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Independent Evaluation of WCVA's Making the Connections Project
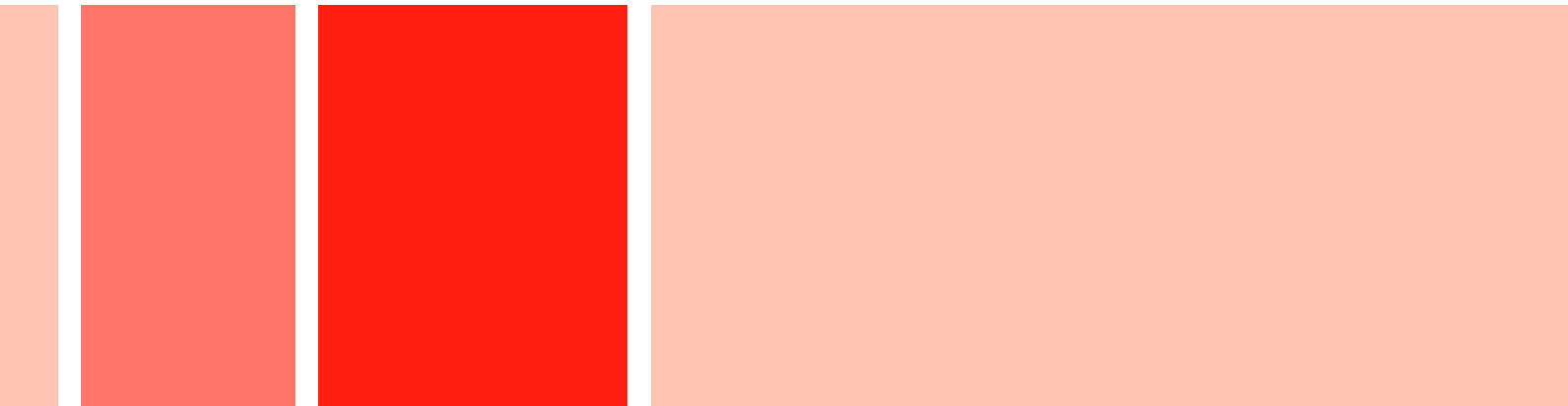
Baseline and Initial Process Evaluation

Independent Evaluation of the WCVA's 'Making the Connections' Project

BASELINE AND INITIAL PROCESS EVALUATION

Gareth Williams, Old Bell 3 Ltd

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

CVC	County Voluntary Council
ESF	European Social Fund
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
GAVO	Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations
LHB	Local Health Board
LSB	Local Service Board
MtC	Making the Connections
RBA	Results Based Accountability
SIP	Single Integrated Plan
SLA	Service Level Agreement
TSO	Third Sector Organisation
WCVA	Wales Council for Voluntary Action
WEFO	Welsh European Funding Office
WG	Welsh Government
WLGA	Welsh Local Government Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Old Bell 3 Ltd. has been commissioned by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) in conjunction with the Welsh Government to undertake an independent evaluation of the WCVA's 'Making the Connections' (MtC) project[1].

Established in June 2012 and fully operational by March 2013, the MtC project provides funding for additional post(s) within each County Voluntary Council (CVC) in the Convergence area to stimulate and harness the contribution of the third sector to the public service reform work being driven forward by Local Service Boards (LSBs).

The MtC project aims to building the long-term capacity of the third sector to contribute to the process of public service reform and in particular to the implementation of the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) developed for each local authority area. In particular, MtC's objectives are:

- to enhance the readiness of third sector organisations to deliver public services, including co-produced services;
- to increase the number of third sector organisations prepared to deliver public services through consortia or collaborations;
- to ensure that the third sector is better informed about the LSB and progress of public sector reform in its area and more generally;
- to increase the capacity of the third sector to engage meaningfully with service users; and
- to increase the capacity of the third sector to influence decisions affecting design and delivery of public services.

The project is due to end in March 2015 (though funding for the MtC Officers will cease on 31 December 2014) and the project evaluation will support decision makers in determining whether and how the project is meeting its

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[1] Part funded by the European Social Fund through the Welsh Government as part of the wider the Local Service Board Development and Priority Delivery Project - funded under Priority 4 Theme 1 of the Convergence ESF Operational Programme for West Wales and the Valleys

stated objectives, as well as providing on-going feedback and learning that allows continuing improvements to be made to the project.

This report is the first of what is expected to be three reports arising from the evaluation: a formative evaluation will be undertaken in the first six months of 2014, with a final evaluation to be undertaken by March 2015.

The report is based on work programme undertaken between October and December 2013 which involved:

- an inception phase, leading to a final Work Programme agreed by the Steering Group and including a meeting with the team undertaking the long-term evaluation of the wider LSB ESF project[2] to share views and fieldwork approaches;
- receiving and reviewing monitoring data from the MtC project, as well as SIPs and MtC Officers' individual action plans;
- developing and deploying a short survey addressed to key LSB stakeholders in both the Convergence area and in East Wales;
- undertaking four face-to-face interviews with 'national' stakeholders and two focus groups with MtC officers not working within the case-study areas;
- undertaking a package of fieldwork relating to five case-study areas involving desk research and face-to-face or telephone interviews with key local stakeholders;
- Undertaking a literature and data review covering key policy documents, data related to the third sector in Wales and documentation specifically related to the MtC project.

While it may well be premature to try to draw any firm conclusions as to the progress of the MtC project at this very early stage of the research, our work to date suggests:

- The aims and objectives of the project resonate well with some consistent themes of Welsh Government policy over the last decade in

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[2] Cardiff University, Shared Intelligence and IFF Research Ltd.

terms of the need to increase the engagement of the third sector in the design and delivery of public services and to strengthen the role of the citizen's voice in shaping public services;

- There is considerable 'buy-in' to the overall project concept, though many of those involved think it is overly ambitious given the scale of the project and the short time-scale over which it is being implemented;

- The delay between conceiving the project and implementing it appears to have had a negative impact, with considerable instability and change within the environment of partnership working at a local level making it more difficult for the MtC officers to establish themselves;

- The baseline for the project is very different from one area (and to some extent from one public service) to the next. While in most areas there appears to have been a reasonable level of formal engagement of the third sector in discussions about local services, the general view of interviewees was that experience on the ground prior to the establishment of the project was very mixed. The limited data from WCVA suggests that the level of third sector earned income from public service delivery was in reality very limited, although a common perception is that the sector is increasingly divided between larger organisations, particularly in children's services and health and social care, who are well geared up to compete and smaller organisations whose contribution is less recognised and who are much less able to make the transition from grant dependency to a more competitive environment. Other recent evaluations suggest that citizen engagement and working with the third sector, while important themes in local partnership working, may not be seen as the highest priorities for local government in particular;

- In practice, MtC officers are being deployed in very different ways in different areas, with decisions about their day to day activities informed to a great extent by the context within which they are operating;

- While it is difficult to generalise, there appears to be a strong focus on participation in meetings and disseminating information about LSB and other partnership working, with less focus on input into service design

(arguably because many LSBs are not yet dealing with such practical issues). Work on building the capacity of third sector organisations to generate earned income from public service delivery is in some cases a major focus of the role but in others, the CVC has other resources with which to deliver this sort of activity on the scale they think appropriate. Work on the citizen's voice also varies considerably, though supporting LSB teams on their engagement work appears to have been a key function for some officers;

- There is an inherent tension in the project design between the CVCs as the employer and line-manager and WCVA as project manager and, in practice, the attempt to ensure that the MtC officers role reflects the RBA framework has come into conflict with the understandable desire by CVCs to deploy an additional resource in a way which compliments their other staff's pre-existing roles;

- The work to develop Individual Action Plans and to agree a report card has been relatively onerous but, despite this, the current arrangements do not seem to be working particularly well;

- MtC officers and other interviewees report a range of positive results to date, and the small number of survey respondents believe that the officers are making a positive contribution to increasing the visibility and role of the third sector in LSB and partnership working and in the design and delivery of public services;

- Most interviewees believe that the formal targets for the project will be met (with the possible exception of secondments) but there are mixed views about the extent to which the project will achieve the outcomes envisaged in the RBA framework, particularly within the lifetime of the project.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Old Bell 3 Ltd. has been commissioned by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) in conjunction with the Welsh Government to undertake an independent evaluation of the WCVA's 'Making the Connections' (MtC) project[3].

Established in June 2012 and fully operational by March 2013, the MtC project provides funding for additional post(s) within each County Voluntary Council (CVC) in the Convergence area to stimulate and harness the contribution of the third sector to the public service reform work being driven forward by Local Service Boards (LSBs)[4].

Originating as a distinct project proposal to WEFO from the WCVA and CVCs, the project has been awarded funding of some £2.7 million from the European Social Fund (ESF)[5] as part of a wider (and previously approved) Welsh Government project – the Local Service Board Development and Priority Delivery Project - funded under Priority 4 Theme 1 of the Convergence ESF Operational Programme for West Wales and the Valleys[6].

The MtC project aims to complement the wider project by building the long-term capacity of the third sector to contribute to the process of public service reform and in particular to the implementation of the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) developed for each local authority area. In particular, MtC's objectives are:

- to enhance the readiness of third sector organisations to deliver public services, including co-produced services;

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[3] Part funded by the European Social Fund through the Welsh Government

[4] The project provides funding for one project development officer in each of 13 CVCs and two in the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO), which covers both Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, as well as a central project management resource (1.9 FTE) in WCVA itself.

[5] The total funding for the project consists of £2.7 million of ESF, £453,352 of match funding from CVCs and £45,788 of match funding from WCVA.

[6] Throughout this report we use 'the project' to refer to the WCVA element of the wider project, and 'the wider project' to refer to the overall LSB Development and Priority Projects Delivery Project.

- to increase the number of third sector organisations prepared to deliver public services through consortia or collaborations;

- to ensure that the third sector is better informed about the LSB and progress of public sector reform in its area and more generally;

- to increase the capacity of the third sector to engage meaningfully with service users; and

- to increase the capacity of the third sector to influence decisions affecting design and delivery of public services[7].

The project is due to end in March 2015 (though funding for the MtC Officers will cease on 31 December 2014) and the project evaluation will support decision makers in determining whether and how the project is meeting its stated objectives, as well as providing on-going feedback and learning that allows continuing improvements to be made to the project.

1.2 Aim of the Evaluation and of this Report

The aims of the evaluation are to:
1. Assess how MtC has impacted on the involvement of the third sector in public service delivery, development and redesign;
2. Assess how MtC has affected the design, planning and development of local public services and whether this has brought about improvement.

The detailed objectives for the evaluation are to:
- examine how the role of the third sector in delivering local services is changing (e.g. whether the scope and volume of the third sector's delivery is changing);

- explore how supply and demand for third sector services has changed and how this will affect its sustainability;

- assess impacts of these changes on workforce planning and skills in the third sector;

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[7] From the Project Summary as submitted to WEFO. See also Section 2.

- explore whether the relationship and network-building and other activities of MtC officers will be sustainable beyond the lifetime of the Project;
- examine if and how the third sector's influence on key partnerships, and the activities they pursue, is improving through the implementation of MtC;
- assess whether the design and planning of public services (particularly around Single Integrated Plan priorities) is being improved through better integration of the third sector;
- examine how citizen engagement has featured in the establishment of LSB and SIP priorities and the design and delivery of services;
- assess whether MtC has brought about improvements in this respect.

This report is the first of what is expected to be three reports arising from the evaluation: a formative evaluation will be undertaken in the first six months of 2014, with a final evaluation to be undertaken by March 2015.

Although intended principally as a review of the baseline, in reality this initial phase of the work was undertaken only once the project was well underway. It thus represents both an attempt to establish a baseline retrospectively and an initial process evaluation, albeit on the basis of limited evidence.

1.3 Method

This report is based on a work programme undertaken between October and December 2013 which involved:
- an initial meeting with the Evaluation Steering Group to agree the work programme;
- agreeing with the Steering Group an initial list of five case-study areas, taking into account contextual differences in the various CVCs and the diversity of different approaches adopted by MtC officers;
- an initial meeting with the MtC officers on 9 October 2013;

- a meeting with the team undertaking the long-term evaluation of the wider project[8] to share views and fieldwork approaches;
- receiving and reviewing monitoring data from the MtC project, as well as SIPs and MtC Officers' individual action plans;
- developing a questioning framework for the entire project;
- developing and deploying a short survey addressed to key LSB stakeholders in both the Convergence area and in East Wales. It was originally intended to conduct this as a web survey but because of concerns over the likely response rate, a telephone survey approach was used. However, response rates were still low, with only 27 completed interviews from a sample of 161 contacts (17%);
- undertaking 'national' stakeholder interviews on a face-to-face basis with:
    - Tricia Jones, the Project Manager (who resigned as of 31 October 2013);
    - Constance Adams, WCVA;
    - Amanda Williams, Participation Cymru;
    - Ceri Thomas, the wider project manager in the Welsh Government[9];
- undertaking two focus groups (one in South Wales, one in North Wales) with MtC officers not working within the case-study areas: in all, these were attended by nine officers[10];
- undertaking a package of fieldwork relating to each of the five selected areas which involved:
    - analysis of key background information including the SIP, the MtC Officer individual action plan and CVC data;
    - face-to-face or telephone interviews with key local stakeholders (in all, we conducted 18 separate interviews);
    - drafting a short case-study report;

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[8] Cardiff University, Shared Intelligence and IFF Research Ltd.
[9] We had also hoped to interview Eleanor Marks of the Welsh Government's Communities Division but this has not proved possible in the timescale.
[10] Two of these were part-time officers from the same CVC. One post was vacant at the time we were undertaking the fieldwork and one officer was on long-term sickness absence.

- Undertaking a literature and data review covering key policy documents, data related to the third sector in Wales and documentation specifically related to the MtC project;
- drafting this report.

1.4 Structure of this Report

In the remainder of this report, we firstly set out the background to the project and the context within which it is operating, including a project logic model which summarises our understanding of the relationship between project activities, outputs, results and longer-term impacts **(Section 2).** We then report on our findings from this initial phase of the fieldwork **(Section 3)** before **(Section 4)** providing a brief set of conclusions.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Policy Context

2.1.1 The Public Service Reform Agenda

The Welsh Government has, over more than a decade since the publication of the original 'Making the Connections' report authored by Sir Jeremy Beecham in 2004, developed a distinctive and coherent approach to public sector service delivery based around the idea of 'voice, rather than choice', in other words seeking to harness the experience, views and preferences of service users to help shape public services that are more tailored and responsive to users' needs in preference to a more marketised approach. This approach has been based around the need for collaboration rather than competition within the public sector in order to improve the integration between different services and to deliver citizen-focused services.

A critical part of this approach was the creation of Local Service Boards (LSBs) within each of the local authority areas in Wales, a process which was set in train by the (then) Welsh Assembly Government in 'Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries' (2006). LSBs were intended: *'to bring together the key contributors to local service delivery, both devolved and non-devolved. They will have a mission to improve service delivery and undertake joint action where the need is identified in fields such as health and social care, services for vulnerable children and others where good outcomes depend on joined-up action'*[11].

The LSBs would *'develop out of the existing Community Strategy Partnerships and build on their valuable experience, adding to that the mission for joint action on service delivery'*[12].

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[11] Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries', Welsh Assembly Government, 2006 p.3
[12] Ibid., p. 20

At that time, however, the intention was for the LSBs to be an over-arching mechanism of co-ordination, bringing together the main public service providers (Local Authorities, Local Health Boards [LHBs], Police, the Fire and Rescue services and Welsh Government itself) but complimenting rather than supplanting pre-existing thematic partnerships:

'Local Service Boards are not intended to replace key existing partnerships such as those for Community Safety, Health and Well-Being and Children and Young People, but they will provide the hub around which these other partnerships can function'[13].

However, in the context of pressure on public finances and *'a multiplication of joint working arrangements at different levels and across multiple partners, including those partnerships working at a community level through the Communities First Programme [and] the development by the WLGA of Regional Partnerships'*[14], the Welsh Government has become increasingly concerned to achieve some streamlining of institutional arrangements at the local level.

Thus, the 'Programme for Government' of the new Labour administration in 2011 promised to '*simplify our statutory partnership structures, removing the need for so many separate plans, needs assessments and committees'*[15] and to *'publish statutory guidance that will set out clearly what Ministers expect from local authorities and public service partners in respect of increasing effective collaborative activity'*[16].

These promises were followed through with the publication (initially in January 2012 as a draft consultation document and then as final statutory guidance in June 2012) of 'Shared Purpose, Shared Delivery: Guidance on Integrating Partnerships and Plans'.

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[13] Ibid., p. 21
[14] Literature Review for the LSB-ESF Development and Priority Delivery Project, Meza et al, Cardiff Business School, 2013, p.4
[15] Programme for Government, Welsh Government, 2011 p. 8
[16] Ibid., p.9

While expressing general satisfaction with the development of partnership working between those involved in the development and delivery of public services, the Guidance noted that:

'as these local partnerships have developed they have given rise to too much complexity and duplication, including second and third tier partnerships, working groups and task and finish groups'[17].

It therefore concluded that:

'Streamlining of local partnership structures under the clear leadership of the LSB is necessary in order to make them fit for purpose, to re-establish accountability and redirect staff and resources to support integrated planning and delivery'[18].

At the centre of this process of streamlining was the requirement for each LSB to develop - by April 2013 - a Single Integrated Plan (SIP), which would *'replace at least four of the existing statutory plans and strategies (the Community Strategy, the Children and Young People's Plan, the Health, Social Care and Well-being Strategy and the Community Safety Partnership Plan...), thereby reducing complexity and duplication, and freeing up resources'*[19].

SIPs were to be based on *'a strategic needs analysis to determine which should be the priorities for local action'*[20]. Crucially, SIPs and the needs analyses underpinning them were seen as integrally linked to the need to re-orient service provision to a much clearer focus on early interventions, not least as a way of responding to increasing financial pressures:
'It is the view of the Welsh Government that the foundation for moving forward sustainably is a well-evidenced, single integrated plan for the area that clearly reflects the needs of the local population, and that local government and partners must focus their efforts most forcefully on early intervention and

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[17] Shared Purpose, Shared Delivery: Guidance on Integrating Partnerships and Plans, Welsh Government, 2012, p. 3
[18] Ibid., p. 4
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., p. 9

prevention, in order to break cycles of dependency and prevent the persistence of poor outcomes from one generation to the next[21].

A critical part of the needs analysis was expected to be better engagement with service users and the population in general, with this seen as an area where LSBs had been relatively weak:
*'The Welsh approach to public service reform is premised on citizen voice as a driver for service improvement. The single integrated plan should include an engagement strategy setting out how partners intend to engage with people and communities, with a very clear focus on how this will best support service improvement and improve the experience of people using the services…
There is little evidence at present that this sort of focused citizen engagement aimed at tackling failure and creating top-class services is in widespread use, although there are specific examples of excellent practice'[22]*.

The Guidance made clear that LSBs should continue to be the driver of change in terms of public service reform and improvement and highlighted the importance of a clear link to public service delivery and commissioning:
'LSBs should ensure that there is a strong strategic focus to commissioning and delivery, which must clearly link back to evidence of need'[23].

The Guidance also stressed that while Local Authorities have a key role to play *'the LSB is a partnership of equals and should not be local authority dominated'[24]*. It required that *'the core membership of a LSB should consist of leaders of the local authority (political and / or executive), police, health service, county voluntary council, and a senior representative of the Welsh Government'[25]*.

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[21] Ibid., p. 2-3
[22] Ibid., p. 15- 16
[23] Ibid., p.9
[24] Ibid., p. 7
[25] Ibid., p. 8

Building on this Guidance, the Welsh Government is now considering whether to put the SIPs on a statutory footing through the forthcoming Future Generations Bill (formerly the Sustainable Development Bill)[26].

2.1.2 The Role of the Third Sector in Public Service Reform

Turning to the specific role of the third sector in terms of public service delivery, it was recognised early in the development of the agenda that the third sector had a key role in enabling the 'voice' of service users to be heard in shaping public services. Thus in Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries the Welsh Government emphasised the importance of the sector in *'developing (as appropriate for each organisation) an enhanced role as citizens' advocates, providers of policy and service development expertise, and as delivery partners through a new strategy under the Voluntary Sector Scheme'*[27].

However, while initially perhaps somewhat reticent about the potential role of the sector in delivering – as opposed to shaping – public services, in the period since the onset of the financial crisis in 2008 and the subsequent introduction by the UK Government of sharp cuts in public expenditure, the Welsh Government has become increasingly interested in the potential for the third sector to contribute even more extensively to the provision of public services. Thus, 'The Third Dimension' (2008) identified three main motives for the Welsh Government in supporting the sector:

- '*To support further growth and development of the sector's capacity to strengthen communities of place and interest.*
- *To harness the knowledge and expertise of the sector to help design better public policies and services.*
- *To encourage and support the sector to contribute to the delivery of citizen-centred public services'*[28].

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[26] Sustainable Development Bill – White Paper, Welsh Government 2012, p. 11
[27] Page 9
[28] Page 8

These motives led to five 'action areas', three of which (*'enhancing opportunities for citizens to be heard', 'supporting and accelerating social enterprise'* and *'making public services more accessible and citizen centred'*) clearly relate to the role of the third sector in the design and delivery of public services[29].

The 'Third Dimension' noted *'the innovative and transforming role the sector can play in making public services reach more people and become more sensitive to their needs'*[30] and emphasised that *'third sector organisations have a big part to play in facilitating greater citizen engagement and in helping people's voices and experiences to be heard and taken properly into account'*[31]. In this context, it also stressed the Government's expectation that the sector would *'fully participate in Local Service Boards, Community Strategies and Spatial Plan Groups'* and that the sector also had a valuable role to play in terms of the scrutiny of public services to help *'generate the challenge advocated by Beecham as one of the key drivers of service improvement'*[32].

In terms of service delivery, the 'Third Dimension' noted that one of the key objectives of the Welsh Government's social enterprise strategy was *'increasing the involvement of social enterprises in delivering public services'*[33] and stressed the importance, in the context of a greater personalisation of services, of the development of a 'mixed economy' of public service provision, while recognising that this might take time and effort: *'Local Service Boards may therefore need to work step-by-step towards a 'mixed economy' of service provision by helping build up the capacity of the third sector whilst ensuring the continuity of statutory services through the public sector'*[34].

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[29] Ibid.,, p. 7
[30] Ibid., p.19
[31] Ibid,., p.28
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., p. 31
[34] Ibid, pp.34-5

As part of this, the document noted the importance of encouraging collaboration between third sector organisations in order to increase their capacity to tender for and deliver services:

'Such collaboration could mean anything from a full merger, to the forming of consortia (e.g. to tender for large contracts), to the sharing of back office services'[35].

While the 'Third Dimension' is now some five years old, more recent Welsh Government policy documents have continued to emphasise the contribution the sector can and should make to citizen engagement and the design and delivery of public services.

Thus, the recent Welsh Government Consultation Document 'Continuity and Change – Refreshing the Relationship between Welsh Government and the Third Sector in Wales' re-iterated the continued relevance of the three motivations cited above, and proposed six core roles of the Third Sector Infrastructure (a term which covers WCVA, the CVCs and the Local Volunteering Centres) going forward:

- *'Enabling other Third Sector organisations to grow and develop.*
- *Supporting individual volunteers and collective voluntary action.*
- *Promoting good governance across the Third Sector.*
- ***Supporting Public Service design and delivery.***
- ***Providing voice and representation for the wider sector.***
- ***Sharing good practice and innovation'[36].*** [emphasis added]

The document went on to emphasise that:

'Continuous improvement of public services in Wales is of key importance to the Welsh Government. The Third Sector is an important partner in this, with its ability to contribute to the design and delivery of a very wide range of services in local communities and more widely… More fundamentally, there is an appetite to work with the Third Sector, and with service users, carers and

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[35] Ibid., p.47
[36] 'Continuity and Change – Refreshing the Relationship between Welsh Government and the Third Sector in Wales', Welsh Government, 2013, p.12

communities, to identify and implement new models of service delivery. Demographic changes, growing individual needs and expectations, and the pressures on public finances mean that we will need to place more emphasis on prevention and early intervention, and on community support and services'[37].

Contributing to this agenda was seen as a key function of the Third Sector Infrastructure: '*Infrastructure organisations, most obviously WCVA at the national level and CVCs at the local authority and regional level, are well-placed to enable Third Sector organisations to contribute to this agenda. Once again it is essential that their role should be an enabling one, ensuring that the full resources of the sector are harnessed as fully as possible so that grassroots community organisations, charities of all sizes and social enterprises can all make a full contribution*'[38].

At the same time, the consultation document noted that a review of the Third Sector Partnership Agreement had suggested there were mixed views of the effectiveness of CVCs and that CVCs were very varied in terms of their structure, size and capacity[39].

Indeed, this review, based on an analysis of stakeholder views both within and outside the third sector, also underlined the fact that it was not only in terms of the Welsh Government's policy agenda that third sector input into public service delivery and reform has been increasing in importance. The report noted that the objective of:
'*establishing and maintaining formal links between the voluntary sector, the local authority, the NHS and other bodies…was seen as an increasingly important role for the CVCs to fulfil, especially with the changes that have taken place in recent years and the growing reliance on the third sector to be delivering key services to the public…While this was considered a vital role for CVCs, the pressure it puts on their resources and the limitations of what they*

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[37] Ibid., p. 26
[38] Ibid., p. 15
[39] Ibid., p.13

can achieve was noted by some stakeholders and that this needs to be acknowledged[40].

2.1.3 Public Service Reform and Regional Working

While in many ways the last decade has seen considerable continuity in terms of the policy agenda of public sector reform – with a strong emphasis on local partnership working focused on the LSB and the critical involvement of the third sector in terms of harnessing the 'citizen's voice', influencing public service design and delivering public services as part of a 'mixed economy' of provision - a complicating factor has been the increasing focus on regional working in terms of public service delivery.

Even in 2006, it was recognised that there was a need for the commissioning of some services at a regional or national level, with a priority being: *'**Regional and national collaborations** - in which local bodies work together regionally or nationally to deliver specialised, complex or cross boundary services which they cannot deliver effectively and efficiently on their own to 21st century standards'*[41].

However, with the onset of the financial crisis and the subsequent squeeze on public sector spending, the issue of regional delivery of public services has moved into sharper focus. The Simpson Review, published in 2011, argued for a much stronger emphasis on the collaborative procurement at regional or national level of a wide range of public services[42] and made clear that, in the context of pressures on public funding and a relatively generous settlement for local government to date *'"steady as you go" is not an option'*[43].

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[40] Stakeholders views on the objectives of the Third Sector Partnership Agreement and of the performance monitoring of the third sector infrastructure. Report of findings', Welsh Government Social Research Report Number 29/2012, p. 7.

[41] Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries', Welsh Assembly Government, 2006 p.25-6

[42] Local, Regional, National: What Services are best delivered where? Welsh Government, 2011, p. 6

[43] Ibid., p.10.

Building on this, the Welsh Government agreed a new 'collaborative footprint' for public service delivery in July 2011, which consisted of six regions[44]:

- North Wales (the six Unitary Authority areas of Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham).
- Mid and West Wales (Powys, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire).
- Western Bay (Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend).
- Cwm Taff (Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf).
- Cardiff and Vale (Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan).
- Gwent (Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen).

In reality, there appears to be some tension between the growing focus on regionalisation and the emphasis on the LSB and the SIP as a key building block of local service delivery, and 'Shared Purpose, Shared Delivery' suggested that clarifying the relationship was a work in progress:

'While the regional agenda for collaboration may be distinct from the agenda of LSBs, there are clear connections between the two. These connections are likely to develop differently, depending on the agreement of partners in each area, in response to the challenges of service delivery. Where regional leadership groups are already in place, they should establish clear mechanisms for linking local and regional needs analysis, delivery and accountability. Where regional arrangements are not already in place, LSBs might jointly consider how best these can be established'[45].

'Continuity and Change' noted that CVCs (all of which – with one exception, that of the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisation (GAVO) – work at local authority level) would need to adapt to this changing agenda:

'There is already considerable existing Third Sector activity within this footprint, involving amongst others, many of the CVCs. There is also a shared expectation that in future Third Sector organisations will develop more

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[44]See: http://wales.gov.uk/topics/improvingservices/footprint/?lang=en

[45] Shared Purpose, Shared Delivery: Guidance on Integrating Partnerships and Plans, Welsh Government, 2012, p. 23

regional working with each other and with other agencies aligned to this footprint[46].

More recently, in April 2013, the Welsh Government announced a further review of *'public service governance and delivery'* by a Commission headed by Sir Paul Williams to identify alternatives to the current arrangements for public service delivery, in the light of the First Minister's view that these are '*not sustainable or acceptable in the longer term, given the scale of the public sector cuts which are yet to come*'[47].

The recent evaluation of the Welsh Government's policy framework for local government between 2007 and 2011 suggested that there were significant tensions between different policy goals (a regional agenda driven by the need for greater efficiency and a citizen engagement agenda focused on greater personalisation of services):

'So the evidence from our study suggests that the Welsh Government needs to choose which policy instruments it believes offer the best hope of securing more effective and efficient local services. If citizen engagement is going to be the main driver of these changes, it follows that powers and funding need to be devolved down to neighbourhoods. This might imply retaining existing unitary authorities but encouraging a much stronger role for neighbourhood teams, community groups and community councils. If, on the other hand, the best way to improve services and make better use of the available resources is through regional or even national consortia, then Government needs to continue to encourage partnership working between authorities, or to reorganise local government in order to create larger councils and, perhaps, consider whether the current division of responsibilities between local and central government is right'[48].

[46] 'Continuity and Change – Refreshing the Relationship between Welsh Government and the Third Sector in Wales', Welsh Government, 2013, p.27
[47] Welsh Government Press Release, 30 April 2013
[48] Learning to Improve: An Independent Assessment of the Welsh Government's Policies for Local Government, 2007 – 2011, Cardiff Business School, Welsh Government GSR Report 58/2013 p.9

The evaluation suggested that the citizen engagement agenda had not been carried through with real consistency:

'The Welsh Government has not done enough to clarify what the commitment to citizen engagement really means; while local government has not devoted the resources required to realise a corporate response…effective engagement and co-production are not yet embedded into how public services are managed and delivered'[49].

The report also noted in this context that there was some evidence that citizens were reluctant to engage, noting that the Living in Wales survey had suggested that more than eight in ten respondents were not interested in participating in decision making[50].

2.2 The Third Sector in Wales

2.2.1 Overview of the Sector

The Third Sector in Wales (as defined by WCVA) consists of some 33,000 organisations[51], with a total annual income of some £1.6 billion[52]. Between them they are estimated to employ around 50,000 people[53].

Third sector organisations are widely distributed across Wales, with the distribution between different local authority areas broadly (though by no means exactly) reflecting the population of each authority: thus, the number of organisations 'active in' a given local authority varies from 2,521 in Torfaen (with Anglesey, Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil also having less than 3,000 in each case) to 3,981 in Carmarthenshire and 3,928 in Rhondda Cynon Taf, with Swansea and Gwynedd also each having more than 3,500 active organisations[54].

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[49] Ibid, p.80
[50] Ibid. p. 76
[51] Third Sector Statistical Resource, WCVA 2013 p. 4
[52] Ibid., p. 13
[53] Ibid., p,12
[54] Ibid., p.8

However, the vast majority of third sector organisations (over 90%) are unincorporated[55], meaning that they are unlikely to be involved in any form of contractual delivery of public services, while WCVA estimates that around 3,500 (just under 11% of the sector) are involved in some form of service delivery, most commonly related to Health and Social Care (833), Children and Families (821), Community (750), Religion (612), Disability (542) and Arts, Culture and Heritage (452)[56].

In financial terms, third sector organisations derive most of their income from Government (34%[57]) and from public giving (27%). Around 30% of all income derives from trading activities and investment, but it seems likely that only a small proportion of this relates to the delivery of public services, since around £460 million of this £480 million derives from rents paid to Registered Social Landlords[58].

Moreover, evidence suggests that third sector organisations have suffered a significant squeeze as a result of the recession and subsequent funding cuts, with grants and income generally falling and demand for many services (particularly those which are provided free of charge) rising sharply. In a 2012 survey, many more organisations expected their financial position to worsen than expected it to improve, with medium sized organisations particularly likely to be pessimistic[59]. Cuts to public sector funding and a tendency for local authorities to move away from providing grants or Service Level Agreements towards competitive tendering as a way of reducing costs were cited as one key concern[60] which ties in with wider research evidence that a focus on commissioning and increasing formal relationships between the public and third sectors *have worked in detriment to smaller TSOs which lack*

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[55] Ibid, p.10
[56] Ibid., p. 15
[57] 19% from Welsh and UK Government; 12% from local authorities and local health boards and 3% from European funding
[58] Ibid., p. 13 -14
[59] State of the Sector Survey, WCVA, 2012 p. 17
[60] Ibid., p.29

the skills or capacity (in terms of resources and resilience to change over time) to respond to the requirements set out by local commissioners'[61].

These concerns have in part at least led WCVA to formulate proposals for a new approach to public services in Wales 'Putting People at the Centre'. This argues that there needs to be a far stronger focus on 'co-production', engaging citizens at the heart of decisions about service provision and recognising that a *'mix of individual, family, community and state action in which the former will often be the most important'* is needed in order to address the challenges posed by rising demand for acute services and falling budgets and a failure to capitalise on voluntary action. The paper argues for commitment to four principles: engagement of citizens; prevention and early intervention (including a focus on *'intelligent commissioning instead of short term competitive procurement practice');* seeking alternative models of delivery (e.g. mutuals, joint ventures, timebanking); and scrutiny[62].

2.2.2 County Voluntary Councils (CVCs)

County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) are '*the independent intermediary bodies supporting the voluntary sector at local authority level, representing the interests of and providing a strategic lead for the sector*[63]'. They provide support to third sector organisations in their areas: in all, there are 19 CVCs in Wales, with 14 of them serving the West Wales and the Valleys Convergence area. CVCs receive core funding from the Welsh Government (via WCVA) in return for providing a range of services set out in an Integrated Development Plan for the sector. This plan aims to achieve a series of outcomes under the three headings of 'active and involved citizens', 'a thriving and sustainable third sector' and 'effective engagement in policy'[64]. In practice, as noted above, however, CVCs vary considerably in size and resources: according to WCVA records, the number of staff employed by the 14 CVCs varies from 10 in the case of Medrwn Môn (serving the Isle of Anglesey) to 39 in Neath Port

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[61] Literature Review for the LSB-ESF Development and Priority Delivery Project, Meza et al, Cardiff Business School, 2013, p.23
[62] Putting People at the Centre, WCVA, 2013
[63] Local Service Board Development and Priority Delivery Project, version 5 Addendum Para 2.4
[64] 'Continuity and Change – Refreshing the Relationship between Welsh Government and the Third Sector in Wales', Welsh Government, 2013, p.11-12

Talbot CVS and 44 in the Carmarthenshire Association for the Voluntary Sector (CAVS), while GAVO has some 124 staff (though covering four Local Authority areas). Similarly, annual expenditure similarly varies from £346,307 in the case of Medrwn Môn to £1.56 million in the case of the Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council (and £5.8 million in the case of GAVO).

2.3 The WCVA Making the Connections Project

2.3.1 Overview of the project

The MtC project has its origins as a distinct project proposal to WEFO from WCVA and CVCs which aimed to *'provide a wide range of support to the activities of the third (voluntary and community) sector in delivering the priority activities of their relevant Local Service Boards (LSBs) and related public service planning groups, and enable WCVA to provide strategic support and advice to complement the work of the CVCs'*[65]. The proposal was based on a budget of just under £5 million (£2.37 million of which would have come from ESF) for a project running from late 2010 to mid 2015.

At the behest of WEFO, however, WCVA and the Welsh Government agreed that the project should be incorporated as a distinct element within the wider LSB Development and Priority Delivery Project, which had been approved by WEFO in February 2011[66]. An amended Business Plan incorporating this element and increasing the budget of the wider project by some £3.2 million was approved by WEFO in December 2011. The project will run until March 2015[67].

The main aim of the project is to *'strengthen the capacity of third sector involvement/participation through the county voluntary councils (CVCs) in LSBs and other public service planning groups'* while also contributing to the three other aims of the wider project (*'to further develop LSBs into a sustainable support and delivery infrastructure; to co-ordinate generic or*

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[65] WCVA draft Business Plan v.3 (2010), .p.3
[66] Local Service Board Development and Priority Delivery Project, version 5 Addendum Para 1.0
[67] Funding to the CVCs will cease as of 31 December 2014, with WCVA having three months for winding up the project.

common LSB themes to reduce duplication and encourage shared learning'; and *'to accelerate the implementation of collaborative change projects – in individual counties across LSB boundaries on a regional or sub-regional basis or as pilots on common themes'*)[68].

In particular MtC's objectives are:
- to enhance the readiness of third sector organisations to deliver public services, including co-produced services;
- to increase the number of third sector organisations prepared to deliver public services through consortia or collaborations;
- to ensure that the third sector is better informed about the LSB and progress of public sector reform in its area and more generally;
- to increase the capacity of the third sector to engage meaningfully with service users; and
- to increase the capacity of the third sector to influence decisions affecting design and delivery of public services[69].

It seeks to do this by increasing the human resources of the CVCs, funding one project development officer in each of 13 CVCs and two in the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO), which covers both Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, as well as a central project management resource (1.9 FTE) in WCVA itself.

The development officers are seen as a resource which can build on the pre-existing representation of each CVCs Chief Officer on the LSBs to *'enable county voluntary councils, as core members of LSBs and other strategic partnerships concerned with local public service planning and delivery, to strengthen and deepen their impact on the LSB agenda, complemented by support and coordination from WCVA. Through this it will strengthen the capacity of third sector organisations to contribute effectively to public service delivery, development and redesign through involvement with the LSBs'*[70].

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[68] Ibid, Para. 1.2
[69] From the Project Summary as submitted to WEFO.
[70] Local Service Board Development and Priority Delivery Project, version 5 Addendum Para 2.1

The officers are also expected to play a role in the delivery of the LSB Priority projects, funded by the wider ESF project[71].

In line with this, the model job description for the MtC Officers specifies the following duties:

- To create opportunities for dialogue between networks and local groups, and service planners and managers through presentations at network meetings;
- To develop the role of relevant groups involving service users
- To provide information (e-briefings, website information, newsletter articles, briefing papers) about public service developments, and opportunities to engage;
- To organise consultation events and activities to enable local citizens to engage in public service planning;
- To ensure that the views of marginalised and equality groups are included in the work of the project;
- To support third sector organisations to develop effective mechanisms for service user involvement;
- To work with public sector partners to raise awareness and encourage the use of participatory planning methods;
- To assist third sector networks and forums to contribute to public service planning;
- To support and train third sector representatives to enable them to engage effectively with public service planning groups;
- To represent the third sector on public service joint planning teams;
- To provide advice and help to potential third sector service providers;
- To assist third sector service providers to adopt or improve equal opportunities and environmental policies;
- To assist third sector service providers to establish collaborative ventures or services.

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[71] Ibid. Para. 2.8.

The Business Plan states that the officers will be line-managed within each CVC but will also work with WCVA to ensure the delivery of the project: *'They will report to their CVC chief officer/line manager and will work alongside WCVA's project manager and policy officer to ensure that the project's strategic aims are achieved at a local level'*[72].

WCVA is, however the *'joint sponsor… with responsibility under the Memorandum of Understanding with the Welsh Government for ensuring the delivery of the discrete activity by WCVA and the CVCs'*[73] and the expectation is that WCVA *'will provide a detailed monitoring framework to all CVC partners in order to capture all financial and performance data needed to manage the project and to meet WG, WEFO and European Commission requirements'*[74].

The management approach is based on the Results Based Accountability (RBA) model, with each Officer having developed an Individual Action Plan based around the five key outcomes for the project:

- Third sector organisations are more ready to deliver public services, including co-produced services;
- An increase in the number of third sector organisations which are more ready to deliver public services through consortia or collaborations;
- The third sector is better informed;
- An increase in the capacity of the third sector to engage meaningfully with service users;
- An increase in the capacity of third sector to influence decisions affecting design and delivery of public services.

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[72] Ibid., Para 8.1
[73] Ibid., Para. 8.2
[74] Ibid. Para 8.3

The Business Plan also states that WCVA will establish a *'Project Steering Group comprising of representatives of WCVA and partner CVCs'* which will meet quarterly[75].

The formal targets for the WCVA element of the project as agreed by WEFO are set out in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1: Targets agreed with WEFO[76]

Output	Number
Dissemination initiatives	15
Initiatives to support LSB development	1
Collaborative agreements with public sector bodies	13
Secondment places	12

The budget for the project is set at £3,260,746, of which £1,930,036 (59%) is the ESF contribution, with £831,000 match funding provided by the Welsh Government and a further £499,000 provided by WCVA and CVCs.

2.3.2 Project logic model

Drawing on the above, and on information derived from the initial fieldwork, it is possible to construct an outline model of the logic underpinning the project. This is shown in Figure 2.2 over.

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[75] Ibid., Para. 8.19
[76] Ibid., Para 1.5

Inputs/ Resources	Activities	Outputs	Results	Impact
	Representation and information			A shift towards early interventions reducing the need for acute services
	Ensure representation of sector at LSB and key groups	Dissemination initiatives and products	The third sector is better informed	
	Provide information on public service developments to third sector orgs	Initiatives to support LSB development		
	Input into service planning			
15 MtC officers in CVCs	Facilitate input from third sector into public service planning (through brokering links)	Collaborative agreements between public sector/third sector	An increase in the capacity of third sector to influence decisions affecting design and delivery of public services	
	Training to enable third sector orgs to engage in service planning effectively	Secondments between third sector/ public sector		
Line-management from CVCs		Organisations trained in service planning		
	Input into service delivery			Citizen-centred public services better designed and delivered more effectively
	Provide advice and help to potential third sector providers		Third sector organisations are more ready to deliver public services, including co-produced services	
1.9 FTE project management staff in WCVA	Training/support to ensure third sector orgs able to tender (equal opps., environmental policies etc.)	Organisations trained/ supported to meet procurement standards	An increase in the number of third sector organisations which are more ready to deliver public services through consortia or collaborations	
Project management support from WG	Support/brokering collaborative ventures between third sector organisations	Collaborative agreements within third sector		A more sustainable third sector
	Citizen voice			
	Organise events/activities to enable citizens to engage in public service planning			
	Support service user groups to input into public service planning	Consultation events organised/attended	An increase in the capacity of the third sector to engage meaningfully with service users	
	Support third sector orgs to engage effectively with service users	Organisations (third sector/public sector) trained in service user engagement/participatory planning		
	Work with public sector partners to encourage participatory planning methods			

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3. FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

In this Section, we report on our findings from this initial stage of the research, drawing principally on the fieldwork undertaken but also on elements of the literature review.

It is important to stress that the evidence base at this stage is quite limited, particularly in the case of the baseline (which is significant because no further baseline data will be gathered in the later stages of the research).

The case-study fieldwork does provide a useful first snapshot of the very varied situation in these five areas, but as yet this is based on the perspective of only a small number of 'core' interviewees within the CVCs and local authority staff working for LSBs. This has been complemented by the focus groups with the remaining MtC officers and by the small number of interviews with national stakeholders, although in the latter case, several felt they did not have the information to comment with any degree of confidence on the day-to-day activities of MtC officers.

Moreover, although almost all the MtC officers now have an agreed Individual Action Plan, and each has submitted quarterly report cards since January 2013 on activity, we have found it difficult to derive a clear picture from these of activities and achievements. This is not helped by the fact that the format of the quarterly reports has changed for each of the three quarters for which information is available, but the main reason (as discussed below) is that each officer is working in a very different context, in terms of the resources and priorities of the individual employing CVC and the structures and culture of the LSB. Without an explanation of this context (not really allowed for in the format of the action plan, although the project plans for each area summarise the outcomes, targets and population baselines for the relevant SIP, where extant), it is difficult to make sense of these reports – a view shared by several of our strategic interviewees.

Finally, as noted in Section 1, the results of our survey are disappointing and need to be used with considerable caution. Although we were provided with a list of some 161 names of key contacts across all of Wales' 22 local authority areas – principally key CVC and third sector representatives on the LSBs and operational staff working for each LSB who were deemed more likely than LSB members to have some awareness of MtC – and despite deploying additional resource in a telephone survey rather than a web survey, we only succeeded in talking to 27 individuals. Table 3.1 below provides information on the outcome of the survey.

Table 3.1 Telephone Survey outcome:

Response	Number
No phone number available[77]	21
Phone number not in use	7
Did not work for the Local authority/CVC anymore	4
Phone working but unable to get a response (minimum of two calls)	52
Left message – but no response	44
Did not answer the survey due to lack of knowledge of the MtC project	6
Successful	27
Total	**161**

The overall response rate was thus 17% or 21%, when those who could not be contacted (i.e. those with no working phone number or who had left their post) are excluded[78]. Although only a small minority explicitly refused to take part due to insufficient knowledge, and although the timing of the survey (mid November to mid December) did not help, it was clear that a part of the difficulty in achieving completed interviews was related to a lack of knowledge/recognition of the project on the part of stakeholders.

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[77] In many cases, although no telephone number was provided with the original data, we were able to identify telephone numbers via organisation's switchboards or by sending emails to the named individual. In 18 cases, however, we were unable to do so, while in three cases, the individuals had an indirect relationship with the organisation cited (e.g. non-Executive Chairs of LSBs or CVCs) and telephone numbers could not be provided.

[78] Although somewhat disappointing, this is not especially low compared with other telephone surveys which tend to generate response rates of between 20% and 33% once those who are uncontactable are excluded. It is also significantly higher than might have been achieved by the original methodology of a web survey, where typical response rates are usually below 10%.

Of those who did respond, just over half (14) were from the public sector, with all but two of these (one of whom worked for a Local Health Board and one being the non-Executive Chair of a LSB) local authority employees. The remaining 13 respondents were from the third sector, all but two of them being employees of CVCs. Only five of the respondents (three from CVCs and two from Local Authorities) were from the non-Convergence area of East Wales. Of the 22 from within the Convergence area, 20 were aware of the MtC project and 16 had had some contact with the MtC officer in their area.

In the remainder of this Section, we consider what this limited evidence base does tell us about the baseline prior to the start of the MtC project (Section 3.2), the views of the rationale for the project (Section 3.3), the activities and outputs to date (Section 3.4), the prospects for long-term results and impacts (Section 3.5) and project management (Section 3.6).

3.2 Baseline: previous engagement of the sector with public service reform agenda

Although, as we have seen in Section 2, a significant theme of Welsh Government policy over recent years, there appears to be surprisingly little hard evidence about the scale or effectiveness of the engagement of the third sector in the process of public service reform or indeed the delivery of public services.

In terms of formal engagement with LSBs, the development of SIPs and the process of commissioning services, information provided by CVCs in Annex 1 provides an overview, suggesting that all LSBs have engaged with CVCs in terms of the preparation of SIPs and that all CVCs are themselves represented on LSBs, but that (in the view of CVCs) few Local Authorities have a transparent process for commissioning services and only one LSB has included other third sector organisations in the membership.

As noted in Section 2, other data from WCVA does not separate out income derived from the delivery of public services from overall earned income, and the figures suggest that this income is probably quite modest.

As we have also seen in Section 2, the most comprehensive evaluation of local government policy also suggested that in the period to 2011 there had been relatively modest progress in terms of developing the role of the 'citizen's voice' as a key element of public service planning, and this report also cast doubt on the effectiveness of much of the partnership working to date:

'There are formidable practical and cultural barriers to collaboration and mounting evidence that an entirely voluntary approach will not succeed'[79].

The evaluation also argued that two different partnership models could be discerned to be operating within Wales:

- *'efficiency partnerships'*, focused largely on reducing costs and predominantly involving *'other local authorities but not the third sector'*; and
- *'engagement partnerships',* focused on stakeholder engagement, delivering more joined-up services and meeting the requirements of government, involving *'other public sector, voluntary sector and to a lesser extent, private sector organisations'*[80].

Local authority respondents to surveys undertaken as part of the evaluation were significantly more likely to identify the third sector as key partners in a number of policy areas, notably education, adult social care, housing and corporate affairs[81].

The evaluation noted that local authority interviewees involved in engagement partnerships (and those who reported that the third sector were important partners) were more likely to report that partnerships added value and

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[79] Learning to Improve: An Independent Assessment of the Welsh Government's Policies for Local Government, 2007 – 2011, Cardiff Business School, Welsh Government GSR Report 58/2013 p.6
[80] Ibid., p. 52
[81] Ibid., Figure 4.2, p. 54

improved services, but less likely to report that they generated savings or other efficiencies:

'The more respondents rated the voluntary sector as a key partner, the more they thought that their partnership had improved services to citizens'[82].

However, unsurprisingly, perhaps, it also reported that over the period from 2008 – 2011, as the economic recession and the consequences for public spending became clearer, citizen engagement became relatively a less important concern and the focus of partnership working was increasingly on the efficiency agenda. This entailed a stronger emphasis on inter-local authority working, although in many cases, the third sector remained an important partner[83].

The mixed picture with regard to the importance of partnership working and in particular the engagement of the third sector in public service design and delivery is also suggested in the recent work undertaken by the evaluators of the wider LSB ESF project.

A survey of ESF project partnerships undertaken in the mid-2013 found that, when asked to identify the extent to which their project focused on different themes, engaging citizens in decisions about service provision and increasing the third sector's role in service delivery were the two least salient foci, with 25% and 26% respectively scoring this 6 or 7 on a scale of 1-7 (this compared to 55% giving the same rating to 'delivering more joined up services' and 54% giving the same rating to 'finding new solutions to the problems facing the area', for example). Of course, it is important to stress that projects funded by the wider LSB ESF project cover a wide range of different themes, but interestingly, this finding was broadly in line with the findings of a parallel survey of other local authority led partnerships, where the equivalent figures were 30% and 18% (though it may be worth noting that the importance of third sector public service delivery was even lower amongst these partnerships). Moreover, these same themes were amongst those where respondents

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[82] Ibid., p. 59-60
[83] Ibid., p. 57

reported that their projects were least likely to be making a difference, with just over a half of those who rated citizen engagement or third sector delivery of public services as a key focus of their project confident that it was proving successful in this regard[84].

Turning to our own survey, respondents were asked to provide views on the situation prior to 2012 – in other words prior to the start of the MtC project – on a range of relevant issues. While the results have to be treated with caution and while in a significant proportion of cases respondents were unable to comment, they suggest a fairly consistent pattern of reasonable levels of engagement, with public sector respondents consistently somewhat more positive than those from the third sector itself.

Thus, in response to questions about the involvement of the third sector in a range of aspects of public service planning and delivery:

- 15 out of 27 respondents in all thought that the third sector had contributed either to a great extent (seven) or to some extent (eight) to the planning and design of public services by participating in relevant partnerships;
- 16 respondents thought that the third sector had contributed either to a great extent (six) or to some extent (ten) to the design of public services by acting as a channel for the user voice;
- Similarly, 16 respondents thought that the third sector had been involved in bidding for openly tendered contracts for the delivery of public services either to a great extent (six) or to some extent (ten) but more than two-thirds thought that the third sector had been involved with actually delivering public services either to a great extent (five) or to some extent (15);
- Only ten thought that the third sector had been involved in the scrutiny of public services, with two saying this had been to a great extent and eight that it had been to some extent. (Figure 3.1 provides more detail)

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[84] All Wales Public Services Survey 2013: Presentation of Key Findings to the Evaluation Steering Group, 14 November 2013.

Figure 3.1: Views of the third sector's role in a range of activities prior to 2012

Prior to 2012, to what extent did the third sector in your local authority get involved in..	Great Extent	Some Extent	No extent	Extent varies according to the particular public service	Don't Know
Contributing to the planning design of public services through active participation in relevant partnerships?	7	8	2	4	5
Contributing to the design of public services by acting as a channel for the 'user' voice?	6	10	3	1	6
Scrutinising public services?	2	8	7	2	7
Bidding for openly tendered contracts for the delivery of public services?	6	10	1	1	8
Delivering public services?	5	15	1	1	4

- Similarly, around two-thirds of respondents thought that, prior to 2012, the third sector had influenced the LSB and other key partnerships either to a great extent (four) or to some extent (14)[85].

Asked about which third sector organisations had historically been most active in contributing to the development of public services, interviewees gave a wide range of answers, but those public sector respondents able to comment often cited the CVC itself, suggesting the key role CVCs play as an intermediary between the third sector and the public sector.

Similarly, most respondents who were able to comment thought that organisations outside of the third sector had been broadly supportive of involving the third sector in public service issues prior to 2012:

- 18 respondents thought that the local government and other public service providers in their area were supportive of third sector involvement in public service planning and design either to a great extent (four) or to some extent (14)[86];
- 14 respondents thought that the local government and other public service providers in their area were supportive of third sector

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[85] One thought it had had no influence and five did not know.
[86] Five thought this varied according to which public service was considered and four did not know.

organisations actually delivering public services either to a great extent (six) or to some extent (eight)[87];

- Similarly 19 respondents thought that the Welsh Government was supportive of third sector involvement in shaping public services, though only one of these thought it had been very supportive[88].

More generally, respondents thought that prior to 2012 citizens had some level of input into the design and delivery of public services, with three saying that this occurred to a great extent and 17 that it occurred to some extent[89], but were relatively sceptical about the overall design and planning processes for public services (Figure 3.2)

Figure 3.2: Views on the design and planning processes for public services prior to 2012.
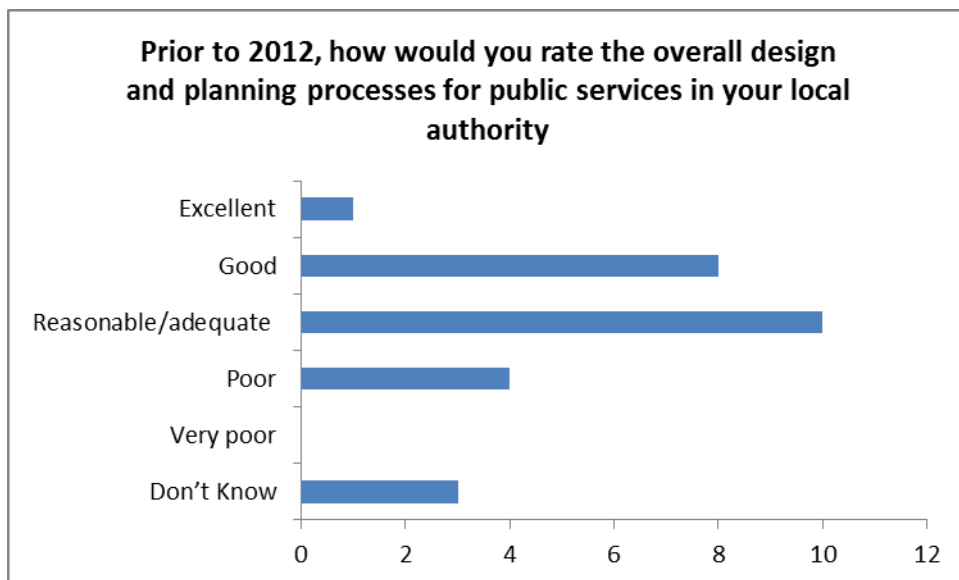
Unsurprisingly, perhaps, there was a clear difference here between the views of public and third sector respondents, with only one of the 13 third sector interviewees rating the processes as better than 'reasonable/adequate', compared to more than half (eight of 14) of the public sector interviewees. .

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[87] One thought they were not at all supportive, six said that it varied according to which public service was considered and five did not know.

[88] Three thought it had been neither supportive nor unsupportive and five did not know.

[89] Two thought that citizens were not involved at all and four did not know.

Turning to third sector capacity to engage with the public service reform agenda, most of those able to comment (21 in all) thought that, prior to 2012, the third sector had had the capacity to influence and deliver public services to some extent[90]. A majority also thought that voluntary and community organisations had been willing to work collaboratively to provide public services (with five saying this was true to a great extent and 11 that it was true to some extent)[91].

Asked more specifically about barriers or constraints faced by the third sector to getting involved in the planning, design and delivery of public services, respondents highlighted in particular the lack of staff and resources and the lack of information or knowledge about the processes involved (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Views of barriers or constraints faced by the third sector

What do you see as the barriers or constraints faced by the third sector in getting involved in the planning, design and delivery of local public services?

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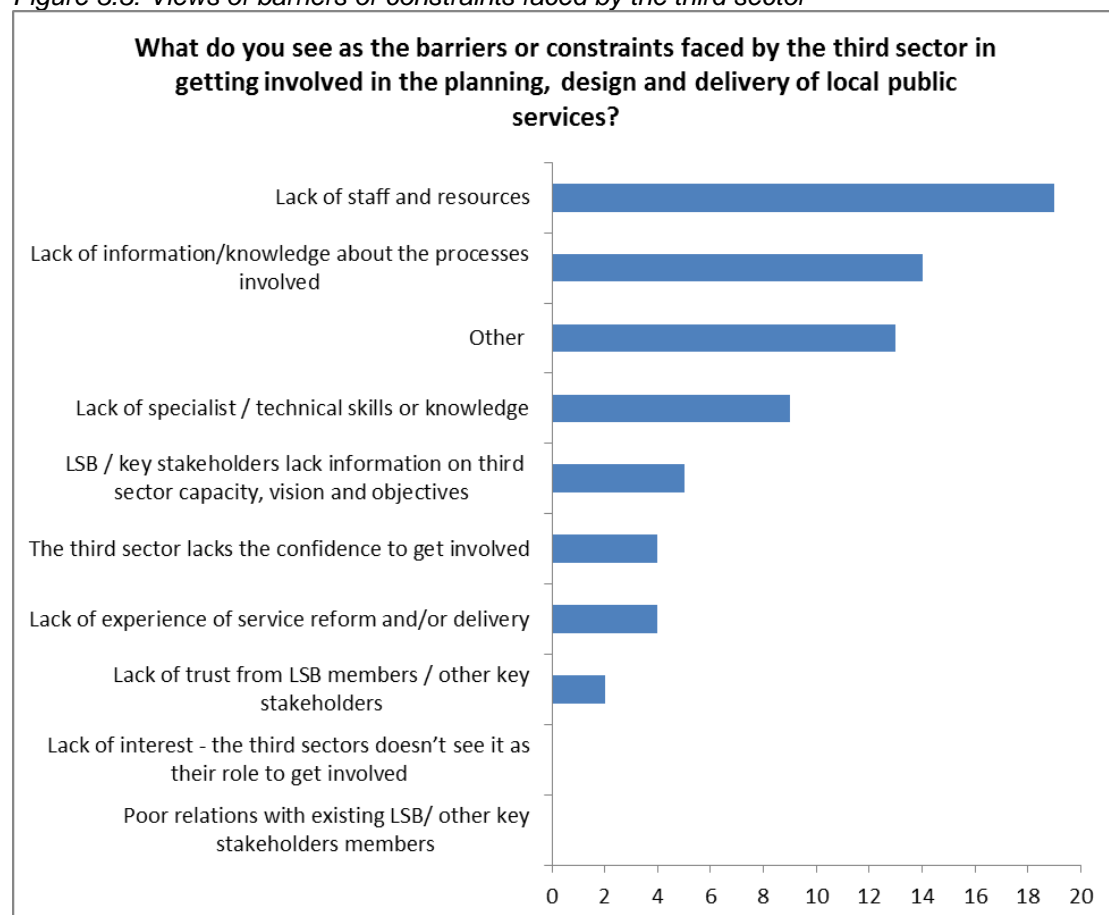
[90] Four did not know. No respondent thought that the sector had the capacity to do so to a great extent or to no extent.
[91] Three said it was not true at all and seven did not know.

It is perhaps striking that none of the respondents identified lack of interest on the part of the sector or poor relations with the LSB. Other barriers identified included a general lack of capacity, a view of the third sector as a junior rather than an equal partner, and the concerns of commissioners that third sector provision was unreliable because it was heavily dependent on volunteer input and short-term grant funding.

The national stakeholders we interviewed were for the most part reluctant to generalise about the situation prior to the start of the project, arguing that the extent of real engagement with the third sector over the planning and delivery of public services had varied hugely, both between different local authority areas and even, in some cases, between different parts of the same organisation. While certain policy areas, particularly perhaps health and social care and children and young people, were seen as ones where there had tended to be a stronger track-record of engagement (in the former case, with the funding of Health and Social Care Co-ordinators within CVCs having played a significant role), even here there were thought to have been very significant differences between, for example, different LHBs.

In terms of the case-study areas, interviewees also presented a mixed picture. In all but one (case-study d where relationships between the local authority and the CVC were tense), formal relationships prior to 2012 appeared to have been reasonably good or better (notably in the case of case-studies a and b), with CVCs represented on the LSB and key other fora, and thus having the opportunity to contribute to discussions on public service development and delivery, although in some cases (e.g. case-studies b and e), the reorganisation of partnership structures as a consequence of the introduction of the SIPs was thought to have been a disruptive influence, reducing opportunities for the sector.

However, in at least three of the case-study areas (c, d and e), third sector interviewees felt that the commitment of public sector partners to real engagement had not been particularly deep. In two of these (c andd), the local authorities were seen to have at times tried to circumvent the CVC by using

other fora or networks and in another area(case-study b), there were also some concerns on the part of local authority interviewees that the CVC did not represent the totality of the sector. In some cases (e.g. case-studies b and e), even where relationships were perceived as reasonably good, local authorities were reluctant to use the sector to *represent* the 'citizen's voice' and contested the view that the sector should fulfil this role, believing that this risked putting an intermediary in place between service providers/commissioners and the user.

It was striking that generally case-study interviewees had no real overview of the extent of third sector involvement in public service delivery within their areas prior to the start of the project, a point which was echoed by some focus group participants, although a common theme was that the sector was increasingly divided between larger organisations (particularly in fields such as children's services or older people) who had the capacity and skills to tender or negotiate effectively with local authorities and other public sector bodies and smaller organisations which struggled to engage with these issues, even with the support of the CVC. As with national stakeholders, policy fields such as children's services and health and social care were generally those where the third sector was seen as having most involvement in the past. However, several interviewees noted that in practice there was a disconnect between the high-level deliberations of the LSB and the practical commissioning of services and in some cases (e.g. case-studies b, c and e) it was felt that in real terms there had been few instances of services being procured externally.

3.3 Project Rationale

In general terms, almost all interviewees believed that the MtC project was designed to meet a real need, in terms of enhancing the capacity of the sector to contribute effectively to the work of LSBs and to engage more effectively in issues around both the design and delivery of public services. Interviewees tended to see the MtC officers as an important complement to the involvement of the CVC Chief Officer in the LSB and as a way of

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'operationalising' the relationships between the third sector and public bodies, disseminating information, making links and facilitating contacts. MtC officers were often seen as 'brokers', helping relevant third sector organisations or fora make the appropriate linkages into local authorities and other organisations and correspondingly helping the public sector identify third sector organisations who could provide useful input into the analysis of needs underpinning the SIP.

The 16 survey respondents who had had some contact with the MtC officer in their area were also asked what they saw as the key aspects of the officer's role. Results are shown at Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4: Views on key elements of the MtC officer's role
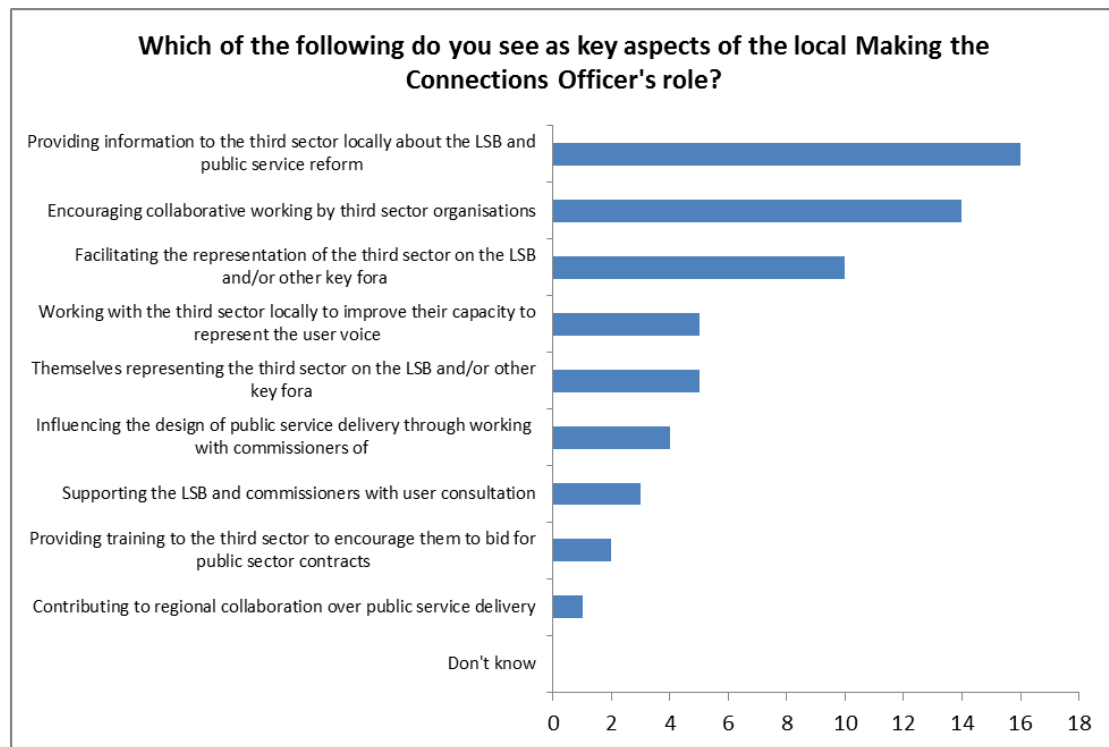
It is interesting that the main aspects of the role were perceived to be directly related to the work of the LSB and other partnerships (the representation and information function) and to encouraging collaboration between third sector organisations: the roles of influencing service planning and facilitating the citizen's voice were seen as much less central by this group of interviewees

(although arguably the former is the end to which representation is an essential means).

This view of the role of the MtC officer perhaps relates to a number of important *caveats* which other interviewees made to the endorsement of the overall rationale of the MtC project. These can be grouped under four main headings.

The first related to timing. Many interviewees pointed to the fact that there had been a very long delay between the original project proposal (which dated back to around 2008/9) and the project receiving funding. Indeed, at least two of the case-study area CVCs (e.g. b and e) noted that they had given up hope of the project ever coming on stream. The delay had a number of consequences, which it was argued had reduced the relevance of the project as designed:

- With the strong focus on the public services as part of the core remit of the third sector infrastructure, more well-resourced CVCs had already put other arrangements in place to support third sector involvement in partnership working (for example, identifying staff to participate in sub-groups to the LSB and incorporating this into their job description), meaning that MtC officers had to 'work around' pre-existing arrangements;
- Similarly, a number of other projects and initiatives (some of them European funded) such as Collaborative Communities[92] and Enterprising Communities[93] had come on stream which had related objectives (and targets) in terms of capacity building to enable third sector organisations to operate more commercially. Another example

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[92] An ERDF project in south-west Wales promoted by the CVCs and local authorities to provide organisational development support to third sector organisations to become more financially sustainable. See http://www.collaborativecommunities.org.uk/english/about-us.html

[93] An ERDF project delivering throughout West Wales and the Valleys and delivered by CVCs to provide support to organisations and individuals interested in establishing social enterprises. See http://wefo.wales.gov.uk/news/latest/120206enterprisingcommunities/?lang=en

was the Brokers[94] project in West Wales, while more recently, the BIG Lottery Funded Community Voice programme has come on stream, also undertaking related activity[95]. (Annex 1 contains further information on the involvement of different CVCs with these projects);

- LSBs had been in a period of flux as a result of the changes introduced in the wake of the 2011 Programme for Government and the requirement to move to a SIP and to abandon a series of earlier plans and partnership structures. While arguably this made the requirement for a good flow of information more important, it had disrupted established structures which the officers might have slotted into more easily and had arguably also moved LSBs away from a focus on service delivery issues to a more fundamental (but more abstract) focus on analysis and strategizing. Some interviewees felt that in reality LSBs had little input into commissioning and that the middle-managers who were responsible were not easily targeted by the project as designed;

- At the same time, whereas local government in particular had generally been shielded from sharp cuts in budgets prior to 2011/12, this had now become a very major issue. While some interviewees recognised that this offered opportunities to the third sector in terms of a wholesale re-design of public services, with a much stronger focus on voluntary effort (albeit often in an ad hoc rather than strategic fashion), most felt that it had led the public sector to turn in on itself. Moreover, high staff turnover as a result of redundancies meant that relationships were often disrupted.

The second group of concerns about the rationale for the project related to what was seen as its level of ambition, given the limited scale of the resources involved and the short timescale of the project. Many of those we interviewed (perhaps particularly the MtC officers themselves) stressed that the culture

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[94] A project funded by the wider LSB ESF project and providing Health and Social Care Brokers to help enable third sector input into the co-design of health pathways. See
http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dpsp/general/LSB/130814agreedpropen.pdf
[95] http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/programmes/wales/community-voice

change which would be required to deliver a fundamental change to the way in which public services were designed and delivered could only take place over the long-term and that it was unrealistic to expect to see concrete outcomes within the lifetime of the project, which was rather about '*laying the foundations*'. Some also stressed that, given the highly complex environment within which the project was operating and the range of external factors also influencing decisions on public services, it would be impossible to attribute any observed changes to the project in isolation.

Thirdly and related to this, some interviewees stressed the inconsistency between the level of ambition and the relatively junior nature of the MtC posts, arguing that it was unreasonable to expect middle-ranking staff on short-term contracts to be able to convincingly fulfil those parts of the role which related to influencing public sector commissioners:

'They are probably at too low a level – they are probably struggling as to how much influence they can really have'.

Fourthly, the significant differences in the resources and priorities of CVCs and their relationships with public sector partners were seen as problematic in the context of a project which had adopted a relatively undifferentiated approach in terms of offering one post for each local authority area. In some cases, this was thought to be more than might have been needed (and in case-study e, the CVC had seriously considered not taking up the post because of the difficulty of fitting the post around other arrangements which had been put in place in the intervening period between the original project submission and agreement from WEFO to proceed) and in others was clearly felt to be inadequate.

3.4 Activities and outputs

Turning to the activities being undertaken by the MtC officers, the evidence from this initial phase of the research perhaps above all highlights the very varied ways in which the resource being provided by the project is being used.

To a large extent this reflects the need for individual officers to adapt their role to the context within which they find themselves. MtC officers themselves, both in the focus groups and the case-studies, pointed to ways in which they had had to 'work around' other officers and projects (such as those cited in 3.3 above) where potentially at least they might have risked 'treading on the toes' of other staff.

Thus, in one of our case-studies (e), the CVC Chief Officer was clear that the MtC officer should have a minimum role in building the capacity of third sector organisations to tender for public sector contracts or in arranging training, as the CVC current core resources and EU project delivery more than adequately covered this work and the post should concentrate on where there were clear gaps: it was also argued here and in two other of the case-studies (a and c) that there was a serious risk of over-inflating expectations, given that relatively few real opportunities for tendering had emerged:

'In relation to Third Sector organisations being more able to work collaborative or on a co-production basis it seems that there has been so much discussion around "working together" to maximise opportunities that it feels that there is almost a sense of burnout amongst Third Sector groups as the opportunities to procure, tender, or commission have not been, and are still not, forthcoming'.

More generally, a focus group participant noted:
'There are some things that I would like to do with areas of work but I can't move it forward because I need to either get them [fellow CVC officers undertaking similar themed activities] on board or they want to do it their particular way, the way they've always done it.'

By contrast, in another case-study area (b), where relations with the local authority were excellent, the officer felt that there was less of a role for MtC in terms of harnessing the citizen's voice, because this could be seen as getting in the way of the engagement strategy of the local authority and other public bodies:

'The action [relating to citizen's voice] is based more around third sector organisations rather than end-users. So it's not something we see as a priority because if we did that we would be stepping on the toes on public sector organisations that collect their own information on service users… We have to be wary also about spreading ourselves even more thinly than we already are. So what we are doing is really about bringing together the third sector and public sector'.

The flip side of this is that MtC officers often appear to be deployed to fill gaps which have emerged within the local context, for example providing a secretariat function to the local Compact Committee (cited by a focus group participant and also in case-study b) or servicing pre-existing fora, such as the Children and Young People network (case-study e), which had previously been supported by a dedicated member of staff, a Community Halls forum (case-study c) or what was reported as being a struggling Environmental Network in another CVC area. In case-study a, the MtC officer, who had had considerable experience within the sector locally, was focused largely on delivering two specific outputs (which both required developing increased co-ordination and collaboration between third sector organisations locally) under the area's SIP where the lead had been assigned to the CVC, with little time left over for other parts of the role as envisaged in the Business Plan.

From the evidence of the report cards, MtC officers also appeared to have been used quite widely (in at least six cases) to pull together local third sector responses to the Welsh Government consultation document on the third sector infrastructure, 'Continuity and Change', including developing 'easy read' versions and holding consultation events. In at least three areas, MtC officers had played a major role in organising wider third sector fora or events.

Other specific tasks which MtC officers had undertaken included:
- Research and consultation on the impact of UK welfare reforms on local populations (in several cases);

- Supporting the start-up of Community Voice projects[96], either through arranging events or helping with the induction of new staff (in several cases);

- Organising training which was only indirectly related to capacity building to engage with public service design and delivery e.g. stress management;

- Work on flood defence planning;

- Facilitating co-operation between credit unions to respond to housing benefit changes;

- Playing a significant role in developing a local Armed Services Compact;

- In one case, developing and in others working with projects funded under the wider ESF – LSB project to ensure a significant level of third sector involvement and awareness.

While in most cases these specific tasks fit reasonably comfortably within the overall conception of the MtC officer role, they also reflect a fairly opportunistic approach to using the additional resource provided by the project. This is not surprising given the context within which CVCs operate, juggling multiple funding streams, over and above the core funding received from the Welsh Government:

'Because the third sector has had to be very pragmatic…that mentality of 'if there's money available what can we use it for' has been in evidence'.

The fieldwork also suggested that there had been a steep learning curve for some of the MtC officers, particularly where they had not had previous experience of working within the third sector or more specifically in CVCs, with one of the stakeholders commenting:

'They've needed a lot of time to get their heads around what it is exactly they should be doing.'

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[96] Community Voice is a strategic funding programme of the BIG Lottery Fund Wales and provides funding to some CVCs to implement a portfolio of projects aimed at harnessing service users' views into the design of public services.

Similarly a focus group participant commented:

'Because I'm new to the area, I had to spend a lot of time building relationships with senior managers within the LSB partners and only now am I digging down into the various groups'.

In both focus groups, participants talked about this process of bedding in having taken longer than they expected and also highlighted the challenge of building relationships within large and complex public sector organisations, particularly in the context of frequent staff changes.

Many had also found it surprising that their CVC did not have more detailed information on the third sector within their area, for example information on which organisations were already providing public services under contract or Service Level Agreements to public bodies or which were specifically interested in providing such services in future.

For some, clearly the role had not been what they had expected, and remained quite fluid. One focus group participant, for example, commented that because the LSB was all-embracing, it was difficult to draw boundaries:

'It's difficult not just to be seen as an extra resource…I've had to tell [the CVC CEO] on several occasions that I really couldn't take something on which he'd asked me to do'.

Another warned of the dangers of getting sucked into *'resource vacuum'* activities.

Turning to consider the different elements of the MtC's officer role as outlined in the model job description and summarised in the logic model in Section 2.4, it would appear that for many MtC officers **representation and information** forms the lion's share of their work. While MtC officers were often not invited to attend LSB meetings themselves, they tended to be active participants in sub-groups (for example, on engagement) and fora which supported the LSB, and also frequently participated in existing groupings bringing together third sector organisations with a common interest or theme. For some, attendance

at, and reporting on, these meetings was a significant element of their workload:

'We just turn up at everything, we offer to facilitate meetings, just to get our foot in the door; there's a lot of 'loss leader' stuff'.

A small number of interviewees were concerned that MtC officers were overly focused on themselves representing the sector at partnership meetings rather than facilitating the involvement of representatives with appropriate skillsets, though in general terms most of the local authority interviewees in case-study areas (with the exception of case-study d) were satisfied with the inputs from the CVC.

Dissemination of information on LSB developments was also said to be a key part of many MtC officers role, which was a subject for concern on the part of at least one national stakeholder:

'I have a horrible fear it's just about churning out material'.

In one case-study area (b), for example, a main focus of the project was on developing and maintaining a dedicated website which provided details of local partnership arrangements and forums and provides information to support third sector representatives engage with or already on those local partnerships and forums: the site also allows people to vote for their preferred representatives on forums and in partnerships when vacancies are advertised.

However, as noted in Section 3.1 above, many CVCs appear to have had relatively little information on which third sector organisations were either engaged in or interested in the delivery of public services, and for some of the MtC officers, undertaking a mapping exercise was a prerequisite to be able to target information effectively: at least four of the officers' report cards refer to such mapping exercises being undertaken. As a result some CVCs (including in case-study areas d and e) appeared to be reluctant to participate in the baseline survey which it was intended would be deployed across the whole of the project in late 2013.

In terms of **input into service planning,** there was less evidence in the fieldwork of concrete activities related to this, though as previously noted, a key goal of representation on the LSB and associated fora is to ensure that the third sector perspective is brought to bear on high-level discussions of these issues. However, some interviewees argued that there was a mismatch between the focus of the project on the LSB and the emphasis on service planning, since the LSBs were operating at such a strategic level that they were not really engaged in the practical issues of how services should be delivered.

This same point applied to **input into service delivery.** MtC officers' activities in relation to this part of the role again varied widely. In some case, officers were heavily involved in organising and providing training to third sector organisations on procurement-related issues (either directly or by brokering arrangements with other providers such as Menter a Busnes, funded by the Welsh Government). Thus, in one case-study area (c), the MtC officer had organised a long series of training either on her own or in conjunction with other officers in the same CVC or MtC officers in neighbouring areas, including:

- a 'Get your House in Order' workshop;
- an 'Equality and Diversity' workshop;
- a 'Green Dragon' environmental management workshop;
- a co-production event which included a 'How to Tender' workshop, delivered by Menter a Busnes;
- a 'Streamlined Quality Assurance Systems' workshop;
- an event involving the Social Enterprise Network;
- for speakers from the Council and the LSB to attend a Health and Social Care Network event focused on tendering;
- a presentation for the third sector on 'the tendering process, procurement and the Local Service Board'.

By contrast, as noted above, in other case-study areas (such as e), involvement in training or capacity building was minimal, with the exception of

putting in place arrangements mandated by WCVA (notably training on the ten engagement principles by Participation Cymru) because such activities were felt to be covered elsewhere within the CVC.

In terms of the **citizen voice,** the extent of individual MtC officers work again appeared to vary hugely, again in part depending on the capacity elsewhere in the CVC (it being particularly relevant here whether or not the CVC had been successful in bidding for BIG Lottery Fund Community Voice funding), but also reflecting the stage of development of SIPs.

In some areas (for example, in case-studies a and e), the MtC officer played a significant role working with the local authority on developing an engagement strategy and on arranging public consultation events around the needs analysis and in one of these (a) the officer was also playing a key role in an LSB Scrutiny Panel, with half of the members drawn from non-Executive local authority members and half from the local third sector. In a third (case study d) the officer was also involved in arranging consultation events on the draft SIP, though this was largely related to concern that the local authority's own processes were inadequate. Focus group participants also reported working with newly elected Police and Crime Commissioners on their engagement strategy and ensuring input into local authority Scrutiny Panels, for example. But in other areas (such as case-study b), involvement with this element of the MtC project seemed much less prominent, with one focus group participant for example commenting:
'We've not done much on citizen voice because our Service Board was already undertaking a consultation exercise'.

Overall, interviewees identified a range of contextual factors which determined the extent to which they were able to fulfil the role envisaged in the Business Plan and the model job description, several of which have already been discussed. These included:
- The overall quality of the relationship between the CVC and the Local Authority (which was generally seen as in effect controlling the LSB, whatever the theory). Where relations were good, and the CVC was

well embedded (as in case-studies a, b and e), this could be an enabling factor but it could also mean that the MtC officer was focused on filling gaps in terms of taking forward the work on the public service agenda where the CVC had not already allocated resources (for example, case-study a). Where it was poor (most notably in case study d), it made much of the envisaged role all but impossible;

- The resources available to the CVC and the extent to which key aspects of the MtC post, as originally conceived, were already being fulfilled by other staff funded by other projects and funding streams;

- The progress (or lack of it) in terms of developing the SIP, and (in some cases) reconstituting the LSB (including where joint LSBs were being piloted in Conwy/Denbighshire, Anglesey/Gwynedd and RCT/Merthyr Tydfil) and its structures to take into account the Guidance from the Welsh Government issued in 2012[97]. In many instances (for example, case-studies c and e), it was argued that the uncertainty over structures and the focus on getting to grips with a new (and fairly prescriptive) approach to strategic planning meant that MtC officers were trying to work in a vacuum and where senior officers' eye had been taken off the ball in terms of practical issues of commissioning. Thus, one case-study participant noted:

'The guidance came with the Single Integrated Plan that they wanted to reduce the number of partnerships. But certainly in my area there was a vacuum while the SIP was being developed around who is leading on what and what in the future the new partnerships would look like. It's still not very clear'.

Conversely, it was argued it could be difficult to find anything useful about LSBs and their work to disseminate because it seemed so abstract to most third sector organisations. At the same time, this state of flux did provide opportunities for the MtC officers to 'make themselves useful', for example in playing a leading role in developing work on engagement (case-study a and e, for example);

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[97] The first SIP in the Convergence Area was published by Carmarthenshire in September 2011, followed by Denbighshire in November 2011 and Conwy in February 2012. SIPs for other areas were published between April 2012 and March 2013, with the exception of Swansea, where the SIP was first published in July 2013 and Gwynedd, which has not published a SIP.

- The impact of financial cuts on local authorities and other public sector organisations. While in some instances (e.g. by local authority interviewees in case-studies c and e), this was seen as presenting opportunities (in terms of offering new opportunities to deliver non-statutory services such as libraries and community centres through the sector with a greater use of voluntary input), a common theme was that local authorities were too transfixed by dealing with the immediate crisis – and in many cases trying to minimise the loss of jobs - to think imaginatively:

  'With the cuts that are being announced everyone is trying to be protective. People are not making decisions, nor are they willing to engage. What that means is that trying to introduce new ideas is like working with treacle. People are not realising that with cuts comes opportunities and the third sector has got to be more dynamic at making this case'.

  Echoing this, one national stakeholder also thought that the third sector itself had failed to come up with a new narrative to stimulate the sort of new thinking that was required, though it was hoped that WCVA's recent paper, 'Putting People at the Centre' might start this debate;

- The high turnover of staff as a side-effect of the financial pressures on the public sector and the difficulties this caused for *sustaining* the connections:

  'Whenever there is change around in people, then you are basically starting from scratch to build those relationships'.

  This was highlighted for example by one focus group participant who noted that in a year, the two posts in the local authority which were most important to her role had been filled by three and two individuals respectively and that a key initiative with the Fire and Rescue Service appeared to have stalled as a result of a change in personnel;

- The impact of cuts and the difficult economic situation on third sector organisations themselves, through cuts or reductions in grants which reduced the capacity of organisations to engage with more strategic agendas such as public service design. In one case-study area (case-

study c), the decision to put a whole range of services which had previously been delivered through SLAs with individual third sector organisations out to tender (without publicising the fact) had caused significant disruption within the sector;

- The uncertainty created by the Welsh Government's review of the third sector infrastructure which was seen by some interviewees as unsettling and distracting CVCs;

- Uncertainty over the future direction of Welsh Government policy in terms of the role of local authorities in commissioning services. A number of interviewees noted the tension between the focus of the MtC project on LSBs and the local authority level and the increasing focus of Welsh Government policy on regional collaboration. While many MtC officers found it difficult to discuss regional working at all, those who were suggested that CVCs were generally still struggling to get to grips with emerging regional structures. Moreover, perhaps particularly in the context of south-west Wales (where there were some inconsistencies between the new 'footprint' of the Western Bay and other regional structures) and given the uncertainty surrounding the Williams Commission, some felt that there was a degree of 'planning blight' in terms of local authorities being reluctant to make decisions on commissioning of services before future arrangements became clearer.

Finally, in terms of formal outputs, many of those we interviewed noted that the targets agreed with WEFO did not really capture the essence of the project, while recognising that it was important to meet them. Welsh Government data suggest that there has been reasonable progress against the output targets, as shown in Table 3.2 (over) - though it should be noted that in many cases the claimed outputs have not yet been fully evidenced.

Interviewees generally believed that the WEFO targets would be met without difficulty, with the exception of the secondment places. This target was felt by several interviewees to be challenging, in view of the fact it had been based on what had proved an unfounded assumption that many of the MtC officer

posts could be filled by secondments, despite the fact that guidance from WCVA had stressed that less formal secondments could also be counted against this target.

Table 3.2: Progress against WEFO targets

Output	Target	Achieved
Dissemination initiatives	15	13
Initiatives to support LSB development	1	0
Collaborative agreements with public sector bodies	13	6
Secondment places	12	1
Collaborative agreements within the third sector[98]	N/A	5

3.5 Results and Impact

Obviously, with the project having only been underway for around a year at the time of the fieldwork, it would be unrealistic to expect much hard evidence in terms of results to have emerged as yet and most of those we interviewed face-to-face were unwilling to attribute significant achievements to the project to date.

However, in some of the case-study areas (notably case-studies a and b), interviewees were very positive about the way in which the additional resources provided by the project were both directly and indirectly (by freeing up scarce resources in the CVC) resulting in improvements in the engagement of the third sector with public sector design and delivery. In case-study a, for example, the project was enabling the CVC to take hands-on responsibility for progressing a number of the core outputs identified by the SIP through improving collaborative working amongst third sector organisations. In case-study b, positive results were being achieved by

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[98] This is not a target agreed with WEFO but it has been agreed that it is an important measure of success for the project.

broadening the range of third sector organisations involved in partnership working and creating efficient feedback mechanisms for them to ensure they were representing the sector, as well as by giving greater capacity to interact with key public sector contacts:

'What we've been able to do with Making the Connections that we couldn't do previously is work on developing the one to one relationships with the public sector bodies. Previously the links were much more about being members of the same partnership groups. We can be more proactive now.'

In these areas, interviewees were generally very positive about the prospects for longer-term results.

In the three other case-study areas, interviewees were significantly less positive, though in two of these (case-studies c and e), the local authority partners in particular nevertheless appreciated the work of the officer. In one of these, the CVC Chief Executive and the MtC officer themselves were quite clear that the officer had not been able to make any significant difference because *'the LSB...hasn't achieved anything'* and *[the LSB] underpins the MtC's ability to do things'.* In another the difficulties were seen to relate partly to the slow progress on moving the LSB from dealing with high-level strategy to practical issues, such as service design and commissioning (which in turn had been exacerbated by a focus on dealing with budget cuts and 'planning blight' over possible local government reorganisation) and partly to the steep learning curve of the MtC officer.

In the third (case-study d), the MtC officer's role was difficult owing to poor relationships between the CVC and the local authority (with the local authority recently having taken steps to create an alternative forum for community organisations, for example): here, the local authority interviewee was very sceptical as to whether the MtC officer was likely to achieve much, questioning whether the focus of the officer's work (e.g. on newsletters, training and attending meetings) was appropriate and objecting to the fact that there had been no consultation about the content of the officer's action plan.

Many of the focus group participants were reasonably positive about their achievements to date, reporting good progress in embedding themselves in local arrangements (partnerships groups, third sector networks etc.) and establishing good working relationships with both public and third sector organisations:

'Everything is working really well. We've got a representative on the LSB. We have me, my line manager and other partnership officers sitting on the thematic and operational groups'.

These relationships were seen as an essential foundation for achieving the desired outcomes, with the next stage being about *'deepening that'*, going further than just having meetings to also *'ensure we make co-productive values real in practice.'*

At the same time, many were nervous that the timescales for the project were quite short and that much of their work was really just helping to create a platform for changes the benefits of which would only be seen much further down the line.

This view was echoed by other stakeholders.

By contrast, perhaps, telephone survey respondents were reasonably positive both about the general 'direction of travel' in terms of third sector engagement with public service reform and about the difference being made by the project – though again caution is needed because of the low response rate.

Of the 16 respondents with knowledge of the MtC officer role (many of whom, of course, were working very closely with the officer concerned), almost all rated the MtC officer in their area as either very effective or effective across all five 'dimensions' of their work[99], but were particularly positive about their role in disseminating information about the planning of local services (where seven

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[99] Disseminating information about the planning of local services, representing the sector and working with public service commissioners, building the capacity of third sector organisations to influence the design of public services, building the capacity of third sector organisations to bid for and deliver public services, enabling third sector organisations to consult more effectively with service users)

said they were very effective and five that they were effective). Interestingly, the minority of negative views came almost exclusively from third sector respondents, rather than their public sector counterparts.

While most interviewees who were able to comment believed that the third sector's involvement in various aspects of public service design and delivery had stayed the same over the last two years, between a quarter and a third thought it had increased, with almost all of these attributing the change at least in part to the work of the MtC officer. Similarly, all eight of the respondents who thought that the capacity of the third sector to influence and deliver public services had increased since 2012[100] attributed this to a great extent (four) or to some extent (four) to the MtC officer.

Moreover, 12 of the interviewees (equally divided between third sector and public sector respondents) believed that support from local government and other public service providers for the involvement of the third sector in public service design had increased[101] with all but one of these attributing this either to some extent (ten) or to a great extent (one) to the MtC officer[102]. Almost all respondents (24) thought that demand for third sector input into public service reform would increase over the next two years.

A majority of survey respondents (17 in all) believed that third sector organisations were better informed both about how they could influence the design of public services and how they could deliver public services[103], with most of these again believing that the MtC officer had played a part in bringing about this improvement[104], while nine survey respondents believed that collaborative working between voluntary and community organisations had

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[100] 14 thought the sector's capacity had stayed the same, one that it had decreased and four did not know.

[101] Nine thought it had stayed the same, one that it varied between different public sector organisation and five did not know.

[102] The remaining one did not respond to the question.

[103] In the case of service design, six thought there had been no change, one that they were less well informed and two did not know; in the case of service delivery, four thought that there had been no change, one that they were less well informed and three did not know.

[104] In the case of service design, four attributed the improvement to the MtC officer to a great extent, and nine to some extent; in the case of service delivery, four attributed the improvement to the MtC officer to a great extent and eight to some extent.

increased[105], with seven of these attributed this increase in part to the MtC officer.

More generally a majority of survey respondents (19 and 17 respectively) believed that the workings of the LSB and other key partnerships and the design and planning of public services had improved over the last two years, with most of these believing that such improvements were partially at least due to the increased input from the third sector. 10 also believed that the citizen's input to the design and delivery of local services had increased[106], with all but one of these attributing this in part to an increased role of the third sector in facilitating this.

3.6 Project management

Finally, the fieldwork revealed some issues around the structure and project management of the project which appeared to have had a bearing upon its effectiveness and prospects of success.

The design of the project was based on a model where MtC officers would be employed and line-managed within each CVC but would have a reporting responsibility to the WCVA project manager (and through this post to the Welsh Government project management team of the wider project). While this model has been employed before, and while it was widely seen as essential that MtC officers were embedded in CVCs (not least because a key part of the role was to support the Chief Officer in their role vis-à-vis the LSB), a number of interviewees (including some MtC officers) felt that it was problematic. Officers (in many cases often new to the sector) were in some cases struggling with two separate command structures, with different concerns and priorities, partly reflecting wider tensions between some CVCs and WCVA and partly reflecting more structural issues of a project management team which was very focused on the RBA model developed for the project and CVCs which wanted to deploy an additional resource flexibly.

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[105] Ten thought it had stayed the same and seven did not know.
[106] 10 said that it had stayed the same and six did not know.

This, it was widely felt, had been exacerbated by the fact that the project manager's post had only been filled after many of the individual MtC officers had come into post. This meant, on the one hand that WCVA had had less input into the individual job descriptions (which were based on, but not identical with, the model job description) and recruitment processes than it might have done, and on the other, that the process of developing templates for local project plans, individual action plans and quarterly report cards had only been put in train once MtC officers had already been in post: most of those contributing to the focus groups thought this had been unfortunate: *'[the project manager] had the painful job of trying to pull the RBA together, drawing on 15 very different models of what was actually happening'.*

In practice, it appears that the process of developing individual action plans and refining the quarterly reporting template absorbed a significant amount of time and effort on the part of the WCVA team and to some extent the individual MtC officers. However, it was not clear from the fieldwork that the action plans were really fulfilling the intention of steering the project at a local level, as a national stakeholder recognised:
'The Action Plans reflect what the project is trying to do, but whether the officers are doing what the Action Plan says is a different thing'.

Although in some instances, Action Plans were seen as guiding the day-to-day work of the officers, in many others they were not regularly referred to, with focus group participants arguing, for example, that they had to respond to specific opportunities as they arose and that the action plan (and the report card) did not allow them to highlight some of the most important aspects of their work (for example, providing the secretariat to the local Compact). In this context, the recent audit visits by WCVA were seen as having been helpful in allowing officers to explain in more detail how their role was tailored to the specific context of their local area.

The key issue here is the contrast between the relatively prescriptive approach of the action plan and the reporting template (based around the

RBA framework and the five key outcomes, with a requirement for officers to show some activity related to each of the outcomes) and the way in practice the resource is being deployed.

Another issue has been staff turnover, both in terms of core project management staff (with the project manager having resigned to take up another job at the end of October, only shortly after an administrator had taken up a part-time post for the first time) and in terms of the MtC officers themselves, where at least three of the 15 posts (though none of those in case-study areas) have seen a change in officer, while in a fourth, the officer was absent on sick leave for several months. Though in itself not unusual in ESF projects, where contracts are fixed and often (as in this case) relatively short-term, it is clearly disruptive particularly where the project is new and still in development.

Finally, in terms of co-ordination arrangements, the MtC officers group has met five times and has been reasonably well attended by both the officers and WCVA and Welsh Government staff. Feedback from interviewees about the group was generally positive, though some focus group participants felt that there had been insufficient time for officers themselves to discuss what was working and what was problematic (*'generally we have been talked to rather than doing the talking')*. In addition, WCVA has encouraged regional meetings which were also valued by interviewees.

However, while the officers group arguably fulfils the role of the Steering Group as envisaged by the Business Plan, and while it is understood that there is regular reporting about the project's progress to WCVA's Board (which includes representation from CVCs), a small number of interviewees felt that it would have been desirable to have had a more strategic project management group, including managers from some of the CVCs as a sounding board to guide the project.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It may well be premature to try to draw any firm conclusions as to the progress of the MtC project at this very early stage of the research. The evidence base in terms both of hard data on third sector engagement in public service design and delivery and our fieldwork to date is limited. One problem here appears to be that, while the ambitions of the project are great, relatively few of those who might be expected to have an interest in it (particularly in terms of the public sector) have yet come into direct contact with it. A second is that, given the very significant differences between our case-study areas, any attempts to generalise have to be treated with caution.

Nevertheless, a number of issues do emerge relatively clearly:

- The aims and objectives of the project resonate well with some consistent themes of Welsh Government policy over the last decade in terms of the need to increase the engagement of the third sector in the design and delivery of public services and to strengthen the role of the citizen's voice in shaping public services;
- There is considerable 'buy-in' to the overall project concept, though many of those involved think it is overly ambitious given the scale of the project and the short time-scale over which it is being implemented;
- The delay between conceiving the project and implementing it appears to have had a negative impact, with considerable instability and change within the environment of partnership working at a local level making it more difficult for the MtC officers to establish themselves;
- The baseline for the project is very different from one area (and to some extent from one public service) to the next. While in most areas there appears to have been a reasonable level of formal engagement of the third sector in discussions about local services, and while our survey respondents were moderately bullish about the prior extent of the third sector's role, the general view is that experience on the ground prior to the establishment of the project was very mixed. The limited data from WCVA suggests that the level of third sector earned

income from public service delivery was in reality very limited, and few CVCs appear to have had systematic information about which third sector organisations were actually engaged in public service delivery (although a common perception is that the sector is increasingly divided between larger organisations, particularly in children's services and health and social care, who are well geared up to compete and smaller organisations whose contribution is less recognised and who are much less able to make the transition from grant dependency to a more competitive environment). Other recent evaluations suggest that citizen engagement and working with the third sector, while important themes in local partnership working, may not be seen as the highest priorities for local government in particular;

- In practice, MtC officers are being deployed in very different ways in different areas, with decisions about their day to day activities informed to a great extent by the context within which they are operating. Some have clearly had a steep learning curve and have struggled to carve out a role for themselves, and in many cases they are used opportunistically to respond to specific needs linked (sometimes tangentially) to the public service agenda;

- While it is difficult to generalise, there appears to be a strong focus on participation in meetings and disseminating information about LSB and other partnership working, with less focus on input into service design (arguably because many LSBs are not yet dealing with such practical issues). Work on building the capacity of third sector organisations to generate earned income from public service delivery is in some cases a major focus of the role but in others, the CVC has other resources with which to deliver this sort of activity on the scale they think appropriate. Work on the citizen's voice also varies considerably, though supporting LSB teams on their engagement work appears to have been a key function for some officers;

- There is an inherent tension in the project design between the CVCs as the employer and line-manager and WCVA as project manager and, in practice, the project management team's attempt to ensure that the

MtC officers role reflects the RBA framework has come into conflict with the understandable desire by CVCs to deploy an additional resource in a way which compliments their other staff's pre-existing roles;

- The work to develop Individual Action Plans and to agree a report card has been relatively onerous but, despite this, the current arrangements do not seem to be working particularly well. In some cases, at least, the action plan is not a practical tool to guide the work of the MtC officer and the report cards do not really give a full account of the activities and achievements of the officers;

- MtC officers and other interviewees report a range of positive results to date, and the small number of survey respondents believe that the officers are making a positive contribution to increasing the visibility and role of the third sector in LSB and partnership working and in the design and delivery of public services. Interestingly, in both the survey and case-study fieldwork, public sector interviewees (often in quite operational roles) were more likely to be positive than respondents within CVCs;

- Most interviewees believe that the formal targets for the project will be met (with the possible exception of secondments) but there are mixed views about the extent to which the project will achieve the outcomes envisaged in the RBA framework, particularly within the lifetime of the project.

ANNEX 1: BASELINE INFORMATION FROM CVCS

	CVC a member of LSB?	Other TSOs in membership of LSB?	A trans-parent process for Commissioning?	User and community involvement in devising SIP?	SIP endorsed by TSO/CVC?	Enterprising community project in the area?	Community Voice (from early 2013) in the area?	Collaborative Communities in the area?	LSB Brokers project in the area?
Ynys Mon	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Gwynedd	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Conwy	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Denbigh-shire	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Ceredigion	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Pembrokeshire	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Carmarthen	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Swansea	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Neath Port Talbot	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Bridgend	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Rhondda Cynon Taff	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Caerphilly	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Merthyr Tydfil	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Blaenau Gwent	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Torfaen	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No