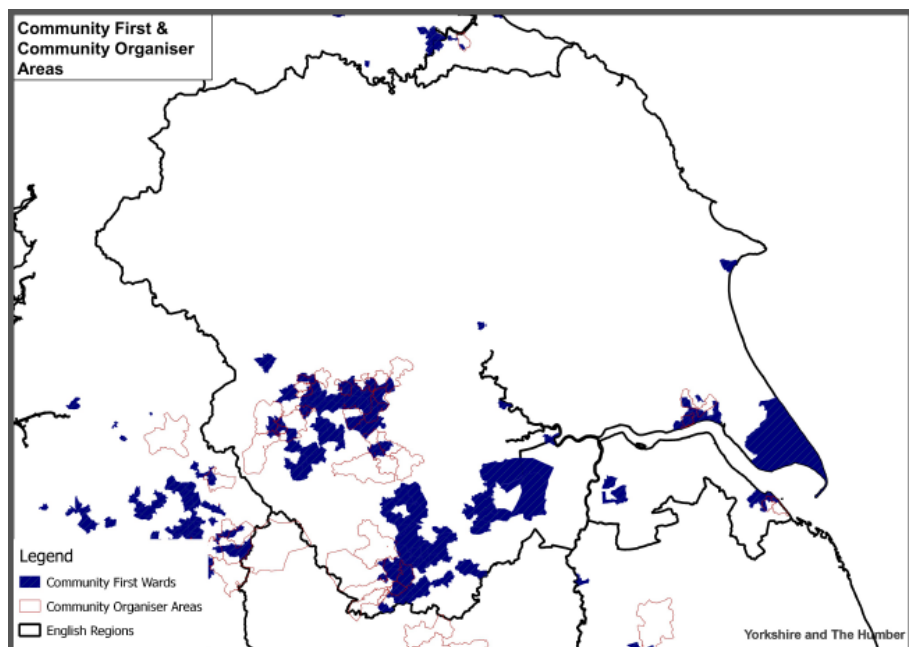


Figure 8.4 – North West

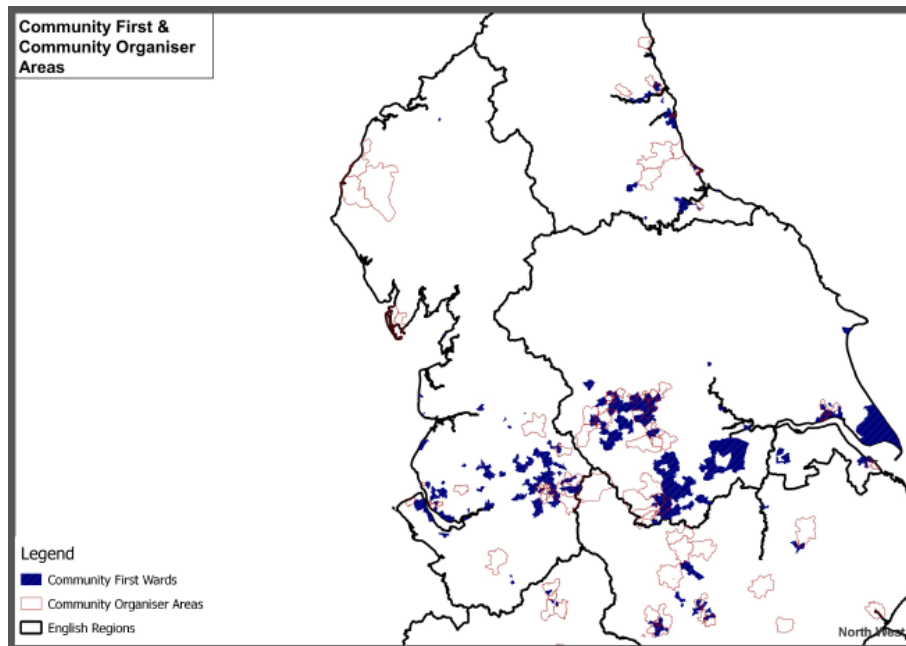


Figure 8.5 – West Midlands

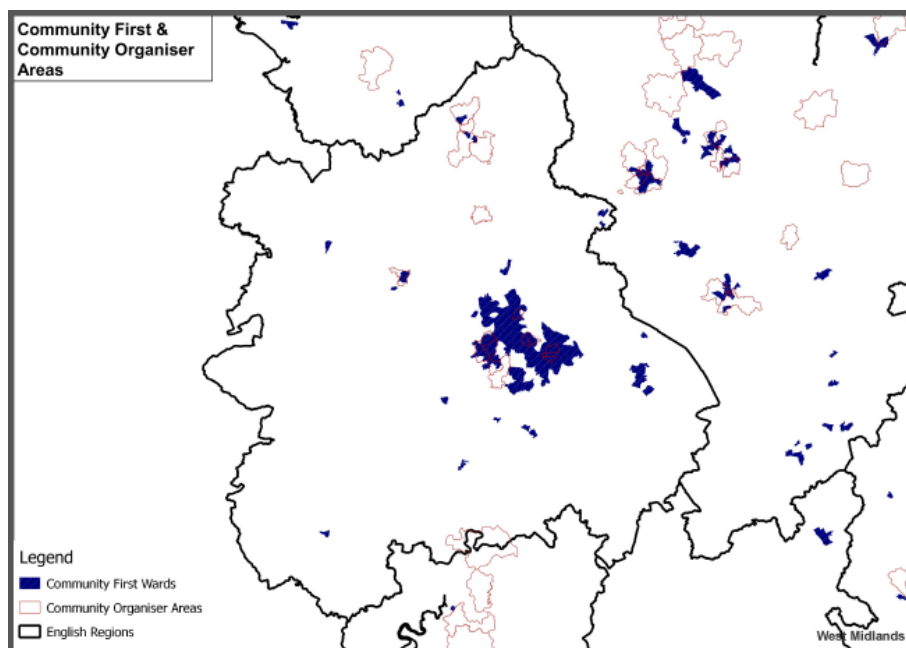


Figure 8.6 – East Midlands

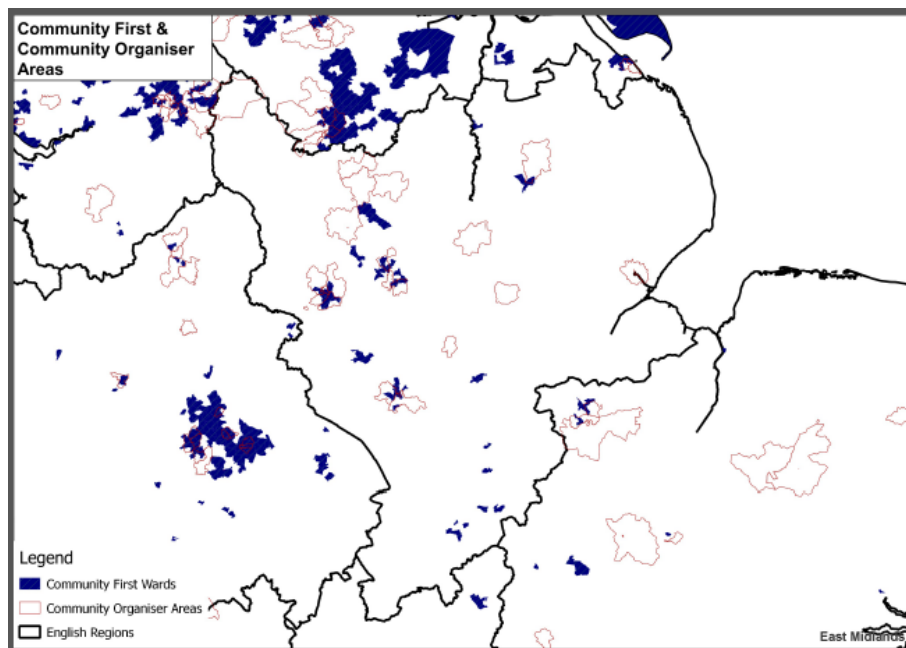


Figure 8.7 – East of England

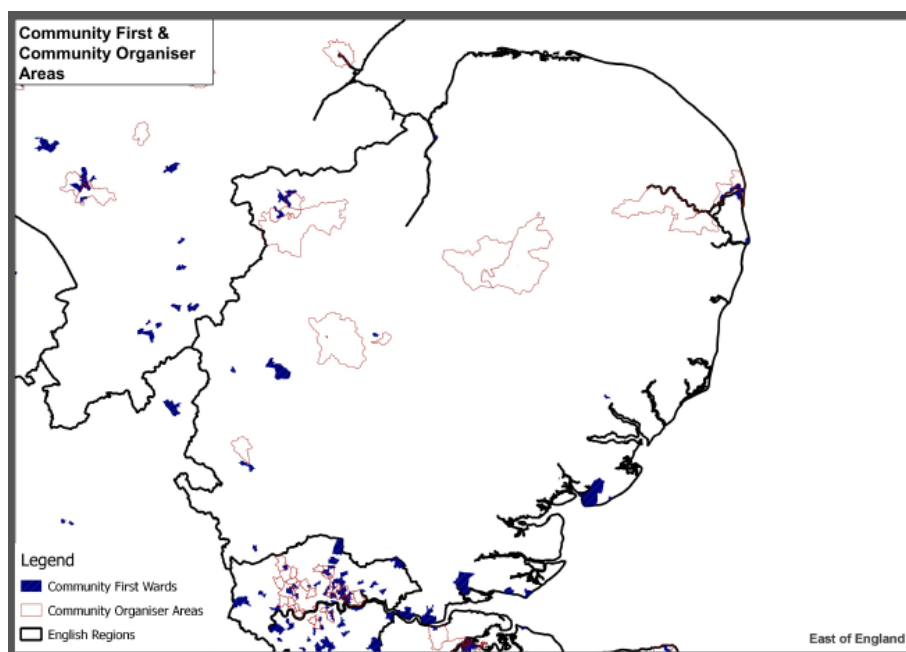


Figure 8.8 – London

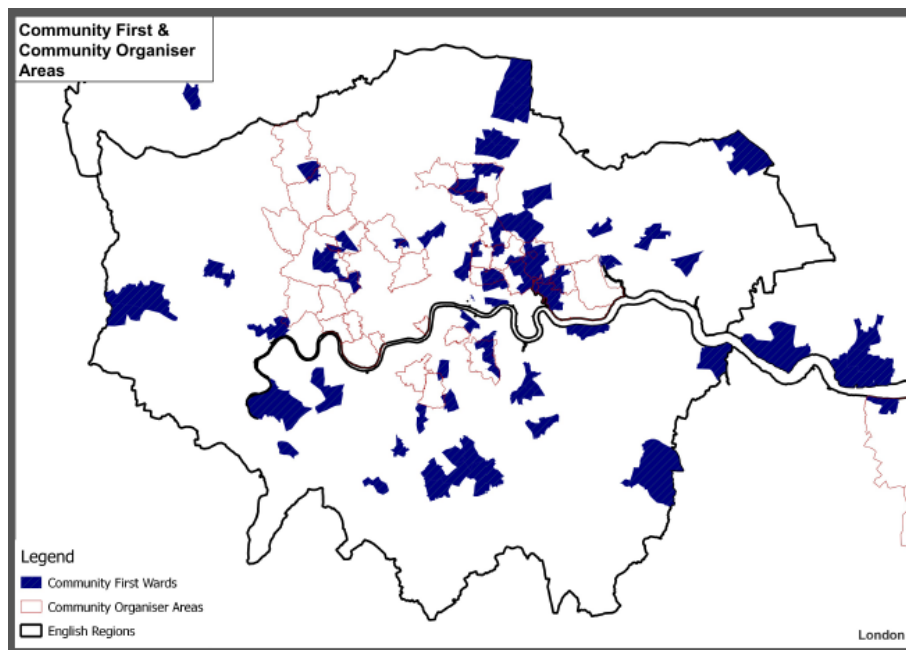


Figure 8.9 – South East

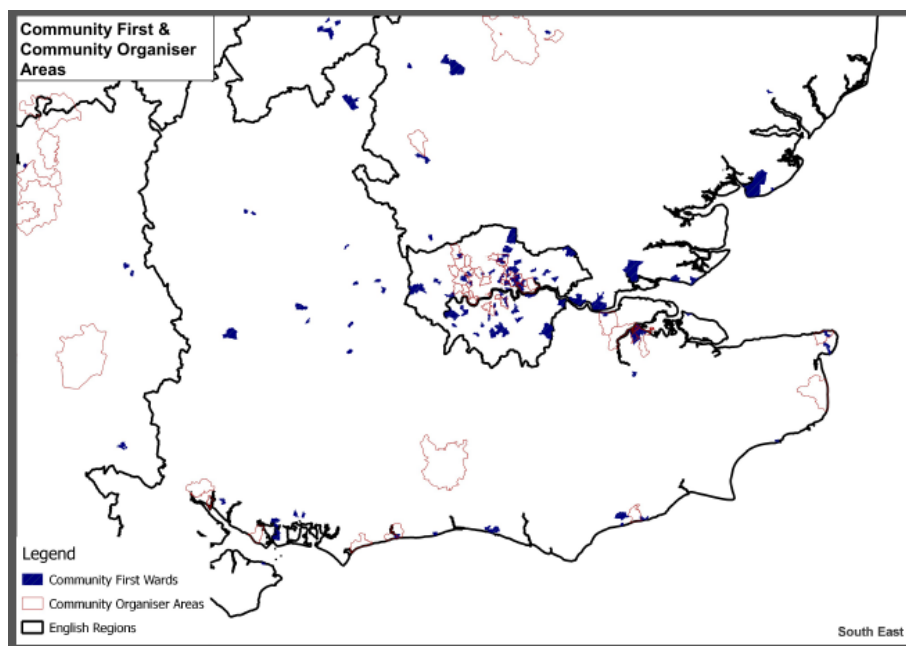
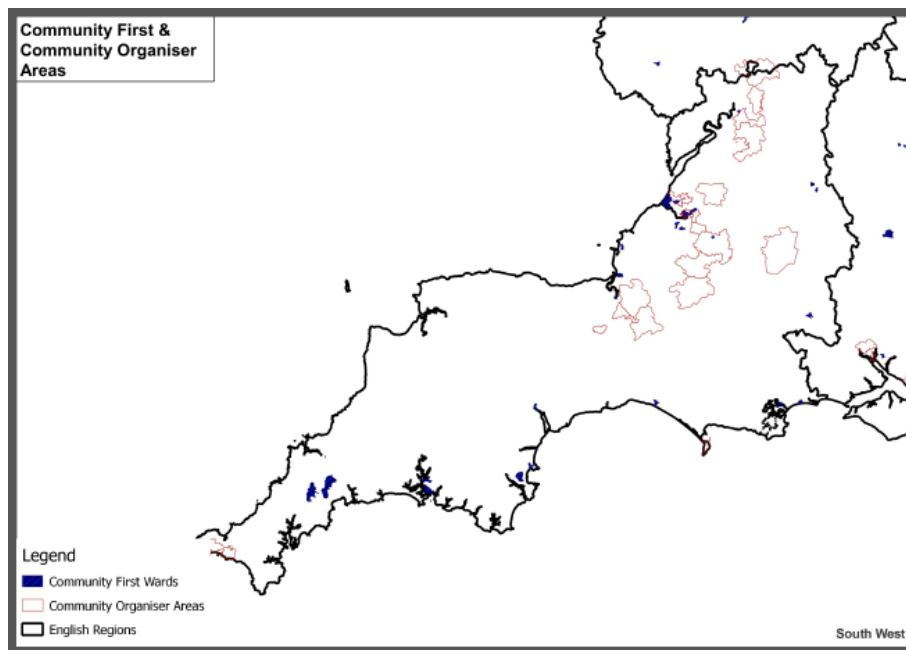


Figure 8.10 – South West



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