Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITIES@ONE PROGRAMME

FINAL REPORT

September 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This is the final report from a long-term evaluation of the Communities@One Programme which was commissioned in 2006 by the then Social Justice and Regeneration Department of the Welsh Assembly Government.

This report is intended as a freestanding document, accessible to readers who have not had access to previous reports. It provides a summative evaluation of the Programme, although, as a result of a decision to extend the Programme to December 2008, final outturns were not available at the time of writing.

Background

"Digital inclusion" is a process which seeks to ensure greater equality of access to the potential benefits of ICT to those groups which might otherwise be excluded for economic, social, spatial or cultural reasons. The Communities@One Programme aimed to support the digital inclusion of individuals and communities within Communities First areas in Wales, by proactively working with voluntary and community organizations (through a number of "Community Brokers", managed centrally but located throughout Wales) to develop projects and approaches to digital inclusion and by funding such projects through a Grant Fund. The Programme was funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and by European Regional Development Fund monies, but was managed by the Wales Co-operative Centre. The Programme was originally allocated a budget of £9.565 million for the period to June 2008, but this was subsequently increased to £10.457 million, alongside the extension of the Programme to December 2008.

The evaluation was centred on twelve case-studies, nine examining activity in individual Communities First areas and three based on relatively large-scale projects. Three "control group" areas - communities with relatively high-levels of deprivation but which were not eligible for Communities First and thus for Communities@One – were also the subject of case-studies. The work programme involved desk research related both to the case-study areas and the Programme as a whole and interviews (in many cases, on two or three separate occasions during the two years of the evaluation) with:

- 52 stakeholders in the case-study and control group areas (Brokers, Community First Co-ordinators and representatives of other key local organisations).
- 45 individuals involved in managing or delivering a total of 39 Grant Fund projects.
- 78 "beneficiaries" of 19 grant fund projects.
- 22 "central stakeholders" (Wales Co-operative Centre staff and Welsh Assembly Government and other members of the Programme's Advisory Group).

Findings

There is little doubt that in many ways Communities@One has succeeded in a way few initially expected, and which is remarkable given the relatively short timescale over which it has operated.

The Programme has succeeded in developing a facilitated Grant Fund, based around the so-called Broker model (which involves staff employed by the Programme working with voluntary and community groups to develop project ideas), which has brought forward more than 200 projects and has succeeded in disbursing more than £7 million without moving away from the original emphasis on supporting small community projects. While funded groups had some criticisms of the perceived bureaucracy around the Programme (particularly in terms of the financial processes), most were very strongly appreciative of the role of the Brokers and felt that this was a model for other funders.

Many of the projects funded by the Grant Fund have offered new opportunities in terms of access to ICT and to the skills and confidence to use it to individuals who have otherwise had little exposure to such technology and there has been a good mix between projects offering drop in facilities open to the community and more innovative projects working with voluntary and community groups to apply ICT to their core activities, thus stimulating an interest on the part of individual members with digital technologies as a result.

Most projects appear to have delivered against their original objectives and very tight Programme management has kept underspends to a minimum. The limited evidence available suggests a relatively high level of additionality both in terms of Grant Fund projects being brought forward and individual beneficiaries increasing their knowledge and awareness of ICT who would otherwise have struggled to do so. If a strong focus on older people, which appears to have characterised many projects, has implications in terms of limiting the potential impact of the Programme in terms of addressing issues around economic inactivity, it ties in with the strong evidence that older people are most likely to be digitally excluded and, as a result, are likely to suffer in terms of access to services and a reduction in their quality of life.

The Programme's approach fits well with emerging thinking about good practice in promoting digital inclusion in the UK and elsewhere, even though it was developed in advance of much of this thinking. Communities@One has also succeeded in promoting awareness of and interest in the issue of digital inclusion at the level of Welsh Assembly Government policy – albeit with only (thus far) a limited penetration in terms of education and skills.

At the same time, it seems clear that the delivery of a Grant Fund of a size significantly above that originally envisaged (with the funding having grown from an originally intended £5.05 million to £7.44 million) has absorbed an enormous amount of effort which may have reduced the effectiveness of what was an ambitious Programme in some other ways. In particular, the Brokers have had less time to work with other local stakeholders to increase their engagement with digital inclusion activities and less time to help strengthen the networking of the voluntary and community sector within targeted areas on these issues, with the exception of collaboration flowing very directly out of Grant Fund activity. There has sometimes been a tendency to do things *for* funded Groups (not least in terms of coping with the disciplines of external funding) rather than to enable them to gain the skills to do so them themselves. Progress in capturing and disseminating good practice and learning from Grant Fund projects has probably not been as extensive as it might have been.

Moreover – and an inevitable consequence of the design of the Programme with its emphasis on working from the bottom up – there has been a wide variety of different

experience in different areas, with our case-study areas suggesting that the Programme may actually have reinforced the gap between Communities First areas with a vibrant and engaged voluntary and community sector and ones where the voluntary and community infrastructure was limited. The limited timescales of the Programme may also have meant that some projects have had insufficient time to really establish themselves, while there is also evidence of a lack of focus on progression routes for individuals who want to move on beyond the *"taster"* they may have got from engagement with a Grant Fund project. Finally, because of the way in which the Programme was set up, there is a lack of meaningful data to illuminate the achievements of the Programme.

Despite these *caveats*, we conclude that the Programme has to a large extent met three of its four stated objectives (in terms of developing *"ICT enabled communities"*, providing *"national and local information and support structures"* and moving towards a *"community sector enabled by ICT"*) and has clearly respected the underlying principles identified at the outset, in particular, supporting new community ICT provision where needed, but working with existing community provision where possible.

In view of the work which is in hand to develop a successor Programme to Communities@One - something which we believe is well justified by the evidence we have found – we make a series of recommendations in respect of this potential future Programme, as well as recommending a number of shorter term actions, including:

- increased efforts to ensure that there is a comprehensive archive which will enable interested groups to draw on good practice developed through Communities@One;
- using any remaining Programme resources to engage those groups which have not taken part in any networking activities; ensuring that there is a clear statement of overall digital inclusion policy to inform future work;
- increasing efforts to engage the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills with delivering the digital inclusion agenda; and
- disseminating the Broker model to other parts of the Welsh Assembly Government and other organisations funding Grant regimes targeted at the voluntary and community sector.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Report

Old Bell 3 Ltd. was awarded the contract to undertake a long-term Evaluation of the Communities@One Programme in June 2006, with the Inception meeting being held on 23 August 2006. The Evaluation was commissioned early in the life of the Communities@One Programme, with the aim both of informing – and thus improving – the delivery of the Programme and of gauging the impact of what is a new approach to addressing what is also a relatively new issue – "digital inclusion".

The Evaluation had four purposes:

i. To set up a clear monitoring and evaluation framework for the initiative, setting out arrangements at the local and national levels that can be used throughout the initiative to provide feedback, and to inform the final assessment of the impact of Communities@One (see iv).

ii. To provide a baseline position of the areas to be addressed by the initiative, assessing the ICT facilities already in place, the current levels and characteristics of ICT access and usage, and the levels of ICT awareness and skills.

iii. To analyse the relationships between community Brokers, the central team, the Assembly Government, the Wales Co-operative Centre, community organisations and partnerships, and any other relevant parties, and to advise on maximising their effectiveness.

iv. At the end of the programme, to assess the extent to which Communities@One has been successful in meeting its stated aim.

In our first report in December 2006, we set out a monitoring and evaluation framework, provided an overview of the baseline (insofar as this was possible, given that the Programme began to be delivered at the start of 2006, while the study only commenced in September 2006) and provided an initial formative evaluation, particularly in respect of the activities and processes of the Programme. In that report we made a number of recommendations about the future implementation of the Programme.

In our second report, based on fieldwork undertaken in May and June 2007, we provided an update on our Baseline report as well as providing a view of the emerging effects and impacts of the Programme.

In this, our final report we aim, in particular, to address the fourth objective outlined above, by providing a summative evaluation of the Programme. The report is based on the work previously undertaken and a further round of fieldwork between May and July 2008.

However, it should be noted that while the intention was that this report would be compiled after the end of the Programme (planned for June 2008), this is not now the case, because the Programme has been extended several times, most recently to December 2008, as a result of additional funds becoming available to the Objective 1 Programme for West Wales and the Valleys. Subject to discussion with the Steering

Group, it is now the intention to update the report to include final financial outturns once the Programme has been fully closed.

1.2 Method

This report is based on an extensive work programme over the last two years. It has involved:

- Developing a monitoring and evaluation framework to underpin the evaluation, based on scrutiny of key Programme documentation and initial discussions with Communities@One staff and the Evaluation Steering Group (see Appendix 1);
- A policy review of relevant policy documents related to Wales, other parts of the UK and the EU in November 2006 and revisiting this in July 2008;
- Desk-based analysis of internal Programme papers including papers prepared for the Advisory Group, financial data and the Monitoring Framework;
- Face-to-face interviews with key Communities@One central stakeholders - centrally-based staff, other Wales Co-operative Centre staff, Welsh Assembly Government staff, members of the Advisory Group and the Grants Panel – in October/November 2006 (14 interviews involving 17 individuals) and again in May/June 2008 (15 interviews involving 16 individuals), with brief updates by telephone or e-mail with Advisory Group and Grants Panel members and a staff discussion in May/June 2007;
- Undertaking a programme of fieldwork in 12 case-study areas/projects[1] over the three cycles (October/November 2006; May/June 2007, May/July 2008) involving:
  - Face-to-face interviews with the responsible Community Broker;
  - Face-to-face, telephone or e-mail contact with 35 key local stakeholders (Communities First Co-ordinators and representatives from CVCs and local authorities);
  - Face-to-face interviews with a total of 45 managers and staff of Grant Fund projects (many of them on two or more occasions) involved with a total of 39 projects (just under 20% of all projects approved) and scrutinising key documents related to these projects (applications monitoring returns and in some cases closure reports);
  - Face-to-face interviews or small group discussions with 78 individual "beneficiaries" of 19 Grant Fund projects[2];
  - Drawing up and updating a case-study report on each of the areas (in each case, the fieldwork for each of the case-studies was undertaken exclusively by one member of the research team);
- Undertaking limited fieldwork in three control group areas, involving face-to-face interviews with six key individuals.

As will be seen, this gives a solid basis for an evaluation of the project. At the same time, we would highlight a number of weaknesses in the evidence base.

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[1] The case studies were selected in agreement with the Steering Group to provide a representative mix of experience of the Programme and included at least one area/project from the areas of responsibility of each of the Brokers in place at the time of the Baseline Report.

[2] In some cases, individual interviewees were representatives of community groups who had benefited from support from Grant Fund projects; in the case of many projects, project managers and staff were also "beneficiaries" but these have not been counted in this figure.

The first is the lack of consistent data from the Grant Fund projects as to outputs or outcomes.

While individual projects were required to put forward within their application a number of quantitative and qualitative objectives (targets) which enabled individual project progress to be monitored, there was no standard format for these and no common definitions even for superficially similar targets (see also Section 2.3.2).

Although this was something which we highlighted in developing our monitoring and evaluation framework, the fact that the Grant Fund had by that point already received a large number of applications (76 approved and 92 in the pipeline by the time of the Baseline Report) meant that it was felt impossible to introduce a more coherent system retrospectively. This means it is virtually impossible to provide any meaningful aggregate quantitative data either for the all Grant Fund projects or for those within our case-study areas.

The second is the relative difficulty which we encountered in interviewing Grant Fund project "beneficiaries" (albeit that we were able to interview 78), particularly in view of the very large number of overall beneficiaries reported as having been in contact with all Grant Fund projects (see Section 3.3.1).

In part this reflects the very constrained timescales within which many Grant Fund projects operated, even where they involved employing staff rather than just purchasing equipment: in many cases, projects had not started at the time of our fieldwork in spring 2007 and had wound up before our fieldwork in summer 2008. In part, also this reflects the difficulty in differentiating (particularly in the case of the smaller grants) between those managing projects and the beneficiaries. But, in part, it is simply the case that small voluntary and community groups are operating in such an informal and flexible way that even where they had undertaken to ensure that individual users or group members were present at a time when we had agreed to visit, none actually materialised.

While much useful qualitative evidence was derived from those beneficiaries we were able to meet, clearly the sample is not large enough to allow for more than general observations, while the fact that beneficiaries were interviewed while still engaged with the projects reduced the opportunity to explore outcomes. Even had the resource been available it would have been impossible to undertake a more structured survey of beneficiaries because projects were not required (and generally appear not to have) retained formal contact data for individuals who have used them.

Thirdly, there is a lack of any top-down data to track what has been happening in Communities First areas in terms of the uptake of digital technology compared to national trends (which might provide a useful "sanity check" for the evidence emerging from projects as to their "penetration"). There have been discussions within the Steering Group as to whether analysis could be commissioned based on work undertaken at a sub-ward area in England about the uptake of internet connections (as a proxy for engagement with ICT) within Communities First areas in comparison with Wales as a whole, but it was recognised that to derive meaningful data a time-series would be required, and in the end this proved impractical. It is possible that some data may become available later in the year from the "Living in Wales" survey.

Finally, a more minor problem has been the fact that it has not been easy to undertake fieldwork in the three control group areas, because (unsurprisingly)

potential informants have known nothing about the Programme and have had little objective reason to wish to provide information. Having said this, in each case we were able to locate at least one well informed individual based within the ward who was willing to assist and have been able to undertake the research on a longitudinal basis.

We had also anticipated that the approach of following a number of case-study areas/projects over the lifetime of the Programme might risk biasing the efforts of the Communities@One team to these areas. Perhaps because our research only began once the Programme was well underway (and many Grant Fund projects had already been identified), we are confident that in practice this has not been the case. As will be seen, the sample contains a mix of areas where much and where relatively little has been achieved and of successful and less successful projects.

1.3 Structure of the Report

This report is intended as a freestanding report, accessible to readers who have not had access to the earlier reports.

Chapter 2 which considers the context in which the Programme has operated is largely taken from the Baseline Report, although Section 2.4 has been updated to reflect policy developments over the last two years.

Chapter 3 considers the findings of the research and is structured to look in turn at inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes and impacts (while recognising that this entails, to some extent, some repetition).

Finally in Chapter 4, we present our conclusions and recommendations.

2.0 Context: The Communities@One Programme

2.1 Digital Inclusion and the Origins of the Programme

In the last two decades, ICT has transformed life in developed societies: whether it is used for keeping in touch with friends and relatives in other parts of the world, for enabling people to work in more flexible ways (such as home-working and operating "virtual" enterprises), for shopping and for by-passing traditional service providers such as travel agents or insurance brokers, or for accessing information about, and doing business with government, ICT either already has or is in the course of radically reshaping the way in which we live our lives.

But the very fact that ICT has the potential to empower individuals and communities means that differential access to, familiarity with and use of ICT can potentially exacerbate the gap between wealthier and more powerful groups in society – whether defined in social or spatial terms – and those who are less privileged. While "entry costs" to the use of ICT in terms of hardware and internet access costs have become progressively less, they are still not negligible for those on fixed low incomes. Even more importantly, the gap between the "knowledge rich" and the "knowledge poor" can mean that even where there is access to the ICT infrastructure, it is used in a far more constrained way by excluded groups and communities. This has led to the development of the concept of "digital inclusion" – a process which seeks to ensure greater equality of access to the potential benefits of ICT for those groups which might otherwise be excluded for economic, social, spatial or cultural reasons and to go further by using ICT as a way of empowering people to transform their lives.

"Digital inclusion" was the fundamental aim of Communities@One. Launched in January 2006 and funded by what was then the Social Justice and Regeneration (SJR) Department of the Welsh Assembly Government (now the Social Justice and Local Government Department) and the European Regional Development Fund (from the Objective 1 and 2 Programmes for West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales respectively[3]), the Programme was targeted at the Communities First areas: 100 wards and 32 sub-wards, identified in 2000 as the focus of a long-term, flagship community development programme to provide holistic support to the most disadvantaged communities in Wales.

The development of the Programme began in the second half of 2004 and, in origin, was essentially opportunity-led. Funding of some £4.5 million had been informally ring-fenced under Priority 2, Measure 2 (*"To Stimulate and Support Demand for ICT"*) of the Objective 1 Programme for a project aimed at demonstrating the benefits of ICT for the community as a whole and supporting communities to increase their access to and use of ICT[4]. The then Welsh Development Agency had been developing a project (known as *"e-communities"*) which was intended to take this forward, but in mid-2004 the Agency's Objective 1 funding applications were reprioritised and work on the project abandoned. At this point, the Communities

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[3] Though the structure of the Objective 2 Programme meant that there were in total four separate ERDF projects (Objective 1, Objective 2 Core, Objective 2 Transitional and Objective 2 Rural). Funding for parts of Wales not qualifying under any of these Objectives was provided solely by the Welsh Assembly Government.
[4] Objective 1 West Wales and the Valleys Programme Complement November 2002, page 24 - 5

Directorate of SJR was asked to take on responsibility for developing an alternative project (and to source match-funding for it) which could promote "digital inclusion" and community access to ICT.

The Programme concept and idea – which early on focussed on targeting the initiative on Communities First areas - were developed by the Communities Directorate, but drawing on widespread informal consultation and the support of an informal (and pre-existing) network of organisations and individuals with an interest in the agenda during the second half of 2004. Match-funding was secured from within the Welsh Assembly Government's budgets. A formal Objective 1 project application was developed in the first half of 2005 and funding secured, with the first staff appointed in the autumn of 2005.

2.2. Communities@One: Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of Communities@One was to *"help achieve social inclusion through the use of technology – digital inclusion"* and more particularly *"to enable communities and individuals to use ICT in ways relevant to them to enhance their quality of life, overcome difficulties and allow them to fulfil their social, economic and cultural potential"* [5]*.*

In this broad context, Communities@One at its outset had four interrelated objectives (as set out in Box 2.1 over)[6]:

Although the Baseline Evaluation Report suggested that the last of these objectives should formally be dropped, since it was clear this was not in practice a main theme of the Programme, this does not appear to have been taken forward: a report to the Advisory Group in May 2007 noted that:

"there is a much broader agenda within the Welsh Assembly Government in relation to e-engagement, and to which Communities @One might need to relate. The Social Justice and Regeneration Department is therefore giving consideration to this recommendation, prior to reaching a conclusion"[7]*.*

In essence, therefore the Programme was intended to:

- use community organisations as a way of providing individuals in those communities with access to ICT infrastructure and opportunities to better understand and exploit ICT in a range of ways including a better interface with public service providers, with a view to promoting economic and social regeneration; and

- strengthen the community sector itself, both by encouraging the most effective use of ICT and building closer collaboration both between diverse community organisations operating in the same areas and increasing co-operation between community organisations and statutory service providers.

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[5] Guidance p. 11
[6] Project Plan p. 3-4
[7] Report of the Project Manager to the Project Advisory Group, May 2007

ICT enabled communities – to encourage and support community use of ICT to ensure ICT access, skills progression and outreach to the disengaged. It will help engage citizens with community organisations and activities. This objective will include ensuring that suitable ICT support provision is made available throughout the project area, using existing provision where possible but delivered to common quality thresholds.

National and local information and support structures– to ensure that the local projects delivering the programme are well guided and have the capacity to deliver results, that resources are channelled as effectively as possible and that a network of support and sharing is established. Good practice will be identified and exemplars will be established as points of references for other community organisations involved in this initiative.

A community sector enabled by ICT – will be developed which is well co-ordinated with local regeneration partnerships and is able to make the best strategic use of ICT for efficient operations both within its own organisations and the communities it serves. The project will resource local community Brokers to provide support to community organisations to develop a range of projects. This, in turn, will enable local organisations to engage local ICT specialists to support their work, so creating new jobs in high technology in SMEs and social enterprises.

Better enabled service delivery - to encourage communities to better engage with key service deliverers, including local authorities, health service providers, the police, employment and careers services and learning centres. The project will encourage service providers to make innovative use of the medium in order to forge better links with communities and fine-tune their services to local need. It will also allow community organisations to build stronger links with the National Assembly in its priority areas.

The Programme was firmly based on encouraging bottom-up, community-based initiatives, but at the same time sought to provide "central" expertise, ensure common quality standards and disseminate good practice. The Programme's underlying principles (see Box 2.2)[8] underlined the importance of capitalising on existing provision, including building new linkages between existing ICT provision, rather than creating parallel structures.

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[8] Guidance, p. 12

Box 2.2: Communities@One Underlying Principles

New provision is brought to areas where it does not currently exist;

Existing provision is extended to provide an outreach capacity for the most marginalized groups;

Contact is made between ICT activities that are already in place in order that they no longer stand alone and can benefit from working and learning together and sharing experiences;

Priorities are identified locally by community groups in conjunction with a community broker

2.3 Communities@One Delivery Mechanisms

2.3.1 Budget

The original overall budget for Communities@One was set at £9.565 million for the period until June 2008. Just over £5 million of this was originally earmarked for the Grant Fund, with just over £1.5 million allocated for the costs of the Central Team (staff, management costs and overheads of the managing body and marketing). The balance of the funding – some £3 million – was allocated for outreach support costs, with around £1.7 million of this allocated to meet the costs of the Community Brokers (staff and location costs) and the balance available for technical support.

However, there were significant changes in terms of the budgetary framework during the lifetime of the project. As a result of the weakening of the pound against the euro, extra resources became available in 2008 to the Objective 1 Programme, and this led to Communities@One also being offered additional funding: by August 2008, the overall budget for Communities@One had increased to £10.457 million.

Moreover, the strong level of demand for the Grant Fund and the limited call on the resources for technical support led to a decision to vire funds into the Grant Fund, increasing this to £6.884 million[9]. This was further increased to £7.44million (almost 50% higher than the original figure) as a result of additional funds being made available to the Programme from WEFO in the course of 2008. These changes meant that the Grant Fund by the end of the Programme accounted for 71% of total Programme funding as compared to a planned 53% at the start.

2.3.2 The Grant Fund

The Grant Fund represented a key element of the Communities@One Programme – although originally great emphasis was placed on the fact that the Programme was intended to be more than a Grant Scheme.

According to the Communities@One Guidance[10], the Grant Fund was intended to provide grants of any size to groups which:

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[9] Paper to the Project Advisory Group, May 2007
[10] p. 43

- *"are a not-for-profit community or voluntary sector group (including Communities First Partnerships)*
- *would normally be working in, and involving people from, a Communities First area, or if outside the area, the activity must be of direct benefit to the Communities First area;*
- *have a constitution or set of rules, dated and signed as "adopted" by the Chair, or other senior office holder on behalf of the group*
- *have a bank account, in the name of [the] group, which requires at least two signatures*
- *can provide a copy of [the] most recent accounts or statement of income and expenditure and a bank statement."*

Applications could only be submitted with the support of a Community Broker[11] but there were no upper or lower limits on the size of the application.

Larger applications (over £15,000) were assessed by a Grants Panel, which consisted of members of the Advisory Panel (see 2.3.4). This met at least quarterly, and at some points in the Programme's life, monthly. Applications below £5,000 were assessed by a "mini-Grants" panel consisting of senior members of the Central Team (which also screened larger applications before submission to the full Grants Panel). It was originally intended that all applications over £5,000 would be assessed at Grants Panel meetings, but it was subsequently agreed that applications between £5,000 and £15,000 should be assessed by the mini-Grants panel and then considered by the Grants Panel by written procedure[12]. In all cases, the Assessment Criteria used were the same and are outlined in Box 2.3 (over).

Although the grant criteria originally excluded national voluntary organisations, this was revisited by the Advisory Panel in May 2006, when it was decided that projects promoted by national organisations could be considered where it was the case *"that the Community Broker Managers confirm that the service or project could not otherwise be provided by a local community/voluntary group"[13]*. The same meeting also decided that projects promoted by statutory organisations (but not by for-profit private companies) could also be considered, provided that the Community Broker Managers were convinced that a similar project could not be undertaken from within the voluntary or community sector.

Grants were available for a wide range of projects, both capital and revenue, which were seen to help promote digital inclusion. Examples given in the Guidance included not only supporting existing locally-based ICT projects and *"setting up new computer provision"* in communities where this was not readily available, but also projects to support mentoring of individuals in the use of ICT and applications from community projects without a specific ICT focus which *"display an innovative approach to utilising ICT and bridging the "digital divide" within their locality"[14]*. Support was not restricted to groups which provided general public access to equipment and ICT was deliberately defined in a broad fashion:

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[11] Guidance, p. 45
[12] Minutes of Advisory Group Meeting of 10 May 2006
[13] Advisory Group Meeting, 10 May 2006, Document 3, p.1
[14] Guidance, p. 45- 46

Box 1: Grant Fund Assessment Criteria

Community Benefit
Is there a clear identified need for the project?
Does the application benefit the community, in general, as a whole and is it available to all of the community?
Are there any parts of the community which would directly benefit from the project?
Is there evidence that the project can achieve the results described in the application?

Marginalised Groups
Does the application help the digital inclusion of e.g.:
Minority Ethnic Groups
People with Disabilities
Older/Younger People
Other

Innovation
Is the application innovative in looking at new ways of engaging people with ICT?
Will it date quickly?

Sustainability
Is this sustainable in longer term?
What is needed to make it so?
Does the project have the potential to generate income and move towards self-sustainability?

Support
Has the group identified the skills it needs to make a project work?
Does the group have the existing skills to do the project?
What support does the group need, is this factored into the bid?

"Do" ability
Is the project do-able - given skills, costs and support?
What existing provision is already in the community concerned?
Does it or should it link to other projects?
Is there scope for partnership working with other local projects?
Does the project bring additional benefits if it is an existing project?

Links with Partnerships/Strategies

What evidence is there of links with other strategies at both a local and national level?

Jobs (for applications in excess of £5,000)
How many jobs, if any, are created through the application?
How many jobs, if any, are safeguarded through this application?
What informal training is provided for Group Members?

Performance
Has the applicant set measurable outcomes?

Management systems
Does the group have the capacity to manage the grant/project?

Eligibility
Does the project meet eligibility requirements of WEFO including measures to promote environmental awareness? (checking what the WEFO requirements are and then this will be a fuller question for the Brokers to answer)

Cost effectiveness
Does the project demonstrate value for money?

"ICT refers to any technology that is used to communicate, provide or find information. Obvious examples are computers, the Internet, e-mail, telephones, mobile phone and even digital television and radio"[15].

Payments were made on a quarterly basis and for revenue elements, projects were paid in advance.

In terms of monitoring, Grant Fund projects were required to set for themselves a number of qualitative and quantitative objectives (targets) against which progress could be measured. However, in line with the "bottom-up" philosophy of the Programme and the fact that WEFO did not require any substantial information about outputs or outcomes, at the outset of the Programme, there was no central guidance as to what these might look like or what definitions might be used.

In summer 2007, the Communities@One team finalised and started to implement a Monitoring Framework, which put in place a structured process (differentiated in three tiers[16]) enabling the Brokers and central team to identify and take remedial action where projects were falling behind either in terms of their implementation timescale or in terms of delivering their anticipated targets. For projects over £15,000 this involved monitoring visits involving the Monitoring Officer and/or Brokers. As part of the Monitoring Framework, all projects were asked to complete an Equal Opportunities and Diversity Checklist, which included data or estimates of the *"approximate numbers of people you have engaged"*, and to break this number down according to gender, age, disability and Welsh language use, as well as giving a broad indication of the ethnic groups engaged.

In addition to the Monitoring Framework, spot-check audits were introduced on a random basis for larger projects.

2.3.3 The Central Team

Although the Programme was "owned" by the Social Justice and Local Government Department of the Welsh Assembly Government, who were the applicant for the ERDF funding, the management and delivery of the Programme were contracted out through a public procurement process to the Wales Co-operative Centre, a not-for-profit organisation whose main remit is the promotion of social enterprise. The Programme's Central Team was based in the Centre's headquarters in Cardiff and consisted of:

- The Programme Manager, Alun Burge, who was recruited by open competition but who was a secondee from the Welsh Assembly Government and who was responsible in his previous role as Head of Communities First for developing the Programme[17];
- Originally two, but later one, Community Broker Manager(s) having line management responsibility for the Community Brokers but also undertaking a number of other roles within the Programme;

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[15] Guidance, p. 21

[16] Projects requiring a one-off payment only or lasting less than 3 months; grants under £15,000; and grants over £15,000)

[17] Alun Burge returned to the Welsh Assembly Government in June 2008 to undertake work on the successor project for Communities@One

- A Finance Officer (integrated with the Centre's Financial Team) and support colleagues;
- One (later two) Marketing/Communication Officers (working alongside the Centre's own Marketing Manager);
- A Monitoring Officer;
- A Technical Support Officer providing advice not just to Programme staff but direct to Grant Fund applicants and projects[18];
- An Administrative Officer.

The overall role of the Central Team[19] was to:

- Provide management support to Community Brokers;
- Ensure that Community Brokers were aware of interesting initiatives so that community and interest groups were kept informed of latest developments;
- Manage the Grant Fund used to fund projects and provide technical support at a local level;
- Maintain contact with other initiatives and developments across Wales and beyond;
- Provide quarterly reports to WEFO and the Communities Directorate;
- Ensure that the initiative is appropriately marketed.

The Team was line-managed by Lesley Jones, who is the Deputy Chief-Executive of the Wales Co-operative Centre.

The Central Team was assisted by the Advisory Group, which was set up at the initiative of the (then) SJR Department, with Members appointed by the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration.

The Terms of Reference of the Group, as agreed at its first formal meeting in November 2005[20] were *"to support the successful delivery of the project by providing informed advice to the Wales Co-operative Centre and the Project Manager"* and more particularly to:

- Discuss and advise on the overall strategic direction of the project;
- Receive and consider quarterly reports on project activity including statistics relating to project targets;
- Nominate a number of representatives to sit on the Grant Panel which will assess grant applications from community organisations and make recommendations for grant payments to the Wales Co-operative Centre;
- Advise on procurement and provision of technical support at a local level;
- Undertake any additional activities as may be identified and agreed with the Wales Co-operative Centre.

The Panel was chaired by David Jenkins, who is Chair of the Wales Co-operative Centre and also holds a number of other relevant appointments. It met quarterly.

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[18] The Technical Support Officer left in December 2007 and was not replaced
[19] Guidance, p. 17
[20] Draft Terms of Reference and Minutes of the Meeting of 1 November 2005

2.3.4. Community Brokers and "Outreach"

According to the Communities@One guidance, the *"Community Brokers are pivotal to the success of the Communities @One initiative"[21]*. In total, there were 12 Brokers[22]. Although they were on the payroll of the Wales Co-operative Centre and were recruited centrally, they were based in the field. Originally, they were located with bodies which were perceived to be playing a critical role with regard to digital inclusion and to Communities First (mostly local authorities or County Voluntary Councils [CVCs]), although as the Programme developed it was decided to base some of them within Wales Cooperative Centre offices. Their formal responsibilities (as envisaged at the outset of the Programme) are set out in Box 2.4[23], although they were also expected to play a key role in *"the identification and dissemination of best practice [which] will be at the heart of this project"[24]*.

In reality, however, the role of the Brokers evolved considerably since the "model" job description was developed with a stronger emphasis on developing networks and partnerships and more particularly helping to develop, as well as co-ordinate, applications for the Grant Fund.

Brokers were expected to work closely with the Communities First Partnerships, but were not directly answerable to them. On the contrary, the Guidance makes clear that Brokers:

"may, if appropriate, convene and work with a local group to assist in the development of the Communities @One programme at the local level. The Community Broker may also work with any previously existing groups. However, it will be for the Community Broker to determine the most appropriate way forward"[25].

Besides the direct assistance of the Brokers, the Programme was conceived as having a key role to play in building up the local availability of technical support, both by increasing the capacity of community organisations themselves and by encouraging the development of local social entrepreneurs capable of providing such support. Ensuring the provision of adequate and long-term technical support was seen as a crucial way of underpinning the Programme's sustainability, since prior research had suggested that lack technical support was often a cause of ICT infrastructure within deprived communities being unused[26].

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[21] p. 17

[22] Eleven Brokers were initially appointed. A twelfth post had been originally envisaged to cover RCT. However at the outset of the Programme it was agreed with the local authority that there was a degree of overlap with a separate, Local Authority- led Objective 1 project, Shape-IT.org, and that for the first six months Communities@One would not be actively promoted in RCT. After the six months this was reviewed, and while it was agreed that it would be appropriate for Communities@One to be promoted in RCT, by this point, the Grant Fund was already heavily committed, so it was decided not to appoint an additional Broker in RCT. However, an additional Broker was appointed in January 2007 to work in North Wales..

[23] Guidance, p. 18-19 and "Model Brokers job description" at Annex B, p. 69 onwards

[24] Project Plan, p. 14

[25] p. 18

[26] BT: Communities@One audit, p1.

Box 2.4: Brokers roles and responsibilities

Establish links and partnerships with key local agencies (community/voluntary, statutory and private) and develop their role in digital inclusion.

Work alongside local people to help them to overcome barriers to access and facilities.

Review local ICT and Internet resources, facilities and barriers to access.

Assist in drawing together baseline information in order to identify gaps in current provision and access and developing creative and effective ways of meeting needs, e.g. through local content and networks.

Promote and enhance use of local resources and facilities among new and existing users.

Advise new and existing Internet users and groups of rights and responsibilities and any appropriate codes, protocols or standards.

Co-ordinate applications from local groups and present them to the Advisory Group for consideration.

Help local community groups access other prospective funding sources.

Motivate and work with a team of volunteer community champions and activists and community tutors who promote interest in learning locally.

Work in partnerships with local learning providers to create learning progression routes.

Work in partnership with local agencies, to create joined-up approaches to skills development and job seeking.

Promote government services online through appropriate local channels.

The Project Plan referred to "Circuit riders" as one of the key elements of the Programme (alongside the management agency and the central unit, the Advisory Group, the Community Brokers, and the Grant Fund). It was envisaged that they would be:

"local ICT specialists, … funded for project support through the central fund. Local ICT specialists from the communities themselves will be encouraged to apply for consulting status as a means of creating tangible social enterprises. These Circuit Riders will be available as a resource for the Community Brokers to support bottom up project creation, assistance with any IT related queries/issues and to advise on such matters as required"[27].

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[27] p. 7

A Technical Support Fund, with a budget of well over £1 million was created in order to underpin these efforts, although as already noted, this was subsequently much reduced as a result of virements to the Grant Fund.

2.3.5 Dissemination and Publicity

In terms of dissemination, the Programme undertook a range of activities, directed both at voluntary and community organisations engaged with the Programme and with a wider audience. These included:

- The development of a website (www.communities@one.org);
- A major Digital Inclusion Conference held in March 2008, which attracted some 170 delegates and which highlighted the progress made by Communities@One since it was launched;
- A series of workshops for Grant Fund projects on using new technologies and safety on line;
- Ensuring that materials related to the Programme have been shared on relevant websites, most notably the EU Commission's epractice website (www.epractice.eu/cases/communities@one);
- Ensuring that information on funded projects has been included in the UK Government's database created to assist the development of digital inclusion best practice;
- Securing coverage in a range of newspapers and journals;
- Developing a range of case-studies on individual Grant Fund projects.

2.4 Digital Inclusion Policy

In our Baseline Evaluation Report of February 2007, we considered digital inclusion policy in other parts of the UK. For this final Evaluation Report, we briefly consider a number of strategy documents and research studies which deal with digital inclusion policy elsewhere in the UK, Europe and internationally.

2.4.1   Digital Inclusion Policy in the UK

Digital Inclusion has been assuming a greater importance within UK Government thinking within recent years, reflected in the fact that the UK Government's Minister for Digital Inclusion (The Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy MP) who also holds the post of Secretary of State for Wales is chairing a Cabinet Committee on Digital Inclusion which met for the first time in April 2008.

The main function of the Committee is to *"co-ordinate policies and a coherent strategy that all citizens, especially the disadvantaged, can benefit from new technologies"[28].* Specific Welsh input is being made to the committee's work by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales, Huw Irranca-Davies MP. Publication of the Digital Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan was imminently expected at the time of writing this report.

In terms of underpinning research about digital inclusion in the UK, a key recent publication is *"Digital Inclusion: A Discussion of the Evidence Base"* (prepared by

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[28] Source: news.BBC.co.uk. Extract from Minister's Speech to Digital Inclusion Conference in London on 29 April 2008.

Fresh Minds for UK online centres, July 2007). This research was commissioned by UK online centres in order to *"review the available evidence pertaining to issues of digital inclusion and the digital divide"*[29]. Its main aim was to *"inform the debate led by the [UK Government] Digital Strategy Review team*[30]*"*. It stated as its objectives:

- *"To assess the current evidence base on digital inclusion and the digital divide;*
- *To discuss the how digital inclusion and the digital divide are currently conceptualised;*
- *To explore and evaluate the existing frameworks for measuring the digital divide;*
- *To profile the segments of the population affected by the digital divide;*
- *To discuss the factors which may influence the future evolution of the digital divide;*
- *To examine the case for market failure and public sector intervention to bridge the digital divide;*
- *To suggest some ways of addressing gaps in the current evidence base"*[31].

Although the report concentrates mainly on England, a number of sections are relevant to the Communities@One project and the digital inclusion agenda in Wales.

In the context of digital inclusion, the report suggests that as more and more people become digitally included, there is a real risk that:

"the remaining excluded people will fall further behind the rest of society. The severity of their exclusion will deepen – meaning that they will miss out on the convenience, reduced cost of living, increased access to social networks, and access to employment opportunities which ICT can enable".[32]

The research goes on to make a number of interesting points concerning digital inclusion, including that:

- *"There is no single 'digital divide': inequalities exist in many aspects of the application of ICT in society, but these differences are complex and interconnected";*
- *"Digital exclusion is relative: increased take-up of technologies may deepen the exclusion of those left behind (same point as above)";*
- In terms of understanding the size and nature of the digital exclusion, the report states that the most relevant means of doing this is to consider *"individuals' functional capabilities – what they can achieve, rather than how they achieve it";*
- *"Discussion has usually focused on the internet rather than other communications technologies – but other technologies also have a significant impact on peoples' lives, this is expected to increase in the future";*
- *"Interactivity is most common with internet use on the PC; therefore this is often the focus of much of the research"*[33].

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[29] p.6
[30] P.6
[31] p.6
[32] p.11
[33] p.14

The key findings of the report in terms of 'measuring' and analysing the nature of digital inclusion are that:

- *"Technologies tend to reach a 'plateau' at which their market penetration levels off. This appears already to have happened for both mobile phones (at around 85–90% of the population as owners and users) and for the internet (at 60–61% of the population as users)[34]";*
- *"Take-up of any technology requires the individual to have access, motivation, skills and confidence. A better understanding of the characteristics of both users and non-users of a technology can be gained by examining the barriers which restrict peoples' access motivation, skills or confidence"[35];*
- *"Lack of skills presents a barrier to making sophisticated use of ICT, even among regular users[36]";*
- *"The incidence of digital exclusion is highest among some groups who are at risk of social exclusion, including those who are elderly, economically inactive, low qualified, or living alone"[37];*
- *"Conversely, those who are socially excluded are three times more likely to be non-users than users of the internet";[38]*
- *"There is evidence that those who make the greatest demands on public services also tend to be less likely to be digitally included"[39];*
- *"Some groups at risk of social exclusion are particularly likely to rely on public internet access points, including unemployed people and lone parents"[40].*

The report then outlines a series of 'drivers for change', which include that:

- *"The market for internet access and mobile phones may already have become cyclical: it is likely that the ICT industry's focus is now on existing customers, rather than extending its market penetration to harder-to-reach groups"[41];*
- *"Generational change will help to reduce the incidence of digital exclusion – but only slowly. Allowing for the effect of generational change alone (while holding all other factors constant), 31% will still not be internet users in 2015, and 24% in 2025".* It goes on to say that *"the existence of a core of excluded young people means that this phenomenon will endure. However, opportunities for engaging more people exist, in the form of new technologies – particularly in interactive digital television"[42].*

The report then refers to HM Treasury's *"Long-term opportunities and challenges"* report in November 2006 which stated that:

"In the decade to 2017, continued reductions in the price of ICT, an increasingly ICT literate population and the convergence of technologies – such as more internet

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[34] p.26
[35] p.26
[36] p.26
[37] p.34
[38] p.34
[39] p.34
[40] p.34
[41] p.40
[42] p.40

connections on mobile phones – are all expected to increase uptake of ICT generally and reduce the digital divide further" (HM Treasury 2006)[43].

In the context of bridging the digital divide as a policy priority, the report comments that:

"While price reductions and technological convergence certainly present opportunities for extending digital inclusion, it is not at all clear (as the Treasury report implies) that this will be an inevitable, organic process. Encouraging use of these technologies among those who are currently excluded from communicating, transacting and interacting online will require outreach activities, backed up by useful and useable content. Public sector service deliverers have an incentive to lead in this area"[44].

The report concludes that there are *"clear benefits to be gained for the UK as a whole from promoting the use of interactive digital technologies".* It goes on to say that these benefits include:

- *"Tackling some of the causes of social exclusion and deprivation, by enabling people with new opportunities to interact and improve their life chances[45];*
- *Efficiency gains to public service providers from increased interaction with their clients through technologies[46];*
- *Improved international competitiveness, as a result of upgrading the national skills base and increased efficiency[47];*
- *Increased economic growth as a result of increased efficiency in both the public and private sector"[48].*

The report also concludes that there are, however, complexities in planning the type and extent of public-sector intervention:

- *"The greatest potential benefit to service deliverers is from engaging the most socially excluded groups in ICT: but these people are also likely to be the hardest to reach[49];*
- *"Focusing on the ICT skills base for international competitiveness alone will not provide an argument for outreach to some of the most excluded and may worsen their exclusion"[50].*

Next, we consider *"The Digital Inclusion Landscape in England: Delivering Social Inclusion through ICT".* (The Digital Inclusion Team, March 2007).

The aim of this document is to describe the landscape of digital inclusion activities in England. The broad definition of digital inclusion used for this study was *"the use of technology, either directly or indirectly, to improve the lives and life chances of people and the places in which they live"[51].*

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[43] p.40
[44] p.40
[45] p.43
[46] p.43
[47] p.43
[48] p.43
[49] p.44
[50] p.44
[51] p.2

The document was produced following research with stakeholders across government, local authorities, industry, academia and the third sector. The Digital Inclusion Team[52] was set up in May 2006 as a result of a recommendation in the Social Exclusion Unit's 2005 study *"Inclusion Through Innovation".*

The report collates information on more than 260 live projects operating in England. Its headline findings include that:

"ICT has transformed the way we live, learn, work and play" and that for many people *"jobs are easier to find, services are more convenient, goods are cheaper, social networks are deeper and opinions can be heard more widely".* However, the report goes on to say that *"around 40% of adults are missing out on the benefits of the information society, many of whom also suffer multiple social disadvantages[53]"* and that there is no evidence to suggest any change to this situation since 2004.

The report suggests that digital inclusion should be seen as a *"crosscutting opportunity[54]"* to tackle the problems of social exclusion, estimating that around 15% of the adult population in England (6 million people) suffer both social exclusion and lack of engagement with ICT.

The report draws a number of overall conclusions which include that:

- *"Policies and strategies for citizen and community uses of ICT are fragmented across government, industry and the third sector;*
- *There is also fragmentation of resources and effort. Programmes and policies that could be joined up are not being linked. There is duplication and there are also gaps;*
- *There are programmes and projects that have delivered social impact and form an excellent foundation to build on, but these tend to have low visibility;*
- *There is a wide knowledge gap between social policy teams and technology experts that isn't being bridged, leading to low awareness of the opportunities;*
- *'Digital' is all too often seen as an end in itself"[55]*

Of specific interest to the Communities@One project, the report goes on to draw attention to a number of barriers that hinder the *"scaling and repeating of successful initiatives",* including that:

- *"Sustainability is a key issue and many projects using technology to deliver social outcomes have difficulty in achieving a sustainable business model or don't even try to. Projects often remain dependent on grant funding;*
- *Funding is often locked in silos at a local level and difficult to use to tackle crosscutting issues like social exclusion;*

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[52] The Digital Inclusion Team is funded by the UK Government (Communities and Local Government department) and hosted by the City of London to implement the report "Inclusion Through Innovation" published in 2005. Our focus is on how the innovative application of digital technologies, of any kind, can improve the lives and life chances of socially excluded people and deprived neighbourhoods in England. See http://digitalinclusion.pbwiki.com/About+Us

[53] p.5
[54] p.20
[55] p.6

- *Funding mechanisms get pilot projects off the ground but seldom provide second wave resources to enable scale-up and knowledge transfer. Many projects end at the pilot stage;*
- *With no single point of focus for funding, successful project teams typically waste existing resources chasing around government and industry looking for new resources"[56].*

Finally, the report makes a number of recommendations relating to areas where *"more can be done".* These recommendations include:

- *"Improving strategy, governance and leadership of activities to increase the social impact of technology;*
- *Capacity and capability building in local government and the third sector around the use of technology to support disadvantaged people;*
- *Joining-up and leveraging major programmes that could either benefit from or broaden digital inclusion, and make better use of existing resources;*
- *Investing in national infrastructure critical to increasing the social impact of technology;*
- *Tackling the barriers to scaling pilot projects that have clearly demonstrated social impact, especially finding sustainable funding models;*
- *Bringing together the social policy, practitioner and ICT communities, to bridge the knowledge gap and stimulate innovation;*
- *Supporting effective partnerships between government, industry and the third sector;*
- *Reviewing how existing legislation, codes of practice and procurement frameworks can support social and digital inclusion"[57].*

We now briefly turn to consider *"Digital Inclusion in Partnership".* (Scottish Executive, February 2007).

The purpose of this publication is to record the (then) Scottish Government's achievements since it set out its 2001 Strategy *"Connecting Scotland's People".*

Section 1 of this publication starts with a fairly detailed analysis of ICT usage and uptake in Scotland. The key conclusions of this analysis are that:

- *"Further work needs to be done with the emphasis on a different approach to tackling the key themes;*
- *Evidence shows that certain disadvantaged groups (such as disabled people, older people and those living in deprived areas, remain digitally excluded;*
- *10% of people with a disability or long-term illness aged 60+ use the internet compared with 23% of people of the same age with no disability or illness;*
- *People, particularly disabled people who live in households with incomes above £25,000 are far more likely to use the internet than those with incomes below £10,000;*
- *Area deprivation is associated with low levels of home internet usage;*
- *There is no clear relationship between broadband uptake and measures of area deprivation;*
- *However, household annual income is clearly related to uptake"[58].*

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[56] p.6
[57] p.7
[58] p.4-5

The publication prioritises four key themes in moving forward, which, in summary, are:

- Accessibility – to improve accessibility for disabled and older people;
- Awareness/Marketing – developing more effective signage and branding for locally available Internet Access points and more targeted awareness raising to outline the benefits of using ICT;
- Training and Support –appropriately tailored and directed depending on the target group. There is scope for better co-ordination between training and awareness raising to avoid duplication of effort;
- Community Involvement – public ICT and internet access should be targeting disadvantaged communities (mainly in deprived areas) with low incomes and where there is limited public access (e.g. remote rural communities).

2.4.2 EU Policy

EU policy on digital inclusion consists of a number of different but inter-related documents, including the i2010 strategy which was launched in June 2005 and was intended as a *"coherent policy framework for the era of convergent telecommunication and media services".*

The main strands of the Commission's e-inclusion strategy are:

- Enabling Actions for everyone to take part in the information society[59]. This strand includes proposed measures to:

  - o Bridge the broadband gap;
  - o Bridge the e-Accessibility gap;
  - o Tackle the digital competencies gap.

- Accelerating effective participation of target groups at risk of exclusion and improving quality of life[60]. This strand includes measures to:

  - o Include the socially disadvantaged through modern public e-services;
  - o Address ageing, health conditions and disability in the information society;
  - o Explore ICT-enabled opportunities for marginalised young people and migrants at risk of exclusion.

- Integrating e-inclusion actions to maximise lasting impact[61]. This strand includes proposed measures to:

  - o Enhance and sustain impact through mainstreaming and co-ordination;
  - o Improve understanding and compare progress on e-inclusion.

The emphasis on digital inclusion (or e-inclusion as it is more commonly referred to in EU circles) was further underlined a year after the launch of i2010 in June 2006 with the so-called "Riga Declaration" which recognised the importance of ICT in social and

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[59] p.6-8
[60] p.8-9
[61] P.9-10

economic terms and committed the EU to a number of e-inclusion related policy goals.

The Riga Declaration outlined the importance of ICT in the EU by stating that:

"ICTs are a powerful driver of growth and employment….a quarter of EU GDP growth and around 50% of productivity growth are due to ICT".

It also highlighted some of the disparities that ICTs can create:

"Many Europeans still reap few or no benefits from ICT and there are still resilient gaps in ICT use".

The Declaration went on to focus on a number of policy related goals under the following headings:

- *"Addressing the needs of older workers and elderly people[62];*
- *Reducing Geographical digital divides (including a specific target that broadband coverage should reach at least 90% of the EU's population by 2010)[63];*
- *Enhancing e-Accessibility and usability[64];*
- *Improving digital literacy and competences (with a specific target to halve the gap between disadvantaged groups and the average EU population by 2010[65]);*
- *Promoting Cultural Diversity in relation to inclusion[66];*
- *Promoting inclusive e-Government (including a specific target to ensure accessibility of all public web sites by 2010)[67]".*

In November 2007, the European Commission published a Communication to the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers, ECOSOC[68] and the Committee of the Regions entitled *"To be part of the information society – European i2010 initiative on e-inclusion"[69]*.

This communication effectively set out the Commission's e-inclusion strategy and made it clear that:

"Despite valuable initiatives, progress is still lacking and most of Riga targets may not be achieved. Fragmentation of efforts and lack of collaboration continue to persist".

It went on to say that *"much more must be done to achieve e-inclusion and the Riga targets"[70]*.

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[62] p.2

[63] p.3

[64] p.3

[65] p.4

[66] p.4

[67] P.4-5

[68] The European Economic and Social Committee.

[69] http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/docs/i2010_initiative/comm_native_com_2007_0694_f_en_acte.pdf

[70] p.1

Finally, *"Preparing Europe's digital future - The i2010 Mid-Term Review"* (April 2008), highlights some of the key achievements that have been implemented since the initial i2010 strategy and Riga Declaration. These include:

- *"A new regulatory framework for audiovisual media services;*
- *proposals to reform the regulation of electronic communications;*
- *a Regulation to create a single market for mobile phone use across borders;*
- *initiatives to boost online content across Europe;*
- *new R&D and innovation funding initiatives[71];*
- *public private partnerships (Joint Technology Initiatives) and new e-inclusion initiatives launched"[72].*

Of relevance to the Communities@One project and the digital inclusion agenda in Wales, the mid-term review also contains a specific section on e-inclusion. The headline findings of this section (at a European level) are that:

- 2007 was the first year in which over half of the EU's population used the internet regularly (51% of EU citizens accessed the Internet at least once a week, up 8% on 2006);
- Growth in usage terms varies considerably across the EU27, with growth highest in Ireland (up 20%) and France (up 18%). Growth was weakest in Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal and Romania). Denmark, Iceland and the Netherlands top the table on usage and are reported to be *"close to saturation with nearly the entire adult population using the Internet regularly in 2007"[73]*.

Despite some of these encouraging findings, the report also highlights that:

- 40% of the EU's population have never used the Internet;
- Detailed research undertaken as part of the i2010 e-inclusion initiative shows that there are *"large disparities"* in Internet use and digital literacy between the overall EU population and disadvantaged groups. The research goes on to confirm that *"the elderly and economically inactive are furthest behind"* but that *"women and the unemployed"* are getting closer to the EU average*;*
- As public and private services become increasingly available online, *"those people unable to access them face far greater disadvantage"[74].*

2.4.3   US Research on Digital Inclusion

Here, we briefly consider *"Power Up: The Campaign for Digital Inclusion. Digital Inclusion Imperatives Offer Municipalities New Social and Economic Opportunities"*. (A white paper by Maria E. Wynne and Lane F. Cooper for Microsoft Corporation.Undated).

This report which was undertaken by Microsoft's Office for Economic Development and Innovation concentrates on Digital Inclusion in America and begins by estimating

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[71] The Seventh Research Framework and the ICT Policy Support Programme under the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP).
[72] p.8
[73] p.47
[74] p.48

that there has been *"roughly a decade since the term Digital Divide was introduced into national public policy discourse"[75]*.

Since then, the report claims that access to information technology has become a *"socio-economic given".* Yet it goes on to say that "*little progress [has been] made in making technology accessible to everyone".* Interestingly, the report focuses in particular on the link between digital exclusion and economic productivity, saying that:

 "It is a fact that those who have online access and are digitally literate are more likely to be economically secure and at less risk than those who do not"[76].

As with a number of the UK reports already covered, this paper also suggests that *"access alone does not equal Digital Inclusion"* stressing that *"Governments must actively pursue broader initiatives to meet the challenge".*

The report explores some interesting "key issues" that are relevant to the context of Communities@One.

In terms of economic development, the report suggests that the implications of the digital divide are growing as computer literacy in America becomes *"a growing requirement for all kinds of jobs including occupations traditionally considered blue-collar[77]".*

Specifically, it suggests that:

"Without access to the Internet, it is becoming increasingly difficult to become aware of job opportunities".

and that:

"At a national level, experts predict that a lack of digital literacy will have a dampening impact on economic progress"[78].

On the issue of delivering public services via ICT, the report comments that:

"Government agencies are advancing their own e-government initiatives to improve citizen services and optimize operational efficiency".

Based on this increasing drive by governments to deliver services via ICT, the report goes on to say that:

"the Digital Divide is not only a barrier to accessing technology resources; it is increasingly an impediment to how the most vulnerable citizen receives vital social services"[79].

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[75] p.2
[76] p.2
[77] p.4
[78] p.4
[79] p.5

Perhaps of most direct interest to the Communities@One project, the report identifies a number of good practice elements found in American Digital Inclusion projects. These findings include:

- *"Programs that have been inclusive in their approach to engaging community partners appear to enjoy the highest levels of success"*;
- *"Many of the most successful DI initiatives begin with appointing a mayoral task force or internal working group. Later on, these efforts are transitioned to a charitable organization with a mission focused on carrying out the execution and expansion of the city's Digital Inclusion Plan"*;
- *"An integrated set of phased strategies to bring hardware, software, and Internet-access services to their underserved communities"*. The report expands on this to give examples public agencies *"replacing desktop and networking technologies in their offices, old assets are refurbished and reconfigured to be placed in public facilities or offered at significant discounts to qualified residents"*;
- *"The most successful initiatives….engage in aggressive outreach initiative that is designed to target all major underserved groups, including:*

  - *Low income families and individuals;*
  - *Children;*
  - *Seniors;*
  - *People with disabilities;*
  - *Non-English-speaking immigrants"*.[80]

Continuing with the theme that addressing supply side issues (in terms of making ICT available) is not enough in itself to bridge the digital divide, the report suggests that:

"Community technology centres, tutoring, and other educational initiatives must be a vital part of a DI initiative. Moreover, the curriculum must be broad in scope, while at the same time fulfilling the needs of targeted audiences. The goal is to equip the targeted population with the digital skills needed to either engage in employment opportunities or, in the case of the disabled or the elderly, to positively impact their daily lives with the relevant access skills"[81].

Again, of direct relevance to Communities@One, the report suggests that:

"Digital inclusion initiatives should be seen as a long-term, perhaps even permanent dimension of a community's offerings to its citizens. To that end, it is important to identify multiple financial sources and engineer a service delivery structure that is not subject to changes in political winds or one-time infusions of cash".[82]

It goes on to highlight the importance of monitoring and evaluation of Digital Inclusion initiatives, saying that:

"All of the pertinent goals set at the outset of a DI initiative should be tied to specific metrics that can be tracked independently by key stakeholders. Clear definition of the program's goals, objectives, and timelines will be key to short-term evaluation of

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[80] P.6-7
[81] p.9
[82] p.9

progress and success. Governments that commit to holding themselves accountable are more likely to be successful".[83]

Finally, the report makes some interesting remarks about the need for strong cross sector partnerships in delivering a digital inclusion agenda:

"It's about the economic empowerment of the 21st century citizen – equipping them for full participation in everything the digital and global economy has to offer. Success will require innovation at all levels, including partnerships we have not seen before among government, private sector, philanthropic and community leaders to ensure no citizen is left out of America's economic future"[84].

2.4.4   Recent Wales based Research

Here, we consider a working paper entitled *"Transforming access to public services through ICT enabled channels: Issues for hard-to-reach-groups".*

This is a research document intended to inform the implementation of the forthcoming Welsh Assembly Government's e-Access Plan as part of the Making the Connections agenda.

"The findings of this report will help inform WAG's approach to promoting, and bringing about, increased e-inclusion as part of its strategic approach to achieving social justice for the people of Wales, through programmes such as Communities First and Communities @One".[85]

The aim of the research is to *"build up an understanding of problems and opportunities surrounding how hard-to-reach groups access public services through ICT enabled channels[86]".*

Three specific objectives of research were to assess:

- ▪ *"Hard to reach groups' access to public services through ICT enabled channels: requirements and problems";*
- ▪ *"ways in which government and public services can improve hard-to-reach groups' access to information, advice and services through ICT enabled channels; and*
- ▪ *more broadly, the design of public service information (which has a major bearing on the effectiveness of all access channels)"[87].*

The research undertaken involved a literature review and engagement with a range of stakeholders.

The main findings of the research in terms of access to public services by hard-to-reach groups are that:

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[83] p.9
[84] p.10
[85] p.5
[86] p.5
[87] p.6

- *"Evidence strongly suggests that telephone and face to face contact remains the preferred channel for socially excluded groups engaging with public services;*
- *Welsh Consumer Council research ("Internet Inequality in Wales" reports) suggests that "people who are older (56+) or from a lower social class" use the internet least. This is important because research also suggests that poorer households are also likely to have a greater need for public services and information, yet problems with them gaining access through emerging technologies could mean that without carefully targeted interventions, this technology could increase rather than help tackle this disadvantage".*[88]

In its chapter 5, (much in line with other policy documents reviewed), the report highlights that the following groups are likely to have increased problems/difficulties in accessing public services on-line:

- *"Disabled People;*
- *People with low Basic Skills;*
- *Older People;*
- *Black and Ethnic Minority People".*[89]

Chapter 6 of this report[90] deals with Guidance and Good Practice in relation to digital inclusion. It states that:

"While Welsh government public service interventions around the design of assistive technology may be very limited, interventions to provide hard-to-reach people with the opportunity, confidence and skills to use ICT have been significant. Prominent among these interventions has been Communities@One and Credu Digilabs".

Finally, we briefly consider the 2008 OFCOM Nations and Regions Report for Wales, which considers the picture in relation to Broadband availability and up-take.

The report outlines that *"since the end of 2006, broadband take-up in Wales has increased by 3 percentage points to 45%".* However, more worryingly, it goes on to say that:

"Wales now has the lowest broadband penetration of the UK nations"

and that this *"contrasts with significant growth in other parts of the UK; in England take up rose from 44% to 57%; in Scotland from 46% to 57% and in Northern Ireland from 42% to 52%".*

In terms of how broadband penetration is spread across Wales, the OFCOM report finds that it is:

"Higher across the larger southern urban areas (58% in Cardiff and 56% in Swansea) and lower in the smaller southern towns (34%). Broadband take up in rural Wales is similar to that in rural areas of Northern Ireland, but lower than in England and Scotland".

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[88] P.6-7
[89] p.26-29
[90] p.30-33

It is also worth noting however that during August 2008, National Statistics[91] published figures on Internet Access in the UK. Whilst these statistics concur with OFCOM's assessment that there has been a significant increase in overall UK take up of broadband (56% of all UK households had a broadband connection in 2008, an increase of 51% from 2007), in contrast to OFCOM, it suggests that the region with the lowest Internet access level is the North East (of England) with 54%. Moreover, and in very stark contrast to OFCOM, National Statistics suggests that:

"Wales has now overtaken England with 67% of households having access [to the Internet] compared to 66% of England and 61% in Scotland".

It is important to note that the National Statistics data (which puts Wales as ahead of England) relates to Internet Access, whilst the OFCOM data relates only to Broadband penetration. Nevertheless, there is clearly some reason for confusion from these two different data sources.

2.4.5   Conclusions of the Policy Review

There are a number of key messages and themes that emerge from the policy review which are relevant to our understanding of the Communities@One project:

- Digital inclusion seems to be increasingly recognised as an important policy objective across the UK, the EU and beyond. The fact that there is now a UK Government Minister with special responsibility for Digital Inclusion and a Cabinet Committee which is preparing a Strategy and Action Plan underscores the level of commitment afforded to it at a UK level;
- There appears to be a clear recognition (in a European context and more widely e.g. in the US) that digital exclusion, poverty and disadvantaged groups are very closely linked;
- As increasing numbers of people globally have access to ICT and become more ICT literate, those who do not will become even more socially excluded (from for example labour market opportunities and equal access to public services);
- There appears to be widespread recognition that there is a role for government, public and third sector intervention in tackling digital exclusion and some suggestion that rates of technology penetration are reaching a plateau, with the private sector focusing more on selling more advanced products to existing users than on attracting new users;
- Whilst the rationale for intervention seems unquestioned, tackling the digital divide is a complex challenge and by definition those excluded are likely to be 'hard to reach' groups;
- Successful digital inclusion initiatives require strong policy direction, clear leadership and relatively long timescales, with the most successful projects and programmes involving proactive outreach elements;
- As well as a strong policy base, there is evidence to suggest that active partnerships across organisations in the public, private and third sectors are very important to the on-going sustainability of digital inclusion initiatives;
- Much remains to be done to promote the availability and up-take of ICTs in Wales: despite more encouraging data from National Statistics on Internet access, recent data from OFCOM suggests that Wales is lagging fairly significantly behind the UK as a whole in terms of broadband penetration.

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[91] Source: www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=8

Finally, it is clear that Communities@One pre-dates a good number of these Digital Inclusion policy and strategy initiatives (meaning that initially at least it had been developed an implemented in a policy vacuum). The fact that Communities@One's objectives and activities align so well with current policy priorities and indeed much of the good practice identified from elsewhere in the world shows in our view that the programme has been innovative and "ahead of the game" in many respects. In this context, the experience of Communities@One should have relevance in informing the evolving Digital Inclusion policy landscape, particularly within the UK.

3.0 Findings

In this Section we report on our findings, drawing on the fieldwork undertaken during all three phases of the evaluation in our case-study areas and in the control group areas, as well as desk-research and interviews with staff and "central stakeholders". We consider in turn the inputs and externalities, the Programme processes and the way in which they operated, the immediate effects (or outputs), both of the Programme's own activity and the projects which have already received funding, the longer-term effects (or outcomes) and the impacts of the Programme.

3.1 Inputs and Externalities

3.1.1 Inputs at the Central Level

Apart from the direct resources which were made available for the implementation of the Programme, there were a number of enabling factors which served to assist Communities@One.

Firstly, clearly, as a Welsh Assembly Government project, the degree of ownership and commitment from the Welsh Assembly Government has been important. It was clear at the time of our Baseline Report that the level of engagement from the Communities Directorate was considerable, even if staff resources were limited. Moreover, there was seen to be political commitment from the highest level.

The extent of political commitment to the project appears, if anything, to have grown during the lifetime of the Programme, and in the final stage fieldwork, many of the staff and central stakeholders reflected on the importance of the very public involvement of the Deputy Minster for Regeneration, Leighton Andrews AM as an advocate of the Programme.

At the same time, at all stages of the fieldwork, central stakeholders expressed some doubts as to the extent that Communities@One was working within an explicit policy framework:

"As far as I am aware the Assembly's never had a digital inclusion policy, so there hasn't been a policy for it to sit within, a strategic context".

"I don't get a sense of a complete [digital inclusion] agenda".

There was also a broad consensus amongst stakeholders that while digital inclusion was seen as important (increasingly so during the lifetime of the Programme) by individuals across a range of Assembly Government departments, this was not necessarily widely understood within them:

"I would say there are individuals who grasp the importance of it....and if that could be translated to a proper strategy…..then that would make a massive difference" .

"[understanding of digital inclusion] is considerably better than it's ever been but I don't think it's cracked yet".

We noted in our Baseline Report that many stakeholders saw lack of engagement from what was then DELLS[92] as a barrier. Despite the fact that representatives from DCELLS have regularly attended Advisory Group meetings, most stakeholders still felt towards the end of the Programme that there was a lack of real engagement, though this was now seen as more of a structural issue, reflecting the low priority attached to community learning in the Department's thinking – and its budget.

"I don't see any evidence in the DCELLS stuff of any appreciation of the importance of informal learning".

Secondly, in our Baseline Report we explained how Communities@One had from the start been able to draw on a degree of pre-existing expertise and enthusiasm from a range of organisations outside the Welsh Assembly Government (including BT Wales, Citizens Online, the BBC and the Scarman Trust) and that key individuals from these organisations had been engaged early on in the development of the project in a very open way. We noted that these individuals had gone on to play an important part in the Programme through their participation in the Advisory Group and the Grant Panel.

The importance of the contribution of these individuals (with the backing of their organisations) continued to be seen as a key enabling factor for the Programme by staff and central stakeholders throughout the lifetime of the Programme, though in our final stage fieldwork there was a stronger emphasis on the small size of this "nucleus":

"There were a few individuals who had a grasp and a vision and the technical knowledge to a degree who were very wise and helped us a lot and that was a very small number….I think it was difficult in some instances …there were a few people who didn't have vested interests and they were really useful".

"I would say that it felt as if it was a very small core, four or five people…it was a broader group on paper, but either they didn't come to meetings or if they did, they didn't say very much compared to the four or five vociferous ones, including me".

Almost all stakeholders saw this engagement as critical to the success of the Programme, but while this degree of commitment may not be easily replicable, one key individual noted that the "buy-in" had been achieved by ensuring that they were involved from the start, and that their ideas were genuinely welcomed by those charged with developing the project:

"An environment was created for them….. that was open, dynamic, creative…we didn't have formal agendas…there was a space created for discussion, where for 2 or 3 hours every fortnight we went in and tackled the major issues….one at a time…we just tackled them until at the end of the process there was an outcome that was the project".

As a result, as one of these key stakeholders commented:

"We were never struggling to agree what we were about".

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[92] The Department of Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. Now DCELLS – the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.

A third "given" for the Programme – reflecting the policy priorities of the then Social Justice and Regeneration Department which was its sponsor - was its targeting on Communities First areas. At the time of the Baseline Report we found that this was viewed by central stakeholders as a positive factor, in that there were established structures for the Programme, and more particularly the Brokers, to relate to and build on, or at worst a necessary evil, given the limited resources available to the Programme and the short time-scales with which the Programme was developed.

Perspectives at the end of the Programme were broadly similar with a majority of the stakeholders (particularly amongst the staff who were involved with delivering the Programme) feeling that it had been essential to have a clear focus at the start, and to work in areas where there were established structures in place:

"It allowed the Programme to be manageable…it allowed us to cut our teeth".

"We needed structures on the ground and Communities First was really important to piggy back on…we could go to the Coordinators and ask who were the movers and shakers….. …our model doesn't work in barren terrain, you would need a different model".

Some stakeholders, however, continued to see the focus on Communities First as a regrettable necessity:

"It could have been an even better project if it was an all Wales project…my gut feeling is that…there are digitally excluded people all across Wales….but I recognise the timing constraints, the funding constraints, all those things".

"I always thought it was a shame…there are plenty of people who are digitally excluded who are outside those areas…but I have to say it was difficult to see what other way we could have gone".

A fourth enabling factor for the Programme was the skills and experience of the Wales Co-operative Centre - in particular in project management and, more specifically in managing European-funded projects. This was seen by stakeholders to be particularly important in getting the Programme off to a quick start, not least in terms of the recruitment of the Brokers.

Finally, as we noted in our Baseline Report, one area of weakness underlying the Programme which was highlighted by several stakeholders was the lack of any coherent mapping of facilities and capacity across the Communities First areas. Although the Programme was able to draw on a number of studies, undertaken by Citizens On-line, the WCVA (on behalf of the then ELWa and concentrating on the voluntary sectors use of e-learning) and BT, those involved with these studies admitted they were "*quick and dirty*", highlighting some generic lessons (for example, that the key issues were not around the existence of "kit" but around the skills and motivation of people in deprived communities to use it) and the demographic groups who were most likely to be digitally excluded. In practice, the research did not provide anything like comprehensive spatial mapping which could have informed the development of projects at a local level – a view which was confirmed by our own review of these documents.

3.1.2 Inputs at the Local Level

It was clear from our initial work with the case-study areas that one of the key contextual issues shaping the work of Communities@One in the field was the way in which Communities First was functioning in the case-study areas. At the time of the Baseline Report, we estimated that, in four of the ten areas[93], the Communities First process and structures were highly problematic and divisive; in three, there were less serious issues and in three others Communities First was functioning smoothly.

Over the lifetime of the Programme there appears to have been some change in these background dynamics. By the time of our final stage research, working relationships within Communities First in two of the areas where the Communities First Partnership had had fairly serious problems had improved quite considerably and some improvement had been reported in a third of these along with one of the areas where there had been less serious difficulties. On the other hand, in two of the three areas where in 2006 the Communities First Partnerships appeared to be working reasonably well, some difficulties had subsequently arisen.

However, it would appear that the way in which the Communities First Partnership was functioning influenced but did not determine the effectiveness or otherwise of the effort to engage community groups with Communities@One. Our case-study area with the most vibrant collection of Communities@One projects was one where initially the Communities First process had encountered considerable difficulties, though it was also an area where Communities First had begun to deliver over the evaluation period. In this and two other areas where relations between the various partners involved in Communities First were problematic, the Brokers had succeeded in not getting caught up in the local politics and in finding other ways "in" to the voluntary and community sector.

"*I made it quite clear from the start that I was going to keep out of it, that I wasn't taking sides. I've had to try quite hard to stick out of it because they've all been soliciting support…..its the same with the conflict between [the CVC] and the Council….I've kept my nose well out of all the politics*"
.
Conversely, while having an effective Communities First Partnership may have been important in providing a springboard for the Broker to engage with the broader voluntary and community sector in some areas, this did not necessarily mean that Communities@One remained intertwined with Communities First: in one area, where the Broker relied heavily on Communities First early on, there was little engagement by the stage of the final fieldwork.

However, in three of our ten case-study areas, issues around the relationships within the Communities First Partnership and between the Communities First Partnership and other key players appear to have "choked off" activity on the part of Communities@One: in each of these areas only one project has been funded and it was clear that Brokers had prioritised other Communities First areas in their "patches" because of the perceived difficulty of working within them:

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[93] There are nine "area-based" case-studies but one of the three "project-based" case-studies is located in only one Communities First area, so the area is considered alongside the other nine for the purposes of the analysis

"It is about the people who stand between you and the community, they don't really get Digital Inclusion".

A more important external factor in determining the success or otherwise of Communities@One – perhaps unsurprisingly – appears to have been the vibrancy of the broader community and voluntary sector in the area concerned. We noted in our Baseline Report that this varied greatly between different case-study areas, with four of the areas having a large number of voluntary and community groups, and six only a relatively limited voluntary and community sector, with, in each case, only one or a handful of organisations with paid staff and two of these six lacking even a single Community Centre with paid staff within them.

This pattern was mirrored in terms of the pre-existing ICT infrastructure with four areas (the same four as identified as having a fairly large community/voluntary sector), having a number of reasonably well-equipped ICT facilities, open to the public or to particular sectors of the community (particularly young people) either within the Communities First ward or very close to it; four areas having more limited facilities, predating the Communities@One Programme, within the ward which provided some access to community organisations and individuals to ICT and the internet; and two areas having no publicly accessible ICT facilities within the immediate area although in both cases there were library-based ICT suites available within walking distance.

Interestingly, in five of our case-study areas, only one organisation received Communities@One funding (and in three of these cases, it was the Communities First Partnership itself) and these five were all amongst the six assessed as having a very limited pre-existing voluntary and community infrastructure and little or nothing in the way of open access ICT facilities. In the remaining area (where the Communities First Partnership embraced both the case-study area and the neighbouring ward, which also qualified for Communities First), four organisations received funding (though only one was physically based in the case-study area, with the other three based in the neighbouring ward). Here, although the numbers of voluntary and community organisations were small, the Broker had been able to rely on a pre-existing network of organisations which had provided the "way in" to the sector. Three of the four organisations funded had been involved with this network, with the fourth being run by individuals whose families were employed by one of the other organisations.

Given the Programmes short timeframe and the explicit intention to work from the bottom up, the correlation between the success with which Communities@One succeeded in getting initiatives off the ground and the pre-existing vibrancy of the community sector is not surprising.

It does however mean that Communities@One has worked most effectively in those areas where there was already quite a lot of activity and succeeded less well where the ground was not so fertile.

Moreover, in all of the case-study areas, there was no evidence of any significant developments in terms of ICT infrastructure unrelated to Communities@One. Indeed, in one or two of the areas, things had if anything gone backwards: in one case, for example, an ICT suite within a school which had been used for outreach activities to adults had been withdrawn, while in another a community centre, which had offered some access to admittedly ageing PCs for informal and more formal uses, had shut

down. If this suggests that in the absence of Communities@One, access to publicly-accessible ICT might have become more, rather than less, difficult in the Communities First areas, this would appear to be confirmed by the three control group areas.

In two of these there had been limited access to ICT facilities through local libraries at the time of our initial fieldwork. In both of these areas, these had been maintained, but in one case, without any renewal of the PCs. In the other, despite moving to new premises, opening hours remained limited to four half-days a week.

Moreover, in the case of the one control group area where some ICT training had been available as a result of outreach courses run by the local College, these had been withdrawn by the time of our most recent fieldwork because of the College's view that it could not generate a sufficient number of enrolments: in a second area, efforts to induce learning providers to run ICT courses at a community project had not succeeded and indeed, a project which had provided some learning opportunities was on the verge of closing.

In the third area, which at the time of the Baseline Report had nothing in the way of the provision of publicly accessible ICT facilities or training, there appeared to have been no progress during the two years Communities@One had operated.

The control group areas therefore suggest strongly that, at a Programme level, the counterfactual is that little enhancement of the "offer" in terms of mediated access to ICT for people without access to equipment, or the skills to use it, could have been expected.

Within the case-study areas, there appears to have been little change in terms of access to more formal ICT training. While our baseline research suggested that Brokers (and other partners) had not really succeeded in undertaking detailed mapping of the availability of such training, it seemed clear that all of the case-study areas had access to no- or low-cost ICT training from a range of providers within the area or in very close proximity, with the barriers to socially excluded individuals taking up these learning opportunities being not physical or even financial but attitudinal.

In general, where information was available, there did not appear to have been much change in terms of the availability of local ICT learning opportunities (outside those provided by Communities@One itself) by the time of our final fieldwork, though in one area, the Workers Educational Association, the main provider, had recently started charging for courses, which was thought to be having a negative impact on demand, while in another, provision was thought to have improved somewhat as a result of outreach courses being run as part of a Communities First initiative.

However, (as at the baseline stage of the research) Brokers and other interviewees generally did not have a detailed knowledge of what courses were available where.

At the time of our baseline research, the evidence offered by interviewees (though patchy) in eight of areas suggested that local voluntary and community groups were generally using ICT only for fairly basic administrative tasks (e.g. writing letters and documents, book-keeping, producing flyers and other publicity) in the case of those organisations with paid staff, and often not even this in groups run entirely by volunteers. Particularly in the Valleys, it was felt that the majority of community

groups were managing with very limited or no use of ICT, illustrated by the Chair of one group receiving funding from the Programme who had started using his home PC to produce Minutes of meeting only to give up because:

"They [the other Committee members] *didn't know what to do with their bits of paper, so I've gone back to reading them out of the minutes book".*

This also appeared to be the case in the control group areas. In two case-study areas, however, both ones with a large number of community and voluntary organisations in the area, more groups were thought to use PCs for internal administration and in both cases there had been specific support for this to the local voluntary sector in the past. Even in these case-study areas, however, few groups were thought to use ICT proactively to engage with or provide services to their clients.

Clearly, given the focus of the Programme on working with and through voluntary and community groups, it is difficult, if not impossible to disentangle changes to the use of technology by groups within the case-study areas from the Programme (and thus considered in Section 3.3). Very limited evidence from the case-study areas suggests that outside Communities@One change has probably been quite slow, despite what appears to be increasing access to ICT at home. In one control group area, an interviewee commented that although many of the local regeneration Partnership had e-mail:

"You have to take lots of hard copies to the meeting, because only one prints them out... I think most don't even open the attachments".

However, in another control group area, a Community website had been developed, which though limited contains information about active community groups and the Community Council.

Finally, one of the key contextual factors (and potentially a key indicator of the success or otherwise of the Programme) which the evaluation has regrettably been unable to get to grips with is the availability and use of ICT in the home by the general population (we consider this further in Section 4.5). At the time of our baseline research, little hard evidence was available from the fieldwork about this – apart from very limited evidence in one or two areas that the proportion of households with access to PCs and internet connections was lower than the average. Equally, at the time of our final fieldwork, there was little or no hard evidence from our case-study areas about these issues, with the exception of one area where a relatively recent household survey commissioned by the Communities First Partnership had revealed that 56% of households had a PC (though not necessarily an internet connection).

Interviewees generally reflected a view that within the case-study areas access to PCs and internet connections at home had increased in line with (albeit still at a lower level than average) national trends, though in one control group area, a new Community Development worker who had recently moved from South-West England, noting the very limited use by the secondary school in communicating with parents and children compared to his recent experience thought:

"It certainly feels like people don't want to use technology or at least not to its full potential".

In terms of the project-based case-studies[94], as we reported in our Baseline Report, both of these projects built on pre-existing organisational infrastructure which had been funded by Objective 1. In one case the project was built around a formal partnership of community-based organisations which had developed from an Objective 1 project (which finished in 2005) which had built up a network of ICT-based learning centres. In the second, the project developed out of a project which had operated over more than six years, with funding first from Objective 5b and then from Objective 1. In both instances, however, the Communities@One project represented a development of the previous projects, and in the latter case, a change of its spatial focus (focusing in on Communities First areas but over a much wider geographical area).

In both cases these were building on established infrastructure, both in terms of hardware and training provision, in at least part of the area covered by the new project. It was clear at the baseline stage that in the areas covered by one of the projects there was *"quite a lot of stuff going on"* even outside the boundaries of the organisations involved in the project, but it was felt that this mostly consisted of formal training and was reliant on fairly low-level marketing which would be unlikely to overcome the reluctance or lack of interest of those least "switched on" to ICT. By contrast:

"This project lets us really try the more informal softly-softly approach. Some of the work won't lead to formal accreditation – but that's not the point - there is learning and there is fun - that's what this project is about".

It is clearly difficult to generalise about contextual developments to ICT infrastructure and training provision in the larger geographical areas where these projects operated, although in broad terms they would appear to confirm the experience of provision outside Communities@One being fairly stable or suffering minor retrenchment. Interestingly, however, and perhaps in line with the suggestion above that Communities@One funding has succeeded best in areas with the capacity (in terms of the most dynamic pre-existing culture of voluntary and community activity) to use the opportunities it presented, in one of the case-studies, which involved four different community organisations in four different areas, the organisation which was perceived at the baseline stage as least sophisticated in its approach never really bought in to the second aspect of the project (which was concerned with providing outreach workers to draw in and enthuse people about informal learning about ICT) as opposed to the first, which provided a technical resource to maintain pre-existing "kit" and offer a repair service to local residents and ultimately dropped out of the partnership:

"They were only really interested in the technical support aspects of the project….they saw [the outreach workers] *as a bit of a nuisance to them".*

By contrast, perhaps, in the second of the project-based case studies, the focus on Communities First which had initially been seen as a negative (because it constrained the sponsor organisation to target support on a small number of Communities First areas rather than the whole County) was in the later stages of the

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[94] Each of these "projects" actually received two separate phases of funding from the Grant Fund, and thus account for four of the total number of projects examined. As noted above, the remaining project-based case-study has been grouped with the area case-studies for analysis purposes because it was based in one Communities First area.

project seen to be something of an advantage, because it had forced them to be proactive, going to areas where people were not at a level where they were ready to engage i.e. those in greater need rather than simply responding to the more vocal groups who requested support.

One final "input" which has shown itself to be particularly important was the prior experience of the Communities@One Brokers themselves. As we reported in our Baseline Report, the Brokers collectively brought a wealth of relevant experience from previous employment to the Programme. This included:

- In two cases, experience of working on the "Everybody Online" programme which had similar broad aims to Communities@One and in two cases, experience of working with the Rhondda Cynon Taf "Shape.IT.org" project;
- In another two cases, having worked as an "e-learning" champion as part of the ELWa funded mapping project;
- In almost all cases, experience of hands-on community development work, including as Community First Co-ordinators. This appeared to be particularly important in equipping Brokers with the skills, and even more the instincts, they needed to cope with the often difficult circumstances in individual areas.

Perhaps even more importantly, there has been considerable stability in the *cadre* of Brokers: only one has resigned (and this Broker only left in June 2008 as the Programme was coming to an end). This contrasts very significantly with the turnover of Communities First Co-ordinators, which in the early days of Communities First was very high (as was reflected in our case-study areas). This appears to have been key to the Programme's ability to deliver effectively, as one of the Advisory Group commented:

"With one or two exceptions…it's been an incredibly impressive group of people….the intelligence with which they approached the projects, the passion and the absolute detailed knowledge that's what really impressed me…..wherever it [the Broker model] came from, it was a lynchpin to its success".

3.2 Processes

3.2.1 Communities@One and Wales-wide Stakeholders

We have already seen (Section 2.21) that an important contextual factor underpinning the implementation of Communities@One was the strong engagement with key external stakeholders, particularly those within the Advisory Group. This continued to be a major asset to the Programme throughout its life, with external stakeholders during the final phase of the fieldwork continuing to emphasise both their enthusiasm for and their positive experience of, the Programme:

"I found it one of the most rewarding groups I've worked on….because one of the things I think is quite rare is that everyone around that table wanted it to work for itself …I mean none of us got anything out of it….everyone wanted it to work and everyone had very different expertise to bring to it, which is why we'd all been asked I guess".

Stakeholders also generally believed that the Programme staff had made considerable efforts to engage at a national level with other key stakeholders such as

local government and the formal representative structures for the voluntary sector (the WCVA and County Voluntary Committees or CVCs) – though it was acknowledged by some that the response was inevitably patchy, given the short timescales involved in developing and delivering the Programme and the fact that the level of understanding and interest varied within partners':

"We haven't had the time or the luxury of being able to plan all those strategic links…

"Cynically, once they [the WCVA] didn't get the contract…their interest disappeared quite quickly and CVCs…very very patchy…they often take their lead from the WCVA anyway: apart from PAVS[95] and a few, not a huge buy in"

At the baseline stage, interviewees felt that the core relationships with the Social Justice and Regeneration Department and the Welsh Assembly Government in general were very well managed and this continued to be the case at the final stage of the evaluation, with a strong recognition of the crucial role of the project manager, himself a secondee from the Assembly Government.

"That's partly down to Alun Burge…..he's a great networker".

However, as already noted, the lack of a strong relationship with DCELLS was seen to be an issue, even towards the end of the Programme, and for some this was potentially a major problem:

"I think to be honest we all just gave up on DCELLS….but we can't do this in future…...so much of what Communities@One has been involved in and achieved, so much relates to the skills for work agenda….we have to make sure that…. the skills for work agenda… is reflected in the work that Communities@One 2 takes forward"

One area where some stakeholders, by the time of the final stage fieldwork, felt that the Programme had been less successful was in engaging effectively with the large private sector IT providers, though this was attributed less to any lack of effort on the part of the Programme than the difficulty of pinning down such players into real involvement:

"We've had a quite few meetings with private sector organisations, and there's a lot of lip service, but really very little else…they are so focused on their economic bottom line that everything else is just, they're not interested in, and CSR[96], their budgets are just so insignificant"

More surprisingly, perhaps one or two interviewees argued that more could have been done to integrate Communities@One with the business support agenda, including with the mainstream work of the Wales Co-operative Centre:

"Within the Coop…the business support bit which probably could have taken a greater interest has always been a bit separate".

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[95] Pembrokeshire Association for Voluntary Service, the Pembrokeshire CVC.
[96] Corporate Social Responsibility

This was acknowledged by Wales Co-operative Centre staff themselves who at the time of the fieldwork had been considering how the delivery of a successor Programme could be more integrated with the other staff of the Centre:

"[It's] something we would like to do a lot more of, that we haven't done enough of".

3.2.2 Broker Engagement with Local Stakeholders and Community Groups

Our baseline research suggested that in the early stages of the Programme, Brokers were mostly effective at making connections with key local stakeholders in terms of raising awareness of the Programme and the Grant Fund and of digital inclusion more generally. The vast majority of those who had had dealings with Brokers at this stage were highly complementary about the way in which the Brokers were doing their job.

"I'm astounded at the number of organisations he has engaged with in such a short time".

"She has been great...can't fault her".

In areas where Communities First was divisive, Brokers generally appeared to have avoided being drawn into the conflicts, and in some of these cases, were praised by the warring factions, even as they attacked each other.

However, it was clear that even in the early stages, different Brokers had adopted different tactics with regard to local stakeholders, with two cultivating close relationships with a wide range of partnerships and working groups relating to Communities First, regeneration and lifelong learning (which was positively regarded by all concerned, but which carried the downside that this could absorb considerable amounts of the Brokers' time), three working closely with Communities First team and others working fairly independently of the established stakeholders.

In later stages of our fieldwork it seemed clear to us that, as the Programme moved on, Brokers tended to become less engaged or visible to stakeholders such as Local Authorities and CVCs (except where the latter were themselves delivering projects). One Local Authority interviewee, for example, said:

"I've not really heard anything from [the broker] in the last year..."

a view echoed by the CVC in the same area. In other areas, outside stakeholders who were repeatedly contacted for the final stage of the research did not respond to our requests for interviews, which perhaps also reflects a low level of engagement with the Brokers or the Programme.

In terms of Communities First Co-ordinators and Partnerships, Brokers generally had good or reasonable contacts with the Partnerships, though to some extent these were driven by engagement by the Partnerships in Grant Fund projects: in half of our case-study areas, Communities First Partnerships were themselves grant recipients, and in three of these, these were the only projects to be funded. In the other areas, relationships with Communities First Partnerships were more limited: in three (one of which where relationships at the start had been good), there was no or very little contact, while in the fourth, where Communities@One funded the only significant voluntary organisation in the area, but one which was at loggerheads with the

Communities First Partnership, the Communities First Co-ordinator clearly regarded Communities@One with suspicion because of this involvement and claimed to have:

"Only met her [the Broker] *once".*

In the final case, one where at the time of our baseline research Communities First was in serious difficulties, relations between the Broker and Co-ordinator had become very close.

It is important to stress that in many ways, Brokers and Communities@One more generally have clearly done well to ensure reasonable working relationships with Communities First partnerships while maintaining a distinct identify and – given the highly conflicted nature of many Communities First Partnerships – to avoid being drawn into significant disagreements.

Only in one of our case-study areas was there at any point a significant conflict between Communities@One and Communities First and this was in the relatively early stages of the Programme. In this case, the Communities@One team acted quickly to try to heal the rift, (even though in many ways it would appear that the Broker had become caught up in other conflicts within the area) redeploying the Broker and employing a new Broker who succeeded in re-establishing a reasonable working relationship.

However, our fieldwork - not least with the Brokers themselves – suggested strongly that as the Programme progressed the focus of their work narrowed to concentrate on developing and supporting Grant Fund projects and that the part of their role which was originally seen as:

"Establish[ing] links and partnerships with key local agencies (community/voluntary, statutory and private) and develop[ing] their role in digital inclusion"[97].

seems to have withered under pressure of delivering the Grant Fund. This was reflected in a comment from Brokers in the summer 2007 research:

"We just don't have time to engage at the strategic level"'.

But it seems to have been equally true as the Programme was coming to an end (though it needs to be recognised that such interlocutors may also have had less interest in talking to Brokers once the Grant Fund monies started to be exhausted).

In terms of engaging with voluntary and community organisations, we found at the time of the baseline research that Brokers had generally been very effective at reaching out to organisations within the case-study areas, building on pre-existing networks and that no interviewees at that stage were able to identify voluntary and community organisations with whom any Broker might have worked who had not been engaged. Remarkably, perhaps, given the problems within some of the Communities First Partnerships, we also uncovered no suggestions that Brokers had been anything other than wholly impartial in the way they had gone about working with different groups.

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[97] See Section 2.3.4 above

At the same time, as we reported in our Baseline Report, in around half of all the cases, the Broker had worked directly with only a relatively small number of organisations, suggesting a tendency to concentrate on working fairly intensively with groups who could deliver "*quick wins"* in terms of developing grant applications.

This does not to appear have changed significantly during the lifetime of the Programme. As we have already noted, in five of the areas only one organisation accessed funding, and in the 18 months between the baseline and final research, outside two of the areas with the most dynamic voluntary and community sectors (where in total five new organisations *"came into the frame")* only two other new organisations across seven areas were brought into the Programme. In practice, this almost certainly reflects the relative dearth of appropriate voluntary and community organisations to work with, rather than any lack of imagination on the part of the Brokers but it does perhaps imply that the "outreach" activities were concentrated heavily on the early stage of the Programme when Brokers were driven by the need to identify Grant Fund projects. This, as we noted in our First Annual Report was echoed by a Broker who commented that they had not been in touch with a Communities First Co-ordinator in recent months because:

"I'm not marketing at the moment either".

Even so, another Broker believed that in "his" case-study area:

"Pretty much everyone who wanted a bite of the apple got it…I was desperate to give money away it was ridiculous".

The concentration on the delivering and supporting Grant Fund projects also appears to have reduced the emphasis – compared with the original intention of the Programme – on:

"Work[ing] in partnerships with local learning providers to create learning progression routes"[98].

During all three stages of our fieldwork, we found relatively little evidence of Brokers having close contact with some key statutory providers of ICT services, such as libraries, youth centres, family learning centres in schools, Further Education Colleges or the Digilabs, seeing their focus rather as working with individual groups who needed support[99], despite the fact that the Central Team was active in developing links and raising awareness of key organisations at a national level such as Cymal and FFORWM and, in the wake of our Baseline Report, in encouraging Brokers to make these linkages[100].

3.2.3 Grant Fund Processes: Applications and Appraisal

Turning first to the application and appraisal of Grant Fund projects, as we reported in our Baseline Report, almost all of the central stakeholders were convinced that in

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[98] Ibid.
[99] It is understood that as part of their initial training, Brokers were encouraged, quite understandably, to focus their efforts on engaging with the voluntary and community sector. Moreover, in the case of Digilabs WEFO advised the project that double funding rules prevented joint working between the two projects: in some cases, Brokers were clearly aware of what Digilabs were providing but did not engage with them for this reason.
[100] Advisory Group Meeting, 18 May 2007, Paper 5.

general terms the Grant Fund processes represented an extremely positive model of how to deliver a funding scheme for small voluntary and community organisations, with a particularly strong support for what was perceived as the very distinctive Broker model by which groups were given hands-on support to develop grant applications:

"Spending time and taking the trouble of working with people.. not telling them what to do, but pointing them in certain directions".

Stakeholders were also keen to explain that the role of the Grants Panel was not so much to filter out poor applications (since the proactive involvement of the Brokers and the Central Team meant that applications which were not suitable were identified at a much earlier stage) but rather was:

"A fine tuning process…we have a good look at them not to see if they need to be turned down but to see if they've thought through all the issues and in some cases we've offered more than they've wanted….hopefully we've mitigated the inexperience of some of the Brokers".

By the time of the final stage fieldwork, the enthusiasm for the Broker model on the part of both staff and other central stakeholders was undimmed:

"If we didn't have the broker model, I don't think we'd have got anywhere near as much money out…applications would have been less well prepared and projects would have failed. What the Brokers have been able to do is to continue to work on the ground with the projects".

"A lot of it has been down to the quality of the Brokers and the Broker manager who seems to be very organised and focused… from my point of view one of the most positive aspects….because we really learnt from Communities First".

"[As a member of the Grants Panel] you felt that all the difficult non-starters had been weeded out and didn't actually come to the table….and also the fact you felt some engagement had happened with these groups and they weren't just left floundering around trying to fill in an application form for a lottery grant or something"

Staff and other stakeholders also continued to pay tribute to the way in which the Grants Panel had played a key developmental role in terms of bringing forward robust and workable projects:

"[It] provided a lot of input and provided some assurance for the grants process".

However, views were more mixed as to whether the application process had been as smooth as it might have been, with some of the emerging doubts about the number of iterations required to move from initial application to approval (with separate comments being made by the Technical Support Officer, the Finance Officer, the internal "mini-Grants Panel and then the Grants Panel itself) expressed at the time of our 2007 report becoming more audible, particularly from the staff:

"Sometimes the external Grants Panel would raise different questions and we'd have to go back to the group again….whilst we were doing it seemed very reasonable, but now I wonder…..if the Brokers weren't really doing their jobs properly".

This interviewee argued that in hindsight there were common issues that kept on coming up and that Programme managers should have been more proactive at identifying these issues, highlighting them to Brokers and training them to make sure they did not come up over and over:

"Of course, we wouldn't have resolved 100%...but I think there were things that were more of a pattern, and then we could have addressed those. But as I said at the time, it seemed perfectly good, the system, but now in hindsight it was one of the feedbacks we have had, that the process was quite intense".

Other stakeholders recognised that the degree of detail required in applications appeared over the top, with one talking of the *"huge problems with the pickiness of some of the questions…".*- in particular with the need to be very specific indeed on expenditure*: "having to say down to the penny what each item is going to cost".*

Staff however, tended to see this as a result of concerns to achieve compliance with WEFO requirements:

"The process…has been given to them rather than developed internally….its certainly got a civil service type stamp on it. Next time I'd hope we'd look at [our processes] more deeply".

However, most of these views of what might, in hindsight, have been done better represented only relatively minor cavils compared to the achievement of stimulating and processing more than 200 applications in a Programme which was intended to last less than two years and with very few complaints:

"[It's] absolutely astounding….we've done what we've done in the way we planned to do it and largely got the outcomes we hoped, with hardly any single problem in that period…the fact you avoid problems isn't noticed".

"It's a neat and slick process…we've had very few complaints, so by reverse you think it must have been working fairly well".

In terms of the findings from the case-studies, it was quite clear at the baseline stage that for the smaller groups in particular, Brokers were very actively involved in developing Grant Fund projects, in advising on the specific way in which the project application should be completed and, in some cases, in actually writing the application on behalf of the applicant Groups.

"I get them to write them where I can or I get them to dictate what they want to me".

Echoing this, another Broker, who was fairly critical of the application form said that she often avoided

"Showing them [the applicants] *the whole form".*

In helping groups develop applications, this Broker's approach was to *"pick out some key questions for them to think about"* and then *"sit with them to address the silly questions".*

At the baseline stage, the applicants generally echoed this view, though perhaps unsurprisingly tending to play down the extent to which they had been happy to let

the Broker do much of the work: in one case, where the Broker said he had written the application, the Group said:

"We did it together…he asked the right questions... and helped to find the right words…we were together all the way through".

Another put it more forthrightly:

"[The Broker] came and asked us about our plans and ideas, then she put them into the right kind of words for the grant people and said 'how does this sound?'"

However, not all the Brokers were perceived as taking on such an active role: in one case (where there was a problematic pending application) a local stakeholder felt the Broker had not been sufficiently "hands-on", commenting on the fact she had been:

"Marking the application like a teacher in red pen".

While all the Brokers saw helping applicant groups to develop applications as integral to their role, at least four of them commented at the baseline stage that they felt the role had become too narrowly focussed on this aspect of their role. One believed that the process had become far too based around:

"Doing it for them…its very disenfranchising for the groups…the applications are really ones from the Communities@One team".

Despite this (minority) view, it was quite clear through our case-study fieldwork that the majority of Grant applicants were strongly appreciative of the role of the Broker in terms of developing and supporting applications which was seen as a distinctively different approach to other funders. One interviewee, for example, described the *"huge support"* they had received from the Broker and from Central Team staff in the Wales Co-operative Centre and described C@1 as *"one of the best funders".*

In all, of groups accessing the Grant Fund, around half (15 of 31) clearly felt that the support provided by the Broker was excellent with another ten feeling it was good[101].

Typical comments from applicants were:

"[The Broker] did a lot of really good work to help us and this made the first phase bid pretty straight forward".

"I can't speak highly enough of [the Broker]*…I wouldn't have been able to do the application without him".*

"I've got lots of regard for their [the Brokers] *enthusiasm and professionalism…I had as much support as I needed and a lot more than I usually get".*

The small number of projects (four) which were not satisfied with the Broker's inputs at the application stage were two projects in the case-study area where there was a major conflict with the Communities First Partnership (and where the Broker was

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[101] Project managers were asked to comment qualitatively rather than to provide a score. These rankings attributed by the project team on the basis of the comments made by Project Managers.

subsequently transferred), one in another case-study area where the Broker was kept at arms length by the Communities First Partnership and one of the project-based case studies.

Most groups with experience of different funding regimes believed that the process was relatively pain-free, though for some it was overlong: in a small number of cases, projects took more than twelve months from first being developed to being approved. Some project applicants were also confused by the fact that the ground rules appeared to change as the application progressed, which probably relates back to the fact of applications going through a succession of stages each of which resulted in comments and requests for changes (e.g. from the Technical Officer, the Finance Officer, the mini Grants Panel, the Grants Panel) which were channelled back through the Broker.

There were, however, a small minority of groups (six in all[102]) who were more heavily critical of the process. Interestingly, three of these were larger projects, including two of the project-based case studies. A typical comment here was:

"The whole process was a bit stifling and really irritating…I feel they showed a real lack of trust in us as partners. The level of detail they were asking of us on quotes for equipment was very restrictive and has not allowed us any flexibility within the project".

From our point of view as a research team, the application and appraisal process seems to have been a strength of Communities@One, with the Broker model a particularly interesting innovation. At the time of our Baseline Report, we were concerned that the very proactive engagement of Brokers in developing project ideas could have led to groups being deprived of ownership of the projects which had been submitted in their name. In practice, however, few of the projects appear to have failed to deliver (see section 3.3.2), which would indicate that this has not been the case to any real extent. Nor does the presumption of the Grants Panel in favour of support for projects (and for working with inadequate applications to improve them to the point where the projects could be funded) have appeared to resulted in a higher level of weak projects being supported than might have been expected in the case of a more competitive regime. At the same time, we would endorse the view of many applicants (and, in hindsight at least, the staff) that the process could have been streamlined to avoid applicant groups (and Brokers) being asked repeatedly to consider new issues as the appraisal process rolled forward.

3.2.4 Grant Fund Processes: Monitoring and Claims

If views of the application process were generally positive, views of the "downstream" processes, in particular those surrounding the claims and monitoring processes were much more mixed, though in some ways the most critical voices were from the Brokers, rather than from the groups which received funding.

During the fieldwork in mid-2007, one Broker argued that *"about 70%"* of their time was spent on financial issues and while this was, not perhaps, typical, it did reflect a general view that the processes surrounding the quarterly returns were onerous. By our last round of fieldwork, some Brokers acknowledged that systems had improved

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[102] This included one which was complementary and another neutral about the Broker inputs, but not the process as a whole.

somewhat, but several complained of the way Groups were *"bombarded"* with paper from the Central Team.

In practice, it is clear that for many of the smaller groups, Brokers were effectively required to provide very hands-on support to make sure the claims processes were completed:

"With some of them, we are talking to them several times a day".

While Brokers were generally complimentary about the support provided by the Central Team, several argued that they should have had much better training on how to help groups to complete the claims forms, one arguing that Brokers should have:

"Insisted on training on how to fill in these forms for groups … explanations on why they need to be filled in … that would have alleviated a lot of the stress and pressure we had in the first place."

As we noted in our 2007 report, even those Brokers with considerable community development experience expressed surprise over the apparent limited capacity and professionalism of even fairly large and experienced groups to deal with basic project management and the amount of hand-holding they required, though in some cases this was seen to relate to the fact that the Grant Fund project was not perceived as central to the organization. One Broker in the end concluded that he was being taken advantage of:

"I started off doing lots of work for groups helping them with claims, but then I realised they were having a laugh – they just wouldn't do any preparation and took the view "here's the paper you sort it out". So in the end I cut them loose, and guess what, almost all of them coped".

But other Brokers, even by the final stage of our research, were still effectively doing the hard work for Groups, as was recognised by the Groups themselves. In one area with a large number of projects, two interviewees from different projects commented:

"She's [the Broker] been invaluable … she got the quotes for us, she comes to help with the quarterly returns … I could have worked it out, but [the Broker] is more than happy to help and I'm more than happy to accept her help".

"I've done a bit of book-keeping over the years, but it didn't help much with the claim form … [the Broker] does it for me … but if the form could be made easier, it would save [her] a lot of time … not that she minds coming … she seems delighted that the project is up and running"

A third project in this same area said simply that the Broker came and *"she took all my receipts"* so as to fill in the claims forms.

Perhaps because of the extent to which projects were sheltered by Brokers from the work connected with the claims process, the view of projects themselves was, perhaps, less critical than that of the Brokers, though still significantly cooler than their assessment of the Broker inputs at application stage. Around half of the groups (15) appeared to have a "neutral" view of the claims process, in other words that it was neither good nor bad, with the remainder roughly split between those who thought they were excellent (1) or good (7) and those that thought they were poor

(6)[103]. One source of particular irritation for those who felt the claims process was poor was the fact that the system was manual not electronic or web-based:

"In this day and age, when everything is on computer, they should have been able to put that in electronic format with spreadsheets that you can just automatically adjust and that do all the totalling for you … you're reinventing the wheel all the time for no reason … and it would be easier to tie in to the electronic systems of our organisation".

Other common sources of complaint were the rigidity of the budgets agreed as part of the project approval process and the lack of flexibility to vire money between sub-heads. One manager of a small project cited an example of having budgeted for purchasing three memory cards for cameras: she had then found some very cheap cards at a lower specification but had had the expenditure queried when she had bought six cards even though they had the same memory in total as in the specification. Another larger project complained that the rigidity of the specification meant that it was in practice impossible to vire money (though in principle, projects were allowed to do so to up to 10% of a budget line) while a third argued that the lack of flexibility to depart from the budget headings agreed at the application stage:

"Made it more difficult for us to squeeze more out of the suppliers and secure value for money".

In general, most smaller projects appeared to have had excellent relations with the Broker after the Grant approval (which perhaps ties in to the impression that Brokers engagement has been in many case-study areas with a relatively small number of groups, with links established early on in the Programme). This was less true in two areas where Brokers had found it difficult to get around what were seen as blockages erected by Communities First Partnerships.

There also appears to have been somewhat less involvement post-approval with larger projects which were less likely to have had regular contact with Brokers, with one of the project-based case studies commenting during the 2007 fieldwork:

"I suppose I'd have thought they [the Brokers] might have popped in to see how it's going now and again, but to be honest, we've not really needed it".

Turning to the views of the central stakeholders, there were also mixed views of the monitoring and claims process, with several of the Central Team staff arguing that the processes could have been tweaked but not improved substantially:

"Maybe with hindsight we need to look at things a bit more carefully, but again generally there appears to have been a tight ship kept and things have run fairly smoothly".

Others acknowledged that there were problems, reporting that negative feedback on the claims process was:

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[103] Project managers were asked to comment qualitatively rather than to provide a score. These rankings attributed by the project team on the basis of the comments made by Project Managers.

"Pretty universal. Its pretty dense….all the people I've spoken to, 75% of the people raise the paperwork as a negative thing quite apart from the support of the Brokers".

A common view from the staff was that there had been too much emphasis on Brokers completing paperwork for groups rather than supporting them to do it for themselves. This was seen partly to result as a function of the Brokers often intense involvement with projects that they had helped develop:

"[the Brokers are] quite protective of some of their groups, they tend to fight their corner…they are highly passionate…I wouldn't say it's to the point of obsession, but they are hugely motivated, hugely passionate about their projects."

But largely it was seen to result from the very limited capacity of groups, many of whom had never accessed external funding before:

"In many cases we were their [the groups'] very first funding …. and it must have been really scary".

In hindsight, central staff argued it would have been far better to place a much stronger emphasis on training groups in the processes around submitting claims, rather than relying so heavily on the Brokers:

"In hindsight it seems clear to me we could have brought groups together and given some training in basic finance reporting, so they would be less dependent on the Brokers and would gain some skills which could serve them in good stead in the future. Many groups depended entirely on Brokers to do their claims for them, but we could have instead given them the skills they needed for the future…sometimes the level of support can be detrimental to the group because they are not learning from the process because they have someone to do it for them".

However, this was attributed by several interviewees to the over-strong focus on the Grant Fund, at the expense of providing staff resource within the Programme to undertake developmental work with funded Groups:

"But in reality we've always been short of internal resources. I think we could have done a better job with more people giving support, developmental support, project management support once the projects were up and running rather than all the money going to the group and I think that's a lesson learnt".

3.2.5 Capturing and Disseminating Good Practice

At the time of our Baseline Report, we found that central stakeholders were not generally convinced that mechanisms were already in place to capture good practice, but felt this would assume increasing importance as Programme moved on from project development to implementation.

By the time of our 2007 report, most central stakeholders felt progress was being made on this despite the pressures of the continued high level of work on developing and delivering Grant Fund projects. In particular, stakeholders referred to:

- the fact that a series of workshops focussed on internet safety and new technologies had been held in the early part of the year, and although not explicitly marketed as promoting the sharing of good practice, were felt by

several interviewees to have started the process and encouraged projects to share ideas.

- ▪ the fact that work was in hand to commission a much more inter-active website which would enable projects to communicate with each other and to record achievements, including a set of case-studies.

During our final stage fieldwork, it was clear that from the point of many of the stakeholders ensuring that good practice was identified, recorded and disseminated was still work in progress, with several worried that this was less advanced than might have been expected. One key member of the Grants Panel said, for example:

"I think it's a shame that we haven't got the time or the resources to do more about spreading the learning".

This interviewee argued that there might be scope to engage academics during any successor project in:

"Researching in a much more thorough way and writing up what has happened and spreading good practice".

Another stakeholder argued that:

"I think Communities@One itself has been showcased at a European level….but the good practice is something that they really need to be doing now".

And a third said:

"I do worry that a lot of this stuff is just in Brokers' heads and if the Broker goes or there is no future project, it's gone…we need to gather up this content which has been made, scoop it up and put it somewhere we can use it".

This last interviewee was very critical of the new website:

"In terms of wider learning and wider sharing, I still don't think as good as its should be….I've been on the re-launched website and I still can't see many bloody projects… the website's poor…its better than it was, because it was awful….its gone from awful to poor".

While this was perhaps an extreme view, several other stakeholders felt that the website still needed improvement to make it *"more vibrant"* and *"more interactive"*, and when we visited it in August 2008, there were still only seven case-studies featured (although there were project descriptions and contact details for all the projects which had been funded).

Staff who were interviewed stressed that work was in hand to develop a larger number of case-studies, as well as project descriptions for all Grant Fund projects, though to some extent this was seen as being driven by WEFO requirements:

"The key…is to have them on file and then made available, I think…the major issue is to get them off the Welsh Assembly and that they are seen".

They and other stakeholders also referred positively to the Digital Inclusion Wales conference which was seen to have been a great success:

"[The conference] was fantastic. A few more of those, a few more regional or local events if we had time, would be great".

Interviewees also referred to the work of Brokers in terms of *"digital legacy",* arguing that while the nature of this work varied from area to area, some had been very effective at developing networks between funded projects:

"We made groups sit down around the table and think about their own issues and what they could do about them".

This inevitably involved discussion of good practice and experience. Moreover, as it became clear there might be a future project, so the concept of legacy had changed from an effort to:

"Ensure that two, two and half years of work would not be lost… it became how we can make what we have done function more effectively, have a greater impact on the community, how can we through collaborative work and joint resource make it a more effective digital inclusion initiative".

By contrast, however, one central stakeholder who also had been involved at the sharp end of organising events felt that, in practice, not only had the Programme been short of resources for encouraging the sharing of good practice, but that it had also been difficult to persuade groups to participate:

"Just trying to get people together to discuss commonalities has been really difficult …if we'd thought or had more time, we probably should have started some of the technical stuff earlier on, and earmarked some resources to incentivise groups to get together……what is a little bit disappointing, but perhaps not a surprise is how little the funded groups want to talk to each other…it's been the minority willing to travel…with the project we've been doing, we've found its difficult to get them even to travel two miles".

This last comment reflects, to quite some extent, what we found in terms of our case-study fieldwork – though does need to be seen in the context of many of the funded groups having very few, if any paid staff, relying rather on volunteers, often with very many other commitments.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, at the time of our baseline research we found that, from the perspective of the Grant Fund projects, relatively little appeared to have happened to put in place mechanisms for developing networks or sharing good practice between projects, while in our 2007 report, we referred to the efforts by the Communities@One team to encourage Communities@One funded digital storytelling projects to participate in the [Welsh] national digital storytelling conference held in June of that year.

Disappointingly, perhaps, our last phase of fieldwork suggested a relatively low level of engagement, particularly on the part of smaller groups with networking and good practice activities, even though these have been stepped up by the Programme.

Only seven of the 31 groups we interviewed participated in the Digital Inclusion Conference in Cardiff[104] and views from those who did participate were somewhat mixed. One of the larger projects felt that the conference:

"Was OK… the breakout sessions were a bit too basic [but there were] some good presentations on software for the blind by the RNIB".

This and another interviewee also felt that the conference could have usefully taken place somewhat earlier in the life of the Programme:

 "It came a bit late in the day….We were all a bit deflated and preoccupied with future funding by the time the conference came".

However, another project found the Conference "*enlightening"* while a fourth was pleased to have:

"Been picked to be showcased… in between all the big people like Network Training and your Digital UK Switchover".

It might be thought that the relatively low engagement with the Conference by "our" projects was relatively atypical given the high number of delegates at the event, but it is clear from the Delegate list that many of the projects which did attend were represented by a number of individuals and that in total around 65 projects, or around a third of all the organisations funded by Communities@One took part[105].

Overall, only a minority of the groups with funded projects in our case-studies (nine out of 32) appeared to have engaged with any events organised through Communities@One. Apart from the Conference some had attended the regional training workshops organised in 2007 and a small number had been involved with *"digital legacy"* events organised by Brokers. Feedback from these events was again somewhat mixed, with enthusiasm from some (*"[we've] really used C@1 facilities and it's really paid off for us"*) balanced by mild scepticism (*"it was a bit basic"*) from others.

Particularly in the Valleys case-study areas, a common view was that events were often too far away (even where, objectively, the distances involved were not great). One Broker believed that funded groups in her area:

"Threw their invitations into the bin"

when invited to the Conference in Cardiff. Another project manager said that no-one had attended any training events because:

"We're a bit out of the way here".

These views were echoed by another Broker, who speaking of efforts to network funded groups said:

"I don't think that took off particularly well".

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[104] This is confirmed by the Delegates List within the Conference Report
[105] It needs to be borne in mind that several organisations received two separate Grant Fund projects.

This Broker believed voluntary and community organisations in his area simply were not geared up to engage in these sort of exchanges:

"Even though I might say to [a funded project] you might speak to so and so, here's the address, here's the phone number, they won't have done it".

Aside from events, few projects were able to cite good practice materials or activities which they had accessed as a result of participating in Communities@One, though one larger project had been involved with an exchange with another project in a different part of Wales. None referred spontaneously to the Communities@One website.

Even though many of the projects had failed to participate in the networking opportunities which had been offered, some case-study interviewees (generally from larger projects) felt not enough had been done to encourage networking and sharing of good practice:

"It would have been nice if Communities@One had facilitated a bit of exchange of experiences between the projects. That would have been really useful".

By contrast, there has clearly been a great deal of interaction and mutual learning between the Brokers over the life time of the Programme. Most Brokers spoke warmly of the working relationships between the team and the use made of e-mail and 'Skypeing' to keep in touch and to seek the advice of their peers where problems arose.

3.2.6 Internal Management Processes

Overall, the internal management processes of Communities@One appear to have worked well – certainly in terms of enabling the Programme to succeed in bringing forward a large number and a wide range of Grant Fund projects – but have not been without their difficulties.

In our Baseline Report we reported apparent problems in communications between Brokers and the Central Team, with several Brokers concerned that they did not have an effective overview of the way in which the Programme was operating and feeling that:

"Goal posts kept changing".
.
There were also concerns about what were perceived as high levels of long-term sickness, which were in part seen to be related to levels of stress.

By the final stage of our fieldwork, many of the Brokers acknowledged that communication had improved, and believed that they had a good and effective relationship with colleagues in the Central Team, with one describing the finance team, for example as:

"Really, really helpful".

This was echoed by Central Team interviewees:

"Right from the off, we've integrated quite well to the team…You are in contact with the Brokers all the time".

"The relationship has been fantastic….if there is something which isn't right on a claim, we don't have to ring the group, we can talk to the Broker and they will get to the bottom of it".

Moreover, as noted in Section 3.1.2 above, there has been considerable stability with no staff turnover amongst the Brokers, and issues over sickness absences appear to have been significantly fewer over the last 18 months of the Programme.

At the same time, however, several Brokers still felt that they were not fully supported and that management at the Centre had insufficient understanding of circumstances on the *"front line"*:

"Although the channels of communication are open they are not....really open, or they're open but there are consequences if you use them, because you then have to go into detailed descriptions of what you are doing and why you are doing it, because [management] doesn't understand what's going on on the ground….You don't dare put your head above the fence because it will get shot off…"

This and several other of the Brokers felt that regular team meetings were too structured and "top down".

More senior staff, however, tended to argue that relationships had definitely improved and that:

"The structure is right. You need the central stuff going on…you need the people out in the field but with the backing of the things that need to be done centrally like finance and marketing".

One common view (expressed by both Brokers and those in the central team) was that it had, in retrospect, been a mistake to try to manage the Programme with only one Broker Manager, after the second had resigned:

"It's a format that wouldn't work on a long-term basis".

Another area where frustrations were shared between the Brokers and the Central Team related to the ICT platform of the Wales Co-operative Centre which was felt to be inadequate and where several staff argued that a fundamental redesign was necessary.

As we noted in our 2007 report, one response to the concerns about staff welfare had been to make some changes to the arrangements with regard to the location of Brokers in order to reduce the sense of isolation which Brokers could experience. Two Brokers in North-West Wales were relocated to the Co-operative Centre's Bangor Office while two of the Valleys Brokers were now based at the Centre's Pontypridd Office, while later in 2007, an office in Swansea was acquired to provide a base for a number of the South-West Wales Brokers. This represented a move away from the original conception of the Brokers as *"centrally managed but outlocated".*

Brokers did not generally comment on these changes and indeed there was little feedback from other interviewees, apart from one Local Authority "host" who felt that

the move had reduced the communication with the Broker and hence the Authority's awareness of his activities. However, while it is at least possible that the reduced issues about sickness and stress might be related to this development (since it was clear at the time of our baseline research that several Brokers felt isolated), it is also possible that this change has contributed to what has appeared to be the declining engagement with local external stakeholders (see 3.2.2 above) – though in reality this probably results more from the pressures on the Brokers to deliver the Grant Fund.

In terms of the information systems, financial systems appear to have worked well and have provided good and timely data about progress in achieving financial targets. Certainly, both the Communities Directorate and WEFO were very content with the information they received.

At the time of writing this report, the Monitoring Database was not fully populated, and it is therefore difficult to reach a judgement on its effectiveness. However, it does seem clear that the monitoring system has been effective in ensuring Brokers and the Central Team have been alert to projects which are underperforming and has enabled them to intervene, thus minimising the risk of financial under-performance. Certainly, Central Team members were very positive about this, though recognising that in practice, too much has been expected of the Monitoring Officer, and that this has in turn, thrown more pressure back on to the Brokers.

In terms of the Advisory Group and the Grants Panel, as already noted, members were generally very positive about the work of these two bodies. However, some felt that it was the Grants Panel rather than the Advisory Group which had driven the Programme and one stakeholder went so far as to suggest that:

"Frankly, I don't think it [the Advisory Group]'s been worth very much".

3.3 Immediate Effects (Outputs)

3.3.1 Development and Implementation of Grant Fund Projects: Overview

We have noted in Chapter 2 how the Grant Fund, which was originally expected to be of £5.05 million was progressively increased, first as a result of virement from the Technical Support Budget which increased the Fund to £6.618 million[106] (an increase of some 31% over the original budget for the Grant Fund) and secondly as a result of increased funding allocated by WEFO as a result of the fall in the value of the pound against the euro. This increased the Grant Fund to over £7.5 million out of a total of funding allocated to the project of £10.457 million. It is worth noting that this means that the Grant Fund has increased from just over 50% of the total funding for the Programme agreed at its outset to around 75% of total Programme costs.

As we noted in our Baseline Report, the decision to vire substantial resources into the Grant Fund from Technical Support and Central Services (marketing), was based on what was seen as low demand for the initially allocated funding for Technical Support. This was attributed by Programme managers partly to the recruitment of the Technical Support Officer (who had been able to offer advice and support direct to Grant Fund applicants and projects), partly to the way in which organisations

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[106] A virement early in 2007 raised the allocation to £6.4 million, with a virement from the Specialist Support budget line agreed by WEFO in summer 2007.

represented on the Advisory Group had given additional more specialist support free of charge, and partly due to the fact that Grant Fund projects had generally factored in technical support (provided by local suppliers) to their applications, rather than seen this as a stand-alone issue. Although some Advisory Group members expressed some nervousness about this, the overwhelming majority clearly believed this was a sensible use of resources, particularly in the light of the fact that several larger projects which fitted with the original purpose of the Specialist Support budget were instead funded from the Grant Fund as this provided a clear and straightforward mechanism for agreeing to release resources.

Tables 3.1 – 3.3 provide information on the current levels of commitments (and in the case of the Objective areas, actual cash paid out) from the Grant Fund, segmented by Objective area, by region and by project value, with comparisons with the original budget.

By any standards – and even allowing for the fact that since claims are paid quarterly in advance, it is possible that there will be some degree of clawback from Grant Fund projects – these figures represent a stunning achievement for the Programme in terms both of achieving a very high level of expenditure in a new grant scheme (delivered from a standing start in just over two years) and of good financial management, particularly given the requirement to manage budgets fragmented by no less than five separate funding regimes[107]. Our concerns at the time of our 2007 report that there might be underspends seem not to have been realised, thanks to sound programme management.

As Table 3.1 reveals, overall funds to a total of £7.44 million have been committed (of which more than 99% have already been paid out) compared to an original plan for the Grant Fund of commitments of only £5.05 million – an increase of nearly 50%.

Most importantly, these high levels of financial commitment have not been achieved by compromising the commitment to a bottom up approach and the emphasis on smaller, grassroots projects – which perhaps might have been expected given the pressure to spend an enhanced budget.

As Table 3.3 shows, more than 214 individual projects have been funded (with a mean value of £34,767) but more than half of the projects (109 of the 214) have been for less than £14,999. The 17 largest projects (over £100,000) account for 43% of the total value of all Grant Fund projects. This compares with the situation at the time of our Baseline Report where the eight large projects then approved accounted for 57% of all funds committed and when the mean value of projects funded was £39,301.

In terms of the spatial dimension, Table 3.2 shows that the Programme has achieved a good level of spend across the different spatial categories as defined by the Programme. However, one slight concern (echoing a trend apparent at the time of the 2007 Report) is that spend within the Valleys area, while comfortably exceeding the original target has nevertheless been at a lower level, relative to the original budgets than is true for the other areas.

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[107] i.e. the separate Structural Fund projects of Objective 1, Objective 2 Core, Objective 2 Rural, Objective 2 Transitional and the non-Structural Fund monies provided by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Table 3.1: Funds Allocated and Paid out as at 5 August 2008 by Objective Area

Objective Area	Non Obj	Obj 1	Obj 2 Core	Obj 2 Rural	Obj 2 Trans	Grand Total
Total Allocated (a)	£448,557.35	£6,252,222.20	£571,684.75	£92,932.83	£74,863.48	£7,440,260.61
Total Paid Out (b)	£447.537.39	£6,217,578.36	£560,342.92	£90,137.98	£69,198.03	£7,384,793.78
Original Budget (c)	£367,570.00	£4,153,616.00	£431,037.00	£57,338.00	£43,039.00	£5,052,600.00
Paid as % of funds allocated (b/a)	99.77%	99.4%	98.02%	96.99%	92.43%	99.25%
Paid as % of original budget (b/c)	121.76%	149.69%	129.99%	157.2%	160.78%	146.16%

Table 3.2: Funds Allocated as of 5 August 2008 by region

	Cities	NE Wales	NW Wales	Other (Powys & Mon)	South (Valleys)	SW Wales	Grand Total
Total Allocated (a)	£1,461,100.87	£634,592.64	£961,777.18	£106,189.84	£3,458,909.96	£817,690.12	£7,440,260.61
Original Budget (b)	£771,895.25	£371,693.68	£543,463.78	£65,945.80	£2,989,050.76	£310,550.73	£5,052,600.00
Allocated as %of original budget (a/b)	189.29%	170.73%	176.97%	161.06%	115.72%	263.3%	147.26%

Table 3.3 Project Size by Value as at 5 August 2008

	Total	
Value	Total	Number
Less £5,000	£85,270.40	32
£5,000 - £14,999	£729,929.94	77
£15,000 - £49,999	£1,680,036.79	62
£50,000 - £99,999	£1,742,311.04	26
£100,000 +	£3,202,712.44	17
Total	£7,440,260.61	214

Admittedly, we understand that these original budgets were only intended as broad indicators. Moreover, as we highlighted in our 2007 report, a part of the reason for this may be the decision (in agreement with the local authority) at the start of the Programme not to pro-actively market Communities@One in Rhondda Cynon Taf, because of concerns this could lead to confusion with the separate, Objective 1-funded Shape-IT.org project. Since RCT has the largest eligible population of any local authority, this has inevitably had an impact. It is also the case that in some other Valleys areas (notably Caerphilly), large numbers of projects have been developed, but these have generally been only small in terms of financial value, reflecting perhaps the limited capacity or willingness to engage of some of the voluntary and community sector organisations in these areas (something which appears to be the case from our case-study findings).

Nevertheless, this relative underperformance in the Valleys (a level of commitment 15% above the original budget in the context of an increase in the overall budget for the Grant Fund in the Objective 1 area of nearly 50%), given the concentration of deprivation in the Valleys communities, is the only (very small) disappointment in what is an outstandingly good performance.

However, it is also worth emphasising that the achievement of supporting the development and implementation of so many projects has represented a huge management and administrative challenge for the Programme. Moreover, despite the anticipation at the time of our baseline fieldwork that project development would be concentrated in the earlier phases of the Programme, leaving more time towards the end of the Programme for work on dissemination, sharing good practice and developing future strategies, in practice the increase in the Grant Fund project meant that the pressure on Brokers and the Central Team in terms of processing Grant Fund applications has been significant for much of the Programme's lifetime. This is shown by the fact that by December 2006, 76 projects had been approved; by June 2007 this had risen to 157, but a further 57 projects were only approved after June 2007 – in other words less than 12 months before the intended end of the Programme.

In terms of project quality and variety, we found during our fieldwork in 2007 that Brokers and other central stakeholders argued that more recent projects tended to be smaller and more varied, but increasingly focussed on equipment rather than staff, for the obvious reason that time was now too short to recruit staff for a meaningful period of employment and suggested that this risked moving the Programme away from its focus on building confidence and competence on the part of the digitally excluded.

However, during our final stage fieldwork, most central stakeholders believed that an appropriate balance had been struck:

"I think generally making sure that where people have had money it's been geared to the deliverables, not just getting a pile of kit…that has happened".

"The vast majority has been on revenue, staff…..I do think that has been carried through. It's about engaging people with the technologies…not about funding that building by there, for people to sit in all day with no-one coming".

"There probably are examples where kit has been bought for kit's sake but they are few and far between… whoever thought of having a technical support officer within the team ought to have a medal, because it allowed us to make sure the kit was going…to be used effectively, rather than having a very high spec PC sitting on a desk that was only ever used for sending e-mails".

While, in contrast to the situation at the time of our Baseline Report, there were few concerns about the quality of projects which had come forward, a small number of stakeholders did express some surprise at:

"The number of applications we had which seemed to be basically providing a place with a few computers where people would go and do things".

In other words, providing "drop-in" centres, as opposed to *"more imaginative"* projects focused on meeting the specific needs of voluntary and community groups. Another member of the Advisory Group and Grant Panel commented:

"Whenever I saw those applications about 'we want another co-ordinator', my heart wasn't exactly singing… but then we had the robust evidence that this was what the community wanted…overall, though I think there was a very wide range of projects".

Overall, though, most stakeholders echoed the views of one of the staff:

"I still think, how many projects, how much money, with so few staff, a heck of a lot has been achieved".

We have already noted that the way in which the Programme was developed means that little in the way of aggregate data will be available even at the end of the Programme, with the exception of an overall number of beneficiaries engaged by the Grant Fund projects. An interim figure for this as of March 2008 is a little over 33,600 beneficiaries which is clearly an extraordinary figure. It is important to realise, however, that this may involve a considerable amount of double counting, both within and between projects, as an interviewee explained:

"What we were counting was training places, course places, bums on seats…there are 33,000 training places…. but you've got a digital storytelling course, a digital photography course, a website development course and if the same individual does all three they are counted three times".

Our fieldwork with individual projects (see next section) did not suggest that figures reported to the Central Team were particularly inflated, though in many cases they were estimates and clearly did contain this sort of double-counting (and in a few cases may have reflected individual sessions attended, with one individual counted

many times if, for example, they attended a centre several times a week). It is also true that we found many beneficiaries who had been involved in several different projects. However, even allowing for this, there appears to be good grounds to echo the view of one member of the Advisory Group:

"Generally, I've been really pleased with the way it seems to have got out to ordinary people out there, getting a lot of people engaged. I know the numbers are bandied around…if it's anywhere near that 30,000, if it's a third of that, we'll have done terrifically well".

3.3.2 Development and Implementation of Grant Fund Projects: Findings from Case-Studies

As we have already noted, in total our case-studies looked at some 39 projects. This compares with 25 which were considered during our Baseline fieldwork and a total of 30 projects which were "live" at the time of the 2007 fieldwork (which reflects the point made earlier that a significant proportion of projects were only approved in what was expected to be the last 12 months of the project).

However, six groups accounted for 12 of the 39 projects (because in each case the group in question received two separate Grant Fund projects) – two of these were from the project-based case-studies.

While generally our area-based case-studies excluded projects which covered a much wider geographical area than the targeted ward, we did include five projects relating to three case-study areas which were County wide, in order to "test" the importance of these for local areas. In a small number of cases, projects which were based in neighbouring Communities First areas but which were intended also to serve the case-study area in question were also included.

By the time of our final stage fieldwork, all of the ten case-study areas examined had seen at least one project developed. However, as already noted, there was quite a wide range of experience.

- In one ward, a total of 12 projects were approved from ten different organisations (though one of these is not included in our sample, because of constraints of time);
- In a second area, there were four projects (all for grants of less than £15,000) brought forward by four organisations: in this area, we also looked at an additional three County-wide projects;
- In another area, there were four projects brought forward by three organisations (though all were for values below £50,000): in this area, we also looked at a County-wide project;
- In a fourth area, there were three projects brought forward by three organisations;
- In five areas, only one organisation received funding from the Grant Fund, though in one of these cases the organisation received two separate Grants (and in one area we also considered a County-wide project). In two of these areas, the projects were also small (less than £15,000);
- In the tenth area, which was the site of one of the project-based case-studies we did not consider other projects.

As has already been explained in Section 3.1.2, generally those areas where most activity has taken place were those which at the baseline stage were regarded as ones with the most vibrant voluntary and community sector (or in one case, a not particularly large but well-networked sector) – and there appears to be a stronger correlation between this factor and the success of Communities@One than between the state of Communities First and the Programme's success. In fact, in three of the areas where there was most activity, Communities First had been regarded as highly problematic during the time of our baseline research, though in one, the situation improved dramatically over the lifetime of the Programme. One of the four most "lively" Communities@One areas was in a South Wales city, one in a relatively large North Wales town and the other two were in the Heads of the Valleys.

However, the fact that single projects were brought forward in two areas where, even at the time of our 2007 research, there was no activity and where we believed that it was unlikely projects would be developed, suggests the extent to which Brokers have attempted to ensure a wide spread of Grant Fund activity. These areas – along with the other three areas where there was only limited activity by Communities@One - were ones which either were relatively isolated from other Communities First areas (two areas), had poor or dysfunctional Communities First Partnerships (four areas) and/or a small number of active voluntary and community organisations (all five areas).

Table 3.4 shows the breakdown of "our" projects by grant size (and for comparative purposes looks at the breakdown at the time of our Baseline Report):

Table 3.4: Breakdown of case-study projects by grant size

Value	No of projects (Final research)	*No. of projects (Baseline)*
Less than £5,000	8	*5*
£5,000 - £14,999	13	*5*
£15,000 - £49,999	7	*5*
£50,000 - £99,999	5	*4*
£100,000 +	6	*6*
TOTAL	39	*25*

The distribution is clearly a good match with that of the distribution of projects across the Programme as a whole (Table 3.3): for example, 21 (54%) of our projects were under £14,999 compared to 51% of all projects, with 11 of our projects (28%) being over £50,000 compared to 20% of all projects.

Comparing the position at the baseline stage to that at the final research stage, it is possible to see that there was what we termed in our 2007 report as a *"bulge towards the middle"*, with relatively fewer very small projects being developed: by the final stage fieldwork, more than half the projects were in the value range £5,000 - £49,999, compared to 40% in December 2006. This also reflects a wider Programme trend: in December 2006, 50% of all projects (by number) were in the range £5,000 - £49,999 and 25% less than £5,000: by the time of this report that had altered to 64% and 15% respectively. This may have reflected a rising awareness (not least on the part of the Brokers) that the administrative overheads of very small projects were very high.

In terms of what our projects were setting out to do, this was quite varied. Overall, it can be said that:

- The vast majority (37) involved purchasing ICT equipment, and in the case of 16 of the projects, the costs were almost entirely "kit" (though often with a small element of technical support bought in from a supplier). There was a quite clear trend later in the Programme for "kit only" applications to be approved – at the time of our baseline research only six out of 21 projects fell into this category, with only a minority of projects having equipment as the main category of expenditure.

- Around 18 of the projects involved employing staff either on an employed basis (the majority) or a freelance/sessional basis. Almost all these projects were approved early on in the Programme's life – which is understandable given that the timescales for recruiting staff on a meaningful temporary contract would have precluded approving projects which involved employed staff in the last year or so of the Programme (and as we have seen, more than a third of these projects were approved between December 2006 and June 2008).

- 22 projects (more than half) involved providing some sort of "drop-in" or open access ICT facilities at a permanent physical location. Most (but by no means all) of these involved some form of mediation or mentoring support paid for by the Programme, but some had very limited opening hours (in one case, two evenings a week between 5pm and 8pm, in another, only when a Committee member of the organisation could be present, for example). Some were in practice restricted to particular client groups (because of religious or cultural principles e.g. the desirability of gender segregation).

- 13 projects involved providing additional staff resources or equipment to pre-existing drop-in facilities.

- Around 12 projects were principally focused on meeting the internal needs of the community organisation involved: such projects included a Football Club wanting to improve the presentation of its programmes; a Credit Union acquiring laptops to support the training of its volunteers in its own systems and to enable better research and presentation; a cancer charity acquiring ICT equipment to develop on-line selling from its charity shop and to enable it to make better presentations to funders; and two separate groups acquiring music-related equipment.

- Seven projects involved an element of digital storytelling as a way of engaging individuals and/or community groups with ICT (though in some cases this was regarded as a secondary goal, compared to the primary aim of engaging with excluded individuals): most of these were approved early on in the lifetime of the Programme.

- A number of projects were focused on providing help not only to individuals but to community groups, and to some extent represented a "cascading down" of what Communities@One itself was seeking to achieve. Altogether, there were around nine projects where this was an element – four of them promoted in two of the project-based case studies and two other County-wide projects which we sampled as part of the area case-study work. These included elements of supporting website design for voluntary and community groups (seven – though in some activity had been very limited, and in the case of one of our project-based case-studies, the emphasis had shifted in

the lifetime of the projects from creating websites to encouraging community groups to use blogging); providing technical support and training in technical support to community groups (seven projects); supporting groups to develop digital storytelling projects (two projects); providing ICT mentoring and informal training to members of community groups (two groups).

- Two (large) projects involved elements of providing technical support and servicing to individuals with problems with ICT equipment and training volunteers; though one of these was principally focussed on providing technical support for a network of pre-existing learning and access centres.

- Two projects involved recycling computer equipment and providing them at low cost to members of the community.

None of our 39 case-study projects were supporting broadcasting (although of course such projects have been funded elsewhere by the Programme). Also, interestingly, despite the emphasis in the Guidance[108] on the broad definition of ICT (for example, multi-media applications) most of the projects were focussed on fairly conventional uses of PCs and Macs, and of the internet – with the partial exception of those projects involving "digital storytelling" – while content projects were generally restricted to the development of websites or blogging.

In terms of the Objectives set for Communities@One at the outset[109], our case-study projects suggest that:

- Many of the projects were related to the Objective to support **ICT enabled communities** *("to encourage and support community use of ICT to ensure ICT access, skills progression and outreach to the disengaged)*: indeed the majority of projects had an element of enabling access to internet-enabled PCs, with most of these supported by appropriate staffing. This certainly related clearly to the aim of *"ensuring that suitable ICT support provision is made available throughout the project area".* It is also true that in many cases, projects built on *"existing provision"* and, in general terms, we found few, if any examples, of Communities@One financing facilities which in any sense competed with other pre-existing facilities. The partial exceptions to this related to Digilabs (though despite the guidance which discouraged collaboration, in at least two cases Communities@One projects worked closely with under-used Digilabs) and the provision of often neighbouring facilities, but targeted at very different ethnic or demographic profiles. Only in one of the most problematic areas was there a case where two Communities@One projects funded organisations supported two different "drop in" centres without a clear rationale of why they should be distinct, apart from rivalries within the community. It is less clear that the provision has been *"delivered to common quality thresholds"* – though in reality this was probably a "tall order". There has been a wide mix between projects where open access facilities have been provided with very professional mentoring/support to ones where existing staff of Communities First or other organisations have simply been present to support users using their own knowledge.

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[108] P. 26 on
[109] See Section 2.2

▪ In terms of **National and local information structures,** the objective of ensuring that *"local projects….are well guided and have the capacity to deliver results"* was intended to be delivered through the Programme's own structures rather than directly by funded projects (and as we have already seen, Programme processes, particularly the proactive engagement of the Brokers with projects throughout their life, has largely delivered against this Objective). However, in the early days of the Programme (as we reported in our Baseline Report) there was some discussion of working with a range of regional organisations (including PAVS, the Scarman Trust and Deudraeth) to develop a national network which could provide support to the voluntary and community sector across the whole of Wales, but this does not appear to have come fully to fruition.

▪ In terms of **A community sector enabled by ICT**, as we have seen around a third of our case-study projects involved working with individual community organisations to enhance their use of ICT in order to deliver against the core objectives, while around a quarter of projects themselves worked to provide support to community groups. Thus the Grant Fund appears not only to have operationalised the Objective as intended (*"the project will resource local community Brokers to provide support to develop a range of projects")* but also to have concretely focussed on projects which aimed to provide support to a range of voluntary and community organisations to *"up their game"* in terms of their use of ICT.

▪ Finally, in terms of **better enabled service delivery**, this is the one of the original Programme objectives where it is most difficult to see any relationship with the Grant Fund projects. In practice, none of the 39 projects which we examined had as a main aim to *"encourage communities to better engage with key service deliverers"* and we found no real evidence of projects which were focusing on encouraging or enabling individuals to use ICT to interact with service providers: much more common hooks were on-line shopping or booking holidays, or research and activities relating to the particular interests of individual community groups. Nor were any projects related to the objective of *" encourag[ing] service providers to make innovative use of the medium in order to forge better links with communities and fine tune their services to local need"* though, it needs to be remembered that, as statutory organisations could not apply for the Grant Fund, this part of the objective would effectively need to have been delivered by other means than the Grant Fund. It is also true, of course, as several central stakeholders commented:

"If you use the internet to search friends reunited, Tesco on line, then you'll use the internet to search for when your bins are going to be collected".

We have already seen in Section 3.3, that the Brokers played a critical role in proactively working with community groups to develop projects. As we reported in our Baseline Report, it was often clear that Brokers had not only facilitated the grant application process but had also played a significant role in developing the project ideas and in injecting elements which the project sponsor had not always thought of. In particular, it was clear that Brokers had often been responsible for flagging up the need to address issues around training or mentoring, rather than focussing on equipment – something which is clearly in line both with the philosophy of the Programme and the findings of prior research which informed it.

In terms of the counter-factual, it is possible to separate the projects into a number of broad categories, though it is important to recognise that these can not be regarded as definitive:

- Around ten of the projects were essentially project ideas which were already relatively well-developed and which used Communities@One as a funding source to implement them. This included all four of the projects related to the project-based case-studies and a number of smaller projects, which often were focused largely on equipment. It is possible that some of these smaller projects would have been funded without the programme – for example, by the Communities First Trust Fund, the Social Risk Capital Fund or by Lottery funding – although it is interesting that even where there were potential ideas in our control group areas, none of them got off the ground. However, it is much less likely that the larger projects would have been funded. In essence, this would largely have depended on the scope to access European funding from the new Convergence Programmes (which could, in any event, not have occurred within the same timescale) or possibly from Lottery funding. In both of these project-based case-studies it seemed clear that the scope of the potential projects had been increased by the existence of Communities@One: in one instance it had been the catalyst for a broader regional roll out of the project, while in the other it had enabled the addition of new elements (the employment of Digital Outreach workers to attract new clients into community centres over and above those already engaged with more formal learning).

- In the largest number of cases – around 18 of the projects – the project itself was mobilised by the existence of the Communities@One Programme, but built on nascent ideas of things which the applicant group wished to achieve. These can be regarded as "opportunity-led" projects and included a number of projects which gave extra resources to extend use of existing facilities or the range of services provided as well as some projects focused mostly on equipment to enhance the activities of applicant groups. In most cases, these organisations were used to accessing external funding. Some of these projects may well have been developed in response to other external funding opportunities (related to the Lottery or European funding for example) and the groups would generally have been capable of undertaking the grant application process without the input of the Brokers (in other words, in the absence of the Brokers, the projects might have materialised, though without the Grant Fund they would not have). In these cases, however, most applicants felt that the Broker had played a key role in making the process easier, and in some cases making sure a nascent project became an actual one. This included one of the larger projects, where the sponsor was adamant that without the Programme the delivery of an outreach service to the case-study area would simply not have happened. Similarly, another interviewee felt that without the personal engagement of the Broker, even had the funding opportunity been presented, she might not have found the time to develop the project and the application: in the end she completed it over a weekend at home, because:

"Almost I didn't want to let him [the Broker] down".

- A third category involves projects which would not have been developed without the direct contribution of the Broker. There were around ten of these

(mostly small), many submitted by organisations without paid staff who simply did not have the time or resources to develop a funding bid. In these cases, it is improbable that the projects would have happened at all in the absence of the Programme and its Broker model.

▪ The final category involved projects which could be characterised as "Broker driven" where the original idea had been formulated very much as a result of the interaction of the Broker with the group concerned. Although at the time of the baseline report we believed four of the 25 projects we then examined came into this category, we now believe this applies properly only to one project, where the project idea was effectively suggested to the Group by the Broker.

The limited evidence from our control group areas would seem to confirm the strong level of additionality of Grant Fund projects within our case-study areas. Even where there had been aspirations to take forward ICT based community projects in these areas, these had generally not made progress over the period of our evaluation, although in one of the three a community website had been developed with funding from two Local Authority small grant schemes. In our view, the reasons for this appear to be partly due to the difficulty of identifying and accessing suitable external funding (for example, an application to Microsoft to fund a website in one community had failed, whereas in a second, an application – just before our Baseline Research – to BT Community Connections to fund a set of laptops for community use had also been rejected) and in part due to the lack of specific focus on digital inclusion and support for developing such applications of the sort provided by the Brokers.

In terms of implementation, we noted in our 2007 report that there were significant delays in terms of getting some of the projects up and running, with around eight projects (all of them of a value under or just over £15,000) either not having started at all or having procured equipment but not started to use it, and a further six projects (all of them larger projects) having experienced delays, in five of these cases leading to underspends.

Reasons given for those projects which had not started at all were quite varied but included:

▪ Delays in recruiting staff and securing CRB checks;
▪ Problems over securing insurance cover for equipment;
▪ Wishing to locate new premises before commencing;
▪ Underestimating technical support problems – in one case, a project had not been able to network PCs it had acquired and was awaiting the development of a technical support project to resolve this;
▪ Waiting for the opening of a new "PC World" to source the equipment;
▪ Pressure of other commitments leading to delays in moving the project forward.

In the case of the six delayed projects, the cause for problems in four of them related to staffing, including delays in recruitment and in one case, the need to dismiss a member of staff who had proved unsuitable, while in the other two cases, delays resulted from a longer than expected time taken to equip suitable premises and from unsuitable equipment having been purchased and then taken back.

However, by the time of our final stage fieldwork, it was clear that to a large extent, the difficulties encountered by many of the projects had been overcome. Of 35[110] projects, we estimate that 23 had been fully implemented (in terms of the essential elements of identified activity having been achieved), a further four had been wholly achieved but with significant delays (which may have to some extent impaired overall outcomes, for example because mentoring support had been available for less time than had been envisaged), eight had only been implemented in part, and one was not complete.

This seems to us a very positive achievement, particularly as there were only three of the projects which appeared to have substantially failed to deliver (and in two of these cases, the projects had been respectively closed down and were being investigated). In the case of projects which were only achieved in part or were subject to significant delay, and even in the case of some projects which had fully achieved all the essential elements of the application, virements had often been used to ensure projects achieved full (or near full) spend, and these were usually in the form of allowing projects to purchase additional equipment and/or software in place of underspends on staff costs. This was the case for example, in one of the large projects, which initially had involved only very limited elements of equipment purchase, where underspends on staff were "mopped up" by purchasing hardware.

Overall, the case-studies confirm the view of the overall project performance data that programme management has been very tight and that the monitoring system appears to have worked well in identifying problems and resolving them. Where problems have been encountered these have usually been connected with employment/staff related issues for example:

- A Communities First Partnership which had never employed anyone directly employed a mentor and subsequently ended up in dispute with him over what they regarded as his poor performance, leading to him leaving the project prematurely;
- In another Communities First Partnership, the Co-ordinator and Communities@One project manager was suspended for a period and although another worker took the project forward, a breakdown of relations between the two meant that overall momentum was lost and relatively little was achieved;
- A digital storytelling project had used freelance workers, but found that in practice this reduced flexibility to deal with groups who often cancelled meetings or failed to show up at all.

In other cases, more minor issues have occurred in terms of inappropriate or unsuitable technology, though examples of this seem likely to have been reduced because of the role of the Brokers:

- In the case of one of the projects which had gone seriously wrong, in hindsight, the project manager believed using Macs rather than PCs for a digital storytelling approach was wrong-headed:

"[The beneficiaries] were completely scared off by the Apple Macs"

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[110] Of our 39 projects we were not able to undertake fieldwork with four during the final stage evaluation.

- In another very small project, the group had found that the Dell equipment purchased as a result of the guidance from Communities@One did not interface well with PCs which they already used and had found it difficult to get value out of a technical support contract because they used the equipment in the evenings when they could not call out the support;

- In a third project, which also involved digital storytelling, the decision to buy a bulk supply of licenses for a software package at the start of the project which could be passed on to community groups was undermined when the new generation of "mini-Macs" proved to be incompatible with the software.

Of the 78 beneficiaries we interviewed as part of the fieldwork, seven were representatives of community groups which had been assisted by a project which was focussed on providing support to groups, rather than individuals and their personal characteristics are therefore not really relevant to an analysis of beneficiary characteristics. From considering the remainder, it would seem that projects succeeded in accessing appropriate groups, but some interesting points emerged:

- There was a strong bias towards older or retired people – with 27 out of the 66 for whom information is available being aged over 50 – as against 22 individuals between the ages of 25 and 49; children (9) and young people (8) accounted for the balance;

- There was a very even gender split (with 36 men and 35 women);

- All of those interviewed in all but one area were white: in this one area (a large city ward), beneficiaries were evenly split between white and black African beneficiaries;

- Very few (only six) of those interviewed were in employment, with most of those of working age being inactive, either due to caring responsibilities or being on health-related benefits: very few were actively seeking employment;

- Most had either no or relatively low formal qualifications though a relatively high proportion had some recent experience of undertaking often community-based learning (while of course the children and some of the young people were still in education);

- Most (45 in all) had a PC or laptop at home, with almost all of the children and young people falling into this category: in some cases, however, they did not have access to the internet or broadband, with this often being attributed to the (actual or perceived) cost of an internet connection or concerns about security;

- Some, however (including those who had access to PCs at home – where often it was other members of the household who accounted for the reason a PC had been acquired) had clearly been extremely wary of ICT before engagement with the Programme: a common theme for these individuals was the fear of even switching on the Computer

"I used to think that I'd mess everything up".

- However, a significant proportion were already "switched on" to ICT, but were using the projects either to overcome problems they had experienced, to acquire new skills and/or capabilities, to provide them with a social activity or simply to access facilities (e.g. broadband) which were not available to them at home.

3.3.3 Effects upon Local External Stakeholders and the Community/Voluntary Sector

In Section 3.2 we have already referred to the views of several central stakeholders that the Programme came to be dominated by the Grant Fund and that, in hindsight, a better balance might have been struck between the Grant Fund and other more developmental activity. Several stakeholders argued that as a result there was too much focus on getting the money out of the door, and not enough on support to groups to project manage projects which would:

"Have left the groups with more skills afterwards as well, which money couldn't have done, because you had to help groups work out what support they needed".

Even more graphically, another interviewee claimed that:

"Having £9 million gave us a hell of an advantage but it was also an albatross".

Indeed, while the outputs of the Programme in terms of the development and implementation of Grant Fund Projects are very impressive, these views by central stakeholders do seem borne out by our work in case-study areas.

In particular, we have already seen (Section 3.2.2) that Brokers engagement with local external stakeholders (Local Authorities, CVCs, Communities First Partnerships) generally seems to have diminished over the lifetime of the Programme, after an initial burst of intense activity when Brokers were seeking to establish awareness of the Programme and the Grant Fund. While at the baseline stage we found that stakeholders' awareness of digital inclusion and what it meant had been raised, we found no real evidence at all that the Programme had stimulated the engagement of such stakeholders in themselves pushing forward the digital inclusion agenda - with the exception of CVCs or Communities First Partnerships who themselves had accessed Grant Fund monies - or had helped stakeholders develop a better understanding of the "landscape" or what was available locally.

In terms of work within the local voluntary and community sector, we also found that in general Brokers had concentrated on working with individual groups in the context of their Grant Fund projects rather than stimulating partnership working between different groups or helping to develop networks between them. This might be thought to some extent to represent a neglect of one of the underlying principles established at the outset:

"Contact is made between ICT activities that are already in place in order that they no longer stand alone and can benefit from working and learning together and sharing experiences".

In some cases, the reason for this was that local voluntary and community sectors were already reasonably well networked and the Broker could not expect to make introductions between organisations that were already well known to each other:

"I don't think there was many out there he could tell me about that I wouldn't know about".

"We have links ourselves".

In other cases, it was because Brokers rapidly became aware of historic enmities within the community and decided (quite sensibly) to steer clear. But to a large extent, it would appear that this aspect of the original Programme plan was squeezed out by the concentration on the challenge of delivering the Grant Fund.

In general terms, there was little visibility in our case-study areas of efforts to establish a *"digital legacy"* for the programme in terms of closer networking (though this perhaps relates to the generally low engagement by groups we met with networking and good practice activities promoted by the Programme).

Having said this, there were some excellent examples of where the Programme did make a difference in terms of developing closer working relationships between voluntary and community organisations. This was particularly true in the city ward which saw the largest number of projects developed: here the Broker had first stimulated collaborative working between a wide range of groups to jointly develop a technical support project, and secondly, created a number of "clusters" of projects for mutual support. Despite the fact that this was an area which already had a rich "infrastructure" of voluntary and community organisations, these efforts appeared to have created new linkages and networks.

Moreover, as we have already noted, four of the larger projects were themselves to some extent intended to "cascade out" ICT support and awareness to the voluntary and community sector, and these projects appear to have worked very effectively with very small voluntary sector organisations, albeit that in one case the promoter had to scale back ambitions to help groups develop their own websites, using blogging as an alternative. This project had supported a total of 151 individuals from voluntary and community organisations in using blogging, developing websites or producing newsletters and other communications.

A second of these large projects provided assistance to nearly 100 voluntary and community groups, including 54 where work had included the development of new websites (with a strong emphasis of engaging the groups in this work, so that they could maintain them in future rather than "*doing it for them")* and 44 who had received technical support. The Groups covered an enormous range of different types of voluntary activity:

- 16 Children and Youth Groups;
- 14 Community Associations;
- 10 Disability Groups;
- 12 Arts/Music and Drama Groups;
- 10 Geographic Community Groups;
- 5 Social Enterprises;
- 9 Health Groups;
- 2 Counselling Groups;
- 4 Other special interest groups;
- 4 Sports and Recreation Groups;
- 2 Environment Groups;
- 4 Heritage/Culture Groups;

■ 2 Older People Groups.

In general terms, groups who we visited as part of our fieldwork were very highly appreciative of the support provided by this project:

"It was important for us to get a website in place. As a group we didn't have the time or the resources to be able to do it ourselves…We wanted to make sure that we could update the site here and that more than one of us could do it. [The project worker] came here and showed us how to do it".

"I can't think of anything to suggest to improve it. It was all free".

Also within the context of Grant Fund activities themselves, there were further examples of more local projects working in a mutually reinforcing way (albeit, on the downside, a way which must have led to extensive double counting of beneficiaries):

■ A County wide digital storytelling initiative worked through local community groups (including one within the case-study area) and sought to *"train the trainers"* to undertake their own digital storytelling projects: while this did not take off within the case-study area, it did in some eight of the 19 Communities First areas which the project covered;

■ Another County-wide project provided training and support to local "ICT champions" in a number of voluntary and community groups in one of the case-study areas, though in practice, there was only a very modest cascading of the learning from the "champions" to a wider audience;

■ In another case-study area with a rich voluntary and community sector, one of the funded projects also provided a range of support services to other voluntary and community groups.

There is thus evidence of the Programme making a real contribution to improving the technical support available to small groups – at least in some communities – and in encouraging better links between community groups who are actively engaged in the Programme. But in essence these networking activities are ones which have flowed from the Grant Fund rather than having been promoted over and above it.

In terms of encouraging a better understanding by community groups of the potential of ICT, we have already seen that, in the context of the Grant Fund, Brokers were often able to inject new elements into applicants' thinking – often in terms of the "softer" elements of the importance of mentoring or support for new users of ICT - but also in terms of specific technologies or applications such as Skype or internet trading.

One very good example of the Broker "raising the sights" of a group was a very small project where the organisation (a charity helping cancer sufferers which ran a high street shop to raise funds) wanted to start trading on e-Bay in order to increase the revenue-generating capacity of the shop. While helping the group to achieve these internal, organisational aims, the Broker also raised the group's awareness that its (mostly retired, female volunteer workers) probably had little experience of using ICT and could benefit from being helped to use the equipment provided by the grant:

"I don't think I would probably have given it the emphasis without the grant…I needed the computer equipment …I probably wouldn't have involved myself so much in making sure the volunteers understood it…I don't think I would have given it as much

of a priority as I do now…I don't think I would have attempted to get everyone to turn it on…its given me that insight into helping the volunteers to use the equipment".

In terms of community groups' own use of technology, it was clear that some groups were using ICT themselves in a way which had "raised their game". This was true for example, of the group above, which was by the end of the project using e-Bay quite extensively; of a Credit Union project, where the IT equipment and related training had enabled a considerable leap forward in the use of technology by front-line (volunteer) staff; and in a number of groups (both direct recipients of Grant Funds and those that benefited from the "cascading" projects) which were using ICT to present a much improved "face to the world", whether through websites, blogs, presentation materials (for example, an Astronomical Society being able to use film in undertaking educational activities or a Football Club being able to use Desk Top Publishing to produce match programmes). In some of these cases (particularly in relation to small Grant Fund projects), the main motivation of the Group had been to acquire specific "kit" and sometimes (but not always) additional skills or expertise to use it in order to raise quality in this way.

However, in many cases - probably the majority of groups in receipt of funds - Communities@One funding did not appear to have had a major impact on the internal uses by the groups. In some cases, this reflected the fact that the organisations were already relatively sophisticated users of ICT at least in terms of administrative applications, but in others (perhaps particularly those offering drop in facilities), it perhaps reflected a tendency to see the projects as being about users rather than organisations themselves. Even at the end of the project, it was striking that quite a number of the smaller organisations did not regularly use e-mail as a routine form of communication.

3.3.4 Effects upon Access to Facilities and Informal Learning Opportunities

As we have in Section 3.2.3, the majority of the projects within our sample (22 in all) involved providing or supporting some sort of drop-in facility, with most having some sort of mentoring or support provided to users. Over half of these – 13 – involved building in some way on a pre-existing resource, which is wholly in line with the aim of the Programme and represents an optimal use of resources (even if for an evaluator it makes it more difficult to disentangle the precise impact of the Grant Fund project!). In many ways – and perhaps despite the expectation of some of the central stakeholders – providing access to supported publicly accessible ICT facilities has been the core of the Grant Fund.

However, the scale, "reach" and degree of support offered by each project varied hugely, as these examples show:

- A small project (with a Grant of around £30,000) provided seven laptops and associated equipment and wi-fi access (as well as supporting website development and a research project) in a "Community House" (the base for the local Communities First Partnership) on an estate which had very limited access to ICT. This has been used in part to enable the delivery of limited formal training by the local College (which has attracted seven participants) and in part to provide a drop-in facility for two evenings a week between 5pm and 8pm mostly for young people. In all some 23 different young people have used the this facility, with the local demand being a very positive aspect of the project with people:

"Queuing outside the door waiting to get in for their slots on the laptops".

On the other hand, supervision is purely by paid staff of the host organisation, who do not have specific ICT expertise.

- One of the large project providing support to voluntary and community sector organisations also involved supporting a number of open access facilities, for example providing technical support to one which had received the capital investment in an ICT suite from "Opportunities for All", but which required assistance with technical support to keep the equipment in working order so that it could be used both as a drop in centre and for more formal learning opportunities provided by the local College. In another case, the project had been brought in to provide support to a drop-in facility funded by Communities@One when the private company who had been contracted to provide this went into liquidation. The focus of the help was not just on providing maintenance but on training up staff to be able to themselves maintain the equipment in future.

- A second of our project-based case-studies which received £83,000 for a project specifically focussed on employing outreach workers to enthuse and attract individuals from within the target communities to make use of pre-existing community facilities where formal learning was already available, succeeded in attracting a total of 318 individuals to very informal "drop in" sessions on basic ICT as well as involving 234 individuals with digital storytelling projects and (as noted above) 151 individuals from pre-existing voluntary and community groups with the development of websites, blogs or newsletters.

- The other project in this same project-based case-study by providing an in-house maintenance staff had succeeded in keeping open some five community centres which offered extensive lifelong learning opportunities.

- In the case-study area with the largest amount of Communities@One activity, at least four separate drop-in centres, each providing both equipment and mentoring, were supported: this did not, however, represent duplication, in that each was targeted at a different group (one for example, was women only, two were related to a specific ethnic minority, while only one was a generic community centre drop-in) while the Broker has been very active in promoting networking between groups. Two of these centres already had equipment but no real mentoring support, which was the main added value of the Grant Fund projects. All of the projects here were small (£5k - £15k) though in two cases, organisations benefited from two separate grants.

- In one case-study area, two separate open-access centres, both with mentors were supported by Communities@One, one focused specifically on children and young people and one available to the wider community: in the latter, a large number of migrant workers were said to have used the facility to communicate with friends and relatives in their home countries, using both e-mail and webcam facilities.

- In another case-study area, the Communities First Partnership received a grant of just under £20,000 for laptops and associated equipment and to pay for a mentor to work for 20 hours a week to staff a drop in centre. As a result of difficulties in terms of the relationship between the mentor and the Partnership (which included the Partnership believing the mentor was not sufficiently proactive in marketing the facility), the project operated only for around six months within the original lifetime of the Programme: however, the extension of the Programme enabled the Partnership to take on a student over the summer holiday period to reopen the facility with some success. Despite the problems, it was claimed in monitoring returns that some 331 individuals had used the Centre (though this is believed to refer to individual visits, and to include double-counting of individuals attending on more than one occasion). However, one lesson of this experience (for the Broker involved) was that:

"Whether people will actually go and use it [a drop-in centre], well, we've proved they won't…open the door for them and they won't walk through it".

- The project-based case-study project which was focused in one ward had run a wide range of drop-in activities, including informal four week courses, which in total had attracted around 300 beneficiaries (against an initial target of 350). One problem was that its location in a warehouse on an industrial estate was not particularly conducive to casual visitors.

- In another case-study area, the one project funded had provided staff support alongside additional equipment for an established Community Centre and a satellite centre. At the time of the final stage fieldwork, the two centres were open for a total of 18 hours for drop-in activities (though all of these were during the working day) and the Centre had logged more than 500 different users on its server during the lifetime of the project.

- By contrast, in a case-study area where four projects had been funded, none had really provided a drop-in facility, even though there was no pre-existing facility (though a private sector internet café did open during the lifetime of the Programme). One of the projects, based in a Church, did intend to do this, but in practice it appears to have been little used, partly because the project did not provide for any mentoring/support. Although a County-wide training project had run a number of courses in conjunction with several of these projects, in practice no more than a couple of dozen individuals in the ward appeared to have received formal or informal training as a result of Communities@One.

The last two examples here highlight the point that, while Communities@One has brought forward a large number of different opportunities for individuals to access PCs, many with appropriate support, there is a huge variation between what has been available in different areas (and how much uptake there has been) in terms of open access to ICT. Moreover, in one area, no such facility was supported (the only project being support to a youth group to make a digital film) and in another the opportunities were very limited indeed. Of course, this is an inevitable consequence of the combination of a bottom-up approach and the short timescales of the Programme, but it is perhaps worth noting that the provision ultimately depended on the existence of groups able and willing to take on this role (albeit with the support of

Communities@One) rather than the extent of the objective needs of the community in question.

This was reflected by a comment by one of our central stakeholders:

"In a way, the project was never strategic, it started out about going out to grassroots, … The focus of the project was, there's money here, we've got the issue of the potential digital divide, get out into the grassroots…".

In future, this interviewee felt there needed to be more of a focus on identifying and filling gaps in particular areas, rather than simply funding groups who were already established.

Another issue which was clear from our fieldwork was the extent to which many of the projects funded had, in practice, operated for only a very short time, arguably insufficient to really establish a strong presence in an area. In several cases, projects involving staff or mentoring support had not started when we undertook fieldwork in April/May 2007 and had finished by the time we visited case-study areas barely a year later. We return to this issue in Section 3.4.5 below.

As well as providing greater access to ICT and support to enable individuals to use it, two of the large projects within our sample also provided services in terms of "care and repair" of PCs in targeted communities. One of these projects (with a grant of around £175,000 – but which also supported the maintenance of community learning facilities) working from five community centres has supported 574 individuals, and using a commercial rate of an average of £55 per repair calculates the direct support to individuals as being worth nearly £27,000. The focus of this assistance was not, however, just on providing repairs but also on training volunteers (some 26 in total) to provide the service and educating the beneficiaries to understand the basics of maintenance in a way that commercial operators would not do:

"They have developed all sorts of skills to do with hardware and software. They come back and ask questions about things".

The second project with a "Care and Repair" element had dealt with around 900 computer repair incidents. These included:

- *"Call outs"* by clients in the community, some of whom *"bring their computer back four or five times a year;"*
- *"people who bring their computers in";*
- *"internal [within the host organisation]";*
- *"external work for organisations … local charities and things like that";*
- *"advice [given] over the phone".* Only calls from organisations were monitored, though calls from local residents were said to outnumber those. The project manager commented that

"We don't monitor calls from residents … if we had a premium line, we'd be millionaires by now … you'd most probably be looking at four times that figure [of 900 'incidents]!"

However, quite a high proportion of these (estimated at 60% by the project manager) involved equipment owned by the Communities First Partnership and the Accountable Body which implies that the project may not have really achieved its

target of supporting 900 individuals, 50 community groups and 10 businesses with PC maintenance.

Overall, our work with beneficiaries suggested a very high degree of satisfaction with the facilities, services and support provided by Communities @One projects, with none rating these as less than "good" and many being glowing in their praise:

"I'm not embarrassed to come here … I'm not the best of readers, but it doesn't matter here".

"It's much better than one lesson a week … and they're always here and can help you when you're stuck….here you get what you want to learn without the formality … it's more relaxed".

"It's brilliant here…I don't feel embarrassed to ask".

"A friend introduced me…The experience I get here…is better than any college course, because you get the hands on experience…I've learned loads of new skills. As well as tips and tricks, I've learned about customer support and customer care and communication skills".

3.4 Intermediate Effects (Outcomes)

3.4.1 Policy Effects

In our Baseline Report, we noted that while central stakeholders were unable to point to **specific** ways in which the Programme was already driving the digital inclusion agenda in Wales or elsewhere, there was already a considerable interest in the Programme's community development approach to digital inclusion as a viable and potentially far more successful way of tackling the issue than a physical centre-based approach which was seen to have been favoured elsewhere. It was reported that there had been considerable interest in the Programme at a recent Seminar held by the Alliance for Digital Inclusion in London.

We also noted that digital inclusion had been placed firmly on the policy map as far as the Welsh Assembly Government's ICT policy was concerned with the publication in July 2006 of "*Towards E-Wales: A Consultation on Exploiting the Power of ICT in Wales"* which provided clear and consistent evidence of the extent to which digital inclusion was seen as a critical element of harnessing ICT to produce economic and social change. Indeed the first of the list of aims (before even enhancing economic performance) which the Consultation document said it was trying to achieve was to:

"Ensure all citizens can exploit the opportunities offered by ICT"[111]

Similarly, the fact that *"there remains a proportion of the population who are not"* confident and familiar with accessing online information and that our understanding of the reasons for this was *"not complete"* was the first in a list of specific challenges relating to ICT said to be facing Wales[112].

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[111] p.8
[112] p.31

While stressing that it was far from clear that this emphasis could be attributed to Communities@One Programme (since, for example, it was clear from the document that EU thinking on digital inclusion was also a key factor underpinning this[113]), we noted that it was at least consistent with the high profile which the Programme was beginning to command in Wales.

We also noted that the delivery model of Communities@One (with "embedded" but centrally managed Brokers taking a very proactive approach to project development) was seen as one that could and should inform thinking about other Programmes such as Communities First and broader policy agendas such as *"Beyond Boundaries"*[114].

In our final stage fieldwork, interviewees continued to emphasise the important role that the Programme played in informing the thinking of Ministers in Wales about digital inclusion, even though no further policy documents on ICT Strategy and Policy had been forthcoming:

"It's been very influential in that pretty small department that has been given the task of dealing with it".

"It's now receiving support at a political level from different departments across the Assembly".

One interviewee noted that Communities@One was referenced by the First Minister in a major speech at the recent ERISA conference in South Wales as one of two illustrations of the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to pushing forward a proactive agenda on ICT, while others pointed out that the approach of the Programme was extensively reflected in the explanation of ICT policy in the Convergence Programme. An interviewee closely involved with policy development reflected this, talking about the Digital Inclusion in Wales Conference:

"A conference of that size…[it's] .pushing the boundaries…..pushing this whole agenda….[Communities@One] is informing policy as we are moving forward".

It is certainly noticeable that the Deputy Minister for Regeneration speaking at the Conference[115] paid tribute to the role of the Programme in informing policy:

"The Communities@One Programme has been our flagship digital inclusion programme…The clear success of Communities@One is that it seeks to reach people through the things that interest them: understanding how to use the technology is therefore a means to an end not an end in itself".

At the same time, one of our stakeholders noted that while, in his view, the Programme was making policy –

"We have been making policy all along…its straight forward policy formation"

- a clear policy framework was still lacking:

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[113] p. 16
[114] The Welsh Assembly Government's Response to the Beecham Review, looking at ways of improving integrated working across the public sector in Wales.
[115] Digital Inclusion Wales: 2008 Conference Report p. 4

*"When the Minister talks about digital inclusion he talks about Communities@One....
But that falls some way short of a policy".*

Moreover, as both the Digital Inclusion Wales conference and the ERISA conference
made clear, the approach of Communities@One has been noted by the European
Commission as a groundbreaking approach to digital inclusion, with the
Commission's representative at the Digital Inclusion Wales Conference saying[116]:

*"Don't underestimate the expertise that exists in Wales to project work across
Europe….Wales is well in advance in terms of thinking. The issue is 'how do we take
that practice and get it replicated across Europe'…we can make Wales more visible
on a European stage".*

Reflecting the importance of this, one of our interviewees commented:

*"The European element …that is significant and the Welsh Assembly really need to
think very carefully about that. The fact that Europe is looking at Wales as one of the
real leaders could be a real coup for the Assembly… and they mustn't lose sight of
that".*

In terms of the Broker model being rolled out elsewhere as a method of Programme
delivery, during our 2007 fieldwork, the Central Team pointed to the example of a
nascent large-scale basic skills project focused on the Heads of the Valleys area
which was hoping to employ a similar approach (with Community Brokers proactively
identifying and developing community based projects to tackle needs). At the time of
our final stage fieldwork, it was not, however, clear whether this had been taken
forward. .

3.4.2 Outcomes for Individuals

We have already noted that Communities@One did not really set out to "impose" on
Grant Fund projects any predetermined types of targets or indicators, meaning that
aggregate data is virtually non-existent. It is also the case that the targets set by
Grant Fund projects as part of their application were almost entirely indicators of
activity or output, and that few, if any, projects seem to have systematically recorded
positive outcomes. This was recognised by some stakeholders as a shortcoming –
albeit one that was clearly accepted at the start of the Programme:

*"We haven't planned, we haven't measured, because we weren't based on economic
outcomes".*

*"That's history…but I think its regrettable it didn't [monitor outcomes], and I think it's
regrettable that we didn't capture that data even though we weren't required to give it
to WEFO…we've tracked outputs but not outcomes".*

While the central team have thus been able to capture some impressive examples of
outcomes at the level of particular individuals (most notably, perhaps, Sharon Morris
of the RCT Community Radio project, whose presentation at the Digital Inclusion
Wales conference deeply impressed many of those who heard her[117]), it is
impossible to draw any conclusions as to how common such examples are. Again,

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[116] Ibid., p. 20
[117] Ibid., p.8

this was recognised by several central stakeholders, though one expressed a common view by saying:

"If that's only replicated a few dozen times, it's transforming…..[and] if it's happened to one person and it's transformed their life, then they are going to tell their friends…they will have reached other people that in a way, if you were doing it at school or at a CLAIT course, you may be wouldn't tell everyone".

Likewise, in terms of our fieldwork with Grant Fund projects and their beneficiaries we were able to identify some positive outcomes but we were in effect often reliant on anecdotal examples cited by project managers rather than first hand evidence and in practice we can do little more than draw some broad conclusions.

In terms of engaging with individuals who previously had little or no exposure to ICT and increasing their confidence to use technology, we found many projects where this was a major element of their activity – often focused on older people. This was true for example of one drop-in centre based in a Communities First Partnership where the Co-ordinator believed that the 120 users to date were:

"Primarily new users, single, older people … and people in their 50s or 60s who've finished jobs rather than retiring",

a view which was echoed by the fact that of the four beneficiaries (three retired, one on Incapacity Benefit) taking a very basic ICT course who we interviewed, only one had a PC at home and she claimed to have never used it.

In other projects, we found examples of individuals who had previously felt too scared to make use of basic ICT equipment having been encouraged to do so as a result of informal support at "drop in" centres, for example an ex-Steel Worker who *"wanted to belong to the 21st Century"* but who had felt too embarrassed to continue with a formal introductory course he had started, or a long-term unemployed man who had never touched a computer before he accompanied his daughter to a community centre and got "*hooked".*

Similarly, one of our larger projects with a drop-in element believed the majority of its 300 clients were *"novices"* but that 70% had PCs at home.

This apparent contradiction between having access to ICT at home but nevertheless being new to using it is something which was echoed in another project in a case-study area where all five beneficiaries interviewed at one project had a PC at home but either had no confidence in using it, and so wanted the support of the mentor, or preferred to come to the Community Centre because it had broadband access. While the latter reason underlines the possibility discussed below that at least some of the use of such centres was simply providing free access to services which were available to beneficiaries, this finding also underlines the fact that even if a majority of those beneficiaries we met did have access to PCs at home, many might still have had no or very limited skills to use them prior to exposure to the Grant Fund project.

However, from admittedly limited evidence from our fieldwork, it seems less likely that the projects targeting children and young people were leading to significant gains in terms of confidence or new exposure to ICT (unsurprisingly perhaps, given the extensive use of ICT in schools). In one small project, for example, where the Grant Fund had supported the purchase of laptops for the members of a youth group to use

during its Monday evening activities, the children interviewed all had access to internet-connected ICT at home and while they used a range of software programmes in their group activities (including PowerPoint, digital photography etc), they all claimed these were programmes which they had used before. One – who had both a PC and his own laptop at home – commented:

"All the kids at school have a PC – you have to now".

Similarly, in one of the drop-in centres used mostly by children and young people (and without specific mentoring or support) the main use of the laptops was said to be computer games. In these cases, while projects may have had positive effects in terms of social inclusion, it is less clear they were focussed on digital inclusion.

Many of the smaller projects, however, were not targeted at an outside public but were focused on using ICT to meet the needs of the community or voluntary group and its existing individual members – a fact recognised by several central stakeholders:

"As a generalisation….where we had groups who were very specific about what they do….the pigeon fanciers, the Astronomical Societies, the Angling Club, they generally won't have targeted themselves to go out and find new members….they will be looking to develop what they've got, on the other hand where you've got groups who aren't specific, they will generally have found some new beneficiaries".

"If you look at balance, the balance is overwhelmingly for small projects.. and it would be an awful lot to expect them to look out to the broader community…they are about the groups themselves, and if you are talking about pigeon fanciers, engaging with their members is really important".

While the work done by the Central Team in terms of developing case-studies has found many good examples of these sorts of projects engaging individuals with no pre-existing ICT skills, the experience of our case-study projects was rather mixed. In some cases, projects had functioned exactly as the underlying philosophy of Communities@One intended, in other words introducing non-ICT literate individuals to technology by capturing their interest through an activity with which they were already engaged, for example:

- In the cancer charity which received funding to start trading on e-Bay, we met a retired nurse who had been too afraid to undertake a course at the library but at the time of our 2007 fieldwork was considering buying a broadband-enabled laptop after her experience of applying technology. By the final stage of our research, she had acquired a laptop and moreover become the Grants Officer for the charity, because she was now able to do the internet-based research and to complete application forms.

- Members of a community singing group consisting mostly of older people who had received funding for an Apple Mac based sound system had been so impressed by what the system could do that three of them (two of whom had never used a computer) had joined a *"silver surfers"* club, hosted in a Community Centre also supported by Communities@One with one commenting:

  "It has had a knock on effect and now I'm more confident in using computers"

- In an Astronomy Group, the acquisition of new digital equipment funded by Communities@One (with a small grant of just over £6,000) had led to seven members of the group who *"knew nothing at all about computers"*, learning *"how to use them"* thanks in large part to input from the group's five IT literate members and generally *"playing around"* with the technology whilst working on astronomy related *"projects"*. These members, according to the project manager, *"aren't interested in [IT] courses"* but were prepared to learn how to use ICT in order to fulfil tasks related to their primary interest – astronomy. He went on to say that members had been enthusiastic learners because of their interest, but added that *"to be able to use it [ICT] is extremely useful to them in normal life"*.

However, in some instances, these sort of internally-focused projects appear to have had little role in enthusing or developing the softer IT skills of members, for example:

- A Football Club which received a very small grant of £1800 for equipment wanted to upgrade its production of its match programmes. While a target was also to train volunteers in basic ICT, in practice this had involved one of the more skilled members of the group identifying three other members who were ICT literate and

"Spending a couple of hours at my house showing [them] how to put the [fixtures] programmes together and how to download images onto Photoshop".

- The youth group considered above, who had accessed around £6,000 of Communities@One funding because they were a new group with no resources and were:

"Looking for whatever help we could get".

    While the funding played a role in strengthening the voluntary and community infrastructure, in reality it appeared to have made little contribution to digital inclusion.

- A Residents Association which had not really succeeded in engaging its members and where in retrospect the Broker conceded that:

"[The Group's Secretary] probably only wanted a laptop to take minutes".

It is difficult to find any distinguishing features between the two groups in terms of the size of the organisation, the size of the grant or the role played by the Broker in developing the project. In all six cases (both those which showed good practice in engaging people with technology and those where the effect was much more moot), the projects received funding for equipment only.

Fewer of our case-study projects were engaged in increasing the skills of beneficiaries who already were ICT literate, but there were nevertheless some good examples of where this was the case:

- One of our large scale projects recruited 26 volunteers to assist with the repair, maintenance and operation of PCs: many of these were previous

> service users who had become enthused through their involvement with the project and had gained both skills and social benefits from the project.

- Another large-scale project which provided technical support to voluntary and community groups was also in practice enhancing the skills of individuals within those groups to take on greater responsibility for maintenance in future. As already noted, this project had supported almost 100 groups and one beneficiary interviewed, who *"liked to dabble about a bit with the computer … I got broadband put in about two years ago"* had gained skills and was now able to update and maintain his Group's website. Another echoed this evidence:

"They don't just come in here and do things, they sit down with us and show us how to do them so that we learn and can do them ourselves the next time. That's helped build our confidence".

- In the Astronomy Group, nine members had used the equipment purchased with the aid of the Grant Fund to make a digital film (in part aided by another County wide training project funded by Communities@One) which had enhanced the skills of the IT literate members of the group:

"I didn't know a lot about video editing before, but to be honest, you only have to look at the instruction book and you can pick it up quite quickly then".

However, in general terms it was these smaller, more internally-facing projects along with the very large projects which tended to have an element of upskilling those with relatively significant ICT experience, whereas the middle size, "*drop in"* projects tended to concentrate on more basic level skills.

If there is considerable evidence of our case-study projects securing outcomes in terms of enhanced skills and confidence for those with no or limited ICT skills, there is much less evidence in terms of harder outcomes, such as progression to more formal learning opportunities or employment outcomes. Indeed, given the nature of the client group (with high representation of the two ends of the age spectrum – children and retired people), this was perhaps not to have been expected.

Many of our projects were able to talk in general terms about individuals having moved on to enrol on formal courses, but even those who best networked with training providers were unable to provide firm data. Perhaps by definition, most of those beneficiaries we interviewed *"in situ"* had not moved on to other forms of social or economic engagement and only a handful of those of working age who were not already working were keen to seek work. Even so, there were some (reported) examples of individuals progressing into further learning or undertaking activities linked to employability:

- Two of the volunteers at the Cancer Charity (aged 76 and 80!) were undertaking an ICT course at the local College.

- A number of the drop-in centres provided support with writing CVs and in one case, two of the three beneficiaries interviewed were using the centre for job search activities.

- One larger project had referred 32 individuals onto formal training opportunities (though this was below the target of 50 and compared with a total number of drop-in beneficiaries of 300+).

Overall, then, it would appear that positive outcomes, insofar as they can be identified are more related to confidence and ICT skills than to harder outcomes. Central stakeholders recognised that this was likely to be the case and that aiding progression (into formal learning or employment) in the context of the bottom up approach of Communities@One might sometimes be difficult, even if desirable:

"There are examples of progression but that may be more despite the system than because of what we've put in, primarily because…the projects have a focal point which is what they've had money for. The difficulty is if someone gets engaged with it [a project], enjoys it, moves up to a certain point, if they then want to do something outside that group's remit, how do they progress: .is it going to involve money, introductions to people, that's the bit where there aren't natural obvious [links]*….there's a huge step from getting engaged in the first time, and realising you can do e-mails and other stuff on the computer, to feeling they've got sufficient skills…there are steps in the ladder that aren't there at the moment".*

"If they are getting skills and don't know where to go next, then they could just get them, go back home and switch on their Sky Plus and never leave their front door again, whereas they could have perhaps got a job, or something……there's no point spending all this money and not having it joined up at the end".

Increased confidence also appears to have been the main outcome in terms of those projects which involved an element of digital storytelling – though in these cases, there seems to have been a mix between projects which appear to have **both** engaged beneficiaries with the technology **and** increased their confidence and those which concentrated on allowing individuals to tell their stories without really engaging them with understanding the technology. In an effort to ensure that one County-wide digital storytelling project did not lose sight of the importance of the project in enhancing digital inclusion as well as social inclusion, the sponsor had developed a very useful *"digital inclusion through digital storytelling"* ladder of 16 stages (graduating from doing digital stories for people, to working with them on digital stories to creating mini-digital storytelling projects led by volunteers).

A number of beneficiaries of this digital storytelling project gave very positive accounts of the effects on their self-confidence of engagement with these projects, though here the emphasis tended to be on the storytelling rather than the technical aspects:

"When you're like me, I've got no qualifications, writing a story alone was quite an achievement for me – I used to be pushed to the back of the class".

In other cases, the benefits were less certain. A Broker commenting on one project which had encountered significant difficulties (and which in essence had engaged with no more than around 10 individuals despite two project grants worth together nearly £100,000) thought that there had been too much of a focus on digital storytelling projects in general and that not enough of the storytelling projects had been pressed on:

"The so what factor and what happens next… really, we should have been pushing them more to move on to other things".

Finally, it was clear that for many of the beneficiaries in our case-study projects, the key benefits were in terms of quality of life. Many of the beneficiaries interviewed were using the facilities offered to access the internet for a wide range of purposes relating to shopping, leisure, hobbies and interests, who otherwise either did not have internet access at home or had only a dial-up modem which was too slow for many purposes.

Although many of the individuals interviewed were already active in community organisations, in several cases projects were playing a role in combating social exclusion and isolation as well as combating digital exclusion. For example, one volunteer in one of the larger projects who suffered from social phobia noted:

"If it wasn't for this place I'd be lost".

While other similar comments were:

"Coming here helps with my depression … because I'm retired and on my own".

"I live near here and I dropped in to get some graffiti remover and I asked about computer courses … because I'd heard that they did computer courses here … I'm new to the area … well quite new … and at first I didn't go anywhere … I didn't know anyone".

"I'd retired from the steelworks…[I was] totally bored, with no interests of any sort … and eventually I was ending up in the pub all the time…the computer caught my imagination….[helping as a volunteer IT tutor] makes you feel wanted … useful".

3.4.3 Outcomes for Voluntary and Community Groups

In terms of voluntary and community groups again a number of positive, but perhaps relatively modest, outcomes were visible through our case-studies.

In general, most of the outcomes were in the shape of enabling voluntary and community organisations to raise their profile through better exploitation of technology.

As has already been seen, a number of projects were enabling small community groups to develop an internet presence either through the development of websites, or as has been seen above, through blogs. For example, a website for a community festival group which had been developed with the assistance of a case-study project was seen as providing:

"A lot of credibility in helping to get sponsorship from local businesses".

Importantly, however, the project involved supporting groups to develop and learn how to maintain their websites rather than doing it for them. With another commenting:

"I'm more confident now that with the new website, we'll be able to maintain it ourselves. Before, we had an old website that was out of date and nobody here knew how to update it".

This project has also created a legacy website which contains links to all the websites created by the project as well as a range of guidance and information tools on ICT for the voluntary sector.

In all, this project had supported 55 groups to develop websites, while another large project had worked with an even larger number of groups to develop a presence through blogs as well as websites (e.g. an elderly residents association, a guinea pig rescue centre and a horticultural group).

Some smaller projects also had allowed voluntary and community groups to improve their outward presentation:

- The Astronomy Club was able to use the new equipment to put on more sophisticated and engaging exhibitions for schools to enthuse pupils with the subject.

- A museum project in the same case-study area was using a laptop and projector purchased with the aid of the Grant Fund to make presentations both within the museum and in the community, thus enhancing its "*reach"* and its attractiveness. The project was also using a digital camera to record major events within the community - *"history as it happens"*.

- The website for the Football Club allowed the Club to publicise its matches more widely, and also enhanced its attractiveness to commercial sponsors, by offering them advertising on the website.

- The cancer charity, through a second project, had acquired a laptop and projector which it intended to use to make presentations to funders and other interested groups.

- A youth club was able to use Grant Fund monies to buy in assistance from a professional film maker to make a short film which was entered in an international competition and is now featured on "YouTube".

- The equipment for the singing group had enabled their performances to go from strength to strength, with the result they have attracted the attention of the Welsh National Opera with a view to participating in a community project next year.

To some extent, such projects by improving the outward presentation will have made the groups more attractive to new members, while some of the drop in centres (particularly, perhaps those housed by Communities First Partnerships) also saw the ICT projects as a way of getting *"new people through the door"*. In general, though we found relatively little evidence of ICT of itself being used to enhance the attractiveness of voluntary and community groups to new active members, perhaps precisely because of the wariness of technology of (often older) volunteers:

"It hasn't been a major selling point [though] its an add on."

In terms of providing more fundamental support to the work of voluntary and community organisations, we have already seen that several of the larger projects were providing technical support to voluntary and community groups which enabled them to maintain ICT equipment which was used to provide training activities. This was indeed, the core rationale for one of the projects whereby the funding of an in-house technical support service through Communities@One for a consortium of three voluntary sector training providers was enabling continued learning opportunities at five learning centres in Communities First areas.

However, relatively few of the projects in our sample directly enabled voluntary and community organisations to buttress their bottom line or improve their operating efficiency. Indeed, this really only applied to four of the 39 projects – two music-based projects (both in the same case-study area) which were enabling the organisations to increase their revenue by offering a more professional experience; the Credit Union project, where ensuring volunteers could use ICT, instead of manual systems, had increased operating efficiency and the cancer charity shop which was using a PC purchased through the Programme to sell higher-value items through e-Bay: the project manager believed that by the final stage evaluation it was providing 25% of the shops turnover.

In particular, and despite the excellent work done by the projects providing technical support to voluntary and community organisations (and indeed building the competence of organisations to meet their own needs in terms of maintenance) we found little evidence that Communities@One had developed community-based technical support providers who were commercially viable, an initial aim of the Programme in terms of the use of the envisaged Technical Fund. Rather, technical support for most Grant Fund projects was sourced through local private sector suppliers, paid for by the Grant Fund. While this might have departed some way from the original model envisaged by the Programme, it might in itself have been preferable, in terms of encouraging a sustainable market for such providers even in deprived communities, rather than funding the development of a parallel third-sector based resource which might have stifled demand for private sector operators.

3.4.4 Effects on Community Infrastructure

We have already highlighted in Section 3.3.3 some excellent examples within our case-studies both of Grant Fund projects which themselves supported the voluntary and community infrastructure and of Brokers facilitating networking between voluntary and community groups funded by the Grant Fund. Such examples should leave a legacy of collaboration.

However, in practice, Communities@One appears largely to have been driven by the Grant Fund, with Brokers efforts focused on ensuring firstly, that Grant Fund projects came forward, and secondly that they were successfully implemented. It follows that the outcomes in terms of a more *"networked"* community infrastructure are fairly limited, except where these were the explicit intention of Grant Fund projects (and these are considered in Section 3.4.3 above). Indeed, a key member of the Communities@One staff suggested this should not really have been a central focus of the project arguing that where this had happened it should be regarded as a spin-off:

"Whatever the positive version of collateral damage is".

3.4.5 Sustainability of Facilities/Services

In terms of sustainability, the projects in our case-studies present a fairly mixed picture, with around similar numbers (12 each) being likely to be wholly sustainable and likely to be unsustainable in the absence of further external funding after the end of the Programme and a further 10 being sustainable to some degree even without additional funding[118].

There is however, a significant difference between the different groups, with those projects which we judge to be sustainable generally being small (with none having a value of more than £50,000 and all but three having received less than £15,000 in Grant) and involving the purchase of equipment where staff or volunteers have acquired the skills to use the equipment in future and sufficient resource to pay for ongoing technical support. Such projects include:

- The Astronomy Group who by the end of the project had the skills needed to use the interactive technology.

- The cancer charity, whose experience of eBay had proved its worth.

- The Football Club, who would continue to use the equipment to maintain the website and produce programmes and other publicity materials.

- The vocal group, who were able to generate income from performances to maintain the equipment purchased by the Grant Fund project.

By contrast, those which we (and in almost all cases, the project managers) judge not to be sustainable without further grant funding are those which were larger (seven of them having received grants of over £50,000) and which involved making mentoring or support staff available to facilitate access to ICT. These include the two inter-related large projects in one of the project-based case-studies which provided technical support to five community centres providing lifelong learning and outreach workers to *"recruit"* excluded individuals. The project manager summed up their position as:

"The situation now is no different than it was in 2006".

In other words, without continued external funding for technical support, the centres would not be able to sustain their learning programmes.

Similarly, another of the large projects was hoping to access funding from either the successor to the Communities@One Programme or from the Convergence Programme and without this would have to cut back drastically on its activities while the final of our project-based case studies was developing its own Convergence Fund application.

Paradoxically, the lack of sustainability is to some extent in inverse proportion to the extent to which projects have been developed in line with the philosophy of the Programme, involving revenue funding of staff (either on salaried, fixed-term

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[118] This excludes four "Phase 1 projects" which were superseded by Phase 2 projects by the same organisation and one project where we had insufficient information to make a judgement.

contracts or on a sessional basis) and eschewing an emphasis on "kit", since there is no prospect of the majority of these posts becoming self-funding. This was recognised by several central stakeholders:

"If you want to help some of these groups with learning you are always going to need funding: they aren't in a position to pay for it".

At the time of our final stage fieldwork, none of our projects had so far started to charge core clients for services, even where (in one or two cases), this had been envisaged in the applications, so even where staff were not funded from the Programme, there may be issues in terms of meeting running costs such as internet access, consumables and insurance (which has proved a major headache for a number of projects).

Of course, in principle, many of the projects should not have to be eternal: it might be argued that the aim in many cases should be to generate awareness of the importance of access to ICT and the skills to use it on the part of those who do not currently possess them and, once the flame has been lit, to withdraw, leaving it to the market to provide the tools for ongoing engagement. However, many stakeholders recognised that this position was far from being achieved:

"You could have a Communities@One project for the next 10 years and still not reach everyone you ought to".

To some extent, some projects, particularly those concerned with providing technical support to community and voluntary groups, have focussed on capacity building, on enabling the groups to provide their own support in the longer term, but even these projects believed (quite rightly in our view) that they had not reached a position where the short-term needs for support and training had been met by the end of the Programme.

Finally, in terms of social enterprise, while many central stakeholders argued that this had never been intended to be a major focus of the Communities@One Programme, other staff and stakeholders were keen to emphasise that this was the direction that any successor Programme should take. Indeed, the Central Team pointed out that they had identified more than 40 projects which had the capacity to be income generating.

However, while many of the organisations who had benefited from Grant Fund projects in our case-studies had some elements of social enterprise activity within their broader portfolio, few saw any prospect in the short term of generating significant revenue from the activities which thus far had been financed with the support of Communities@One because these had generally been provided free of charge.

Indeed, for some of the beneficiaries, it was the fact that the services available from Communities@One projects (whether in terms of internet access, use of materials or technical support) were free which made them attractive: these beneficiaries were (for the most part) clear that they could not afford (or at least would be unwilling) to pay for them.

This was certainly the case with the care and repair services which were integral parts of two of the large projects considered above, though in one of these projects

(which had received a grant of more than £200,000 over a two year period) the project was generating around £10,000 a year in income and the manager believed it might be viable to cover 50% of core costs within three to five years (though part of this would come from recharging costs for technical support to other parts of the organisation which ran the project).

However, in a small number of cases, social enterprises have already emerged from projects. This was true for example of a County-wide digital storytelling project (originally located within a local authority) which has now been established on an independent basis: however, at the time of the final stage fieldwork, grants were being sought (for example from the Arts Council for Wales) to finance core costs of the new organisation because without such support the business was not seen as viable.

Concerns that the prospects for developing social enterprises from the core business of Communities@One were voiced by a number of interviewees:

"I do wonder how many [funded groups] really understand what social enterprise means, as opposed to income generation".

"We know they will still be funding-led to a certain extent, though in 10 years time they might be in a different place….we have stimulated lots of thinking about sustainability but [given the short time frame]… you are not going to do any miracles really, but if there is a second phase coming on, I would like to think we can build into the programme…an element of sustainability".

3.5 Impacts

We pointed out in our 2007 report that quantifying the impacts of the Communities@One Programme was likely to be impossible, even at the stage of this final evaluation, because of the very diverse nature of the projects being funded, the difficulty of deriving meaningful aggregate data and the very strong influence of external factors (including the inter-relationship of different Communities@One projects). Since impact represents the net outcomes, once deadweight (in other words, results which would have been achieved even in the absence of the policy intervention concerned) and displacement are stripped away, the absence of firm data with regard to outcomes (which is in part a consequence of the nature of Communities@One, centred as it is on a small-scale, bottom-up, community-based Grant Fund) means that it is impossible to draw firm conclusions as to the impacts of the Programme. Moreover, with the Programme still winding down, it is too early for longer-term effects to be considered, even if the means of monitoring them (for example, following up what has happened to beneficiaries in terms of any sort of progression) were available.

However, considering in turn the potential impacts which our monitoring and evaluation framework identified the Programme as aspiring to achieve, we can draw some broad conclusions.

Firstly, in terms of the policy agenda, it is clear that Communities@One has been central to and helped inform, if not drive, Welsh policy on digital inclusion. It has also had an impact on thinking elsewhere, serving as an example for the European Commission of what a citizen-focussed digital inclusion initiative might look like.

Secondly, it is clear that Grant Fund projects have enabled organisations to reach out to and engage often quite large numbers of individuals in ICT based activities, potentially at least increasing their skills and confidence.

Our analysis of the way in which projects were developed (Section 3.2.2) suggests that in the majority of cases, projects were unlikely to have come forward in the absence of the Communities@One Programme: only a quarter of projects - ten in all - were "pre-existing projects" which were already seeking funding in advance of the Programme and some of the larger of these would, in our view, have been unlikely to identify alternative sources of funding. This appears to be confirmed by the very limited evidence from our control group areas which suggests that deprived communities without access to the Programme found it difficult to develop and to get funding for digital inclusion type projects.

Taken together, we believe there is probably a relatively high degree of project-level additionality, in other words, that many of the Grant Fund projects would simply not have existed in the absence of the Programme.

However, it is also important to consider whether for the individuals and community groups benefiting from Grant Fund projects, there would have been alternative ways to achieving the same results, even in the absence of those projects ("beneficiary-level additionality").

Here it is more difficult to draw definite conclusions. In terms of the evidence from our beneficiaries, most, as we have seen had access to a PC, though not necessarily an internet connection at home – even if many of these may have lacked the skills or confidence to use it.

Overall, we calculate that just under a quarter of the small number of beneficiaries we interviewed might have found alternative ways of getting the access to ICT or the support with ICT that they received from Communities@One through alternative means. Generally, this was because:

- Individuals were aware of similar facilities available elsewhere which they could (and in some cases) had used but preferred the environment offered by the Communities@One project in terms of location, or ambience or because it had a direct relevance to another activity: for example, two friends of a mentor at one drop-in project, one of whom had a broadband enabled PC at home, but who preferred to undertake job search activities at the centre to have company; a member of a Church with an IT suite provided by Communities@One who undertook some training but had used computers in her work for 15 years and had a good level of IT literacy; or a volunteer at the cancer charity who had already taken the initiative to attend learndirect ICT courses and already had a PC at home.

- Individuals could have paid for the service provided from an alternative source, for example a small number of the beneficiaries of the care and repair services, or two users of a drop-in centre based at a local community centre, who preferred using the PC there to those in the library because it was free to print off materials (though they also preferred the ambience of the community centre).

- Individuals who were accessing equipment for purposes which they were already using other ICT equipment elsewhere, for example, the members of the youth group who accessed laptops provided by the Grant Fund at their Monday evening group, but each of whom had access to their own PCs at home and at school which they were using for similar applications.

Even allowing for these forms of "deadweight", however, it is clear that the large majority of the beneficiaries (around three quarters) would not have benefited from similar facilities and services in the absence of the Grant Fund projects and many of these, as we have seen, paid eloquent testimony to positive effects of participation on their skills and confidence and in turn their quality of life. These represent real impacts for Communities@One and, as one of our central stakeholders argued:

"Digital inclusion is just the starting point, it can lead to all sorts of potential benefits and advantages".

At the same time, as we pointed out in our 2007 report, in a number of the projects (particularly the smaller ones) within our sample there was a tendency for the facilities/projects to be centred on a relatively limited range of individuals who were already active within organisations which were the grant recipients. In some cases, this was the explicit intention of the Grant, but in others (such as the Church project referred to above, or a digital storytelling project where it was members of the management committee of a Community Centre – itself a recipient of Communities@One funding – who had taken part) this was less obviously the intention. While the individuals concerned were in most cases themselves *"digitally excluded"*, and had low levels of formal education, they were not socially marginalised. In similar vein, a number of projects commented that they had not publicised the resources purchased by Communities@One because they were afraid of excessive demand. This view was also reflected by one of the Brokers who agreed that for small projects, they had generally worked with their existing members, who by definition were not the most *socially* excluded:

"If we scored a 10 on digital inclusion, we'd have a 5 on social inclusion".

and by several of the central stakeholders:

"Those with mental health problems or on the game, homeless or whatever…I don't think I see much evidence of reaching out that little bit farther to groups that like, I guess it's the more socially acceptable within socially excluded groups…if you were going to go that bit further, the levels of investment would be different again…I think its doable, but …it would be a much more intensive approach".

*"[Communities@One has] enabled the active, the middle classes of the deprived, to do something. In any community, there are going to be a few people who are looking for an opportunity and I think those people have seen this as an opportunity and taken it…I don't really think **we've** reached into the really deprived, though some of the projects will have touched them".*

To this extent, the aspiration for the Programme to have an impact in terms of tying voluntary and community organisations more firmly still into their communities may have only been realised in part.

In terms of harder impacts, relating to learning, employability and employment, as we have seen in our consideration of outcomes, these are likely to have been slight. This partly reflects the demography of beneficiaries but also reflects the fact that the Programme as a whole was focused on promoting social and digital inclusion more than these harder outcomes.

In terms of the impact on voluntary and community organisations themselves, there is little doubt that the existence of the Programme and in particular the Grant Fund has had a significant impact in terms of raising awareness of the issue of digital inclusion and in integrating this into the thinking of such organisations in Communities First areas. At the same time, it is less clear that the Programme has had as great an impact as might have been expected in terms of disseminating good practice, or of developing a more integrated voluntary and community sector within targeted areas, while the impact in terms of creating (as opposed to opening the way for) sustainable social enterprises is also quite limited.

Finally, it is impossible at present to comment on whether the Programme has had an impact in transforming attitudes not just of individuals but of whole communities in Communities First areas. If the aggregate figures for beneficiaries – at over 33,000 or nearly 300 per Communities First area – are at all accurate in terms of individuals, it might be expected that the awareness and use of ICT in these areas really would have changed visibly at the level of each community. However, without either longitudinal data on proxies for engagement (such as the increase in access to ICT and/or internet connections at home in Communities First wards relative to all wards) or household based attitude surveys, neither of which could be resourced within this evaluation, it is impossible to verify if this is the case. Most of those interviewed believed, however, that it was too early to expect transformation at the community level:

"We are talking dozens, not hundreds in this area…considering where you are and the people you are dealing with, dozens was a good outcome".

"If I was looking at spread of projects, its probably only 1 or 1 ¼ projects per area, I think realistically if you were looking for it to have a significant impact at a community level…you would have to almost flood an area…..at the end of the day, its small pots of money".

"If you can create a small kernel of people in each community with an enthusiasm for IT that will make a difference…from that point of view it has worked quite well".

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

There is little doubt that in many ways Communities@One has succeeded in a way few initially expected, and which is remarkable given the relatively short timescale over which it has operated.

The Programme has succeeded in developing a facilitated Grant Fund, based around the new Broker model, which has brought forward more than 200 projects, the overwhelming majority of which have been led by voluntary and community organisations and has succeeded in disbursing more than £7 million without moving away from the original emphasis on supporting small projects. While funded groups had some criticisms of the perceived bureaucracy around the Programme (particularly in terms of the financial processes), most were very strongly appreciative of the role of the Brokers and felt that this was a model for other funders.

Many of these projects funded by the Grant Fund have offered new opportunities in terms of access to ICT and to the skills and confidence to use it to individuals who have otherwise had little exposure to such technology. The limited evidence available to us suggests a relatively high level of additionality both in terms of Grant Fund projects being brought forward and individual beneficiaries increasing their knowledge and awareness who would otherwise have struggled to do so. If a strong focus on older people, which appears to have characterised many projects, has implications in terms of limiting the potential impact of the Programme in terms of addressing issues around economic inactivity, it ties in with the strong evidence that older people are most likely to be digitally excluded and, as a result, are likely to suffer in terms of access to services and a reduction in their quality of life.

Moreover, the Programme has succeeded in promoting awareness of and interest in the issue of digital inclusion at the level of Welsh Assembly Government policy – albeit with only (thus far) a limited penetration in terms of education and skills.

At the same time, it seems clear that the enormous effort that has gone into making the Grant Fund work has perhaps reduced the effectiveness of the Programme in some other ways. In particular, the Brokers have had less time to work with other local stakeholders to increase their engagement with digital inclusion activities and less time to help strengthen the networking of the voluntary and community sector within targeted areas, with the exception of collaboration flowing very directly out of Grant Fund activity. There has sometimes been a tendency to do things *for* funded Groups (not least in terms of coping with the disciplines of external funding) rather than to enable them to gain the skills to do so them themselves. Progress in capturing and disseminating good practice and learning from Grant Fund projects is probably not as great as might have been hoped.

Moreover – and an inevitable consequence of working from the bottom up – there has been a wide variety of different experience in different areas, with our case-study areas suggesting that the Programme may actually have reinforced the gap between Communities First areas with a vibrant and engaged voluntary and community sector and ones where the voluntary and community infrastructure was limited. The limited timescales of the Programme may also have meant that some projects have had insufficient time to really establish themselves. There is also evidence of a lack of focus on progression routes for individuals who want to move on beyond the *"taster"* they may have got from engagement with a Grant Fund project.

Finally, because of the way in which the Programme was set up, there is a lack of meaningful data to illuminate the achievements of the Programme.

At the outset of the evaluation process, this final stage was intended to assess the extent to which Communities@One had been *"successful in meeting its stated aim"*. In practice, as the monitoring and evaluation framework revealed, the Programme had a wide range of different aspirations and objectives, which we have considered throughout this report.

In terms of the four Objectives set out in the Project Plan (see Section 2.2), it is possible to conclude that Communities@One:

- Has succeeded very well in addressing the objective of ICT enabled communities, albeit that for reasons of timescale and philosophy (in terms of working with the pre-existing voluntary and community sector) it would be an exaggeration to claim that is has succeeded in *"ensuring that suitable ICT provision is made available throughout the project area"*.
- Has also succeeded well in providing national and local information and support structures, in particular through the role of the Brokers, with the caveat that more can still be done to draw out and share good practice.
- Has made progress in terms of moving towards a community sector enabled by ICT, though inevitably the impact on individual voluntary and community organisations has varied considerably and to some extent may have been somewhat more limited than anticipated. The intention to *"enable local organisations to engage local ICT specialists to support their work so creating new jobs in high technology in SMEs and social enterprises"* has probably only been met to a fairly limited degree.
- Has not really made progress in terms of supporting better enabled service delivery, except incidentally as a by-product of helping individuals to access information on-line more generally: however, key stakeholders argued that this had never been a central objective in practice.

In terms of the Underlying Principles (see Section 2.2) we can conclude that Communities@One has:

- Succeeded to a considerable extent, given the scale of resources available in bringing new provision to areas where it did not previously exist.
- Succeeded well in supporting the extension of existing provision, albeit that the focus on *"the most marginalised groups"* may not always have been possible.
- Made some progress – certainly in the context of Grant Fund projects – in terms of ensuring that "c*ontact is made between ICT activities that are already in place in order that they…can benefit from working and learning together".*
- Has succeeded in identifying priorities by working with local community groups.

As a summative evaluation, we would not normally expect to put forward a significant number of recommendations. However, we are conscious that work is in hand to develop a successor Programme to Communities@One, something which we believe is well justified by the evidence we have found. We therefore make a series of recommendations in respect of this potential future Programme, after first addressing a number of short-term recommendations for the last few months of the Programme

(Recommendations 1 and 2) and some recommendations for actions independent of whether a successor Programme is funded (Recommendations 3 - 5). We have not made a recommendation in terms of whether a future Programme should be targeted on Communities First (or Communities Next) areas as we believe the arguments here are finely balanced, and will depend on the scale of resources available.

Recommendation 1: In the remaining lifetime of the Programme, it is important to continue to build up a comprehensive archive which will enable interested groups to draw on good practice developed through Communities@One. This should include completing the work on the case-studies and ensuring these are available on the website and creating an archive of content (such as digital stories) produced with the support of the Programme.

Recommendation 2: Consideration needs to be given as to how it is possible to engage those groups who have not taken part in any networking activities using any unused resources. This might involve undertaking small scale, but very local events towards the end of the year, although clearly these will need to build on, not cut across work already undertaken in the context of digital legacy.

Recommendation 3: The Welsh Assembly Government needs to ensure that there is a clear statement of overall digital inclusion policy to inform future work. This does not need to be a bulky or complex document, however, and could be integrated into another relevant policy framework.

Recommendation 4: The Social Justice and Local Government Department needs to make further efforts at Ministerial and senior official level to engage the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills with delivering the digital inclusion agenda.

Recommendation 5: The Social Justice and Local Government Department should ensure that the experience of the Broker model is well disseminated to other parts of the Welsh Assembly Government operating Grant regimes targeted at the voluntary and community sector and should also share this experience with other funders (such as the Big Lottery Fund).

Recommendation 6: Any future Programme needs to have much longer time-horizons (we would suggest a minimum of five years)

Recommendation 7: Any future Programme should retain the Broker model which we believe has proved its worth, but should seek to put in place clearer guidance on the extent to which Brokers should undertake tasks for assisted groups as opposed to supporting them to do so. There should be greater emphasis on providing (mandatory) training at a very local level to assisted voluntary and community groups on monitoring and reporting which could also be used to encourage networking.

Recommendation 8: Any future Programme needs to consider carefully how to ensure there are referral mechanisms (provided either through the Programme or by engaging with others such as Careers Wales or learndirect) for individuals who have taken part in projects or activities funded by the Programme but wish to progress onto other opportunities which the group they are in contact with cannot provide.

Recommendation 9: Any future programme needs to consider carefully what (if any) role it is to play in terms of working with public service providers to increase access

to public services on-line, apart from as an incidental potential by-product of increasing digital inclusion more generally.

Recommendation 10: Any future Programme needs to consider carefully the balance between any Grant Fund and the overall programme budget. We believe a Grant Fund does have a merit in terms of clarifying what activity is being funded (particularly where this is clearly linked to measurable outputs and outcomes) but we agree with many interviewees that the current Programme has been imbalanced, risking insufficient investment in real community development activity. We also believe it is essential to consider how funds can be used to ensure that areas where there are no suitable existing voluntary and community organisations able to be mobilised to promote digital inclusion do not miss out.

Recommendation 11: Any future Grant Fund should continue to scrutinise carefully applications which focus on the acquisition of "kit", in order to ensure that they are really intended to boost digital inclusion. This should be easier in a Programme with longer time horizons

Recommendation 12: In any future Programme, digital storytelling projects should be encouraged to use the *"digital inclusion through digital storytelling"* ladder, to ensure that there is an emphasis on engaging individuals with technology, not just with telling their stories.

Recommendation 13: Any future Programme needs to allocate enhanced resources to monitoring and needs to identify a small number of core output indicators with associated standard definitions which should be used by all Grant Fund projects or streams of activity (e.g. beneficiaries, new users of facilities, community groups assisted). This should be informed by considering examples of good and bad practice in objective-setting on the part of the current Programme's Grant Fund projects, as well as work undertaken for other relevant Programmes (e.g. relevant Structural Fund Programmes; Communities First).

Recommendation 14: Any future programme targeted on specific spatial areas needs to have access to some tracking data (at least in a sample of the areas) about uptake of digital technologies. If a successor Programme is funded, we would suggest that baseline research (based on a large-scale household sample) be commissioned in a sample of targeted areas which would provide evidence of the current level of use of ICT and other digital technologies, and which could be repeated towards the end of the Programme.

Recommendation 15: While we recognise the importance of not imposing excessive bureaucracy on funded groups, any future Programme needs to consider how to better track outcomes of funded projects. Consideration should be given to funding longitudinal research with a sample of individual beneficiaries of funded projects or activities.

Recommendation 16: Monitoring and claims processes for any future Grant Fund need to be reviewed, including providing the option of using an on-line system for filing claims for those groups who wish to do so and trying, in so far as possible, to reduce the detail required in terms of categorising individual items of expenditure (though not in providing documentary evidence to support claims) and to increase the flexibility to vire money between different categories of expenditure.

Recommendation 17: The ICT platform used by the Programme needs to be reviewed and redeveloped for any future Programme.

APPENDIX 1

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

	Impact
Impact	More coherent and effective policy making	People developing ICT skills and becoming more confident in their use of ICTs	People becoming and remaining up-to-date with technological developments	People making greater use of ICT to access information	Target groups feeling and becoming more connected to their communities	Social enterprises established or community groups becoming sustainable	Successful projects/ approaches replicated in other areas	Improved quality of life

Impact row (second part):

People becoming more employable	People becoming economically active

Outcome

People accessing and using ICT for the first time via community groups	Community group facilities better used by a wider range of people	Users of community ICT facilities enthusing others in the community to become engaged with new technologies	Community based technical support providers becoming commercially viable
Existing users learning to use ICT at a higher level or in more diverse ways	ICT used for a wider range of community purposes		

Output

Greater community group use of ICT for core activities	Increased community group engagement with target groups	Better quality of technical support available to community groups and clients	Increased profile of groups and facilities within communities	Greater opportunity for community to access modern, connected ICT facilities	More informal learning opportunities available

Process

Community groups acquire new ICT hardware and software	Community groups receive technical support	Monitor community groups' implementation of projects and provide support where necessary	Report progress to central team	Central team process grant claims
Community groups appoint staff				

E X T E R N A L I T I E S

Input

Grant funding	Technical support funding	Broker time	Central team time	Partners' time and expertise	Community groups' time	Community groups' resources

WAG C@1 Funding

Outcome

Influence on local and national digital inclusion policy	Stakeholders developing services to meet community needs	Community groups more focused and coherent in their aims	Community groups submitting successful C@1 grant applications
		Community groups working with other groups or stakeholders	

Output

Stakeholders better understanding of the local 'landscape'	Identification of good practice	Community groups better understanding of the support infrastructure	Development of new and existing project ideas
Better links between community groups		Community groups recognising the potential of ICT	

Process

Central team monitor, report and influence policy making	Broker engagement with community groups	Brokers signposting groups to appropriate sources of help	Brokers & central team sharing good practice with others and promoting integration	Central team manage brokers	Brokers reporting providing central team with progress reports	Processing grant and technical support applications
	Broker engagement with local stakeholders e.g. CVCs, CF Coordinators				Central team reporting progress to Advisory Group & WAG	

Input

C@1 Central staff time	Broker time	Partners' time & expertise	Community groups' time	Community groups' resources

WAG C@1 Funding

PRE GRANT/SUPPORT AWARD	POST GRANT/SUPPORT AWARD

TIME