

Evaluation of Invest Local's First Three Years

November 2019

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Acknowledgements

Thanks are given to the members of Invest Local steering groups, Invest Local staff and trustees and other stakeholders, who kindly gave their time to the evaluation. Without their contributions, the evaluation would not have been possible.

Thanks are given to the other (current and former) members of the Invest Local evaluation team: Andrea Boyce, Rhodri Bowen, James Hall, Alain Thomas, Dafydd Thomas and Dr Leon Quinn, whose contributions to the fieldwork and analysis were hugely valuable.

Thanks are also given to Chris Johnes, Emma Shepherd, Gwen Thirsk, Kate McCabe, Rachel Harding and Zunaira Hassan from BCT, for their comments, corrections, and case studies.

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1. Executive summary

Invest Local

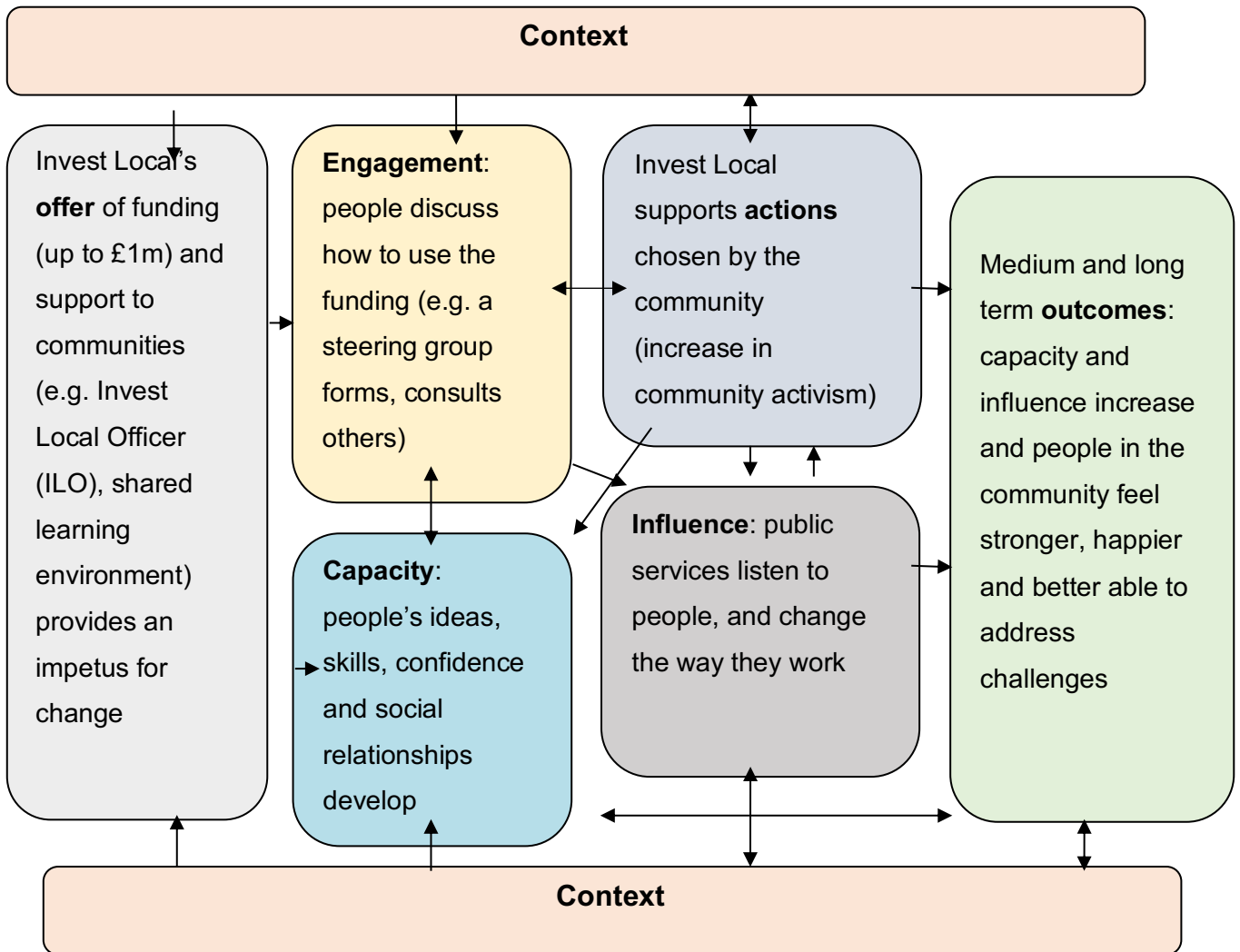
- 1.1. Invest Local is a ten-year programme of funding and support for 13 communities¹ across Wales. It is funded by a £16.5m endowment from the Big Lottery Fund and is managed by the Building Communities Trust (BCT). Each community has up to £1m to invest and it is up to each community to identify their priorities, who they will work with and how their money will be used.
- 1.2. Figure 1 presents a simplified version of the Invest Local's Theory of Change (ToC) (a description of how the programme is expected to work and generate change). It illustrates how Invest Local's "offer" to communities of up to £1m of funding, plus support from an Invest Local Officer (ILO) and, through the programme's shared learning and support with communications, is intended to: "enable residents to build on the strengths and talents within their communities, and take action to make their areas even better places to live"². In return for the offer of funding and support, the programme requires the formation of a local steering group to lead the programme and take decisions and actions (including deciding on investments) and engage extensively with the wider community. This is intended to increase the consciousness (a combination of critical reflection and action)³, confidence, capacity and influence of communities and, over the long term, increase the well-being and resilience (the ability to cope with adversity) of communities.

¹ Aberfan, Merthyr Vale and Mount Pleasant (Ynysowen); Caerau; Cefn Golau; Clase; Glyn; Hubberston and Hakin; Llwynhendy; Maesgeirchen; Penywaun; Phillipstown; Pillgwenlly (Pill); Plas Madoc; Trowbridge and St Mellons.

² <http://www.bct.wales/about-us/>

³ Consciousness is a process through which critical thinking and reflection leads to greater understanding of people's situations, including their strengths and their challenges, informing and enabling action to build upon their strengths and address the challenges and constraints they face.

Figure 1: Invest Local’s Theory of Change



1.3. The programme therefore blends aspects of:

- traditional place-based community development programmes, like the first phase of Communities First, with its focus upon local capacity building;
- traditional grant giving programmes like People and Places, given the availability of significant capital and revenue funding; and
- asset-based community development programmes like the Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities in Wales project, with their focus upon mobilising people’s strengths and thus their agency.

The evaluation

1.4. People and Work⁴ were commissioned to undertake an external evaluation of Invest Local in July 2016. The aims of the evaluation are:

- to help communities achieve as much as they can through the investment from Invest Local;
- to understand to what extent the intended changes, outcomes and successes of Invest Local are being achieved;
- to assess the success of the Invest Local approach as a way to help communities make their areas better; and
- to help BCT to work as effectively as possible.

Evaluation approach, data and methods

1.5. The evaluation uses Realistic Evaluation, a theory-based approach, to understand and identify the difference Invest Local is making, and also “what works, for whom, in what circumstances... and how?”⁵ This involves measuring outcomes (what changes) and then identifying the extent to which these outcomes were attributable to (or caused by) Invest Local, by exploring the relationship between:

- the programme context (e.g. how differences in the size and coherence of each community influenced the response of residents to the programme);
- mechanisms (how changes are generated; e.g. how involvement in steering groups and participation in the programme of shared learning can increase people’s consciousness); and
- outcomes (what changes, such as increases in consciousness, confidence and capacity, enabling people to act and bring about change).

⁴ <http://peopleandwork.org.uk/en/home/>

⁵ Pawson R. & Tilly, J. (1997). *Realistic Evaluation*; London: Sage

- 1.6. The programme's context, mechanisms and outcomes were explored and examined, using primarily qualitative data drawn from:
- structured evaluation exercises with steering groups in each of the 13 communities;
 - interviews with members of steering groups and also other stakeholders in each of the 13 communities;
 - interviews with the Building Communities Trust's (BCT's) Chief Executive (who also acts as Invest Local Officer (ILO) to one community), the six ILOs, the Communications and Events Officer and six of BCT's trustees; and
 - documents produced by BCT (most notably project updates) and steering groups (most notably Driving Change plans and minutes of meetings).
- 1.7. Wherever possible, responses to questions about, for example, the capacity of a community, were triangulated (or compared) by drawing upon responses from members of steering groups, other stakeholders in the community, ILOs and the BCT trustee working with the community.
- 1.8. However, the evaluation team's scope to generate truly rich qualitative data, rooted in an in-depth understanding of and engagement with each community and with BCT, was limited. Because many of the judgments in the report are subjective, further discussion and validation of findings with BCT staff was undertaken and further discussion and validation of findings with steering groups is recommended.

Invest Local's context

- 1.9. The key external factors that have impacted upon Invest Local are austerity (including cuts to public services, and welfare reform), poverty, the legacy of mistrust and cynicism about community development programmes, and the characteristics of each community (e.g. in terms of size, cohesion and the strength of civil society). These factors have shaped the priorities that

communities identified and made community engagement with the programme more challenging.

Invest Local's "offer" to communities and the communities' response

- 1.10. The offer of "up to £1m" was large enough to inspire a group of people to form and sustain a viable, albeit generally small, steering group in each community, so that Invest Local could get going. This was an important achievement that enabled the programme to get going in each community and the time and energy that residents have committed to groups (on a voluntary basis) is impressive.
- 1.11. The offer of up to £1m is also expected to be a large enough sum of money to enable groups to make a difference to communities that can be felt and/or seen by residents. However, the offer did not generally stimulate a wider interest or excitement across communities, and in almost all areas, steering groups struggled to fully engage the wider community, in terms of both the total number of people and hard to reach groups.
- 1.12. Support from ILOs was effective in supporting engagement and the formation and functioning of steering groups (including their structure and practice, communication and planning), and they have played a key role in the progress made. However, ILOs are doing more community development than was anticipated, which has stretched ILOs, as they have limited time to work with each community.
- 1.13. Shared learning and support around communications has been valued, but the take up, particularly of shared learning, has been patchy, and the impact upon steering groups' consciousness and capacity have been correspondingly modest.

1.14. The programme model and processes also created challenges. Invest Local stipulates that “a wide range of local people need to have their say in how the money is spent”⁶ and with the benefit of hindsight, the scale of community engagement undertaken to create the first Driving Change Plans, slowed progress and sapped many steering groups’ energy. BCT’s process for “endorsing” the first Driving Change plans also undermined the programme’s message that: “local people will decide how the money is spent and how key decisions are made”. BCT’s pragmatism on what level of consultation was required before the first plans could be approved and the changes made to make the process more co-productive are therefore strengths of the programme.

What difference is Invest Local making?

1.15. The programme’s Theory of Change (figure 1) identifies the intended outcomes of the programme. The evaluation’s assessment of the difference Invest Local is making focuses upon the progress made in realising these outcomes.

Consciousness, confidence and capacity

1.16. As the example of Pill below illustrates, the programme’s offer to communities motivated people to get involved, and through their involvement in steering groups, increased their understanding and empowered them to take action, increasing the consciousness, confidence and capacity of communities, albeit increases largely limited at this stage, to a small group within each community. Invest Local has also built local capacity through direct investments of money in local groups and organisations and/or by strengthening links between different local groups and organisations (e.g. through organisations’ involvement in steering groups).

⁶ BCT Programme Guidance (n.d) Consulting Your Community, <http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2017-12-19-47-1-consulting-your-community.pdf>

Challenging Power in Pill

Members of Pill Unity (the local steering group) described how people in the area felt let down by services, which had promised things, but never delivered, and “felt downtrodden”. They also described the “terrible attitude” they felt some public services had towards the area. As members of the group put it: “professionals” and the “people who don’t live here...are out of touch with reality”. “They’re sitting in their ivory towers 9-5; they don’t know what it’s like.” “If they lived in the community, [if they] trod these streets, [they would have] more empathy for communities [like Pill]”. The group is growing in strength, diversity and confidence and is now beginning to actively engage with the local authority to help deliver services and activities in their community.

Actions, investments and outcomes

1.17. The investments made by steering groups include a mix of funding to:

- Strengthen the capacity of valued local organisations and enable them to continue delivering services, and in some cases, extend their offer, such as the investment in local community buildings and groups in Caerau, Hubberston and Hakin and Ynysowen and the investment in boilers for the Plas Madoc Leisure Centre (see boxed text).
- Provide new facilities for local areas. These are much less common, but examples include Clase’s new park and Cefn Golau’s Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA).
- Support smaller activities and investments like reinstating a Christmas tree in Caerau, bringing back the Penywaun carnival, and running community events like Plastonbury (in Plas Madoc) and Glynfest (in Glyn).

Tackling food poverty in Clase

The Clase food bank, supported by Invest Local funds, has made a real difference to people's lives, especially after the roll-out of Universal Credit, which is felt to have increased poverty in the community. Investment from Invest Local has helped transform accessing the food bank into a social event (to help reduce the stigma associated with accessing the food bank); supported the provision of information and advice to those accessing the food bank and has helped increase the numbers of people accessing the service (the food bank is now supplying more than 60 people).

- 1.18. By investing in local organisations, the programme is enabling service delivery. As the example of Plas Madoc (below) illustrates, the investments made may often not appear glamorous or adventurous, but they are in line with the priorities local people identified and would generally be difficult to fund through existing grant giving programmes like People and Places. Similarly, in Caerau (albeit on a smaller scale), the investment in Dyffryn Chapel, to provide new disabled toilets and a more efficient heating system, means the community space can now be put to much better use. The Caerau Friends group, which supports people facing loneliness and people with dementia, which can now use the space, is regarded as one of the key successes of Invest Local Caerau, and contributes to the Driving Change plan priorities to reduce isolation and improve mental health⁷.

Plas Madoc: Investing in an Organisation

Plas Madoc Leisure Centre was struggling. Old and inefficient boilers meant running costs were high and the centre was reportedly little used by local

⁷ Caerau Driving Change Plan report – spring 2019. Unpublished Paper.

people. We are Plas Madoc's (the local steering group's) funding for new boilers for the centre has proved a strong investment in a key community asset. It has kept the centre open by reducing its costs⁸ and the leisure centre has been able to develop and extend its offer of activities. These include a family wellbeing day, free yoga classes, bingo nights, a kids' drama club, a "brunch and munch" club, and one of the squash courts has been converted into a community room that local groups can access free of charge.



Engagement with We are Plas Madoc has also helped change the culture of the centre and it is now seen as much more open and welcoming, with many more people from the community reported to use the centre, and it seen as a community space where tenants and residents meet.

1.19. Some groups have also been able to use Invest Local funds to help lever in additional investment in their area; for example, in Phillipstown, Maesgeirchen

⁸ The new boilers save the centre almost £20,000 in running costs each year – money that has been used to develop the centre and provide more activities for the people of Plas Madoc.

and Clase, Invest Local groups have invested in the capital costs of new play facilities, and the local council has agreed to cover the cost of maintaining the facilities.

- 1.20. There are also examples of steering groups influencing the actions of external organisations working locally; for example, some groups have sought to influence local authorities. However, at this stage, in general, influencing external organisations has rarely been a priority for steering groups.

Caerau Friends Group

Invest Local Caerau have health and wellbeing as one of their priorities for the community, and members of the steering group wanted to set up a support group for people with dementia and their carers. Funding received by Dyffryn Chapel for a new heating system and disabled access toilets meant that the chapel could host such a group.

After a first session with just two people attending, the group steadily grew over six months. The group was then opened up to anyone in the community who was isolated, and became even more popular. Now, it is not just residents of Caerau who attend, but also people from throughout the valley.



Today, the group is a lively environment where people make crafts, sing, play curling, go on day trips – and talk to neighbours and friends. It provides a vital social experience for many people in the community who live alone. The popularity of the weekly event has meant that there is now a second befriending group in Caerau.

Source: BCT

- 1.21. There are also already some concrete examples (like Clase's food bank, the Friends Group in Caerau and the Plas Madoc Leisure Centre) of the difference the investments made by Invest Local are making to people's lives and communities' wellbeing and resilience. However, measurement of these impacts through self-evaluation remains weak. Examining the impact of the programme upon medium and longer-term outcomes, like increases in wellbeing, will be a focus for future evaluations.

Conclusions

- 1.22. After a slow start in most areas, the programme is now making good progress. Steering groups have formed in all areas, and despite a sometimes rocky path, have been sustained, or reformed. Their consciousness, confidence and capacity is increasing, and in some areas, they are now growing in size and diversity. This is an important achievement. As a result, nine areas have now agreed Driving Change plans and the remainder have started the visioning process that will lead to their plans in 2019 or early 2020.
- 1.23. At this stage, the evidence suggests that there is no single pathway to progress. Different areas have progressed at different rates. They have worked in contexts of different assets, opportunities and challenges, and they have focused upon different priorities. Nevertheless, at a high level the common factors associated with progress are:
- a “natural” community that is neither too big nor too small;
 - a “good enough” consultation to get going;
 - an effective steering group with clear priorities, opportunities to invest in (that support those priorities), and the decision- making structures and capacity needed to plan and deliver; and
 - an effective ILO.
- 1.24. The “journeys” in terms of consciousness and confidence that steering groups and, in particular, individual members of those groups, have made, as they move forward, are impressive. This increase in community capacity is the most important impact of Invest Local to date. Steering groups’ collective capacity, coupled with the long-term funding and support from ILOs and shared learning, are enabling the groups to take action, most notably through investments, to make their communities even better. It also creates a focal point for local action, capacity building and influence.

- 1.25. A range of local people and groups have engaged with the programme, to identify priorities and develop plans that build upon the assets and strengths of communities. Although the number (and diversity) of residents who have been involved is fewer than hoped, it has been “good enough” to let the programme move forward. Extending and deepening steering groups’ engagement with the wider community is a key challenge for Invest Local going forward. A problem for most steering groups is that without delivery, it can be difficult to engage people, but without engaging people, delivery cannot start. However, once Invest Local gets going, delivery is expected to help fuel increasing engagement, which should support further delivery.
- 1.26. Looking beyond consciousness, confidence and capacity, it is too early to measure the difference Invest Local is making and will make, and this will be a focus of future evaluations. Subject to this important caveat, the evidence to date suggests that Invest Local is investing in and, in a few cases, influencing, assets, activities and services that communities want and which are likely to contribute to an increase in community capacity, wellbeing and resilience. The investments made in, for example, buildings and boilers, may not always appear glamorous, but they reflect the community’s priorities, strengthen communities’ assets and generally could not be supported by other funding streams.

2. Introduction

Invest Local

2.1. Invest Local is a ten year “programme of funding and support for 13 communities across Wales” (illustrated by figure 2). It is funded by the Big Lottery Fund and managed by the Building Communities Trust (BCT). The programme aims to build upon the “strengths, skills and talents of individuals, groups and organisations in those communities to create positive and long-lasting change”⁹. Each community has up to £1 million to invest and it is up to each community to identify their priorities, who they will work with and how their money will be used.

Figure 2: Invest Local areas



⁹ <http://www.bct.wales/invest-local/>

2.2. The programme has three parts:

- “Getting Going”, when communities are invited to join the programme and support is provided to “kick start” the programme in each community. Where needed, this provides access to small scale funding (through a Get Going Grant) to publicise the programme, get people engaged (including the formation of a steering group, which will lead Invest Local in each community¹⁰) and to consult and then develop a vision for the community¹¹. This culminates in the development of a Driving Change plan¹², outlining the strengths and assets of the community, priorities for change, and proposals for action (such as investments) over the next one to three years;
- “Driving Change”, when up to £1m is available over ten years to deliver the Invest Local Driving Change plan; and
- “Shared Learning”, which will run throughout the programme, and which allows members of each community to take part in learning activities (like visits and training) to help them to deliver their Driving Change plan¹³.

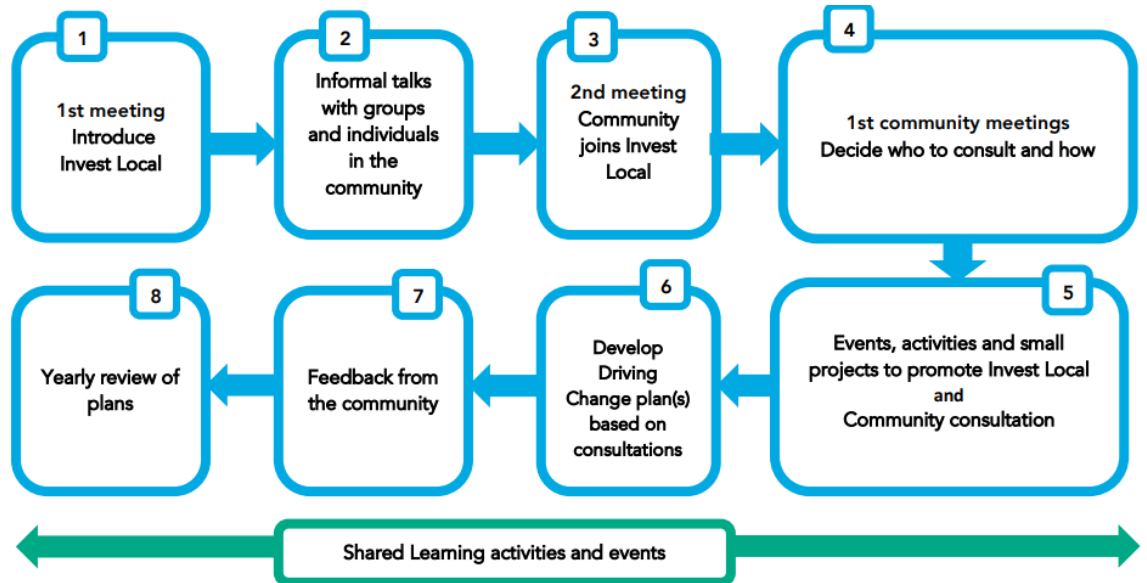
2.3. The relationship between the three elements is illustrated by figure 3.

¹⁰ Further details on the role of Steering Groups are available at:
<http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2017-12-19-50-1-invest-local-steering-groups.pdf>
at <http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2017-12-19-47-1-consulting-your-community.pdf>

¹² Further details on the Driving Change plan are available at:
<http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2017-12-19-13-1-driving-change-plan-guidance.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.bct.wales/how-it-works/>

Figure 3: The Invest Local journey



Source: <http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2016-07-06-28-1-invest-local-flow-chart.pdf>

The characteristics of Invest Local

2.4. Invest Local blends aspects of:

- traditional place-based community development programmes, like the first phase of Communities First¹⁴, with its focus upon local capacity building;
- traditional grant giving programmes like People and Places¹⁵, given the availability of both capital and revenue funding; and

¹⁴ Communities First evolved over time, from a traditional community development programme focused upon capacity building and local priorities (in its first phase), to a more targeted anti-poverty programme, focused upon employment, the early years and empowerment (in its second phase). More information about the programme's evolution is available at: <https://www.thecommunitydevelopmentpodcast.co.uk/short-history-communities-first/>

¹⁵ People and Places is a Community Fund programme that funds capital and revenue community projects from £100,001 to £500,000. More information on the programme is available at: <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/people-and-places-large-grants>

- asset-based community development programmes like the Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities in Wales project, with its focus upon mobilising the strengths and agency of people¹⁶.

Invest Local's asset-based community development approach

The key characteristics of Invest Local's asset-based approach are a commitment to:

- recognising, celebrating and strengthening the assets and strengths of a community;
- working together, building relationships, connections and associations within and between the communities Invest Local works with, and sharing resources;
- being inclusive and welcoming;
- being resident led, with residents taking decisions and actions;
- developing a collective vision; and
- working with, and influencing other institutions¹⁷ and policies (i.e. the social and institutional context people live in), to ensure that the community's collective vision and the mobilisation and development of its assets, is not directed or blocked by institutions or policies.

2.5. As section 5 outlines, Invest Local is prescriptive about the process of how priorities are identified, most notably by requiring the involvement and input from a wide range of individuals and groups from each community. As such it has some similarities to grant giving programmes like People and Places which require the "the community" to "be involved in the design, development,

¹⁶ Project participants received person-centred support to achieve their own goals (such as finding a job or completing a course). Further information about the project is available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/final-evaluation-building-livelihoods-and-strengthening-communities-in-wales-pr-615933>

¹⁷ Institutions include organisations, but also, for example, structures, norms, customs and laws, which both enable and constrain people's choices.

and running ofproject[s]”¹⁸. However, the extent and depth of community involvement required by Invest Local is greater than that of People and Places, given the focus upon the involvement of a whole community in choosing priorities.

- 2.6. Invest Local is not however, prescriptive about the type or nature of investments made, similar to People and Places, but unlike more targeted anti-poverty programmes such as the second phase of Communities First (which was very prescriptive). Although communities’ Driving Change plans have to be “endorsed” by BCT, the money for communities is guaranteed and the intention is that residents identify their own priorities and take decisions and actions, and that BCT have a co-productive role in developing plans. In contrast, applications to People and Places must be approved by programme officers and/or the Programme Committee, and around 60-65% of applications are rejected¹⁹.
- 2.7. Unlike grant programmes such as People and Places, Invest Local offers communities support through ILOs and shared learning. However, overall Invest Local is a “lean” programme. It has few staff relative to the total level of funding, compared to community development programmes like Communities First (focused upon community capacity building) or the Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities in Wales project (focused upon helping individuals and families maximise their assets and abilities). Consequently, much more of the ‘work’ and drive for change rests upon the shoulders of communities, and in particular, members of steering groups, who on a voluntary basis, lead the programme locally.

¹⁸ Community Lottery (n.d). People and Places Guidance
https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/documents/people-and-places/People-and-Places-guidance-E_190129_152132.pdf?mtime=20190129152132

¹⁹ Success rates vary over time, depending on the decisions of the programme committee, which meets monthly or bimonthly and these figures therefore represent a snapshot, rather than, for example, a yearly average. Rates of approval also differ somewhat for the medium and large grant application processes. There is a single stage process for medium grants (up to £100K), with 41% approved in the last round, and a two stage process for large grants (£100-£500K), with 36% approved at the first stage, and 61% at the second stage, in the last round. (Pers. Comm. Derek Preston-Hughes).

The Evaluation

2.8. People and Work²⁰ were commissioned to undertake an external evaluation of Invest Local in July 2016. The evaluation will run until 2026 and its aims are:

- to help communities achieve as much as they can through the investment from Invest Local;
- to understand to what extent the intended changes, outcomes and successes of Invest Local are being achieved;
- to assess the success of the Invest Local approach as a way to help communities make their areas better; and
- to help BCT to work as effectively as possible.

2.9. The research questions for the evaluation include:

- identifying the specific characteristics of Invest Local and evaluating how the focus on asset- based development worked;
- identifying the impact of external factors (the context) upon the programme;
- evaluating programme delivery; and
- assessing the difference that the programme has made.

This report

2.10. This report focuses upon the first three years of Invest Local (2016-2019). The report deliberately does not identify or name communities where challenges have been encountered, but does celebrate the success of named communities. The report is complemented by more technical reports that, for example, discuss in more detail the approach taken to impact evaluation.

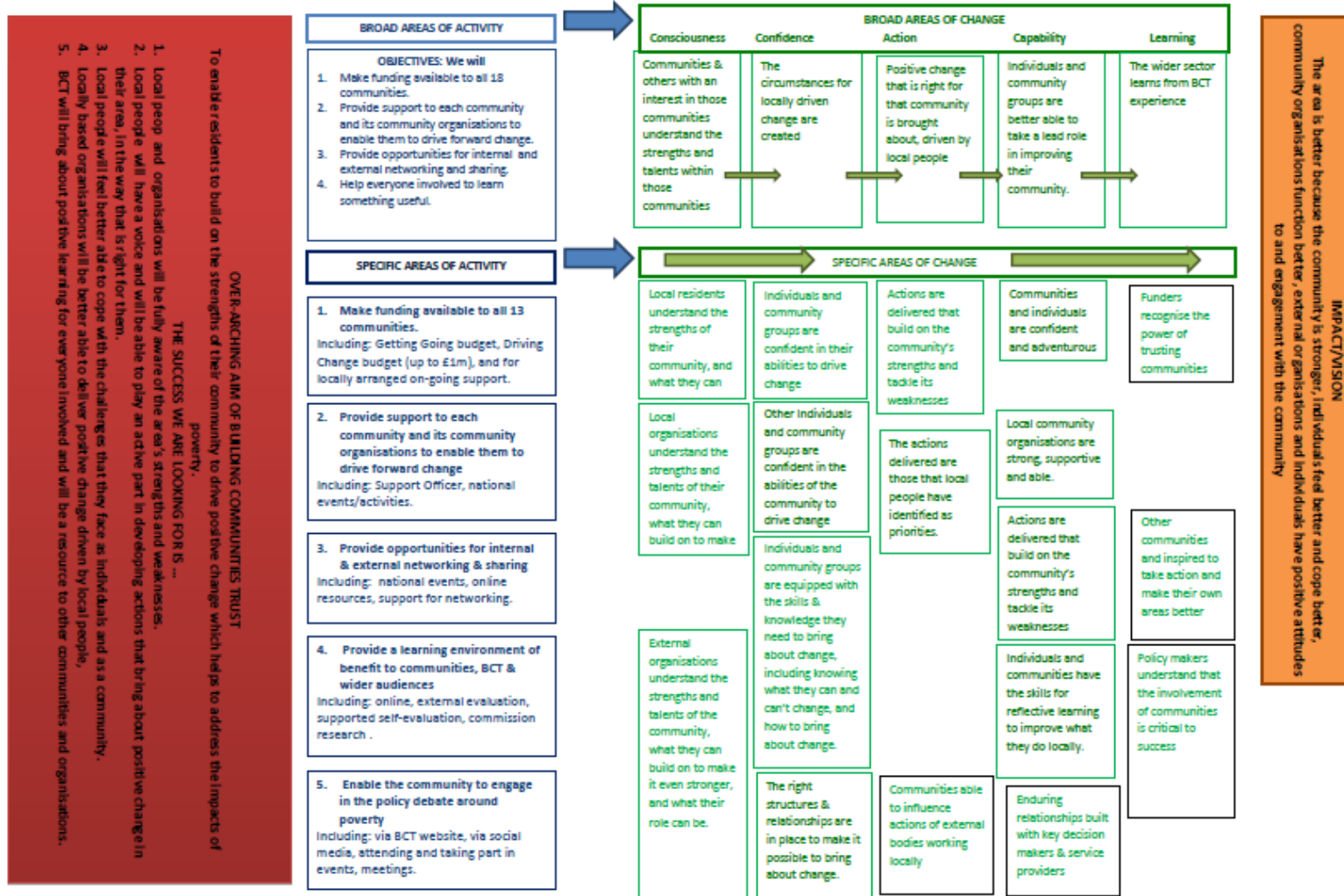
²⁰ <http://peopleandwork.org.uk/en/home/>

3. Evaluation approach, data and methods

A theory -based approach

- 3.1. A Theory of Change has been developed for Invest Local (see figure 4). This is a description of the difference Invest Local aims to make to people and communities, expressed as outcomes, such as an increase in people's well-being, and a description of how these outcomes are expected to be generated.
- 3.2. The evaluation uses the Theory of Change:
- to identify the types of outcomes, such as increases in communities' capacity and well-being, that need to be measured in order to identify if the programme is effective; and
 - to inform an assessment of the extent to which the changes observed in outcomes, such as increases in community capacity, are attributable to Invest Local. This is a measure of the impact, or difference, Invest Local is making; for example, the Theory of Change can help inform judgments about how likely it is that observed outcomes were attributable to Invest Local.

Figure 4. Invest Local's original Theory of Change



Evaluation approach, data and methods

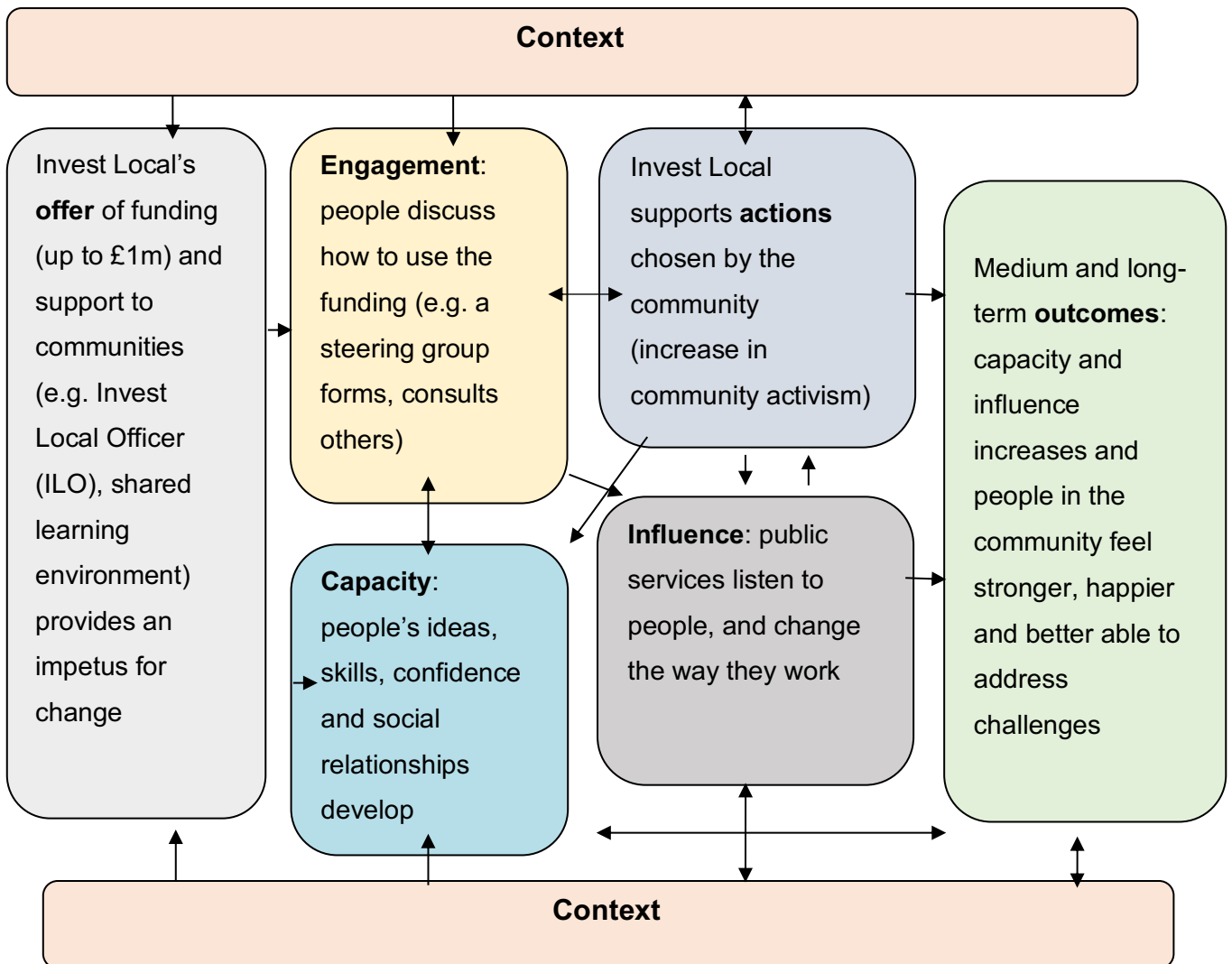
3.3. The evaluation uses Realistic Evaluation, a theory-based approach, to understand and identify the difference Invest Local is making, and also “what works, for whom, in what circumstances... and how?”²¹ This involves measuring outcomes (what changes) and then identifying the extent to which these outcomes were attributable to (or caused by) Invest Local, by exploring the relationship between:

- the programme context (e.g. how differences in the size and coherence of each community influence the response of residents to the programme);
- mechanisms (how changes are generated, e.g. how involvement in steering groups and participation in the programme of shared learning can increase people’s “consciousness”, a combination of critical reflection and action); and
- outcomes (what changes, such as increases in people’s consciousness, confidence and capacity, enabling people to act and bring about change).

3.4. This relationship was expressed by a simplified version of the programme’s Theory of Change illustrated by figure 5.

²¹ Pawson R. & Tilly, J. (1997). *Realistic Evaluation*; London: Sage

Figure 5: Invest Local’s Theory of Change (simplified)



3.5. The programme’s context, mechanisms and outcomes were explored and examined, using primarily qualitative data drawn from:

- structured evaluation exercises with steering groups in each of the 13 communities;
- interviews with members of steering groups and also other stakeholders in each of the 13 communities;
- interviews with the Building Communities Trust’s (BCT’s) Chief Executive (who also acts as Invest Local Officer (ILO) to one community), the six ILOs, the Communications and Events Officer and six of BCT’s trustees; and

- documents produced by BCT (most notably project updates) and steering groups (most notably Driving Change plans and minutes of meetings).
- 3.6. Wherever possible, responses to questions about, for example, the capacity of a community were triangulated (or compared) by drawing upon responses from members of steering groups, other stakeholders in the community, ILOs and the trustee working with the community.

Strengths and limitations

- 3.7. The study has important strengths. The approach and methods generated data that could be triangulated, providing reassurance that it was valid (where data from different sources was consistent), whilst the theory-based approach provides a rigorous framework for examining impact.
- 3.8. However, the study also has limitations. The evaluation team's scope to generate truly rich qualitative data, rooted in an in-depth understanding of and engagement with each community and also BCT was constrained (primarily by the resources available). Because many of the judgments in the report are subjective, they have been discussed with ILOs and further discussion and validation of findings with steering groups is recommended. Moreover, there was only limited self-evaluation data available from local steering groups, in part as it was often too early to measure impact, limiting the scope to evaluate the impact of investments.

4. Context

- 4.1. A cluster of factors linked to poverty and decisions by the state have hampered engagement, weakened local capacity, and shaped Invest Local investments; for example, poverty, austerity and welfare reforms, such as the introduction of Universal Credit, have shaped the priorities that communities identified and the investments they make, such as saving community assets and supporting food banks, and also contributed to residents' scarcity of time and attention²², which has made engagement more challenging. Engagement has also been hampered by the legacy of past programmes like Communities First that are sometimes felt to have failed, and which have left a toxic legacy of mistrust, cynicism and disillusionment in some communities, discouraging people from engaging with programmes like Invest Local.
- 4.2. A cluster of factors linked to the size, character and capacity of communities, has also influenced engagement and also the progress made; for example, engagement (and the articulation of a collective vision for the community) has tended to be easier in smaller, more homogenous communities than in larger, more diverse communities. Equally, over time, it is possible that larger, more diverse communities may enable the programme to mobilise a larger and more diverse range of assets (including people), than in smaller, less diverse communities. As outlined in section 5, engagement and the development of Driving Change plans has also been aided by the strength of local organisations, which can provide important links to residents and ideas and expertise.

²² This could be thought of as residents' "mental bandwidth"; the capacity to process information and make decisions; capacity which is finite, meaning people can become overloaded with information and/or decisions, particularly when under pressure. The concept was developed and popularised by Mullainathan, S. & Shafir, E. (2013) *Scarcity: The New Science of Having Less and How It Defines Our Lives*.

5. Invest Local's offer and the communities' response

5.1. Invest Local's offer to communities of "up to £1 million", plus support from an ILO and access to shared learning is conditional upon the formation of a steering group. The steering group is the keystone for Invest Local, as it is responsible for ensuring that "Invest Local is resident-led" and that "a wide range of people have their say in how the money is spent" in each community"²³. Steering groups lead Invest Local in each area, and are required to "make the overall decisions about how Invest Local will work" in their community and develop the Driving Change plan²⁴.

Steering groups

5.2. The offer of "up to £1m" (plus support from the programme), was large enough to inspire a group of people to form and sustain a viable, albeit generally small, steering group in each community, so that Invest Local could get going. The establishment and continuation of steering groups in each community, while often challenging for both the programme and steering group members, is a key achievement of the programme and the time and energy that residents have committed to groups (on a voluntary basis) is impressive.

5.3. The pace of steering groups' decision-making (e.g. in identifying priorities and actions) has helped determine the progress²⁵ made by Invest Local in each community. This has depended in particular upon:

²³ Invest Local Programme Guidance: Consulting your community
<http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2017-12-19-47-1-consulting-your-community.pdf>

²⁴ BCT (2017). *Invest Local Steering Groups: Mandatory Guidance*
<http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2017-12-19-50-1-invest-local-steering-groups.pdf>

²⁵ Progress can be measured in different ways. This report measures it in terms of getting things done (e.g. the formation of a steering group, completion of consolidation, visioning and development and approval of a Driving Change plan).

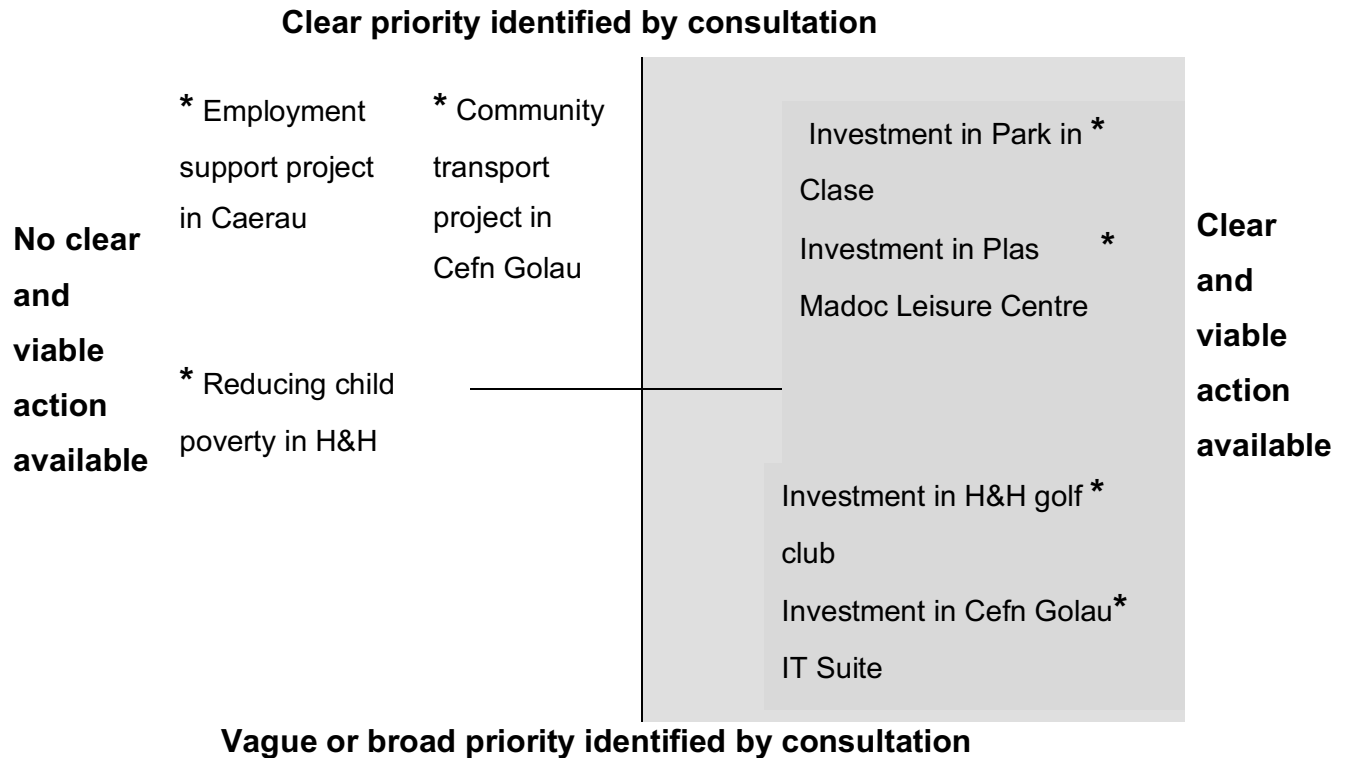
- clarity of priorities and the availability and viability of potential actions to address priorities;
- the capacity of steering groups; and
- the degree of urgency to make a decision.

Determining actions

5.4. Steering groups have had to translate the results of consultations (discussed below) into priorities and then identify actions (including investments) to address those priorities. The process of translating the results of consultation into priorities was usually relatively straightforward. However, the process of identifying actions has generally been more complicated. As figure 6 illustrates, identification of actions has generally been easiest when consultation identified a clear priority and a viable (workable) action to address it, and that priority was either (i) identified by the consultation itself (such as the development of the park in Clase) or (ii) a local organisation presented a project that addressed a priority identified through consultation (such as the investment in the Boxing Club in Caerau and Golf Club in Hubberston and Hakin, in order to support young people). In contrast, identification of actions has been hardest when priorities have been broad or unclear and/or no clear actions were identified by either consultation or local organisations. In response, in areas like Cefn Golau and Hubberston and Hakin plans include proposals for piloting new approaches to address community transport and child poverty respectively.

Figure 6. Identifying priorities and actions

5.5. As figure 6 illustrates, actions (such as investments) in the areas shaded grey are most likely to be made.



Groups' capacity to make and take decisions

5.6. Even when presented with a clear priority and viable action, steering groups have taken the responsibility of investing wisely very seriously. Decision making has tended to be more straightforward and faster for steering groups with:

- low levels of conflict between steering group members (conflict can arise from a combination of “people problems” and/or disagreements about how and what actions to take); and
- effective structures and processes for making decisions and managing conflict (e.g. chairing, codes of conduct and systems for voting).

- 5.7. Groups' capacity has proved in some ways to be a double-edged sword (if progress is measured in terms of the speed at which plans are developed). Groups with more involvement with local organisations and with more individual residents with more skills and experience (and therefore greater capacity), tend to have more options - or opportunities to invest in - available to them and to ask harder questions of proposals. This slows progress, but ought to improve the quality of decision-making.

Online voting in Hubberston and Hakin

The number of members of the Hubberston and Hakin community forum (the steering group) has increased significantly in the last 18 months and now has 25-30 members who regularly attend. Many of the new members represent organisations that have received a small grant through Invest Local and, through an increased understanding of the programme, are now committed to having their say on decisions that affect their community.

Results of one consultation showed that some community members with family commitments were not getting involved because meetings were held in the evenings. To overcome this, a group of parents have been engaged through the school and meet in the afternoons to discuss the same items as the evening meetings. During the Driving Change planning process, the voices of all members were included as voting members by using an online voting system. This also allowed for members to vote anonymously and comment freely without pressure from other members. The group are now exploring options to ensure that all voices are heard equally at both meetings and that relationships can be built between members to ensure they are not seen as separate groups but are seen as all representing the community's needs.

- 5.8. The vision and ambition of steering groups sometimes outstrips their capacity to deliver, which increases demands upon ILOs and means that some groups have chosen to employ paid staff.

Pressure to make and take decisions

- 5.9. The pressure, or urgency in some cases, to make decisions in order to save a local organisation or asset threatened with closure, has helped focus minds and encouraged steering groups to take decisions. Some groups have also felt the need to move forward, so that they can demonstrate change to communities, in order to overcome local mistrust and cynicism about the programme.

The involvement of groups and organisations

- 5.10. The involvement of local groups and organisations has strengthened steering groups' capacity, and reflects Invest Local's asset-based community development approach, which includes an emphasis upon recognising and celebrating the assets of communities (such as its local organisations) and working together and building connections. However, the involvement of local groups and organisations has also created actual and potential conflicts of interest, which have had to be carefully managed, as local organisations themselves are often involved in shaping priorities and bidding for Invest Local funds.
- 5.11. The involvement of public sector organisations that work locally, like schools and health services, and larger voluntary sector organisations, like housing associations, has been mixed. Where, for example, local housing associations have engaged, they have brought valuable knowledge and networks, and there are examples of steering groups working with local authorities to deliver projects. However, in general, influencing public sector organisations and larger voluntary sector organisations has rarely been a priority for steering groups, and where it has, steering groups have generally struggled to engage

them. This reflects a number of factors including cuts in services and mistrust between organisations and steering groups.

Community engagement

5.12. Invest Local's guidance identifies that:

“One of the very few conditions of the Invest Local programme is that a wide range of local people need to have their say in how the money is spent. Before the funding will be released, there needs to be clear evidence that the community has been widely consulted”²⁶.

The challenge of consultation

5.13. Engaging communities was identified as a key challenge for Invest Local and from the start of the Getting Going phase, ILOs worked with the nascent steering groups to identify groups within the community, which it was felt, might be difficult to engage. A range of groups were identified, including those whose circumstances (such as those with caring responsibilities), age, disability and/or location (such as those living in parts of the community that were socially or culturally detached) might make them harder to engage. Steering groups have not always managed to reach out to these groups, but ILOs have continued to highlight the importance of wider consultation and returned to these lists of “hard to reach groups” that steering groups identified, helping ensure that reaching out to these groups does not slip too far down steering groups' agendas and priorities.

5.14. Despite the priority given to engagement by the programme and steering groups, all 13 areas have found it difficult to engage large numbers of people (at most 10 percent of the population responded to consultations, and in some areas it was around 3-4 percent) and to reach out to minority groups and

²⁶ BCT Programme Guidance: Consulting your community.
<http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2017-12-19-47-1-consulting-your-community.pdf>

young people. This reflects a number of factors including, in particular, scepticism about the programme, given a history of previous programmes that have come, promised a great deal but which are felt to have failed to deliver, and competing demands upon residents’ time and attention. The large size and diversity of some areas (the areas range from around 1,500 to 16,000 residents), particularly those with either large ethnic minority populations or which are composed of quite distinct areas, increases the challenge of being inclusive and engaging the whole community.

5.15. As a consequence, despite the offer of “up to £1m”, community engagement has been perhaps the biggest challenge that Invest Local and local steering groups face. As one interviewee (reflecting a widely held view across the programme) put it: “people need change that they can feel and touch” before they will believe and engage. It is expected that change will help create momentum, breaking the vicious cycle many groups feel trapped by (illustrated by figure 7), creating a positive spiral/cycle of action (illustrated by figure 8), increasing awareness, confidence and engagement (including more people volunteering to help deliver Invest Local). Importantly, the offer of up to £1m should be enough to create change that can be seen and felt by communities. This may mean that over time, the size and diversity of some communities becomes an advantage, as the number and range of people and groups with different assets and strengths the community can draw upon, is likely to be larger than the assets of smaller, less diverse communities.

Figure 7: Vicious cycle

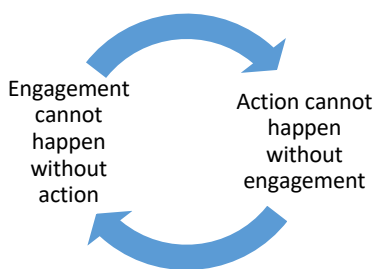
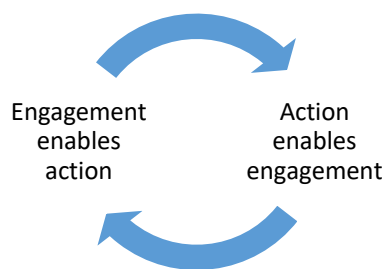


Figure 8: Virtuous cycle



Assessing Invest Locals' requirement for wide consultation

- 5.16. Invest Local's requirement for extensive consultation slowed progress, and in some areas steering groups lost momentum and members. As one interviewee described it, the process was painful, and it felt like "banging your head against a brick wall". Many steering group members felt the requirements for broad consultation were imposed upon them (running counter to Invest Local's message that communities decide how decisions are made), and that the consultation simply "confirmed a lot of what was already known". Equally, there was also recognition from other steering group members that consultation was important, that "if you don't ask, you don't know" and that it gave steering groups a degree of legitimacy and authority.
- 5.17. The requirement for extensive consultation is central to Invest Local's asset-based community development approach. It was intended to ensure that the programme identified and celebrated the key assets of a community and that the programme was, for example, inclusive, resident led, collaborative and built upon a shared vision. Moreover, simply giving communities a "blank cheque" would increase the risks of fraud, "elite capture" (with powerful individual or groups controlling the money) and could limit opportunities for the programme to work with communities in a co-productive way by, for example, sharing ideas and evidence about what works in other communities.
- 5.18. BCT's guidance did not stipulate what "a wide range of local people" meant in practice; for example, it did not set quantitative targets for the numbers and range of people to be consulted in each community. This provided the programme with much needed flexibility. However, there was some miscommunication and misunderstanding about the scale and depth of consultation required before steering groups could move forward with their Driving Change plans, and this slowed progress and sapped some groups' energy.

- 5.19. The step up from small scale activity and engagement supported by Getting Going funding²⁷ of up to £20,000, to the development of the Driving Change plan²⁸ outlining the whole community’s vision, priorities and initial investments (which in some cases accounted for almost a quarter of communities’ total funding), was large. The challenge for steering groups, which were new groups, composed of volunteers, with often limited experience of this type of enterprise, and who did not always know each other before joining the group, was considerable²⁹. A more incremental approach, with initially smaller scale consultations and projects, gradually being scaled up over time to a community-wide, strategic plan (i.e. the Driving Change plan) might have been more effective at building community engagement and sustaining momentum, than the ambitious “big bang” approach taken (with community-wide consultation and investments).
- 5.20. However, requiring communities to take an incremental approach would have run counter to the programme’s ethos that “each community decides how they want their areas to develop, how the money will be used, which organisations they want to work with, and how decisions are made³⁰. Many of the first Driving Change plans were focused upon saving local assets threatened with closure, and this created an urgency to develop plans swiftly. However, once the planning process started, other organisations saw the opportunity, and were keen to have their own projects included, and it might have been challenging to persuade them to wait.

²⁷ More information about the Getting Going phase is available at <http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2017-12-19-44-1-the-getting-going-phase.pdf>

²⁸ More information about the Driving Change plan is available at <http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2017-12-19-13-1-driving-change-plan-guidance.pdf>

²⁹ Similarly, the evaluation of Big Local, the English equivalent of Invest Local identified that the programme’s expectations were a “big ask” for steering groups. NCVO (2014). *Big Local: The Early Years*, https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/local_trust_big_local_the_early_years_evaluation_report.pdf

³⁰ <http://www.bct.wales/invest-local/>

Support from the programme

- 5.21. Support from ILOs was effective in supporting engagement and the formation and functioning of steering groups (including their structure and practice, communication and planning) and ILOs have played a key role in supporting progress, which has been very much valued by steering groups. However, ILOs are doing more community development than was anticipated, which has stretched ILOs, as they have limited time (typically a day to a day and a half a week) to devote to each community.
- 5.22. The shared learning and support around communications provided by the programme has been valued, but the take up, particularly of shared learning, has been patchy. Given the already heavy demands the programme places upon their time, group members have often been reluctant to take on more and in some cases have been reluctant to travel outside their communities. The impacts of shared learning and support around communication upon steering groups' consciousness and capacity have therefore been modest.
- 5.23. Invest Local's model, guidance and processes created challenges; for example, as outlined above, with the benefit of hindsight, the requirement that "a wide range of local people need to have their say in how the money is spent"³¹ before plans could be developed and endorsed (and funding drawn down by communities), slowed progress and sapped steering groups' energy. BCT's process for "endorsing" the first Driving Change plans also undermined the programme's message that "local people will decide how the money is spent and how key decisions are made". The changes made to make the process more co-productive, by enabling BCT trustees, who must endorse plans, to engage earlier in the process, have therefore been widely welcomed and illustrate the programme's willingness to reflect and change, which is a key strength.

³¹ BCT Programme Guidance: Consulting Your Community, <http://www.bct.wales/uploads/resources/2017-12-19-47-1-consulting-your-community.pdf>

Sustaining momentum

- 5.24. Sustaining momentum has been difficult for many steering groups, given the time needed for consultation, developing a vision and identifying investments, and also to realise supposedly “quick wins” to demonstrate to communities that progress was being made. The demands Invest Local places upon steering group members, who give their time and energy on a voluntary basis, increases the risk of burn out. Sticking with Invest Local has demanded resilience on the part of steering groups (the commitment of individuals to Invest Local has been impressive) and support and encouragement from ILOs.
- 5.25. Despite the challenges, all the steering groups are making progress. Nine areas (Caerau, Cefn Golau, Clase, Glyn, Hubberston and Hakin, Maesgeirchen, Plas Madoc, Penywaun, and Phillipstown) have agreed their first Driving Change plans and the remaining areas are all expected to have their plans approved by early 2020. Moreover, a number of groups are growing in size and diversity and the journeys that groups and individual members have made, in terms of increases in their confidence, consciousness and capacity, are impressive.

6. Outcomes

6.1. Invest Local's Theory of Change, illustrated by figure 2, identifies a series of short, medium and longer-term outcomes for the programme. These describe the difference Invest Local will make (its impact), if the programme works as expected (or intended). The outcomes include:

- changes in people's and communities' consciousness, confidence and capacity;
- actions (including investments);
- influence; and
- longer-term outcomes, such as increases in wellbeing, resilience and community capacity.

Consciousness, confidence and capacity

6.2. Consciousness is a process through which critical thinking and reflection leads to greater understanding of people's situations, including their strengths and also challenges, and action to address them. Community consultation and action planning (discussed in section 5), coupled with the enablement of the funding (up to £1m) offered, has been the most powerful mechanism for increasing steering groups' consciousness. Crucially, the programme provided the catalyst (or motivation) for people to get involved, encouraged and strengthened groups' understanding of their communities and their assets, helped raise aspirations and empowered groups (increasing their confidence) to take action to build upon their community's strengths, and address the challenges they faced.

Clase steering group's journey

At the start of the journey, group members, although very able, lacked confidence and often found it difficult to participate effectively in formal

meetings. As well as not being familiar with the processes of such meetings they recounted feeling looked down on by some professionals, and experienced this as a kind of discrimination. Through their involvement in Invest Local and with support from the ILO, group members have become far more aware of their own strengths and have become more confident in their organisational abilities. Their journey continues.

- 6.3. The asset- based approach, shared learning and training by groups such as Dynamix (as part of the shared learning), have also contributed to increases in the consciousness of individual group members. However, these have generally been much more peripheral to steering groups' work than consultation and planning, and have generally had less impact on groups' consciousness. Looking to the future, the shared learning has an important potential contribution to make. As one interviewee put it: "how aspirational can you be if you only know your own community?"
- 6.4. "Communities and individuals are confident and adventurous" was identified as one of the intended outcomes of Invest Local. However, interviewees from steering groups and BCT staff and trustees were divided on how important it was to be adventurous and also what constituted being "adventurous".
- 6.5. Steering groups have tended to focus upon what could be considered safe, and upon immediate priorities, such as supporting young people, the elderly and local organisations. As a consequence, as one interviewee ruefully observed: "they were hoping we'd [Invest Local] fund the unfundable...to some extent we are - roofs, toilets are unfundable". Invest Local is funding things others will not/would not fund. This is particularly likely where the focus is upon enabling activity (e.g. investing in a building, which another organisation will use for service delivery, making it more difficult to identify the outcomes in advance), and where the people or organisation(s) involved lack experience and confidence in applying for grants (given the demands and rigour of the application process).

6.6. Equally, it could be argued that precisely because local residents understand the strengths of their community and what they can do, they have chosen to focus upon saving valued local assets (typically organisations and/or buildings) and addressing the most immediate problems, and as the examples outlined above illustrate, they have done so in effective ways. Moreover, despite their inexperience (as newly formed groups are composed of volunteers), steering groups' decisions have sometimes been bold (i.e. confident and involving some risk), even if not always adventurous, in the sense of being innovative. It was also observed that while, on the face of it, investment in, for example, community buildings might not appear adventurous, the activities this enabled, such as the formation of the Caerau Friends group (discussed in section 1), could well be described as adventurous.

Impact on local organisations' consciousness

6.7. In some areas a range of local groups are actively engaged with the steering group, and Invest Local is felt to have played a key role in helping bring different groups together. In some cases, as in Plas Madoc, organisations' involvement in steering groups, or as the example of Cefn Golau (see boxed text below) illustrates, involvement in projects supported by Invest Local is informing and influencing the way they work. This influence has generally been indirect, with groups reflecting upon and developing their practice, following Invest Local's investment. There are also examples, like Caerau's Men's Shed, of projects founded because of the relationships created by Invest Local, rather than through direct investment, although these are less common.

Bringing organisations back to the community: Cefn Golau IT Suite

In Cefn Golau, the IT Suite project within the Community House has helped bring local partners and services like the Citizens Advice Bureau, Communities for Work and the Credit Union back to the community. Many

of these organisations had stopped coming to the area, due to low attendance and issues with the quality of Wi-Fi, amongst other things. Action by the Cefn Golau Together steering group with the support of their fund holder, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, to invest in the Community House's IT suite has encouraged organisations to return and increased take up of their services.

Actions

6.8. Actions have supported the priorities local people identified, although the breadth of priorities identified through consultation gave steering groups considerable latitude. The actions are principally investments and include a mix of funding to:

- Strengthen the capacity of valued local organisations and enable them to continue delivering services, and in some cases, extend their offer, such as the investment in local community buildings and groups in Caerau, Hubberston and Hakin and Ynysowen and the investment in boilers for the Plas Madoc Leisure Centre.
- Provide new facilities for local areas in response to priorities identified by consultation. These are much less common, but examples include Clase's new park (see boxed text) and Cefn Golau's Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) (see boxed text).
- Support smaller activities and investments like reinstating a Christmas tree in Caerau, bringing back the Penywaun carnival, and running community events like Plastonbury (in Plas Madoc) and Glynfest (in Glyn).

The Clase Park Project

Clase4All is the Invest Local Group in Clase, Swansea. Their biggest project so far has been the transformation of their local park.

More things for children and families to do was a top priority for residents in Clase, and the local park was highlighted as an important community space that needed to be upgraded and improved. People wanted a safe park that would appeal to all ages. The existing park was felt to be poorly designed and people from Clase currently go out of the area if they want to access a park. The new park aims to increase children's physical activity and health as well as providing a fun activity, somewhere safe for families to go, and a focal point where people can meet. The park will also be fully accessible for people with disabilities. It is also intended to help keep spending local (which may create income generation opportunities) and to make people proud of the community. There is excitement about the park in the community and people are keen to see something tangible happen.



The project has involved families from the community throughout the process. The group visited many different parks across South Wales, and brought ideas and photographs back to local children and families. Working together, using participatory techniques³², and taking care to include children of different ages, the community came up with a list of equipment and facilities that they would like to see in the park. The group asked three different park designers to come up with final designs for the park and then local children from Clase Primary School had the final say on which design got the go-ahead.

The park is one of the biggest in Swansea, and features the first MaxSite climbing frame in the UK. It has equipment for children of all ages – as well as a Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGA) for playing sport.

- 6.9. Although a range of worthwhile investments that address local priorities have been made, at this stage they are more a collection of projects rather than a strategic programme of change³³.

Cefn Golau's MUGA

The Invest Local Group in Cefn Golau have created a new MUGA for the community. The group decided to create the open access sports court in response to the community's request for more sports activities and facilities for young people. The group worked with Game On Wales (an initiative from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust), who project managed the design and build of the MUGA. The group continue to work with Game On Wales and the local leisure trust to run a programme of activities for the new MUGA, such as "sports and snacks" sessions during the school holidays and pop-up girls' football sessions.

³² This included a world's best/worst park exercise and dot voting (where participants vote on options, using a fixed number of dots) on the kind of equipment that should be in the park.

³³ Invest Local programme update, November 2018



Source: BCT

6.10. Some groups have also been able to use Invest Local funds to help lever in additional investment in their area; for example, in Phillipstown, Maesgeirchen and Clase, Invest Local groups have invested in the capital costs of new play facilities, and the local council has agreed to cover the cost of maintaining the facilities.

Influence

6.11. There are cases of steering groups influencing the actions of external organisations working locally, and steering groups are becoming increasingly confident that they can influence external organisations working in their community; for example, groups often involve local councillors and have discussed the development of new services in their area with local authorities. Groups have also encouraged or sometimes required local groups or organisations to change the way they work in return for funding.

Challenging Power in Pill

In a group discussion, members of Pill Unity (the local steering group) discussed the extent to which they could influence other organisations working in their community. The group were angry about the negative portrayal and perception of the community, fuelled by a recent national newspaper article on the area: “Sex workers, drug dealers, petty thieves: A visit to the country's most VIOLENT street³⁴. They described how people in the area felt let down by services, which had promised things, but never delivered, and “felt downtrodden”. They also described the “terrible attitude” they felt some public services had towards the area.

As members of the group put it: “professionals”, the “people who don’t live here...are out of touch with reality”. “They’re sitting in their ivory towers 9-5; they don’t know what it’s like.” They “have got to be challenged in their biases”. “If they lived in the community, [if they] trod these streets, [they would have] more empathy for communities [like Pill]”.

After a difficult start, the group is now growing in strength, diversity and confidence and is beginning to actively engage with the local authority to help deliver services and activities in their community.

- 6.12. However, overall at this stage, influencing external organisations has rarely been a priority for steering groups, and instead they have tended to focus more upon community engagement and action planning. Most other stakeholders (such as ILOs and trustees) were generally cautious in their assessments of steering groups’ actual and potential influence at this stage. As outlined in section 4, aspects of the programme’s context, most notably austerity, have limited both the capacity of external organisations to engage, and also the services that can be influenced. As the boxed text illustrates, in some areas, the cultural gulf between large organisations like the council and

³⁴ <https://www.express.co.uk/life-style/life/1135753/newport-wales-violence-anti-social-behaviour-victims-commissioner-baroness-newlove>

community or grass roots organisations (like Invest Local steering groups) was also highlighted as a barrier.

Cultural barriers to influence

In one community, it was reported that there is a lack of “trust between paid-for agencies and community members and this stops them doing things and it’s awful”. Because community members do not understand professional jargon and often do not fit the right visual package they are all too often ignored or not taken seriously. It was reported that: “it has taken a hell of a lot for these guys [in the steering group] to get people to listen to them”. Improving the image and changing the perception of communities was therefore seen as important in increasing influence. Equally, increasing understanding from professionals and accepting new ways of working, such as more informal meetings, was also seen as essential to make progress here. It was observed that the group are challenging the traditional ways of holding meetings as well as improving their own professionalism and that they would expect professionals to meet them half way.

- 6.13. The constrained capacity of steering groups has meant that BCT, and in particular, ILOs and sometimes trustees, have played a key role in some areas brokering links to, and in some cases advocating on behalf of, communities with external organisations, such as the local council.

Communities’ wellbeing, resilience and capacity

- 6.14. There are plausible mechanisms through which the intended long-term outcomes of Invest Local, such as increases in wellbeing, resilience and community capacity, will be generated. Investing in community places and spaces, which enables community activities, is likely to contribute to increases

in trust, social capital and well-being³⁵. As the example in the boxed text illustrates, there are also concrete examples of projects making a difference to people's wellbeing and resilience. However, at this stage in the programme, the scale of projects (in terms of the numbers of people benefitting) has generally been modest (the main exceptions are community-wide activities like "fayres" which reach large numbers but have a modest impact upon each individual). Moreover, measurement of these impacts through self-evaluation remains weak. Looking beyond increases in people's wellbeing and resilience, as outlined above, Invest Local is increasing the capacity of local organisations (the third key long-term outcome).

Tackling food poverty in Clase

The Clase4All group described how the food bank has made a difference, especially after the roll-out of Universal Credit, after which numbers of people in need have increased significantly and the food bank is now supplying more than 60 people. Most people receive one food parcel per month.

The project began when Clase4All group took over a local food bank being run by a resident from their own home, who was struggling to cope with increasing demand. Clase4All decided to run the food bank alongside their breakfast morning, in a relaxed, friendly environment, to remove some of the stigma of accessing the food bank. They have also chosen to run it independently from larger food bank charities, so that it is easier for local people to access without the need for a referral or proof of circumstances. The group receive regular donations from Tesco, local churches and the local Lions Club. The group also runs a surplus food share project – collecting left-over food from Greggs and the Co-op to support local families and prevent food going to landfill.

³⁵ What Works Wellbeing (n.d.) Wellbeing and Communities.

Advice is also available at the foodbank. An advisor from Gwalia Housing Association and from Grace Church are regular attenders. An advisor from the council sometimes attends. They can also signpost people to further support and services.

6.15. Nevertheless, the scale of funding (£1m over ten years) is, as one interviewee observed, “dwarfed” by other transfers to communities, like pension payments, and also by the cuts in public services. This, coupled with the type of investments made to date, suggest that the impact will be positive, but probably modest in scale. Evidence from evaluations of comparable programmes also suggests that impacts upon the non-material dimensions of community development, such as people’s sense of well-being, is much more likely than a measurable impact upon material dimensions like levels of income or economic activity³⁶. The evaluation will continue to measure progress, as is too early in the programme to assess or even predict with any confidence, the long-term outcomes.

³⁶ Crisp, R., Gore, T., Pearson, S., Tyler, P., Clapham, D., Muir, J., & Robertson, D. (2014). *Regeneration and poverty—evidence and policy review*. Final Report. Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR), available online at: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/~media/home/research/cresr/files/jrf-regeneration-poverty-final-report.pdf?la=en>

7. Conclusions

Progress

- 7.1. Steering groups have formed in all areas, consultation has been undertaken, nine areas have agreed Driving Change plans and the remainder have started the visioning process that will lead to plans in 2019 and 2020. This is an important achievement. It was not certain that viable steering groups would form and be sustained in all 13 areas. The journeys that some groups, and in particular, key members of groups, have made is impressive.
- 7.2. There is no single pathway to success, with groups taking different routes at different speeds in each area. If progress is measured in terms of getting things done, the three critical factors associated with progress are the effectiveness of the steering group; the effectiveness of the ILO; a clear vision and priority or priorities and the availability of an opportunity or opportunities to invest in, that support those priorities. Importantly, each of these can be contingent upon context, most notably the size and character of the community (e.g. its coherence and assets, including the strength of its local organisations). It is also an open question whether the communities that have made the fastest progress (in developing plans and making investments), will make the most sustainable impact. It is, for example, possible that a slower pace provides more time to identify, celebrate and enhance the assets and strengths of communities and build relationships and connections.
- 7.3. At this stage, the influence of the programme upon other organisations, and also upon policy, has been generally limited, although the foundations, in terms of the capacity of steering groups, and networks that should aid influence, have been laid.

Engagement

- 7.4. A range of local people and groups have engaged with the programme to identify priorities and develop plans that build upon the assets and strengths of communities. Although the numbers and diversity of residents who have been involved are less than hoped, it has been “good enough” to let the programme move forward. Moreover, the evidence to date, from interviews and discussions with stakeholders in communities, and where available, data from baseline surveys³⁷, suggests that the priorities chosen by steering groups generally reflect the communities’ priorities (i.e. are “resident- led”) and build upon their strengths (in line with the asset-based community development approach).
- 7.5. Going forward, extending and deepening steering groups’ engagement with the wider community is a key challenge for Invest Local. Without this, Invest Local risks becoming the property of a small group of people³⁸. The challenge is that without delivery, it can be difficult to engage people, but without engaging people, delivery cannot start. Breaking this vicious cycle has been painful for groups. However, there is encouraging emerging evidence from one or two communities that, having done so, the programme can take off, creating a virtuous cycle in which delivery increases engagement, which supports further delivery.
- 7.6. Local contexts can make engagement challenging. The “Goldilocks” community is neither too small, so capacity and interest is too limited, nor too big and diverse, so that engagement across the whole community becomes extremely challenging. The “Goldilocks” community has a strong sense of community, but one that is not so strong that it excludes some groups of people in the area. It has strong local organisations that aid engagement and provide access to knowledge and resources, but it is not dominated by these

³⁷ Data was available on Caerau and Hubberston and Hakin.

³⁸ Invest Local Programme update, November 2018.

local organisations, nor riven by factional infighting between different organisations.

- 7.7. None of the Invest Local communities have all the “Goldilocks” characteristics, and differences in each community mean that Invest Local is likely to work somewhat differently in each area and better in some areas than others. This also means that the initial selection of areas where Invest Local was established is likely to have a large impact upon how effective Invest Local is.

The impact of Invest Local

- 7.8. Invest Local is expected to increase the consciousness (a combination of critical thinking and action), confidence and capacity of the communities in which it works. At this stage of the programme, the biggest impact of Invest Local has been upon community capacity and, to a lesser extent, confidence and then consciousness. The consciousness, confidence and capacity of Invest Local steering groups and, to a lesser degree, local organisations, particularly those who are members of steering groups, is increasing. This is evidenced by interviews and discussions with steering groups, ILOs, trustees and other stakeholders in each community. However, at this stage of Invest Local’s journey there is little evidence of an impact upon the consciousness, confidence and capacity of other parts of each community.
- 7.9. Steering groups’ collective capacity, coupled with the enablement for action offered by long term funding, has provided a focal point for local action, capacity building and influence. The moves some groups have made toward employing paid staff and securing their own community buildings runs somewhat against Invest Local’s lean model, but may increase local capacity and sustainability.
- 7.10. Looking beyond consciousness, confidence and capacity, as one interviewee summed it up: “the jury is still out”. Invest Local is a long-term programme and it is too early to measure the difference Invest Local will make, and also to

identify what Invest Local can and cannot do. Subject to this important caveat, the evidence to date suggests that at this stage, Invest Local has not been transformative, but it is investing in, and in a few cases influencing, assets, activities and services that communities want, and which are likely to contribute to increases in community capacity, wellbeing and resilience. It also suggests that Invest Local cannot solve all a community's ills, but nor should it try to. It has neither the resources nor expertise to do so, and in some areas, like employment, other programmes will be much better placed and equipped to make an impact.

- 7.11. The investments made may often not appear glamorous, but they are generally funding activities, organisations and buildings that would be difficult to fund through grant giving programmes like People and Places. Moreover, while the activities may not appear adventurous or innovative to outsiders, for those involved, particularly those with little experience of this type of programme, they are bold, and their outcomes are sometimes surprising (as they have generated greater and/or different outcomes than anticipated).