Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Evaluation of the Communities First Trust Fund

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Communities First Programme

In the summer of 2001, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) designated 142 deprived areas or communities in Wales as eligible for inclusion in a new programme, known as Communities First.

These areas were selected using data from the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (2000), which assessed all wards in Wales and allocated them a rank, based on measures of income, employment, health, education, housing, access to services, and environment.

From this WIMD ranking, the 100 most deprived wards were invited to become part of the Communities First programme, along with 32 sub-pockets of deprivation, and 10 partnerships based on imaginative proposals.

Communities First is founded on the principle that poverty and disadvantage are created by a complex number of factors, such as poor educational achievement, poor housing and environments, substance misuse, local job markets, benefit systems, stigma and perceptions about people and places etc. In order to address these disadvantages, then the causes must be understood. Communities First was therefore set up to provide opportunities for people living in deprived areas, and the agencies that deliver services in those communities, to examine the realities of poverty in their own area, and to work together to address it.

The Communities First programme is underpinned by a number of key aims. In the 2006 Communities First guidance, the aims are stated as:

- To build confidence and raise the self-esteem of people living in the community
- To increase the incomes of local people (including reducing costs of food, heat, credit etc.)
- To improve health and well-being
- To encourage and improve education and skills training for work
- To create jobs
- To make communities safe, secure and crime free
- To ensure public services are delivered in ways which are more responsive and more locally accountable
- To improve housing and the quality of the environment
- To encourage active citizenship

Within the Assembly's website, the aims are stated as:

- Getting local people involved in improving their areas and their own prospects
- Bringing in funding and support from a range of sources to make things happen
- Making sure improvements last
- Encouraging flexibility, risk-taking and new ways of dealing with problems
- Involving everyone working together to identify and do something about their community's problems

A three-year interim evaluation study of the Communities First programme was commissioned by WAG in May 2003, and was led by Cambridge Policy Consultants.[1] The interim evaluation found that WAG had taken the right direction by prioritising investment in capacity building of local community organisations and groups and individual residents to participate actively in the process of change as a necessary pre-condition for regeneration. In addition, after a difficult start, the Communities First programme had developed a structure through which partnerships could begin to achieve community and partner engagement. Further, the evaluation found that the Communities First Trust Fund had been hugely successful.

1.2   Terms of Reference

The key purpose of this evaluation was to answer 4 research questions. These were:

(a)   How efficient and effective is the current administration of the Communities First Trust Fund? Is the administration of the fund conducted well providing good value for money?
(b)   Are the Trust Fund's grants being used effectively to meet the objectives of Communities First?
(c)   To what extent is the current role of Communities First partnerships in the Trust Fund appropriate in terms of the relationship between Trust Fund projects with the work being conducted in Communities First areas?
(d)   Are the principles used to govern the allocation of funding between types of project and types of Communities First areas (e.g. communities of interest, ward based areas, LSOA areas and pockets of deprivation) appropriate, particularly in light of the new Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation?

All of the quantitative and qualitative review and analysis, interviews, focus groups and other research techniques were developed in order to answer these 4 research questions.

1.3   Structure of the Report

This report is structured as follows:

Introduction

- The Communities First Programme
- Terms of Reference
- Structure of the Report
- Methodology

Background Information

- Aims and Objectives of the Trust Fund
- Management and Administration of the Trust Fund
- Communities First Music Trust Fund
- Evaluation Methodology
- Previous Evaluation of the Trust Fund

Evaluation Findings

- Stakeholder Interviews

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[1] http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/research/c1stinterim?lang=en

- Communities First Partnership Focus Groups
- Project Interviews
- Unsuccessful Applicants
- Project Visits

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Research Questions
- Recommendations

Good Practice

- Good Practice – CFSN
- Good Practice – central management and administration
- Good Practice – project delivery

In addition to the above section, there are also 3 annexes:

- **Annex 1 -** WIMD / Policy Context / Similar Scheme
- **Annex 2 -** Methodology and Sampling / Quantitative Analysis
- **Annex 3 –** Interview Data Analysis
- **Annex 4 -** Case Studies

1.4   Methodology

Consultants were commissioned by WAG in April 2007 to undertake an evaluation of the Communities First Trust Fund, the details of which have been outlined above. The key element of the evaluation was to consider four research questions. These were:

- How efficient and effective is the current administration of the Communities First Trust Fund? Is the administration of the fund conducted well providing good value for money?
- Are the Trust Fund's grants being used effectively to meet the objectives of Communities First?
- To what extent is the current role of Communities First partnerships in the Trust Fund appropriate in terms of the relationship between Trust Fund projects with the work being conducted in Communities First areas?
- Are the principles used to govern the allocation of funding between types of project and types of Communities First areas (e.g. communities of interest, ward based areas, LSOA areas and pockets of deprivation) appropriate, particularly in light of the new Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation?

In order to carry out the evaluation, and to answer the four research questions, the consultants developed the following four-stage methodology:

Stage 1 – Inception and Desk Research

The consultant's first action was to hold an inception meeting with WAG to ensure a shared understanding of the purpose and objectives of the research, agree timescales and reporting requirements, and identify the necessary base documents and staff contacts at the Assembly.

Following this, a thorough review of relevant key policy documents, guidance, and research literature was undertaken, in order to set the context for the study. Following this, the consultants undertook a small number of scoping interviews with key staff at WAG, CFSN, and WCVA in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the programme.
Following these meetings and the desk research element, topic guides and questionnaires were prepared for

the various elements of the active field work.

The consultants then undertook a review of the management information that is gathered in relation to the project. This included a review of all quantitative data in order to assess the spending profile of the Trust Fund.

The final part of Stage 1 was to carry out in-depth mainly qualitative interviews with Trust Fund stakeholders. This involved face-to-face interviews with individuals from a range of organisations, such as WCVA, WAG, and CFSN, enabling the collation of qualitative and quantitative data which could be analysed for inclusion within the final report.

Stage 2 – Active Fieldwork and Initial Data Analysis

The key part of this evaluation was the undertaking of facilitated telephone interviews with a sample of 361 projects representing the 5,958 grants that had received funding through the Trust Fund. The objective of these interviews was to gain a clearer understanding of the Trust Fund's impacts, to highlight any problems or issues, and to identify successes, good practice, and other outcomes.

The original brief called for a telephone survey with a minimum of 200 Trust Fund applicants, from a total 5,958 grants awarded. This was later raised to 361 in order to reduce error margins around the results.

Once this figure was agreed, a stratified random sample of 1,000 projects was developed, which took into account factors such as geographical location, distribution of grants, size of grants, and other relevant factors. Projects could then be selected at random from the 1,000 strong sample. The randomness was produced by programming Excel to generate a random number and then ranking the sample according to that random number.

A commitment was therefore made to undertake facilitated telephone interviews with 361 funded projects, using a questionnaire designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative information. The objective of these interviews was to gain a clearer understanding of the Trust Fund's impacts, any key problems or issues, successes, good practice, geographical spread, etc.

The process began with a series of 8 pilot test interviews to test the draft questionnaire against the following criteria:

- Timing
- Question filtering
- Question flow
- Language used (i.e. simple and easily understood)
- Overall respondent reactions

Following these pilot interviews, some minor adjustments to the questionnaire were made, and then an internal training workshop was run for consultation staff who could then begin the process proper. Interviewees were given the choice of an interview in either English or Welsh, and interview results were quality checked at regular intervals throughout the survey process.

All projects were interviewed using a Computer-Aided Facilitated Telephone Interviews (CAFTI) system known as Keypoint. This ensured consistency in the approach and the recording of results, and also enabled various cross-tabulations of the data as required.

Initial data analysis of the results of the 361 interviews was then undertaken, and these initial findings were discussed with WAG, and areas of interest to be further examined within the Case Studies (see Stage 3) were identified.

In addition, during Stage 2, there was also consultation with representatives of Communities First partnerships, namely Co-ordinators and Chairs. This consultation was delivered using a number of different methods, namely focus groups, self-completion questionnaires, and telephone interviews as required.

Finally within Stage 2, the consultants also undertook facilitated telephone interviews with 15 projects that applied unsuccessfully to the Trust Fund. These interviews were intended to establish if projects were clear of the reason for refusal, and whether they felt that this refusal was fair, and the process leading up to it transparent.

Stage 3 – Active Fieldwork (Case Studies)

Following discussions with WAG in Stage 2, the key issues that were to be discussed during a small number of case study visits were agreed.   Face-to-face meetings with 15 projects were then arranged, interviewing key personnel within the projects, and also speaking to beneficiaries where they were available.   These case studies enabled the consultants to gain a more in-depth understanding of the impact of the project on the community, and the impact of the Trust Fund on the project.

Stage 4 – Analysis of Overall Impact

In Stage 4 of the evaluation, the consultants were able to undertake an analysis of the impact of the programme as a whole, using information from desk research, desk reviews, interviews, focus groups, and case studies.

Finally, all of these findings were brought together within a report format, drawing a range of conclusions, answering the four research questions, and developing recommendations. These findings were then discussed with WAG at a triangulation meeting in order to agree any changes and alterations, and to ensure that the recommendations within the report provided WAG with a useful tool for future delivery and policy formulation. Following this meeting, a final quality assured draft version of the report was produced for WAG's approval.

Further to the final report, the consultants will also deliver regional or organisational workshops to feedback the findings of the evaluation as required.

2. Background Information

2.1 Aims and Objectives of the Trust Fund

The Communities First Trust Fund was established by WAG in 2001. From the start, the Trust Fund was conceived as a fund to develop social capital in Communities First areas - it was never designed as a strategic fund. This is the key point to remember when discussing the aims and objectives of the Trust Fund.

The Trust Fund was not set up to meet the objectives of the wider Communities First programme, but rather to support any type of activity, carried out by small community organisations, which involves local people living in Communities First areas and which provides some sort of economic, cultural, social or environmental benefit to that area. The original purpose of the aim was therefore:

"to develop the capacity of groups through small grants to a large number of small community-led organisations"

As can be seen from the above, the aim of the Trust Fund was to develop social capital[2] in deprived communities. In practice, this has been interpreted as distributing small amounts of funding for activities and projects to community groups quickly and easily. In order to do this, the Trust Fund was designed to be red-tape busting – i.e. dramatically reducing the bureaucracy associated with most grant schemes, by reducing the application and evaluation paperwork to the minimum. By doing this, the Trust Fund aimed to quickly and easily distribute funds to Communities First areas, thereby developing the feel-good factor in areas that had suffered from long-term deprivation.

Other than being located in a Communities First area (or delivering activities / services that benefited people living in a Communities First area) groups that wished to apply to the Trust Fund had to show that their project:

- Benefited the community / contributed to the regeneration needs of the area
- Responded to local needs and priorities
- Had the support of the relevant community
- Used local services / providers wherever possible
- Provided value for money
- Identified simple but clear measurable outcomes

2.2 Management and Administration of the Fund

The Trust Fund is managed on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government by the Communities First Support Network (CFSN) and administered centrally by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) via a team of six staff members.

This administration team consists of one operations officer, one full-time and one part-time senior grant assessors, one organiser / assessor, one administrator, and one administration assistant. The team manages an annual budget of £3 million, which is due to increase to £3.23 million in 2007 / 08 (in order to include an additional 46 Lower Super Output Areas that have become eligible for inclusion in the Communities First programme following the publication of the 2005 WIMD).

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[2] *Social capital is the individual and communal time and energy that is available for community improvement, social networking, civic engagement and other activities that create social bonds between individuals and groups.*

Each of the existing 142 Communities First areas has an annual allocation of funds for which community groups within that area can apply. The 100 ward-based partnership areas are allocated £20,000 per year, as are the 10 partnerships based on imaginative proposals or communities of interest. The 32 areas that are classed as sub-pockets of deprivation are allocated £10,000 annually. The maximum size for an individual application is £5,000.

The Trust Fund application process is straightforward, using a four-page application form, which must be filled in and submitted to WCVA. Detailed guidance notes accompany the form, which give explanations and examples on a question by question basis, whilst also explaining the eligibility criteria. There is also a checklist for applicants to ensure that they have included all relevant information, such as bank statements and quotes as applicable.

All applicants to the Trust Fund must have a reference from a local referee. This reference does not accompany the application form, but is requested by the Grant Assessment Team when the application form is received at the WCVA's Cardiff office. Referees are selected from a range of organisations, such as the Local Authority, the local Communities First partnership, or the local CVC. Referees are required to confirm only that the group is legitimate: they are not asked to comment on the work of the group, the merits of its project idea, the quality of the application, etc.

In addition, applications do not have to be approved by the local Communities First partnership. This was a deliberate decision on the part of WAG in order to ensure that narrow interests within the Partnerships do not impact on the objectivity of the assessment process. Further, there was also concern that giving Partnerships responsibility for administering a grant fund in their area would take away their focus from identifying local priorities and regeneration needs.

With the Trust Fund structured this way, there is no compulsion for applicant groups to work with or even make contact with their local partnership. However, a weekly spreadsheet of all applications to the Trust Fund is e-mailed by the Grant Assessment Team in WCVA to all 142 partnership co-ordinators for their comments. This enables partnerships to flag up any problems, such as questionable local impact of a project on the specific Communities First area, or any misappropriation issues that referees may be unaware of. Where such issues are raised by co-ordinators, WCVA will contact the group to clarify the issue, and will also request that the applicant makes contact with the co-ordinator in their area.

Decisions on applications made to the scheme are decided centrally by the Trust Fund Grants Advisory Panel. The panel meets monthly, and is given a series of summary sheets by the WCVA staff team. These sheets distil the application information to its minimum, to enable the assessment panel to make decisions as efficiently as possible. The panel is able to request additional information as necessary, in order to inform its assessment. From receipt of all relevant paperwork to decision should take no longer than 6 weeks.

The panel consists of representatives from the 9 organisations that make up the CFSN. They are:

- Black Voluntary Sector Network (Wales)
- Community Action Network
- Community Development Cymru
- Development Trusts Association
- Groundwork Wales
- Menter a Busnes
- Wales Co-operative Centre
- Wales Association of County Voluntary Councils
- Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Applications are dealt with on a first come first serve basis, with a turnaround time of 6 weeks from when the referee's statement is received. Where there is no funding left in the annual allocation for an area, applications are held on a reserve list. If, after the deadline, there is any under-spend from any other areas,

this is then transferred to an overall Wales under- spend pot of funding, and the Trust Fund is able to reactivate the held applications, again on a first come first serve basis. This method enables areas with high levels of activity to access more than their £20,000 (or £10,000) annual allocation.

Groups are able to apply to the Fund more than once (over consecutive years). The only stipulations are: (1) that the End of Project form for the previous project has to be received before another application for a further project can be accepted, and (2) applications must be for a different activity each time, as the same activity cannot be funded twice.

Unsuccessful applicants to the fund are sent a letter, which details the reasons why their application did not succeed, and offers further feedback on a one-to-one basis if the group requires it. Where possible, applicants are also given information about other sources of funding that may be appropriate to them.

Successful applicants are required to complete an End of Project form once their project has been completed. This is a simple one-page form, which asks for qualitative information relating to the work of the project, and its impact on beneficiaries. In addition, WAG requires that 5% of all groups funded receive a monitoring visit or telephone call from WCVA, which asks some additional and more in-depth questions relating to beneficiary and community impact.

WCVAs central administration of the fund ensures that up-to-date statistics on specific Communities First areas, groups of areas, or counties, can be provided. This information is provided in regular quarterly reports to Assembly officials, and can also be used to flag up areas where application levels are low.

2.3   Communities First Music Trust Fund

As well as the Trust Fund, WCVA also administers, on behalf of WAG, the Communities First Music Trust Fund, commonly known as the Music Fund. This was originally devised as a one-year pilot initiative, running throughout the financial year 2006 / 2007. Funding of £180,000 was allocated to the Music Fund to support extra-curricular music activities, such as community music, within Communities First areas, in order to help re-energise communities and promote social inclusion. The Music Fund is additional to the Trust Fund – the £180,000 annual allocation in 2006/07 was not taken from the £3 million annual allocation to the Trust Fund.

Following the first year pilot, the Music Fund was continued into 2007/08, this time with an allocation of £250,000 of which £25,000 is set aside for the prospective new areas being admitted to the programme during 2007-08.

Again, it should be noted that the Music Fund is an element additional to the Trust Fund, with different distribution and allocation criteria. For example, allocations can be for individual areas, of for groups of counties, and allocations are also based on size of population within those counties (with an additional allocation for communities of interest in Cardiff and Newport).

The maximum application size is therefore dependent on the number of Communities First areas covered by the applicant project:

- If the project is confined to one Communities First ward, the maximum award is £1,000 per annum
- If the project covers 2 or more wards in the same county or cross county, the maximum award is £2,500 per annum
- If the project covers 5 or more wards in the same county or cross county, the maximum award is £5,000 per annum
- If the project covers 8 or more wards and must be cross county, the maximum award is £10,000 per annum

Applications to the Music Fund are accepted throughout the year with two formal closing dates of 31 October and 31 January.

Therefore, whilst the Music Fund is closely related to the Trust Fund, it is run separately, with differing allocation and distribution criteria and arrangements. Whilst the consultants are aware of the operations of the Music Fund, it was not part of our brief to evaluate the Music Fund, as this would be a separate piece of work with different parameters. However, the Music Fund offers a different way of administering a similar grant scheme, and as such the evaluators have compared the Music Fund and Trust Fund models of allocation (see Section 4 of this report).

2.4 Previous Evaluations of the Communities First Trust Fund

An interim evaluation of the Trust Fund was carried out by Old Bell 3 consultants in the summer of 2003.[3]

The evaluation found the Trust Fund to be a success, and highlighted particularly:

- The non-bureaucratic nature of the application process and the fund itself
- The wide awareness of the fund in Communities First areas
- The success of the fund in providing grants to a range of groups across Communities First areas
- The effective referee system
- The positive impact on perceptions in Communities First areas

The report found no evidence that fundamental changes were necessary, and did not support devolved administration of the fund.

In terms of weaknesses of the Trust Fund, Old Bell 3 highlighted:

- Lack of certainty over the future of the fund
- Concerns over the speed of the assessment process
- Lack of clear rules regarding multiple applications
- The lack of focus on social capital (although the consultants did not recommend a change to the eligibility criteria)
- Lack of consultation with partnerships
- Lack of measurable outcomes of the fund (although the consultants did not go so far as to recommend changes to the monitoring process)

These weaknesses and strengths resulted in a number of recommendations, which were taken forward by WAG.

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[3] http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/regeneration

3. Evaluation Findings

3.1 Introduction

The following section of the report presents the evaluation findings from the five different elements of the fieldwork. These five elements are:

- Stakeholder Interviews
- Communities First Partnership Focus Groups
- Project Interviews
- Unsuccessful Applicants
- Project Visits

The different methods of consultation for each of these groups have previously been noted within the introduction and methodology section of this report.

The consultants have drawn out the key results and findings from each of the five sets of consultations, and written up the results in a narrative form. Key issues are highlighted within the narrative in **bold type**: this ensures that the reader can quickly assess the key findings from the report, rather than having to interpret data, charts, verbatim quotes, etc.

For a full record of all data gathered, including graphs and verbatim quotes, please refer to the annexes to this report.

3.2   Stakeholder Interviews

As part of the fieldwork element of the methodology, interviews were carried out with a total of 19 stakeholders[4] from a range of organisations including WAG, CFSN, and WCVA. Of the 19 interviews, 16 were face-to-face and only 3 were self-completion or telephone. Key outcomes from these interviews are recorded below, with a full record of all responses contained within the annexes to this report.

Firstly, stakeholders were clear that **the Trust Fund was not intended to be a strategic fund**; it was simply intended to enable communities in Communities First areas to access small grants quickly and easily. The knock on effect of this was expected to be a raised profile for the wider Communities First programme. For example, comments included:

- *"The Trust Fund was never a strategic fund – it's about enabling communities to deliver their own small projects. It's about quick wins rather than the strategic picture"*

Further, while stakeholders were clear that the Trust Fund was not set up to deliver the aims of Communities First it had, as a by-product of distributing grants, supported some of these aims to some extent.

In addition, over half of stakeholders questioned believed that projects that focussed on health and well-being and leisure activities were the most successful in accessing Trust Fund grants. Some **stakeholders questioned the worth of funding some activities**, such as kit for sports clubs. However, all were clear that these applications were permissible under the grant criteria, and as such were legitimate applicants to the fund.

Taking into account the above, the question for WAG to consider is **whether the Trust Fund should be made to align with the aims and objectives of the Communities First programme.** Such alignment could be national (i.e. aligned to the aims of the Communities First programme as a whole) of local (i.e. aligned to the priorities of local partnerships). Further, there is also an opportunity to consider whether there is scope to develop two Trust Funds (one strategically aligned, one continuing to run in the manner of the current Trust Fund). The consultants were not asked to make recommendations on this issue as part of the research brief; however, it is an issue that should be subject to further consideration by WAG as Communities First becomes Communities Next.

Moving on to effectiveness of the delivery of the programme so far, stakeholders believed that **the Trust Fund had effectively distributed small grants to numerous community groups**, and had thereby positively raised the profile of the Communities First process. Comments included:

- *"It is achieving its aim – small groups – a very wide range of then – are successfully accessing funding"*

Further, stakeholders were quite clear that **groups that accessed a Trust Fund grant did not have to establish a link with their local Communities First partnership**. Partnership support for a group and its application was seen as desirable, but not essential, as the Trust Fund had deliberately been set up to operate independently from the wider Communities First process. Comments included:

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[4] *A stakeholder is an individual or group with an interest in the success of an organisation in delivering intended results and maintaining the viability of the organisation's products / services. In this instance, stakeholders are members of the Communities First Support Network (who manage the Trust Fund), Wales Council for Voluntary Action (who administer the Trust Fund) and the Welsh Assembly Government (the instigators of the Trust Fund)*

- *"Some groups don't work with their local partnership, but that's fine, and we should leave well alone."*

Taking this point further, stakeholders also felt strongly that **Partnerships should not be given control of the Trust Fund**. Reasons centred on the widely varying capacity and grant handling experience of individual partnerships, and the danger of introducing local influences into the decision making process. Stakeholders also felt that significant time and effort had been spent in helping partnerships to understand their role as facilitators to a development process, and that providing Partnerships with the decision making responsibilities of the trust fund could cause a significant step back towards playing a grant committee role rather than a developmental role, thus removing partnership focus from delivery of local action plans. Stakeholders also felt that devolving administration to each county / ward would result in duplication, as well as to increased costs for monitoring, evaluation, and auditing. Finally, stakeholders also felt that devolution would also lead to a loss of consistency and impartiality of the decision making process, as the experience of the Grant Advisory Panel would no longer be utilised.

Despite the above concerns, stakeholders recognised that **Partnerships could play an increased role within the Trust Fund process, without handing over full control of the programme**. Suggestions of how increased involvement could effectively be achieved included:

- Allowing partnerships a more central role in commenting on how applications fitted with local objectives
- Allowing partnerships to be represented in some way on the grant assessment panel
- Giving partnerships more information from panel meetings so that they are able to make comments, thereby potentially influencing future panel decisions
- Setting up focus groups so that partnership can comment on the eligibility criteria of the fund

Whilst the consultants agree that separating the Partnerships from the Trust Fund process is the correct arrangement, Partnerships should at all times be kept informed of the applicants to the Trust Fund, and the success or otherwise of those applications. Failure to do this could result in **double funding** of a group, or **duplication of activities** between groups. At present, Partnerships are given regular up-dates of applicants and results, and this should be continued. If this process works effectively, Partnerships will continue to play a role in co-ordinating activities in their area, and **encouraging joint working** between groups at the local level (and potentially across counties as well, as within the Music Fund). Such joint working could potentially encourage the development of sustainability within local community groups.

In terms of administration, stakeholders had **no concerns about management and administration** of the Trust Fund, which is seen to run efficiently and effectively. However, some – though not all – stakeholders clearly feel that **there is potential to improve the marketing** of the Trust Fund. However, it is recognised that resources are an issue, and any increase in marketing activities would inevitably impact on budgets and staff time. Comments included:

- *"I think that CFTF is the most successful element of the Communities First programme, which says something very positive about its management and administration"*

Stakeholders also identified a range of **good practice**, but particularly that related to management and administration of the programme. In addition, stakeholders identified a number of **lessons learned** during the lifetime of the programme, generally relating to clarity of the criteria for eligibility. Comments included:

- *"Keeping the monitoring very low level is the right thing to do. It doesn't put small and inexperienced groups off applying"*
- *"Right back at the start, there was a little confusion about what was eligible. We've learnt from this and now we have very clear guidelines about what can and can't be funded"*

For the future, stakeholders felt that the **new LSOA areas** (which are set to join the Communities First

programme over the coming months) should simply **slot into the Trust Fund process as it currently stands**, although there was some discussion about levels of funding. (Please note that the consultants make recommendations on this issue later within the report).

In addition, **stakeholders had varying ideas for the future development of the Trust Fund**, all of which could be discussed further in light of the transition to Communities Next. This discussion would be particularly relevant if any decisions were made regarding the **potential for strategic alignment of the Fund**. Ideas from stakeholders included:

- Whether or not groups should in future be allowed to apply to the Trust Fund to fund the same activity more than once
- Whether or not groups should in future be allowed to apply to continue activities
- Whether or not more emphasis on 'quality' of Trust Fund grants was needed – i.e. should groups continue to be able to use the fund to buy blazers and ties, rugby kit, tea urns etc.
- Whether or not there should be more outreach work with communities that do not apply for the Trust Fund (e.g. the gypsy community)
- Whether or not there should be a broker system set up to support applicants to the Trust Fund
- Whether or not these brokers could take on a liaison role between partnerships and groups
- Whether or not there should be more sharing of good practice arising from Trust-funded projects
- whether or not additional resources for monitoring and marketing of the Trust Fund should be made available

3.3   Communities First Partnerships - Focus Groups and Questionnaires

As part of the fieldwork element of the evaluation process, a range of consultation methods were used to engage with Communities First partnership representatives.

In the first instance, three focus groups were arranged – one in Cardiff to cover the south east Wales area, one in Llanelli to cover the south west Wales area, and one in Rhyl to cover the north Wales area. Of course, these locations would not be suitable for all Partnership representatives, so the options of self-completion questionnaire, or completion of a questionnaire with assistance from trained consultancy staff (e.g. through a facilitated telephone interview) were also offered.

To facilitate this consultation process, the current contact database for all co-ordinators in the 142 Communities First areas was used. All co-ordinators were sent an invite to participate, and these co-ordinators were also asked to invite the chair of their Partnership to take part in the discussion (this method was used as no contact database of Partnership chairs was available). The invitation to participate contained :

(a) details of the focus group sessions (b) the chance to return a self-completion questionnaire or (c) the option to complete a telephone interview with consultancy staff.

Therefore, approximately 284 individuals were invited to take part in this consultation (the numbers may vary slightly, due to one or two vacant positions). From the possible 284 responses, the consultants received input from the following:

- 14 self-completion questionnaires were returned
- 17 people attended the focus groups (27 had replied that they would attend the sessions, but only 17 of these actually attended in the event)

Therefore, in total, 31 responses were received from an approximate possible total of 284, constituting a 13% response rate. Please also note that an additional two response were received after the closing date; these could not be included as the data had already been analysed and the report written.

The results of this consultation are detailed below, with a full record of all responses contained within the annexes to this report.

First of all, of the Partnerships that responded, the majority were clear that **the aim of the Trust Fund was to enable small community groups to access small amounts of funding quickly and easily**. Comments included:

- *"To enable local community groups who may be excluded or do not have the capacity to apply to other funders to access a simple, non-bureaucratic fund for their development and the development of the wider community."*

Further, the majority of Partnerships that responded felt that the **Trust Fund enabled groups to build their confidence, develop their project management skills, and move on to success with other funding applications**.

There was a mixed response from Partnerships regarding the **level of project involvement with their local Communities First partnership**, with some of the respondents feeling uneasy that they were effectively by-passed in the Trust Fund process, and others feeling that such involvement was not important. Comments included:

- *"Some are directly involved, others are not so. But I feel that this is not necessarily a bad thing as long as the fund is building capacity in the community and being accessed for the direct benefit of the community."*
- *"Before they apply, groups should get in touch with their partnerships and meet with them. It's not about control – it's about partnerships knowing what's going on"*

When asked about general awareness of the programme, Partnerships that responded raised **no serious issues concerning promotion and marketing**. There was a clear understanding that promotion of the Trust Fund could best be achieved by the Partnership itself, along with other networks and forums, as well as through word of mouth between projects themselves.

Respondents felt that the **elements of the Trust Fund that had worked particularly well** were:

- Access to small scale, straightforward funding for small community groups
- A set allocation for each area had been helpful, as it ensured that partnerships and groups knew exactly what was available
- Application forms that were easy for first time applicants to follow
- Simplified terms used in the application form
- Quick turnover of applications
- CFTF giving confidence to groups to look at other, more demanding, funding schemes
- CFTF giving small groups the chance to develop projects for the first time
- The high success rate of grant applications
- Flexibility regarding under-spend and viring of funds (i.e. groups were able to liaise with WCVA and agree other appropriate ways to spend the grant)
- WCVA willing to come out and assist groups
- Simple, non-intimidating monitoring and evaluation

Further, respondents felt that the **elements of the Trust Fund that had not worked so well** were:

- Lack of partnership control over distribution of funds
- Lack of information requested from local co-ordinators in advance application decisions
- First contact through the advice line (this was seen as potentially off-putting to inexperienced groups)
- No concurrent grants allowed (i.e. groups have to return an end of project report and receipts before

they can apply for another grant)
- Groups from outside the area, with a tenuous link to the local community, applying to the Trust Fund (lack of local knowledge of the referees was cited as a reason for this)
- Lack of complementarity between a group's project and the priorities of the local partnership
- Large organisations that worked county-wide applying to the Trust Fund
- Wards with a small population being allocated the same amount of money as a ward with a large population

Finally, respondents felt that the **elements of the Trust Fund that should be changed** were:

- Referees must have local knowledge
- Partnerships / co-ordinators should have a right to comment on applications
- A more stringent process for large organisations applying for local funds
- Publishing of grants panel meeting dates in order to focus applicants on deadlines
- Groups should only be able to apply up to three times to the Trust Fund to stop those groups that access the fund year on year
- Help for groups to plan for sustainability
- Asking groups to be more specific about their outcomes
- Insistence that groups that receive the Trust Fund should keep in contact with their local partnership
- Under spend in the main Communities First programme to be moved into CFTF
- Develop a halfway house situation where partnerships, with supervision, can decide on applications of under £500
- WCVA should ensure that all groups who contact them are signposted on to their local co-ordinator or development worker
- That financial / monitoring reports that groups produce at the end of their project should be made available to the local partnership

Whilst the points raised above include increased Partnership involvement in the Trust Fund process, it should be remembered that there was a **disappointing response to the consultation** with Partnership representatives, with only a 13% response rate. This seems to indicate that **there is not a strong feeling amongst the majority of Partnerships that control should be devolved to the local level**: the consultants feel that strong views on this issue across a majority of Partnerships would have generated a significantly higher response rate.

3.4   Project Interviews

The key part of this evaluation was the undertaking of facilitated telephone interviews with a sample of 361 projects representing the 5,958 grants that had received funding through the Trust Fund. The objective of these interviews was to gain a clearer understanding of the Trust Fund's impacts, to highlight any problems or issues, and to identify successes, good practice, and other outcomes.

The original brief called for a telephone survey with a minimum of 200 Trust Fund applicants, from a total 5,958 grants awarded. The consultants examined these figures, and recommended interviews with more than 200 applicants. The reasoning for this was as follows:

- Total number of grants awarded (at the commencement of the evaluation) = 5,958
- 200 interviews from 5,958 = a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 6.8

In order for results to be more statistically robust we recommend a confidence interval (or margin of error) should be +/- 5%, and so the following numbers of telephone interviews were recommended:

- Total projects = 5,958
- To give a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval 5, total number of telephone interviews

needed = 361

Once this figure was agreed, a stratified random sample of 1,000 projects was developed, which took into account factors such as geographical location, distribution of grants, size of grants, and other relevant factors. Projects could then be selected at random from the 1,000 strong sample. The randomness was produced by programming Excel to generate a random number and then ranking the sample according to that random number.

The statistical significance of using this method is that the reader can be certain that views expressed by the sample are 95% representative of the total population, when a given response is 50% : 50%; or to put it simply, the results can be trusted by the reader as being statistically representative of the whole population.

Whilst the project sample was being established, a project questionnaire was developed, which contained a mixture of open and closed questions. This covered all of the key issues as highlighted above, and was made available to projects in either English or Welsh, as requested.

Once the draft version of the questionnaire had been developed, a series of 10 pilot interviews to test timing, question flow, and language used (i.e. simple and easily understood) were undertaken. Following the pilot process, some minor adjustments were made to the questionnaire (mainly fine-tune language, and to remove three questions that resulted in repetition of previous answers). Once the questionnaire was finalised, the consultants then ran an internal training workshop for its consultation staff, and the facilitated telephone interview process began.

All interviewees were given the choice of an interview in either English or Welsh, in line with the Welsh Language Act and the recommendations of the Welsh Language Board. All interview results were then quality checked at regular intervals throughout the survey process, in order to ensure that a high quality of data was gathered throughout.

The outcome of these interviews was the collation of a range of qualitative and quantitative data relating to 361 funded projects. The data was analysed, and key results are included below.

Firstly, the **majority of groups (52%) felt that their main focus was health and well-being and leisure activities**.

Further, **the majority of groups (95%) felt that their activities brought social benefits,** with 45% believing that their project brought cultural benefits, 17% and 16% feeling that their project brought economic benefits or environmental benefits respectively.

When asked to say how old their group was when it accessed Trust Fund money, **58% of groups were over 7 years old**, whilst **only 17% were less than 1 year old**. This gives some cause for concern, as it may be desirable for the Trust Fund to attract more new and inexperienced groups, as it is these groups that could potentially benefit most from the simple application process, thereby developing their confidence and project management abilities.

When asked about the impact of the Trust Fund on their group, **75% of respondents felt that accessing Trust Fund monies had made a positive impact on their capacity** (e.g. it had increased confidence in applying for other funding, developed self-sufficiency, helped the group to become more vocal, etc). Further, **98% said that the Trust Fund had helped them to deliver what they wanted to deliver.**

Groups then went on to discuss the application process. **Only 2% felt that the process was unclear or confusing, and only 4% felt that the process was slow**. Further, 76% of groups would not change anything about the application process, although for those that did express an opinion, suggested changes were:

- Speed up the process

- Allow a second application to the Trust Fund whilst the first was still 'live'
- Have more regular grants panel meetings
- Allow more than one application for the same activity
- Ensure that referees have local knowledge
- Ensure that referees are easy to contact

In addition, **94% of respondents felt that the monitoring requirements connected to the fund were either straightforward, or of an acceptable level.**

Groups were then asked how they had found out about the Trust Fund. The **majority of groups (58%) heard of the Trust Fund through their local Communities First partnership**. The comments throw up some interesting issues. For example, one respondent said that:

- *"It was only heard about by word of mouth, therefore more advertising is needed"*

This, of course, misses the point that word of mouth is a legitimate form of promotion. Similarly, another respondent said:

- *"I have never seen it advertised"*

However, the interviewee had obviously still become aware of the fund as they had successfully applied to it. Despite these contradictions, there may be **some relevant information for WCVA and WAG to consider in terms of marketing and publicity**, and as such these comments (reproduced in full within the annexes to this report) should be read and considered.

In terms of **contribution of the groups to the aims of the wider Communities First programme**, most groups focussed on the **co-operative and community working** aspect of Communities First, which they recognised lead to improvements in their community. Comments included:

- *"It brought locals together doing different activities, and improved community morale."*
- *"It really brought the community together – we had 84 children signed up to youth clubs and had fantastic support from the community."*

Further, **61% of groups questioned were involved with their local Partnership**, generally through: attending meetings, sitting on the partnership itself or one of its subgroups, through personal contact with staff, by sharing premises, etc. In addition, a relatively high percentage – 15% - of respondents did not know if their group was involved with their local partnership or not. This is perhaps reflective of the fact that some groups work almost completely independently, and do not see themselves as having a role in the broader regeneration of their community. In other words, they are not concerned about *where* funding comes from, or *why* their group is entitled to it, as long as they get it. Again, it is worth reiterating that, as the Trust Fund was never set up as a strategic fund, then such an attitude perhaps understandable and even acceptable, and if this fact is kept in mind, a figure of 15% is actually very low.

Where groups were not involved with their local partnership, the most commonly given reason was that their project did not really need to be involved with the partnership, and could function perfectly well independently. This perhaps reflects a lack of understanding about the purpose of Communities First and how to get involved in the process (as evidenced by the fact that one or two respondents thought that they were not actually located in a Communities First area). This potential lack of understanding in a significant minority of groups about the purpose of Communities First is perhaps an issue that needs to be addressed.

3.5   Unsuccessful Applications

An additional element of this evaluation was the undertaking of facilitated telephone interviews with 15 projects that applied unsuccessfully to the Trust Fund. Whilst the Trust Fund is a flexible, easy-access fund,

there remain a number of reasons why a grant application may be refused. For example:

- The application comes from a national organisation (the fund is intended to support small, community-led groups)
- The project would deliver limited wider community benefit
- Insufficient information given
- The group is applying for something that could be sourced from elsewhere (e.g. an application for a photocopier, when photocopying is available free through the local CVC)
- The project would not benefit a Communities First area
- The applicant has previously received funding towards a similar item / project
- The application is for items / work / projects that are the responsibility of the Local Authority
- The application is retrospective
- The application is on behalf of another group.

Therefore, the objective of these interviews was to gain an in-sight into a number of issues, such as how much previous grant application experience groups had, and to highlight any ways in which (if appropriate) groups could be supported to make successful applications in the future.

Over the 6 years of the Trust Fund, and from over 6,000 applications, only 190 applications had been refused. This shows the essentially open nature of the fund, and reflects its non-strategic nature (if the Fund had a strategic purpose, refusal rates would be likely to be considerably higher).

As with the 361 project interviews, the consultants developed a stratified random sample of the 190 unsuccessful applications, and groups were then selected at random from this sample. Again, the questionnaire contained a mixture of open and closed questions covering the key issues as highlighted above, and was available to projects in either English or Welsh.
The outcome of these interviews was the collation of qualitative and quantitative data relating to 15 groups whose applications were refused. Key results are included below, with a full record of the interviews included in the supporting annexe documents.

Over half **(9 of 15) interviewees had no previous experience of applying for grants**. Whilst a sample of 15 is not enough to establish a clear pattern, 9 negative responses do seem proportionally high, and lack of experience could therefore potentially be a key factor in submitting an unsuccessful application.

13 out of 15 interviewed found the application process to be acceptably straightforward, whilst only 2 found it difficult. Whilst these figures cannot be directly compared to those for successful applications, there does appear to be parity, and as such this question does not highlight a need to make any changes to the application process.

Six of the respondents felt that they did not need help, or knew that help was available if needed. As these forms of assistance should be available to all applicants, then there is **potentially an issue with either (a) understanding of what assistance is available or (b) lack of willingness to help on the part of those involved in Communities First locally or (c) lack of willingness to help on behalf of WCVA or CFSN**. Understanding has raised its head as an issue several times, so is likely to be a deciding factor for some groups. Assessing the level of support offered by Communities First partnerships to their local groups is beyond the scope of this evaluation. In addition, during interviews with WCVA officers and CFSN members, the consultants were given a clear indication that all staff were willing to work with groups as appropriate to support them through the application process. However, the fact that help is available to all applicants is only stated towards the end of the application guidelines, and is perhaps not stated as clearly as it could be.

Four interviewees stated that they were not clear about the reasons their application was refused, whilst **11 of 15 interviewees said they were clear about the reasons that their application was refused**. A letter is sent to all unsuccessful applicants, giving a reason for refusal, so again perhaps this is an issue of interpretation of eligibility. The initial guidelines and the refusal letter are also both clear that the applicant can discuss the

refusal in more detail with a member of WCVA staff if desired, so there does not seem to be any real reason for lack of clarity on the issue.

11 interviewees stated that they would be happy to re-apply to the Trust Fund in future, and 4 were already in the process of doing so (perhaps with an improved understanding of the criteria). Two interviewees were unsure, and two said that they definitely would not re-apply.

3.6 Project Visits

As part of the third stage of the evaluation process, case study visits were undertaken with 14 projects. (Please note that 15 visits had originally been booked and confirmed with grant recipients. However, one person did not attend a meeting as agreed, and was unfortunately not able to give notice of this due to personal circumstances. Within the timescale, it was not possible to reschedule the visit). However, the rest of the 14 visits progressed smoothly, and the consultants were able to speak to grant recipients and, in some cases, to beneficiaries of the project.

The objective of these project visits was to develop a clearer understanding of the kinds of activities that groups were able to deliver as a result of their Trust Fund grant, to gain a clearer understanding of impact on beneficiaries (i.e. the outcomes of the project), to discuss good practice and lessons learned, to assess groups' view of the application process, and to assess involvement of groups with their local Communities First partnership.

For the project visits, a topic guide was developed that focussed on the key issues identified above. This topic guide was shorter and less structured that the questionnaire used for the telephone interviews: the aim was to engage groups in a more in-depth discussion about fewer issues. As with all interviews, those taking part were offered a choice of an interview in either English or Welsh, in line with the Welsh Language Act and the recommendations of the Welsh Language Board.

As with the telephone interviews, a stratified random sample of projects was used to select the projects to be visited, taking into account factors such as geographical location, size of grants, and other relevant factors. Projects to visit were then selected at random from this stratified sample.

The outcome of these visits was the collation of a range of qualitative information relating to the 14 projects visited. This information was developed into a case study format, and included within the annexes to this report. The key outcomes of the visits are shown below.

Types of Activities Funded

The consultants were able to visit groups that were delivering a wide range of activities to different groups in different parts of Wales. As an example, projects included:

- A majorette troupe in Holyhead
- An accommodation project for homeless ex-offenders in Llanelli
- A boxing club for young people in Blaengwynfi
- A building regeneration project in Lwynypia
- A playgroup in Flint

Within the 14 projects visited, Trust Fund monies went towards a range of activities or equipment. This included:

- Fabric for uniforms, hall hire, and transport costs
- A digital camera, a printer, and a laptop computer
- Materials to develop an outside area into a therapeutic garden for residents
- Bowling kit, trophies, and competition entry fees for junior players

- Equipment for terminally and long term ill patients, such as commodes and nebulisers
- A day trip for members of a club for older people

As can be seen from the above, the case study visits show that **the Trust Fund has supported a range of groups to deliver varied activities**. Despite this, it should also be noted that a number of these **projects were also keen to state that they tried to fundraise for themselves** wherever possible, and did not just rely on grant support. For example, one group held discos and table-top sales, whilst another used volunteer time to bring in match funding.

Project Views of the Trust Fund Process

During the case study visits, issues such as publicity, the application process, and monitoring requirements were also discussed. The consultants found that, as with the 361 telephone interviews, those interviewed had **no major concerns about the range of processes connected to the Trust Fund**.

For example, the **application form was recognised as straightforward** (even for those with little grant application experience), and those who needed help with the form had been able to access it through their local Communities First partnership or from the helpline at WCVA.

Projects interviewed also mentioned the **quick turnaround process**, along with the fact that **monitoring was simple and straightforward**.

When asked how they had heard about the grant, **the majority of projects visited heard about the Trust Fund through their local Partnership**: this reflects the findings of the 361 project telephone interviews. When this point was discussed further, some interviewees also indicated that, as they perceived it, most of the other groups in their area also knew about the Trust Fund, and knew how to access it. This shows, albeit in a qualitative way, that local networks are effective in spreading the word about funding opportunities.

Involvement with Communities First Partnerships

As previously stated, the majority of the groups visited (as well as the 361 telephoned) had found out about the Trust Fund through their local Communities First partnership. For some groups, this relationship with the Partnership was ongoing, whilst for others; involvement in the workings of their local Partnership was minimal.

For example, one group visited worked closely with its local Partnership in order to ensure that the group was involved with the local community. Another worked with a member of Partnership staff in order to decide which grants they should apply for, whilst the Partnership also advised and supported them with advertising and fundraising activities. Overall, the **groups visited generally felt that their local Communities First partnership was effective in ensuring that information was made available to the local community** and, in some cases, individuals were involved with both their own group and the local Partnership, thereby ensuring communication between the two organisations.

During the visits, one or two groups did state that they were not involved with their local Communities First partnership, although this was due to lack of time on the part of group volunteers, rather than any difficulties or specific issues between the two organisations.

Overall, therefore, the consultants found that **relationships between projects and Partnerships were good**, and this reflects the findings of the wider telephone survey.

Impact of the Trust Fund on the Group

All of the **projects visited felt that the Trust Fund had made a positive impact on their groups and its activities**. Benefits of the grant that were highlighted included:

- Removal of a number of financial pressures
- Purchasing of equipment, leading to increased promotion of the group / its activities, leading to more volunteers
- Increased sustainability through the recruitment of additional volunteers
- The success of one Trust-funded project leading to the development of other project ideas by the service users
- Groups feeling that they were able to establish themselves in a more professional manner
- Expanded membership of groups as the costs of kit, travel etc were removed

Groups were all keen to stress that a small grant (often of under £1,000) to be spent on basic equipment, could make a significant difference to the way that activities were run. For example, one group had purchased a digital camera and a laptop, and had then been able to set up its own website. This had generated significant interest locally and helped to recruit more volunteers (to the stage that the group can now deliver all of its day-to-day activities using volunteer hours), but had also put them in touch with another group in England with similar interests. Further, another group had successfully delivered one community project and, bolstered by this success, was now developing further ideas in conjunction with other community groups locally. These examples, though qualitative, do indicate that **a small success with the Trust Fund can lead groups on to other activities** or a strengthening of their current set up.

Impact of the Trust Fund on Beneficiaries

During the visits to about half of the projects, the consultants were able to speak with beneficiaries – i.e. those people who benefited from the activities or services that were delivered by the group. Activities varied, and therefore so do the types of benefits that resulted. However, the following are some examples:

- The group was able to bring local girls together and to establish friendships between different schools
- The group had impacted positively on parents, especially single parents, as they had now created an informal social network between themselves
- The group's volunteers had been able to build up good relationships with the young people using the facilities, who often confided in them in a way that they might not do with their own families
- The group had involved more local young people in its activities, and had seen a corresponding drop in vandalism on its premises
- The confidence of the group's beneficiaries had been raised significantly by the success of its first project
- Group beneficiaries had developed the ability to work together to take forward ideas.
- One beneficiary had grown so much in confidence that they were now planning to set up their own business
- One beneficiary, who came to the group as an unfit young boy, was now being assessed for the British squad for the 2012 Olympics

As can be seen from the above, **different groups and projects made different impacts on their beneficiaries**. For details on all groups, please refer to the Case Studies in the annexes to this report.

Notable Good Practice

Please note that good practice is addressed in full in a separate section of this report. The section below simply gives an outline of the kinds of elements of their work that groups themselves identified as good practice. As before, further details of individual case studies can be found within the annexes to this report.

- Inclusivity – groups often went to some length to ensure that potential beneficiaries were not excluded due to cost of transport, kit etc. This was felt to be particularly important, bearing in mind that groups are operating within the most deprived areas of Wales
- Inclusivity – many groups tried to involve a wide cross-section of the community (e.g. working with the local ASBO group, encouraging residents to use the group's facilities, etc)

- Fundraising – groups were keen to access grants where possible, but still undertook fundraising themselves e.g. by running a charity shop, holding discos etc.
- Publicity – some groups had used the Trust Fund to develop websites and other promotional tools, in order to recruit more volunteers
- Beneficiary involvement – some groups ensured that their beneficiaries were responsible for developing and taking forward their project idea

As can be seen from the benefits and impacts identified above, the case study visits enabled the consultants to develop a more in-depth understanding of the types of activities that were being delivered, how activities impacted on beneficiaries, and elements of good practice that could usefully be shared by other groups. As previously noted, it is important to remember that a small grant can have a significant impact on a community group, leading to additional activities or to capacity building of the group. In other words, the impact of the Trust Fund does not just stop at the purchasing of a laptop computer, or the provision of bowls kit for young players.

4. Conclusions and Recommendation

4.1 Research Questions

The purpose of this evaluation was to answer four research questions that were set by WAG. These questions, (a) to (d) below, were discussed and analysed during Wavehill's quantitative and qualitative research process, and our conclusions (as outlined in the tables on previous pages) sought to bring together common themes and issues. The following section takes the research findings, and sets them against the four research questions asked by WAG.

a)   How efficient and effective is the current administration of the Communities First Trust Fund? Is the administration of the fund conducted well providing good value for money?

From their range of research with stakeholders and projects the evaluator believes that the current set-up for management and administration of the Trust Fund is efficient and effective. A team of 6 staff run the programme, namely: a grants assessor and organiser; a senior grants assessor and; an operations officer. These roles have been refined over time, and consultations with the staff team indicate clarity of roles and responsibilities.

The administration and assessment process has evolved over time, and stakeholders involved in the grant assessment panel are now given a page summary of every application, along with a simple scoring system for each application. This ensures that applications are assessed using a standard method across the board, and the simplicity of the system also ensures that applications are dealt with quickly.

As can be seen from the previous section of the report, the stakeholders had no concerns about management and administration of the fund, which they believe runs efficiently and effectively. Stakeholders felt that there had been one or two teething problems related to the eligibility criteria in the early days of the fund, but these had been resolved as quickly as possible and clear parameters for funding established.

In addition, some members of the grants assessment panel also identified some issues with the referee system in the early days. These issues centred around the fact that referees often felt that it was their role to comment on the quality / suitability of the project applying when, in fact, their role is simply to state that they know of the group and can confirm that it is legitimate.

Comments from stakeholders relating to the administration of the trust fund included:

- *"I think that CFTF is the most successful element of the Communities First programme, which says something very positive about its management and administration"*
- *"It's an exemplar. It's a totally open process, the team is very diligent. There were one or two teething problems, but they were all sorted out in the early days"*
- *"WCVA manage this fund very effectively."*

In addition, projects also felt that administration of the scheme was effective and efficient. 88% of projects interviewed found the application process to be acceptably clear and straightforward, whilst only 2% felt that the process was unclear or confusing. Further 87% found the speed of the decision making process to be acceptable or fast, whilst only 4% felt that the process was slow. In addition, when asked what they would change about the application process, the majority of projects (76%) stated that they would not change anything, with no patterns emerging from the remaining 24%.

Therefore, from both sides – projects and stakeholders – the Trust Fund is seen to run efficiently and effectively, and that there need not be any major changes to the administration and application processes. One or two minor areas in which changes could be made are discussed within the recommendations section that follows.

Further, from a range of research with stakeholders and projects it has been shown that the current set up for management and administration of the Trust Fund provides good value for money. Overheads for the programme (staffing and administration costs) run at approximately 10%, which compares well to costs for other similar grant funds.

Further, it is possible to develop some statistics relating to staff hours per application, which can provide very rough comparisons between projects. This is developed as follows:

The Trust Fund – a rough calculation of administration hours per application

For 2001 to 2004, the Trust Fund administration is 5 posts = 175 hours per week
For 2004 to 2007, the Trust Fund administration is 6 posts = 210 hours per week

175 hours per week over 3 years (46 working weeks per year) = 24,150 hours
210 hours per week over 3 years (46 working weeks per year) = 28,980 hours

Total admin hours = 53,130
Divided by approximately 6,500 applications = 8.2 admin hours per application

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It should be stressed that this is *not* to be considered an exact sum – staff hours per year are estimates, as is the number of applications. However, this calculation does give an approximate indication of administrative efficiency when compared to other grants. In this case, we can see that, when the same calculation is applied to other funds, results are as follows:

Grant Scheme	Admin hours per application
Derby Small Change Fund	13.5
Peckham Partnership Community Council Grant Scheme	9.4
Communities First Trust Fund	8.2

Source: Wavehill Consulting 2006

Therefore, in terms of cost of administration, the Trust Fund provides good value for money and there need not be any changes to the way that the fund is administered.

In terms of addressing value for money in other ways – e.g. cost per output – such an assessment is not possible for the Trust Fund, as there are no monitored outputs for the projects.

b)   Are the Trust Fund's grants being used effectively to meet the objectives of Communities First?

This is, of course, a difficult question to answer as the Trust Fund was not set up as a strategic fund, and as such was not intended to deliver activities against the aims of Communities First. The aim of the Trust Fund was simply to enable community based groups in Communities First areas to access small grants quickly and easily.

However, it is also recognised that, as a by-product of distributing grants, the Trust Fund has supported some of the aims of Communities First to some extent.

The consultants were therefore faced with the difficult task of reviewing the impact of groups that had received Trust funding, and relating these impacts to the aims of the wider Communities First programme. This is an inexact process, and findings can only be considered indicative rather than absolute. In addition, some of the aims of Communities First – for example, ensuring public services are delivered in ways which are more responsive and more locally accountable – are simply not issues that small local groups could be expected to engage with, and are certainly not part of the criteria when assessing applications to the Trust Fund.

However, if we are to try to develop some links between the two programmes, then first of all we need to state the aims of the wider Communities First programme. These are:

- To build confidence and raise the self-esteem of people living in the community
- To increase the incomes of local people
- To improve health and well-being
- To encourage and improve education and skills training for work
- To create jobs
- To make communities safe, secure and crime free
- To ensure public services are delivered in ways which are more responsive and more locally accountable
- To improve housing and the quality of the environment
- To encourage active citizenship

Second, we need to be clear of the aim of the Trust Fund. This is:

- To develop the capacity of groups through small grants to a large number of small community-led organisations *[which can demonstrate]:*

  o Benefits to the community / contribution to the regeneration of the area
  o A response to local needs and priorities
  o Support of the relevant community
  o Use of local services / providers where possible
  o Value for money
  o Simple but clear measurable outcomes

As can be seen, there is no direct reference within the aim of the Trust Fund to the aims of Communities First, although the sub-criteria do complement some of the Communities First aims to some extent.

In addition, any contribution towards these aims is not measured through the standard evaluation / monitoring of the programme, as the end of project evaluation process was designed to make minimal demands on groups. Therefore, there is no formal, quantitative way in which Trust-funded projects contribution to the aims of Communities First is centrally measured and recorded through the current administration arrangements.

To take forward this element of the evaluation, the main aims of the wider Communities First programme were briefly outlined to interviewees, in order to ensure that they were generally understood. The interviewees were then asked how their projects contributed, if at all, to these aims. This question was qualitative, and ensured that groups were able to discuss the 'softer' outcomes of the Communities First programme, such as confidence and self-esteem, and health and well-being. From these qualitative discussions, it was found that most groups focus on the co-operative and community involvement aspects of Communities First, which they recognise leads to improvements in their community. These two themes are repeated frequently throughout the full list of comments, which are recorded within the annexes to this report.

In addition, it should also be remembered that the majority of groups come in to the Trust Fund process through the wider Communities First partnerships network. This will strengthen Communities First overall, thereby contributing to the wider aims of the programme. Further, whilst it is possible to question the effects of funding, say, sports kit, from the perception of the group this can have a wider impact. For example: sports kit = increased participation = a number of other impacts (reduced vandalism, improved health, etc) = further impacts (reduced taxes) and so on, with a domino effect.

In addition, groups were also asked a quantitative question to identify what was the main theme or focus of their project. This was a multiple choice question, with options relating back to the aims of the wider Communities First programme. Main themes of funded projects were identified as:

- 52% - Health and well-being / leisure activities
- 32% - Community activities and support
- 2% - Countryside and environment
- 2% - Education and training
- 2% - Transport and communication
- 1% - Housing
- 1% - Economy and employment
- 8% - Other

Further, it was also discussed with groups which of the 4 key areas – social, cultural, economic and environmental – they felt that their project made an impact. Results were:

- 95% of projects / groups felt that their project brought social benefits
- 45% felt that their project brought cultural benefits
- 17% felt that their project brought economic benefits
- 16% felt that their project brought environmental benefits

Through this mix of 3 questions, both qualitative and quantitative, the consultants found that projects have made some contributions to some of the aims of the wider Communities First programme. To measure these impacts accurately, a large-scale survey of residents of Communities First would have to be undertaken, and this is clearly outside the scope of this evaluation. However, the following summary can be made:

Communities First Aim	Trust Fund result
To build confidence and raise the self-esteem of people living in the community	Consultants were able to speak to a number of beneficiaries of projects during its case study visits, and found that several of these beneficiaries reported increased self-confidence and self-esteem. In addition, 75% of groups questioned indicated increased capacity, with the majority of this identified as increased confidence within the group.
To increase the incomes of local people	17% of projects interviewed felt that their activities brought economic benefits to their local area.
To improve health and well-being	52% of projects interviewed focused their activities on health and well-being and leisure activities, whilst 95% of groups interviewed believed that their project brought social benefits
To encourage and improve education and skills training for work	2% of projects questioned identified their main theme as education and training, whilst 1% felt that their main theme was economy and employment. In addition, 17% felt that their project brought economic benefits to the local area.
To create jobs	17% of projects interviewed felt that their project brought economic benefits to the local area. In addition, a small number of case studies showed that projects were creating jobs (e.g. crèche workers) in the local area

To make communities safe, secure and crime free	A number of projects interviewed during the case study process indicated that their work had resulted in reduced crime and vandalism in the local area, which they stated was recognised by local police
To ensure public services are delivered in ways which are more responsive and more locally accountable	This aim is outside of the scope of the Trust Fund.
To improve housing and the quality of the environment	The Trust Fund does not fund housing repairs, although 2% of projects stated that their main focus was the environment and the countryside
To encourage active citizenship.	This was the aim in which projects seemed to have the greatest impact. When considering the aims of Communities First and how they contributed towards them, most groups focused on the co-operative and community involvement aspects of the programme. This theme was repeated frequently throughout interviews with projects – please see the annexes to this report for a full list of comments made.

From the above, it can be concluded that the Trust Fund and the projects it supports have made some contribution to some of the aims of Communities First, in particular:

- To build confidence and raise the self-esteem of people living in the community
- To improve health and well-being
- To encourage active citizenship.

However, it should again be reiterated that the Trust Fund was not set up to deliver these aims, and as such should not be judged against them. Groups are not required to state how they can contribute to these aims when they apply for funding, and they are not part of the assessment criteria used by the grants assessment panel. In addition, it should be pointed out that the aims of the wider Communities First programme relate back to the seven WIMD indicators. If we examine these, it can be seen that projects have made an impact only in the area of health, and then only loosely.

5. To what extent is the current role of Communities First partnerships in the Trust Fund appropriate in terms of the relationship between Trust Fund projects with the work being conducted in Communities First areas?

When answering this question, it is important to remember that the Trust Fund has deliberately been set up to operate independently from the wider Communities First process.

Groups that apply to the Trust Fund do not have to be involved with the work of their local Communities First partnership, nor do they have to have the partnership's approval for their application. In the Trust Fund application form, groups are asked if they have contacted their local Communities First Co-ordinator, but are not explicitly told to do so. The grant assessment panel sees partnership support for a group and its application as desirable, but not essential. In addition, as previously discussed, the Trust Fund was not set up to deliver the aims of Communities First and projects do not have to relate their own aims to the aims of the Communities First programme.

The above is clearly understood by stakeholders, the majority of whom are happy that the two programmes (Communities First and the Trust Fund) remain separate.

However, Communities First partnership representatives did express some concerns about levels of involvement of projects in their local partnerships. Some representatives clearly felt that their partnerships were by-passed by the Trust Fund process, and that this was unfair to the partnerships and to other local groups. Despite this, it should be pointed out that partnerships are doing a good job of promoting the fund in

their areas, with the majority of the funded projects finding out about the Trust Fund through their local partnerships. However, there is no room for complacency, and there is always scope to raise levels of awareness of the fund, as discussed within the Recommendations section of this report.

However, we should again reference the low response rate from with partnerships, with only 31 responses being received from an approximate possible total of 284: Wavehill feels that strong views on this issue across a majority of partnerships would be expected to generate a significantly higher response rate.

Again, as with research question (b), question (c) is also trying to measure something that was never a part of the design and delivery of the Trust Fund. The fund was always intended to operate independently, with groups able to apply directly through WCVA, without the support or involvement of their local partnership. Clearly, this approach is not favoured by some partnerships, but there was no overwhelming response to the consultation to indicate this is a burning issue across all partnerships.

Further, when groups were asked why they had not become involved in their local partnership, the answers given indicated that groups simply felt that their project did not really need to be involved with the partnership, and could function perfectly well independently. This perhaps reflects a lack of understanding about the purpose of Communities First and how to get involved in the process (as evidenced by the fact that one or two respondents thought that they were not actually located in a Communities First area) but is also reflective of the fact that groups are run by volunteers with limited time resources who have to prioritise their activities.

In summary, therefore, we should reiterate that the Trust Fund applicants were never forced to make contact with or take up a role within their local partnership. Some partnerships are not happy about this, but not enough to advocate changing the set up of the programme as it stands.

c)   **Are the principles used to govern the allocation of funding between types of project and types of Communities First areas (e.g. communities of interest, ward based areas, LSOA areas and pockets of deprivation) appropriate, particularly in light of the new Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation?**

Currently, funding for the Trust Fund is allocated on an annual basis as follows:

- Ward based partnerships (100) – £20,000
- Pockets of deprivation (32) - £10,000
- Imaginative proposals / communities of interest (10) – £20,000

The current system does not take account of population numbers, and the task was therefore to asses how equitable the current system is on a spend per head basis. In order to do this, the mean spend per head in the three different types of Communities First areas was calculated on a year by year basis. These results were then plotted on a graph to show patterns of distribution. Please note that data for 2002 /2003 and 2003 / 2004 were collected together on one spreadsheet covering both years. This single figure has therefore been divided into two, to give an approximate figure for each individual year. Cash figures are as follows:

Mean spend per head*	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Wards	£11.20	£11.20	£6.55	£6.51	£6.27
Pockets of deprivation**	£12.41	£12.41	£6.70	£6.65	£6.95
Communities of Interest / Imaginative proposals***	£8.35	£8.35	£4.20	£4.35	£4.49

*For this calculation, population estimates have been taken from the Assembly document "Communities First: A 2001 Baseline"
**Please note that the figures for pockets of deprivation areas do not include the data for the area of Pantyffynnon in the county of Neath Port Talbot. This is because the area secured over £30,000 of funding in the first year of CFTF (mainly supporting large capital projects, before funding limits were introduced) for a population of just 21 people. This "outlier" statistic skews the data and gives an inaccurate representation of the general funding patterns, and has therefore been removed.
*** Please note that for four out of the ten communities of interest / imaginative proposals areas, no population statistics area available.*

Therefore, figures are based on six areas only.

The following graph gives a visual representation of distribution of funds.

Mean spend per head of Communities First population per year
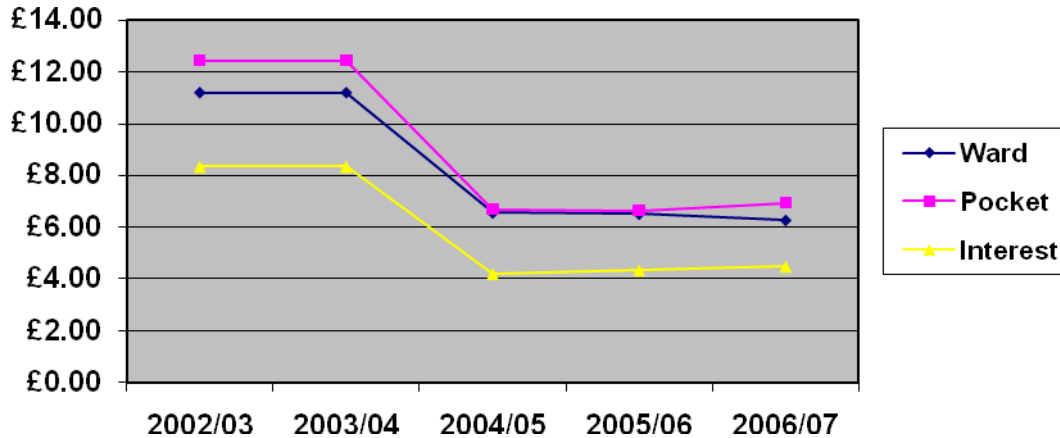
Source of population estimates: "Communities First: A 2001 Baseline"

In addition, an analysis of spend across all years of the programme shows:

	Mean of all years
Wards	£8.35
Pockets of deprivation*	£9.02
Communities of Interest / Imaginative proposals**	£5.95
All areas combined	£7.77

Source of population estimates: "Communities First: A 2001 Baseline"

Again, spend is reasonably equitable, although communities of interest again lag behind slightly. However, the discrepancies are relatively small, and should not cause undue concern.

As can be seen from the graph and table above, spend is currently reasonably equitable across the three different types of Communities First areas. Communities of interest / imaginative proposals lag behind slightly, although it is possible that their average may be increased if statistics had been available for the four areas previously mentioned.

In terms of future distribution of funds, as from April 2007, 46 new LSOA areas are now eligible to become part of the Communities First process and, subsequently, the Trust Fund.

All 46 areas are relatively small in size and population, mainly covering sub-ward areas. All 46 of these areas were invited to send in expressions of interest to WAG to become a part of the Communities First programme, and all 46 did so. So far, 22 of these areas have been granted initial funding to go ahead and begin preparatory work locally, although they are not yet officially a part of the Communities First process. In addition, some areas have chosen to affiliate themselves to existing Communities First partnerships, although no firm details are currently available.

As the situation stands at the moment, as funding is granted for the new areas to begin preparatory work, each will receive a Trust Fund allocation of £5,000 for the financial year 2007 / 2008.

Given that the figures and graphs shown above indicate that the current distribution of funds amongst 142 partnerships is relatively equitable, it is recommended that WAG carries on with the current system of allocation. In the first year, the 46 new LSOAs will receive £5,000 from the Trust Fund. As plans are developed and partnerships are established in these areas, this amount should be raised to £10,000 per year, to ensure that the new areas are on equal terms with the existing pockets of deprivation. Whilst carving up funds in this way may not be an exact science, it is at least consistent across areas, and Wavehill's quantitative analysis has shown that it results in reasonably equitable distribution of funds on a per capita basis.

The following table analyses data relating to the new 46 Lower Super Output Areas. The table shows the population of each of the new LSOAs and the amount of spend needed in years 1 and 2 in order to create the same spending rate or 'momentum' as achieved by the present Pocket of Deprivation areas. This figure is achieved by multiplying the mean spend in Years 1 and 2 for the Pocket of Deprivation areas by the population of each of the new LSOAs, therefore giving a population weighted total. The suggested spend ranges between £13,427 and £21,916.

County	Super Output Area Level 1	Population	Projected spend in each of first 2 years
Bridgend (4)	Brackla 3	1,235	£15,326
	Cornelly 4	1,482	£18,391
	Morfa 2	1,405	£17,436
	Sarn 1	1,222	£15,165
Caerphilly (2)	Newbridge 2	1,497	£18,577
	Penyrheol 4	1,419	£17,609
Cardiff (17)	Adamsdown 2	1,634	£20,277
	Adamsdown 3	1,379	£17,113
	Adamsdown 5	1,098	£13,626
	Fairwater (Cardiff) 5	1,488	£18,466
	Fairwater (Cardiff) 7	1,606	£19,930
	Grangetown 4	1,501	£18,627
	Llanrumney 6	1,576	£19,558
	Llanrumney 7	1,677	£20,811
	Plasnewydd 7	1,567	£19,446
	Riverside 1	1,549	£19,223
	Riverside 2	1,545	£19,173
	Riverside 3	1,518	£18,838
	Rumney 5	1,414	£17,547
	Trowbridge 3	1,522	£18,888
	Trowbridge 4	1,508	£18,714
	Trowbridge 8	1,459	£18,106
	Trowbridge 10	1,344	£16,679
Carmarthenshire	Bigyn 4	1,709	£21,208

County	Super Output Area Level 1	Population	Projected spend in each of first 2 years
Conwy	Glyn (Conwy) 1	1,488	£18,466
	Glyn (Conwy) 2	1,371	£17,014
Merthyr Tydfil (2)	Park 3	1,526	£18,937
	Town 1	1,563	£19,396
Neath Port Talbot (5)	Aberavon 2	1,267	£15,723
	Aberavon 3	1,082	£13,427
	Aberavon 4	1,505	£18,677
	Neath North 2	1,105	£13,713
	Neath South 2	1,707	£21,183
Newport	Malpas 2	1,729	£21,456
Rhondda Cynon Taf (4)	Abercynon 2	1,766	£21,916
	Cwmbach 2	1,454	£18,044
	Tonyrefail East 3	1,456	£18,068
	Ystrad 4	1,467	£18,205
Swansea	Morriston 5	1,372	£17,026
	Morriston 7	1,325	£16,443
	Morriston 9	1,511	£18,751
	St. Thomas 1	1,647	£20,439
	Sketty 4	1,569	£19,471
Torfaen	Blaenavon 2	1,445	£17,932
The Vale of Glamorgan	Court 3	1,601	£19,868
Wrexham	Hermitage 2	1,190	£14,7670
Total			**£837,675.00**

Source: WCVA management information systems and "Communities First: A 2001 Baseline" (WAG statistics directorate)

The following table shows a comparison between the percentage of all projects in each county for both the Trust Fund and the Music Fund.

The data below shows that for the Trust Fund, the range of projects across counties ranges from a high of 14.69% for RCT down to 0.62% for Conwy. This is clearly a wide range, but reflects the concentration of Communities First Trust Fund-eligible areas across the counties.

A similarly wide range can be found for the Music Fund, where Blaenau Gwent records the highest percentage of Music Fund projects (15.22% of all projects), whilst Bridgend, Flintshire and Vale of Glamorgan have recorded no Music Trust Fund projects, and Conwy, Isle of Anglesey and Powys only 1% of projects.

County	CFTF % of total projects	MTF % of total projects	CFTF % of Total spend	MTF % of Total spend
Blaenau Gwent	8.58%	15.22%	8.23%	17.11%
Bridgend	2.73%		3.15%	
Caerphilly	9.65%	13.04%	12.04%	11.41%
Cardiff	4.08%	9.78%	3.74%	8.75%
Carmarthenshire	4.34%	4.35%	5.10%	7.34%
Ceredigion	1.75%	3.26%	1.38%	2.36%
Conwy	0.62%	1.09%	0.60%	0.56%
Denbigh	1.51%	2.17%	1.56%	2.20%
Flintshire	2.67%		2.34%	
Gwynedd	5.96%	3.26%	6.08%	2.50%
Isle of Anglesey	4.93%	1.09%	4.88%	0.86%
Merthyr	6.82%	3.26%	6.37%	8.63%
Monmouth	0.54%	3.26%	0.42%	1.50%
Neath Port Talbot	10.48%	3.26%	12.14%	2.18%
Newport	5.76%	3.26%	4.34%	4.73%
Pembrokeshire	2.70%	3.26%	2.66%	1.67%
Powys	2.19%	1.09%	2.20%	0.52%
Rhondda Cynnon Taf	14.69%	13.04%	13.77%	10.25%
Swansea	3.76%	9.78%	3.69%	10.42%
Torfaen	2.61%	4.35%	1.87%	4.23%
Vale of Glamorgan	0.72%		0.79%	
Wrexham	2.90%	2.17%	2.64%	2.78%

Source: WCVA management information systems and "Communities First: A 2001 Baseline" (WAG statistics directorate)

The following table presents a summary of the key statistics relating to the Trust Fund, drawing together the findings of previous tables, graphs etc.

Summary Statistics – League Table

Rank	County	Spend per head in C1st areas
1	Vale of Glamorgan	£149.41
2	Pembrokeshire	£96.22
3	Isle of Anglesey	£74.60
4	Gwynedd	£61.42
5	Bridgend	£50.70
6	Neath Port Talbot	£49.50
7	Powys	£40.24
8	Torfaen	£35.76
9	Caerphilly	£33.78
10	Carmarthenshire	£33.31
11	Wrexham	£29.90
12	Rhondda Cynnon Taf	£28.68
13	Flintshire	£27.79
14	Merthyr Tydfil	£26.45
15	Denbighshire	£25.44

16	Blaenau Gwent	£24.06
17	Ceredigion	£19.46
18	Newport	£18.10
19	Monmouthshire	£16.18
20	Cardiff	£13.83
21	Swansea	£12.47
22	Conwy	£10.47

Source: WCVA management information systems and "Communities First: A 2001 Baseline" (WAG statistics directorate)

As can be seen from the above, there are notable results in Vale of Glamorgan, where groups in two separate pockets of deprivation areas generated allocation per head of £149.41. However, this result is an anomaly, and is not repeated as a pattern elsewhere – i.e. counties with higher numbers of pockets of deprivation partnerships (or any other type of partnership) do not necessarily generate higher allocations per head than in other counties (please see the Research Questions and Recommendations section of this report for further details).

However, it would perhaps be expected that higher allocation per head would be found in both Rhondda Cynon Taf and Caerphilly, which have relatively large numbers of partnerships. To understand clearly the reasons for low levels of applications is outside of the scope of this evaluation (a large scale locally based survey of voluntary and community groups and stakeholder organisations would be required) and as such Wavehill is reliant on anecdotal evidence from stakeholders, which indicates that local circumstances have changed in these areas, and an increase in applications is expected to follow.

4.2   Recommendations

4.2.1   Evaluation of the Trust Fund

Issue: All parties interviewed were clear that the Trust Fund was not intended to be a strategic fund; it was simply intended to enable communities in Communities First areas to access small grants quickly and easily. All were clear that the Trust Fund was not set up to deliver the aims of Communities First, but has, as a by-product of distributing grants, supported some of these aims to some extent. The consultants have concluded that the Trust Fund and the projects it funds have made some contribution to some of the aims of Communities First, in particular to building confidence, to improving health and well-being, and to encouraging active citizenship. However, we would again reiterate that the Trust Fund was not set up to deliver the aims of Communities First, groups are not required to state how they can contribute to these aims when they apply for funding, and they are not part of the assessment criteria used by the grants assessment panel.

Evidence: The range of interviews undertaken during the fieldwork element of this evaluation, the desk based review of application systems.

Recommendation: That the aims of the Communities First programme are not used as criteria on which to judge the success or otherwise of the Trust Fund.

4.2.2   Support to Groups to Submit Applications

Issue: Unsuccessful applicants were not always aware that help was available to them. Help is available to applicants, but this is only stated towards the end of the application guidelines, and is not as clear as it could be.

Evidence: Interviews with stakeholders and with unsuccessful applicants, review of the guidelines for the fund.

Recommendation: That the offer of assistance within the guidelines is re-worded to ensure clarity, for example: "Who can help me with this application" or some such similar wording.

4.2.3   Sustainability of Groups (1)

Issue: There were calls from a number of different parties to allow projects to apply for funding for the same item / activity more than once, thereby implying sustainability issues. With many grant streams, there is an emphasis on new and innovative activities, rather than funding existing activities. Bearing in mind the fact that the Trust Fund operates in deprived areas, where community capacity may be an issue, the constant pressure to innovate and find new activities is an additional burden that could inhibit community capacity building.

Evidence: The range of interviews undertaken during the fieldwork element of this evaluation, the consultants' knowledge of other grant funds.

Recommendation: That year-on-year applications to the fund continue to be permitted.

4.2.4   Sustainability of Groups (2)

Issue: A number of interviewees raised the issue of sustainability of small community groups and, in some instances, advice on sustainability is needed. Where, for example, a group has accessed the Trust Fund in order to purchase a tea urn, sustainability advice is unlikely to be necessary. However, if a group has accessed the Trust Fund to deliver a specific service or activity for the community (e.g. crèche facilities) then that group needs to consider how it will sustain these activities in the longer term. As the consultants see it, advising on the sustainability of activities currently falls within the realm of CFSN.

Evidence: The range of interviews undertaken during the fieldwork element of this evaluation.

Recommendation: As applications are approved, CFSN should identify those groups for whom sustainability advice may be appropriate, and contact them to offer that support. However, there is a capacity issue to consider here, and any changes to the current process can only be put in place subject to the ability of CFSN to deliver.

4.2.5   Eligibility Criteria / Types of Groups Funded

Issue: All stakeholders and partnership representatives were clear that extensive and evolving discussions had led to the development of clear eligibility criteria for CFTF, and agreed monitoring requirements. However, there were still concerns raised from some interviewees in relation to:

- Whether or not groups should in future be allowed to apply to continue activities
- Whether or not more emphasis on 'quality' of Trust Fund grants was needed – i.e. should groups continue to be able to use the fund to buy blazers and ties, rugby kit, tea urns etc.
- Whether or not concurrent grants should be allowed (i.e. groups have to return an end of project report and receipts before they can apply for another grant)
- Whether groups from outside the area with a tenuous link to the local community were slipping through the Trust Fund assessment net (lack of local knowledge of the referees was cited as a reason for this)
- Whether groups should be asked to be more specific about their outcomes

Considerable time and effort has gone into clarifying the criteria and monitoring requirements for the Trust Fund, and as such is reluctant to recommend raising these issues again, when they were not identified as problems by the majority, and as such could potentially be labelled as 'pet' issues that do not accurately reflect the overall view of the programme. In addition, the assessment panel does have the ability to refuse grants if, for example, the group has applied 3 or 4 times previously. This flexibility is sufficient for the current assessment process, but could potentially be extended further.

Evidence: The range of interviews undertaken during the fieldwork element of this evaluation.

Recommendation: The panel already has discretion in a number of areas. This should include discretion to refuse grants that are not considered to be of a high quality, or to defer the decision on these grants until the end of the application round.

4.2.6   Group Links to Partnerships

Issue: Stakeholders were quite clear that groups that accessed a Trust Fund grant did not have to establish a link with their local Communities First partnership as the Trust Fund had deliberately been set up to operate independently from the wider Communities First process with groups able to apply directly through WCVA, without the support or involvement of their local partnership. In the Trust Fund application form, groups are asked if they have contacted their local Communities First Co-ordinator, but are not explicitly told to do so. The grant assessment panel sees partnership support for a group and its application as desirable, but not essential. Some partnerships clearly felt uneasy that they were effectively by-passed in the process, citing lack of complementarity between a group's project and the priorities of the local partnership as the key area of concern, but there was no overwhelming response to this consultation to indicate this is a burning issue across all partnerships. Strong views on this issue across a majority of partnerships would be expected to generate a significantly higher response rate.

Evidence: The range of interviews undertaken during the fieldwork element of this evaluation.

Recommendation: That the current application process is maintained as it is, with no increased involvement from partnerships at this stage.

4.2.7   Marketing (1)

Issue: Some – though not all – stakeholders clearly felt there was potential to improve the marketing of the Trust Fund. In particular, one or two stakeholders felt that more outreach work with communities that do not apply to the Trust Fund (e.g. the traveller community) may be necessary.

Evidence: The range of interviews undertaken during the fieldwork element of this evaluation.

Recommendation: Some members of CFSN have a wide knowledge of the communities of interest that they work with, and could be in a position to identify the communities that do not apply to the Trust Fund, and target them. Partnership Co-ordinators and Development Workers should also have some level of local knowledge that could be utilised. This should be outside of the range of 'usual suspects' and could include groups such as Polish workers, travellers, young people developing their own projects (rather than projects *for* young people) etc.

4.2.8   Marketing (2)

Issue: 58% of projects that successfully applied to the Trust Fund were over 7 years old, whilst only 17% were less than 1 year old. This gives some cause for concern, as it may be desirable for the fund to attract more new and inexperienced groups, as it is these groups that could potentially benefit most from the simple application process, thereby developing their confidence and project management abilities.

Evidence: Interviews with 361 funded projects, quantitative review.

Recommendation: Partnerships, with assistance from CFSN, should use project case studies in local papers to promote Trust Fund success stories, using accessible language and photographs, which will be meaningful to local people and will encourage newer groups to apply. To facilitate this process, all groups should be required to send in photographs with their end of project reports.

4.2.9   Marketing (3)

Issue: 58% of projects that successfully applied to the Trust Fund were over 7 years old, whilst only 17% were less than 1 year old. One idea, which could encourage new groups to form and to apply to the Trust Fund,

could be a 'formation grant'. Currently, in order to apply to the Trust Fund groups must have a constitution (or apply through a partner organisation with a constitution) and a bank account. If a Formation Grant was established, an individual / group of individuals could propose the development of a group, apply for start-up funding from the Trust Fund, and then develop the necessary structures afterwards, if their application was successful.

Such forming groups would need support throughout the process, but this could be a useful tool to develop additional community groups in deprived areas.

Evidence: Interviews with 361 funded projects, quantitative review.

Recommendation: That WAG and CFSN consider the idea of a Formation Grant.

4.2.10   Marketing (4)

Issue: Information regarding good practice from projects is gathered by CFSN, but more use could be made of this information. CFSN is currently discussing ways to develop the sharing of good practice further, although nothing specific has yet been decided.

Evidence: Stakeholder interviews.

Recommendation: The good practice information contained within this report should form the basis of a Learning Toolkit (or Directory of Good Practice), which should be shared with all projects and partnerships as a matter of course. This document should be a developing resource that is added to on an on-going, perhaps six-monthly basis.

4.2.11   Marketing (5)

Issue: When asked how they heard about the Trust Fund, some projects made interesting comments, e.g. *"It was only heard about by word of mouth, therefore more advertising is needed"* and *"I have never seen it advertised"*. These comments miss the point that word of mouth is a legitimate form of promotion, and miss the fact that the respondent had obviously still become aware of the fund as they had successfully applied to it. Ideas for improving promotion and marketing included:

- *"Advertise the good things that happen within a CFTF area"*
- *"It needs to be in colour, less wordy, as it puts people off"*
- *"More posters"*
- *"Workers from CFTF should visit projects more often"*

Evidence: Interviews with 361 funded projects.

Recommendation: CFSN may consider the comments made by projects regarding promotion – reproduced in full within the annexes to this report – to see if any of these elements can be taken forward by CFSN organisations.

4.2.12   Local Partnership Control of the Trust Fund

Issue: Stakeholders felt strongly that partnerships should not be given control of CFTF (reasons for this are discussed within the conclusions section of the report, and will not be repeated here). A small minority of partnerships felt that they should have control over distribution of funds, or at least a right to comment on applications. Ideas included:

- Allowing partnerships a more central role in commenting on how applications fitted with local objectives

- Allowing partnerships to be represented in some way on the grant assessment panel
- Giving partnerships more information from panel meetings so that they are able to make comments, thereby potentially influencing future panel decisions
- Setting up focus groups so that partnership can comment on the eligibility criteria of the fund
- Developing a halfway house situation were partnerships, with supervision, can decide on applications of under £500

As the Trust Fund stands at the moment, the assessment process is objective. Local control of the Trust Fund could, in some situations, introduce subjectivity into the decision making process. Furthermore, administration costs for the Trust Fund are currently low because the fund is centrally managed, and administration is efficient. Devolving the fund to the local level could increase administration costs, and could reduce efficiency. Further, and perhaps most importantly, Communities First partnerships were established to facilitate development of local communities through agreed local action plans (currently with very varied levels of success). Introducing a grant distribution responsibility to partnerships would reduce the focus on action plan delivery, and this dilution simply cannot be afforded in the majority of partnership areas.

Evidence: The range of interviews undertaken during the fieldwork element of this evaluation.

Recommendation: Partnerships should not be given control of the Trust Fund in their area. If the situation changed so that the fund became more strategically aligned, then we would recommend reviewing this recommendation, but as the fund is currently applied at 'arms length' to other Communities First activities and interventions, it seems logical to keep the approvals process also at arms length.

We would also like to note here that it would be beneficial to the larger projects to receive contact from the Communities First Network officers both pre and post award, in order to reduce the chance of duplication and promote joint working with other projects in the area. If the larger projects are to become sustainable and if they are delivering strategic benefits then a dialogue between Communities First and the project in focus will be required at some stage. We would like to suggest that all projects receive contact from a local Communities First officer to discuss forward strategy and sustainability and links to other (larger) funding opportunities and support networks.

4.2.13   Addition of LSOAs to the Communities First Process

Issue: Plans are currently underway to bring an additional 46 LSOAs into the Communities First process. WAG guidance is that LSOAs should be eligible for a Trust Fund allocation of £5,000 in the first year, progressing to an allocation of £10,000 per year as structures and partnerships are put in place, bringing them in line with the current pockets of deprivation.

Evidence: WAG policy, stakeholder interviews, analysis of quantitative data per head capita.

Recommendation: To create a 'momentum' in new LSOA areas it may be beneficial to 'super fund' these communities for the first two years to encourage as many community groups to come forward and participate as possible. We suggest allocating up to £20,000 per community for the first two years if funding allows.

4.2.14   Allocation of Funding

Issue: Quantitative analysis has shown allocation of funding per head of population across the three different types of Communities First areas to be reasonably equitable.

Evidence: Analysis of quantitative data.

Recommendation: That WAG proceeds with the existing system of allocation of funds to the 142 original Communities First areas, with the addition of LSOAs as described above.

<table>
<tr><td>5.</td><td>Good Practice</td></tr>
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5.1   Good Practice – Communities First Support Network

CFSN does collate examples of what it perceives to be good practice from a range of projects and groups across Wales, not just those projects funded through the Trust Fund. A template is used to gather this information in a standardised way, and records the following details:

- The name of the project, the location, and the date of the case study visit
- What the project does – e.g. when and why scheme started, who the target beneficiaries are, the main aims and objectives, the key areas of activity, and who delivers what
- The inclusive and participatory elements of the project – e.g. how much is the community involved, how much say does the community have in the decisions that are made, does the project use inclusive and non-discriminatory working methods
- What the project has achieved so far and its plan for the future – e.g. the key outputs and outcomes, and how they are measured
- Examples of the added value of partnership working – i.e. the benefits that have arisen that would not have come about if the project had not worked in partnership, how much planning and delivery is done with other agencies in the area?
- The main challenges faced and key lessons learnt by the project

The resulting good practice case studies are posted on the CFSN website, and are also included in the monthly

Communities First bulletins that go to all partnerships. For further information regarding good practice case studies, please go to:

http://www.communitiesfirst.info/CaseStudies/index

5.2   Good practice – Central Management and Administration

Over the following pages, a digest of good practice is presented from two different perspectives – that of management / administration, and that of project delivery. Whilst the information contained within this section is the perspective of the consultants undertaking this work, it should be stressed that the consultants have evaluated a number of grant programmes, and as such they are in a position to identify relevant information relating to good practice in a range of circumstances.

Central Management and Administration	
Good Practice	**Explanation**
One-to-one and outreach officer support to the applicant groups	Applicant groups will find officer support prior to the application process invaluable. This support can help groups to clearly plan their project, and to ensure that they have clearly envisaged the potential impact of the project on their target groups. Officer support during the application will ensure that a higher quality of application is submitted, ensuring that valuable projects do not lose out on funding due to poor bid writing skills. Wherever possible, all support should be delivered on an outreach basis at flexible times to ensure accessibility. The consultants found that the majority of projects had not needed to access support to complete their Trust Fund application. Where they had done so, support was generally felt to be of appropriate quality.

Other accessible central support to groups	As well as officer support directly relating to the application process, support is also required to deal with financial returns and other administrative procedures relating to the grant giving body. Again, this may particularly be the case for new groups, or groups accessing their first grant. This support is particularly valuable if it can be accessed quickly and easily and in an informal and friendly way. This non-threatening approach ensures that groups feel that they are being assisted through the process, rather than being threatened with unpleasant consequences if returns are not made correctly.
Effective marketing and publicity	Wherever possible, marketing and publicity materials should be channelled through umbrella groups that already have a presence within the local community – in this case Communities First partnerships, CVCs, etc.

Additionally, targeting of specific hard to reach or under represented groups may be necessary. Again, access to these groups is best achieved through existing organisations that already have a contact with or presence in the community in question.

Other standard marketing and publicity material – websites, leaflets, newsletters, information days, meetings, word of mouth, etc – should also be used.

WCVAs monitoring figures now record the numbers of new groups that are given Trust Fund grants. In 2006/07, the percentage of new groups accessing the Trust Fund was 19%. Wavehill's own survey of projects indicated that 17% of groups that received a grant were under one year old. |

Central Management and Administration	
Good Practice	**Explanation**
Clear application form	Application forms should require the minimum of information in order to properly assess a bid. All questions should be asked in clear and simple language. All application forms should be accompanied by contact information for sources of advice and support within the grant holding body.

Evidence from Trust Fund research indicates that the application form is simple and easy to understand, with the majority of projects experiencing no problems in completing the form. |

Toolkit of template monitoring and evaluation forms	A good management guide or a toolkit of template forms for monitoring and evaluation and other essential processes can be an invaluable tool for inexperienced applicants. All forms should be clearly laid out, with clear supporting guidance notes. Wherever feasible, it should be possible for all materials to be adapted to suit the individual applicant group, and to fit in more closely with any existing monitoring practices that they already undertake. Particularly important in good management guides are advice and examples on how to monitor distance travelled by beneficiaries: for inexperienced applicant groups, the importance of this kind of monitoring can be overlooked. Assistance in this particular area is therefore essential. All of the above can be supplemented by training events, which can also double up as networking events for grant recipient groups, or by one to one monitoring support. Of course, the aim of the Trust Fund was too keep monitoring to a minimum, and as such the single end of project form is short and straightforward.
Networking between grant recipients to enable sharing of information and good practice	Linked to the above, research shows that successful projects develop and maintain a large number of contacts and networks. Wherever possible, grant holding bodies should therefore provide networking events for grant recipients, supplementary to any training events that are laid on. This will ensure sharing of a wide range of information between groups. In addition, grant holding bodies can use these events for dissemination of good practice through workshops, discussion groups, notice boards, guest speakers, written materials, etc. In the case of the Trust Fund, regionally based events may be more appropriate than national ones, with a focus on celebration and sharing of successes, rather than more structured workshop or information sessions.

Central Management and Administration

Good Practice	Explanation
Centrally organised mentoring for new projects	Linked to the above, it may be possible for the grant holding body (or the Communities First partnership) to identify experienced community organisations that are willing to act as mentors to less experienced groups. This resource can provide on-going practical advice for newer groups, delivered in an informal and friendly setting by someone with practical experience in a closely related field. Such mentoring can be perpetuated by those who use the service, as recipients can in turn pass on their knowledge to new projects.
Rapid assessment of applications	The grant holding body's assessment process should have a target maximum turn round time for applications, as a speedy decision can be of great importance, especially for smaller groups. This research indicates that the turn-around time for the Trust Fund is acceptable.
Accessible grants for grassroots groups	If small grants schemes are to directly benefit small grassroots community and voluntary groups, then a maximum figure for organisational turnover for applicants should be set to ensure that this is the case.
Independent assessment panel	Assessments of applications to small grants schemes should be undertaken using a structured appraisal process of set scoring criteria with a view to ensuring consistency in project selection. An independent assessment panel should carry out this process in order to ensure transparency concerning application decisions. This research has found that the assessment panel for the Trust Fund is clear about the eligibility criteria, and as such is a suitable mechanism for assessing applications.
Additional support to potential social enterprises	Social enterprises will continue to play a growing role in local economic development, especially in areas of disadvantage, providing goods and services that the market or public sector is unable or unwilling to supply. They can provide high added value through social and capacity building, stimulating community confidence and growth, and enhancing employability. Therefore, wherever the potential for social enterprise is identified in an applicant project, they should be signposted to additional specialist business support, if desired by the applicant.
Robust MIS in order to target marketing on particular sub-groups as required	Small grants schemes can be effective in reaching disadvantaged or marginalised sub-groups. However, the grant holding body must still have a robust Management Information System to monitor the types of groups (and their beneficiaries) that access the grants, and adapt their marketing to tackle any under-representation that is identified. WCVA has established good record keeping systems for the Trust Fund, and can provide breakdowns of various elements quickly and simply.

Central Management and Administration	
Good Practice	**Explanation**
Central overall evaluation of the outcomes and outputs of the projects	Outcomes - evaluation of good practice and lessons learned from the perspective of the grant recipient project as a whole is essential across grants programmes. Again, the grant holding body should supply template forms to help groups to clearly measure capacity built, partnerships established, increased sustainability, etc. Outputs – the grant holding body should also, through its MIS, keep a central record of jobs created, volunteer hours inputted, funding levered in, beneficiaries qualified or moved into training or jobs, etc
Enabling grant recipients to plan for sustainability	All grant recipient projects will benefit from thorough sustainability planning at an early stage in their development and delivery. Sustainability planning can be embedded within a project through the introduction of an aftercare programme, offering support as needed, with the aim of improving the return on investment and minimising the risk of organisations failing to realise their potential due to lack of planning.
Positive promotion	Successful grant schemes that assist large numbers of groups are a powerful marketing and promotional tool for the grant giving body. All opportunities to promote the grant giving body through the fund should therefore be utilised. In the case of the Trust Fund, WAG recognises that the Fund is particularly valuable in that it gives people in Communities First areas the impression that WAG is giving them money directly, thereby creating a strong 'feel good factor' directly linked to WAG.
Flexibility of funding	For various reasons, grant funds may find themselves under subscribed in some areas / themes, and over subscribed in others. Where this is the case, there should be flexibility within the scheme to re-allocate funds to make best use of resources. This is currently the case with the Trust Fund where, if there is an under spend in one area at the close of the application process, that area's allocation is put back into a central 'pot', and re-allocated to areas that have spent their full entitlement.

5.3   Good Practice – project delivery

Project Delivery	
Good Practice	**Explanation**
Thorough research into the need for the project	The need within the local community for the activities of the potential applicant project should be clearly proven prior to the submission of the application. Potential applicants should also, where possible, forge links with complementary groups in the local area.
Realism in project planning	This includes issues such as: how many people will be needed to deliver the project; how much time will be needed; what specialist skills are required; etc. Applicant projects will commonly under-estimate timescale or the amount of personnel or volunteers needed for delivery. An effective grant holder will encourage groups to be realistic about what it can deliver. Linked to the above, applicants may also need to be advised to build flexibility into their delivery. Projects can be dependent on volunteers, or work with an erratic target group, or otherwise be affected by circumstances outside of their control. Whilst realistic planning can take a project so far, many will also benefit from planning in 'elbow room' in order to make any minor adjustments to timetable and delivery as needed.
Evaluation at the project beneficiary level	Evaluation of soft outcomes and distance travelled by beneficiaries is good practice. The grant holding body can assist this process by providing template forms and other materials for beneficiary evaluation of both a qualitative and quantitative nature. Grant recipients should be informed of how they can record soft outcomes in a measurable or quantifiable way (such as through multiple choice prompts such as: "my confidence has improved during my time with the project" with set answers such as: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, neither). Such quantifiable questions / statements can be used to capture the baseline and end point position of beneficiaries and also, if required, to inform longitudinal studies. However, it should also be appreciated that the purpose of the Trust Fund was to reduce red tape and to open up the application process to all by significantly reducing monitoring requirements.

Project Delivery	
Good Practice	**Explanation**

Evaluation of the funded projects by themselves	Outcomes - evaluation of good practice and lessons learned from the perspective of the grant recipient project as a whole is essential. Again, the grant holding body should supply template forms to help groups to clearly measure capacity built, partnerships established, sustainability increased, etc. Outputs – the project should keep a record of jobs created, volunteer hours inputted, funding levered in, beneficiaries moved into training or jobs, etc.
Use of all grant holding body support and materials	Where the grant holding body provides good management guides coupled with training support for project management and monitoring, grant recipients should make full use of this support.
Planning for sustainability	All grant recipient projects will benefit from thorough sustainability planning at an early stage in their development and delivery. Sustainability planning can be embedded within a project with the assistance of an aftercare programme provide by the grant holding body.
Avoiding grant dependence	Whilst grant funds exist to grant aid groups, a focus on fundraising and income generation should still be maintained. Grant streams may not be available in the long term, and groups should be encouraged at the application stage to explore all options for income generation where appropriate or possible, without jeopardising their chances of successfully applying for a grant.
Involving beneficiaries in project design	When developing project ideas, it is always desirable to include beneficiaries in the project planning and development process. This can strengthen the project by ensuring that it is delivering according to need, and can also improve its chances of successfully applying for funds.