

Evaluation of Invest Local: Weathering the Storms 2016 – 2023

Dr Duncan Holtom with Rhodri Bowen, Alain Thomas, Dafydd Thomas, Dr Lowri Cunnington Wynn and Dr Leon Quinn.

People and Work - Pobl a Gwaith
CMC@Loudoun
Butetown
Cardiff
CF10 5HW

Email: Duncan.Holtom@peopleandwork.org.uk

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1. Introduction

- 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 (what was) the Big Lottery Fund and is managed by 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 1.1 outlines Invest Local's Theory of Change, which describes 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.

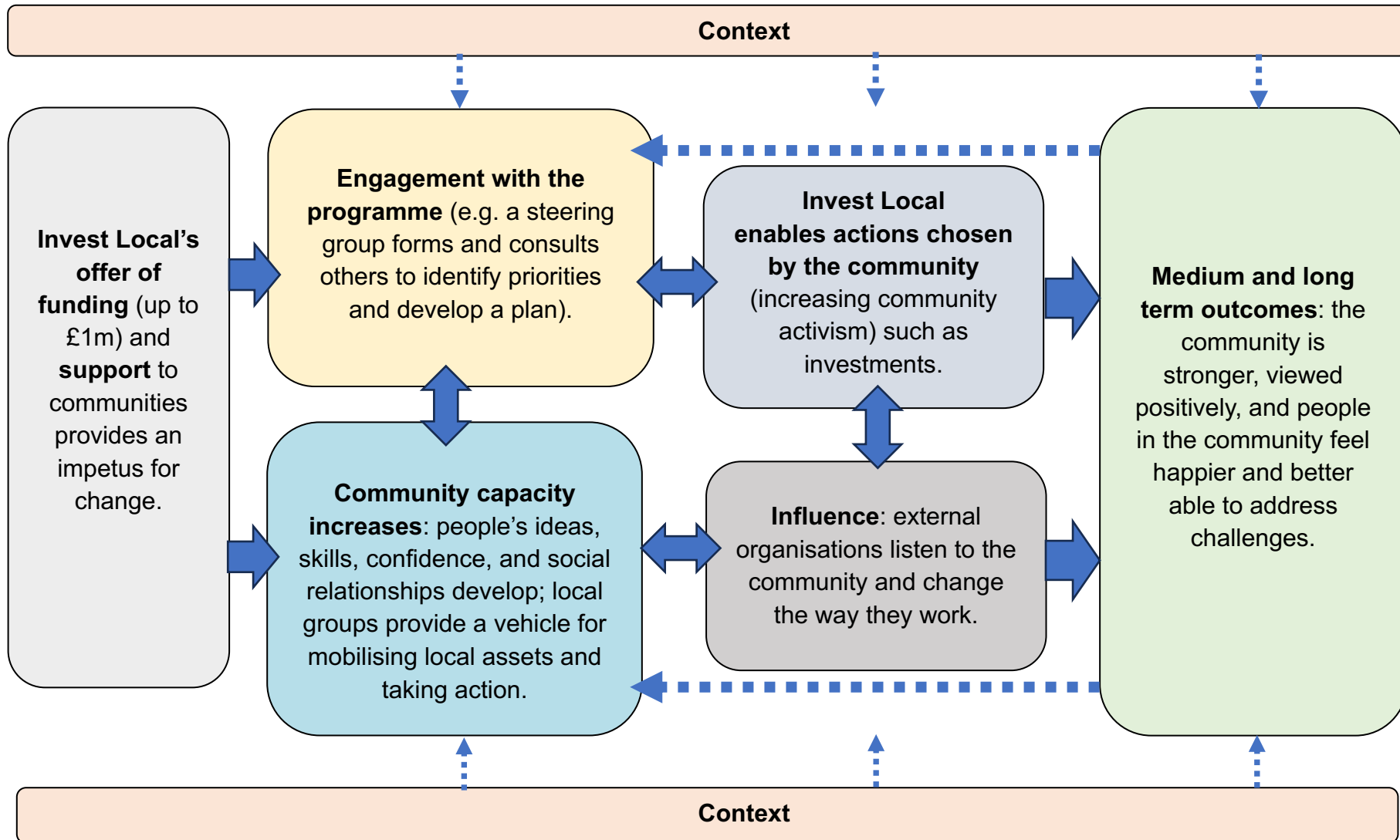
In return for the offer of funding and support, the programme requires the formation of a local steering group to lead the programme and take decisions and actions (including deciding on investments) and engage extensively with the wider community. This is intended to increase the consciousness (a combination of critical reflection and action)³, confidence, capacity, and influence of communities and, over the long term, increase the wellbeing 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 1.1: Invest Local's Theory of Change

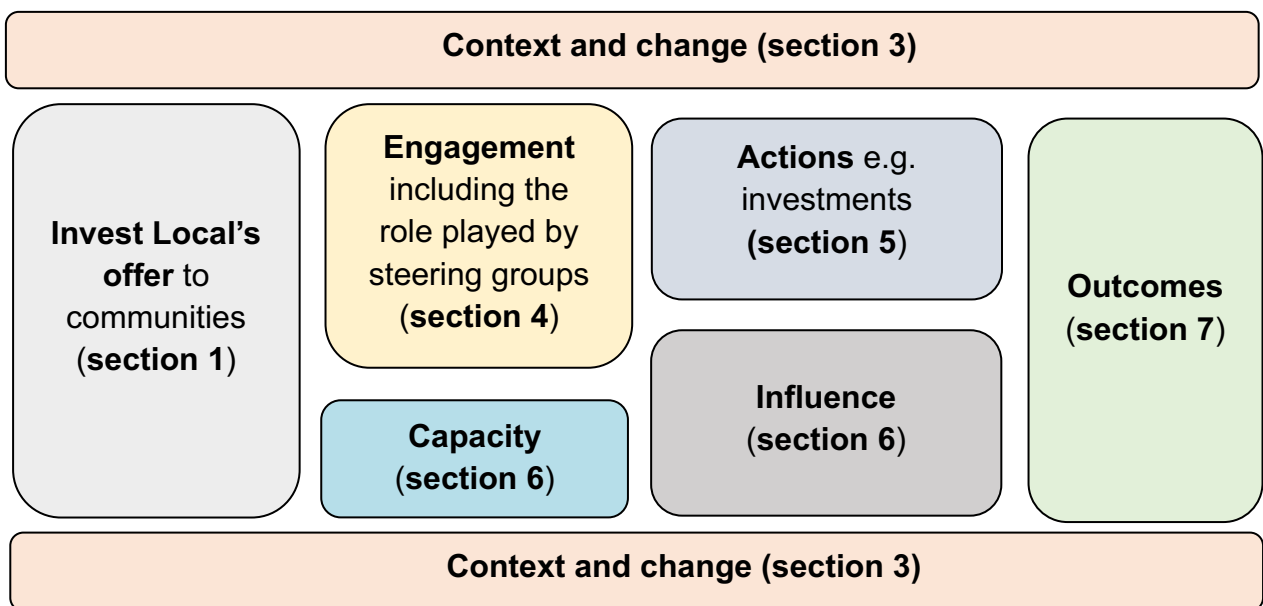


- 1.3. The programme therefore blends aspects of:
- traditional place-based community development programmes, like the first phase of Communities First, with its focus upon local capacity building;
 - traditional grant-giving programmes like People and Places, given the availability of significant capital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

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.

1.5. **Figure 1.2: Structure of the Report (to mirror the Theory of Change)**



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

2. Approach and methodology

2.1. The evaluation uses Realistic Evaluation, a theory-based approach, to understand and identify the difference that Invest Local is making and also “What works, for whom, in what circumstances... and how?” (Pawson and Tilly, 1997). 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 (how wider trends and shocks are shaped communities’ response to the programme);
- mechanisms (how changes are generated, the role steering groups played in deciding upon investments, and the changes that flowed from these investments); and
- outcomes (what changes, such as increases in consciousness, confidence and capacity, enabling people to act and bring about change, and changes in people’s and in communities’ wellbeing and resilience).

2.2. The programme’s context, mechanisms and outcomes, and the relationships between each, were explored and examined, using a mix of qualitative and quantitative data drawn primarily from:

- a desk-based review of programme documents, such as Driving Change Plans and reviews, and minutes of steering group meetings;
- interviews and discussions with stakeholders such as steering group members, paid staff and fundholders in each of the 13 communities;
- site visits to observe and discuss the context and change in each community;
- interviews with BCT’s Chief Executive (who also acts as Invest Local Officer (ILO) for one community) and the other four ILOs; and
- analysis of national data, such as data generated by the Census and National Survey of Wales and administrative data collected by organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

- 2.3. 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, and ILOs working with the community.

Analysis of local (community) level data

- 2.4. The 13 Invest Local areas are made up of 37 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). As section 3 of the report outlines, data on 35 of these LSOAs was combined⁵ to create an average score for the Invest Local programme areas. This was used to illustrate change in these measures over time and, in particular, change over the period since the project started in 2016. Given the diversity of Invest Local areas, the average score of the highest and lowest fifth LSOAs for different measures, such as the number of people claiming out of work benefits, was also calculated, in order to show the differences within the Invest Local programme areas⁶.
- 2.5. In order to explore if changes in the Invest Local communities were in any unusual or atypical, change in Invest Local areas was compared with national or local authority trends and two sets of 35 LSOA areas (70 in total), which:
- had similar overall rank to the 35 Invest Local LSOAs, in the [2014 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) (WIMD); and
 - were judged broadly comparable (by ensuring that each of the Invest Local LSOAs were matched with two LSOAs in a similar geographical location, such as a valleys or urban setting).
- 2.6. These matched LSOAs were used to create a (non-equivalent) comparison group⁷.

⁵ Changes in the boundaries of two LSOAs meant they were excluded.

⁶ The 35 LSOAs areas were split into fifths, creating quinaries, as it was not possible to separate the data into [quartiles](#)⁶ which are usually used to show differences in the spread of data.

⁷ It is “non-equivalent” because areas in the treatment (Invest Local programme) and comparison group were purposely chosen, rather than randomly allocated ([HM Treasury, 2020](#)).

Evaluating impact

- 2.7. In order to evaluate the impact (difference) Invest Local is making to people and communities, two distinct, but complementary perspectives were taken:
- a finely grained, “bottom up” or grass roots perspective, focused upon identifying and exploring the impact of individual investments; and
 - a macro, more ‘top down’ perspective, focused upon exploring the impact of national shocks and trends upon communities.
- 2.8. A theory-based approach was used to identify the likely impact of individual investments upon people’s and communities’ capacity resilience and wellbeing given, for example:
- data collected by the evaluation team, by steering groups and beneficiaries of investment, about who benefited, how many people benefited and how they benefited;
 - evidence from comparable programmes or interventions, which were used to assess and infer likely impacts, when this could not be directly measured; and
 - data about the impact of national shocks and trends upon communities, which was likely to affect the outcomes of investment (such as their impact upon people’s overall wellbeing).
- 2.9. This in turn allowed the evaluation to assess if the programme generated the changes anticipated by its Theory of Change and, in effect, determine if Invest Local had “worked”.
- 2.10. This provides a rigorous account of change, even though, as outlined in section 3, the scope to measure change at a community level In Invest Local communities and a comparator group of areas was constrained by the limited availability of data.

3. Context for the communities and the programme and how it has changed since 2016.

3.1. The 13 Invest Local areas were selected because they:

- suffered from a high level of deprivation (including high levels of child poverty);
- were disproportionately impacted by economic decline and/or welfare reforms; and
- had not benefited from sources of discretionary funding (including lottery funding)⁸.

3.2. Many (but by no means all) of the people in these communities could be considered ‘disadvantaged’, as they lacked the assets, such as:

- strong human and, social and financial capital (such as good health and skills, strong and diverse networks to access information, resources and support, and income and savings); and
- access to green or blue spaces (natural capital), physical capital (such as access to affordable transport and energy, decent housing, and the internet) and/or public capital (such as high quality public services).

These are needed to flourish and people with these assets typically experience high levels of wellbeing and resilience ([Oxfam, 2009](#)).

3.3. Therefore, while each community had valuable assets, they were people and places that faced challenges, and were likely to be particularly vulnerable to external shocks and trends. For example, the impacts of the pandemic were generally greater (worse) for people with poor health and for those on a low income (such as those in poor work) or who were already in poverty ([WCPP, 2022](#)).

⁸ Adapted from “Place Based Funding: A Scoping Report for the Big Lottery Fund in Wales” by OB3 Research.

3.4. Equally, it is important to remember that the 13 Invest Local communities are very different and, as this section outlines, some are more disadvantaged than others when looking at a number of different measures, such as levels of human and financial capital, and also in terms of their access to natural, physical, and public capital. In part this reflects the size and location of communities. For example:

- larger and more diverse communities are more likely to have people with a wide range of qualifications and skills (as there are simply more people in the community);
- city communities may potentially benefit from their proximity to physical and public capital⁹ ; and
- valleys or coastal communities have access to beautiful green or blue spaces (natural capital)¹⁰.

The character of communities

3.5. The first evaluation report ([BCT, 2020](#)) outlined how the character of communities shaped their response to the Invest Local programme and, in particular, factors such as:

- the size and diversity of communities;
- the extent to which the Invest Local area was felt to be a “natural” community, with clear boundaries; and
- the history¹¹ (or legacy left by) and strength of local groups or organisations.

⁹ Proximity does not necessarily mean these capital assets are financially, physically or psychologically accessible though. They may, for example, still require multiple changes in public transport, and a contraction of people’s comfort zones may further isolate people from assets which lie beyond the boundaries’ of their community.

¹⁰ Care needs to be taken though in not stereotyping communities. For example, city communities, like Trowbridge and St Mellons, still have valued green and blue spaces, most notably Hendre Lake Park, on their doorsteps.

¹¹ The most obvious example was Plas Madoc, where several staff of the Communities First project were jailed for fraud. At a less extreme level, as one interviewee explained, there “was a Communities First partnership [in the community] – but Communities First worked in, not for the community. [In contrast,] this [Invest Local] is led by the community. It was Communities First telling us what was

These were seen to be important in shaping how communities responded to Invest Local's offer and how swiftly they developed in each area; for example, smaller "natural" communities, with people who had experience of other programmes generally found it easier to form steering groups and get going.

- 3.6. As section 4 of this report illustrates, these factors have continued to shape communities' responses to the Invest Local offer. Nevertheless, the 2020 report also noted that there was no guarantee that the factors that helped some communities to get going faster would prosper. As section 4 also illustrates, some of the communities that made the fastest initial progress have stumbled, primarily because of conflict within steering groups.

National trends and shocks

- 3.7. The period since 2016 (when Invest Local started) can be divided into three broad phases. The first phase ran from 2016 to 2020 and was a period of sluggish recovery in the wake of the Great Recession (2008 to 2009)¹². Employment was increasing, however real wages remained below pre-recession levels and cuts in working age welfare benefits suppressed incomes. Moreover, the impact of austerity meant that average local government expenditure was 12 per cent lower than in 2009 to 2010 ([WCPP, 2019](#)).
- 3.8. The second phase, 2020 to 2021, was defined by the COVID-19 pandemic and policy responses such as the national/local lockdowns. Socioeconomic factors were key determinants of vulnerability and meant that Invest Local communities were particularly exposed. Incomes fell for those who lost their jobs or were furloughed, although Universal Credit payments were increased ([Senedd, 2022](#)).

going to happen, and we didn't see what it had achieved." Nevertheless, there are also communities where earlier initiatives, such as Communities First, were felt to have left a positive legacy, and for example the skill and connections some residents and groups gained through the programme were seen as valuable in helping Invest Local get going.

¹² The recession lasted from the first quarter of 2008 to the second quarter of 2009. However, the economy did not recover to pre-recession levels until 2014 and unemployment did not return to pre-recession levels until 2015 (ONS, 2018).

There was massive disruption to children and young people's education ([Estyn, 2023, 2022](#)). Mental health and wellbeing declined sharply during this period, particularly for some groups, such as young adults, adults with pre-existing mental or physical health conditions, adults who lost income or employment, adults living in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods and some ethnic minority populations ([ONS, 2022](#)).

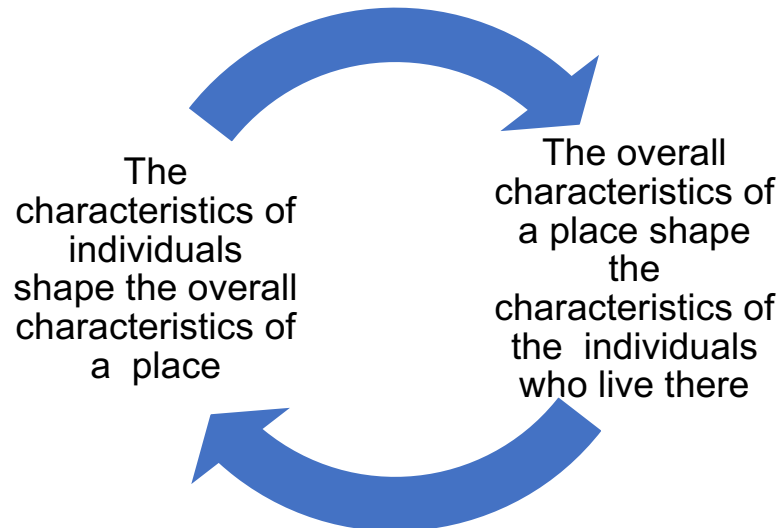
- 3.9. The third phase, 2021 to 2023, was another period of slow and uneven recovery. Although employment increased sharply after the pandemic and restrictions were eased, inflation also increased, creating a cost-of-living crisis, as real incomes fell¹³. Many people were forced to cut back on essentials like food and heating, and worrying about not having enough for the essentials had negative effects upon people's mental health and wellbeing ([PHW, 2023](#)).
- 3.10. There have also been longer-term social trends that have continued since 2016, despite the shocks of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, e.g.:
- the numbers of people with no or low qualifications has declined, although in large part this is because young people are more likely to leave school with qualifications than in previous generations, rather than because older people are gaining qualifications ([Welsh Government 2022a](#)); and
 - there has been declining trust and faith in national institutions ([NatCen, 2023](#)) alongside some evidence of an increase in community spirit ([Welsh Government, 2022b](#)).
- 3.11. The effects discussed in this section focus primarily upon the impact upon individuals, but they also have impacts upon communities. Communities are collections of individuals, so if more people are, for example, unemployed in a community, the overall wellbeing of the community is likely to fall.

¹³ By 2022, around 15 per cent of households in Wales were receiving Universal Credit ([Bevan Foundation, 2023](#)) and over 10 per cent of the Welsh Workforce earned less than the minimum wage ([Bevan Foundation, 2022](#)).

However, it is also because the composition of communities, such as the proportion of people who are employed, who are more highly educated and/or have good health, shapes the character of the place that people live in, which can in turn shape the wellbeing of individuals within that place ([Lupton, 2003](#)).

Therefore, as one recent study concludes, the “wellbeing of residents in local areas is likely to be influenced by local community conditions in ways which are independent of the individual attributes of the residents themselves” ([What Works Wellbeing, 2020](#)). This means that, for example, living in areas with lower average incomes, higher levels of unemployment and perceptions of anti-social behaviour, is associated with lower levels of individual wellbeing ([DCLG, 2013](#)).

Figure 3.1: the relationship between individual and place- based characteristics



3.12. There is also a link between wellbeing and resilience. Resilience (the ability to cope with adversity) is a determinant of wellbeing as, without resilience, exposure to negative shocks or trends (such as the cost-of-living crisis) will (as outlined above) reduce people’s wellbeing.

Moreover, the fear or anxiety associated with knowing you lack resilience may undermine wellbeing, even if an individual is not exposed to negative shocks or trends. Conditions such as having employment and assets such as education, skills and health (human capital), income and savings (financial capital) and strong social networks (social capital) which promote wellbeing can also help strengthen people's resilience ([PHW, 2023](#)).

- 3.13. The resilience of individuals will also have an impact upon the overall resilience of communities and there are likely to be place-based effects, for example:
- individuals living in communities with strong social networks may be able to join and therefore benefit from these networks (increasing their resilience); and
 - the experiences of the pandemic illustrate how community leaders in communities with stronger place-based assets, such as human, financial and social capital, were able to mount swifter and more effective community responses ([People and Work and BCT, 2020](#)).

Trends in income and poverty

- 3.14. Income is a key determinant of people's and communities' wellbeing and resilience. Feeling you have sufficient income and not experiencing anxiety about personal finances are key to an individual's wellbeing ([What Works Wellbeing, 2023](#)).

More broadly, money is a key determinant of whether you can afford the day-to-day necessities, such as food, energy, and housing, that are the foundation of people's wellbeing. Conversely, not having enough money – living in poverty – can lead to social exclusion, ill-health, and loss of resilience.

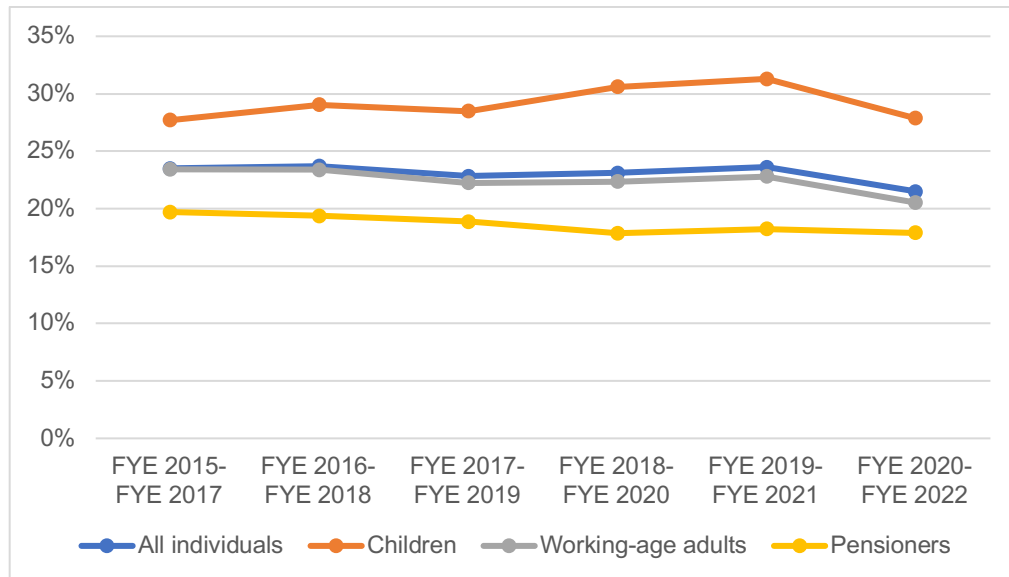
- 3.15. Within Wales, as chart 3.1 illustrates, the proportion of people in poverty has remained relatively stable since 2016¹⁴. Increases in employment are likely to have helped blunt the impact of cuts in working age welfare benefits. However, in-work poverty is an increasing problem¹⁵ ([WCPP, 2022](#)), the pandemic increased poverty and it is expected that the cost-of-living crisis, which started in 2021, will increase poverty further ([WCPP, 2022](#); [PHW, 2023](#)). It has also been calculated that destitution¹⁶ in the UK has more than doubled over the period between 2017 and 2022, with rates increasing more in Wales (and also London and the West Midlands), relative to other regions of England) ([JRF, 2023](#)).
- 3.16. Invest Local communities were purposely chosen because, amongst other factors, they had relatively high levels of poverty. This is likely to remain a significant drag upon wellbeing and resilience in these communities. Moreover, the age profile of Invest Local communities, which tend to be younger than the average for Wales, means that the rising poverty amongst children and the fairly steady rate of poverty amongst working age adults, in the period from 2019 to 2021, is likely to have had a greater impact.
- 3.17. These national trends will not necessarily be mirrored at a local level. Unfortunately, at this stage, local level data on income deprivation in Invest Local communities is not available.

¹⁴ “Although rates of people living in relative income poverty in Wales decreased in the most recent period across the age groups, none of these changes were statistically significant” ([Welsh Government, 2023](#)).

¹⁵ It is estimated that 14% of workers in Wales live in poverty in Wales. This is one of the highest rates in any of the UK regions ([JRF, 2020](#)).

¹⁶ “Destitution” is the “most severe form of material hardship.” For the purpose of this study, it was defined as “Lack of access to at least two of six items needed to meet your most basic physical needs to stay warm, dry, clean and fed (shelter, food, heating, lighting, clothing and footwear, and basic toiletries) because you cannot afford them...and...Extremely low or no income indicating that you cannot afford the items described above” (p. 3 [JRF, 2023](#)).

Chart 3.1: trends in poverty in Wales 2015-17 to 2020-22. The percentage of all individuals, children, working-age adults, and pensioners living in relative poverty in Wales.



Source: [Welsh Government \(2023\)](#).

Trends in employment

3.18. Employment is another key determinant of people’s and communities’ wellbeing and resilience; unemployment:

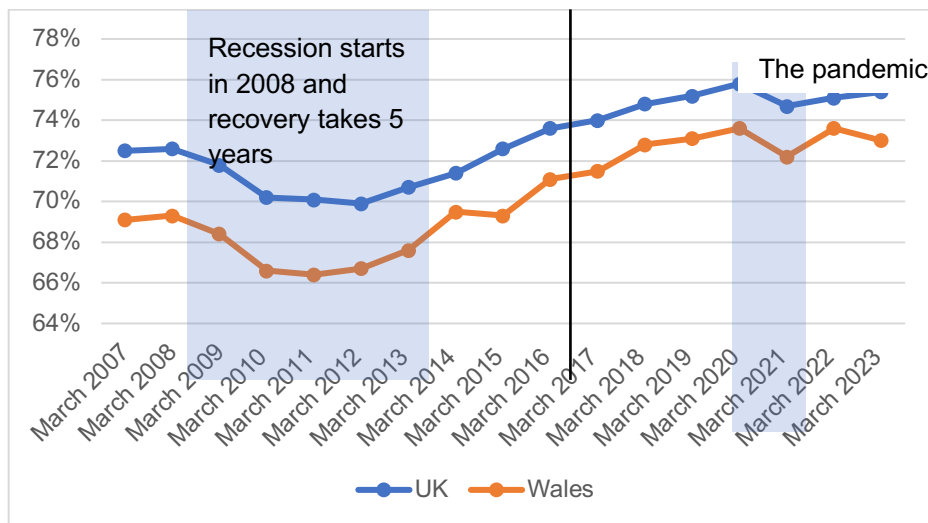
- reduces people’s and communities’ income and financial assets;
- can have ‘scarring’ effects¹⁷ which can reduce wellbeing over a life course;
- can narrow people’s social networks; and
- can reduce the wellbeing of other members of the family ([What Works Wellbeing 2017a](#)).

3.19. The quality of employment is also important as poor quality work is likely to blunt the impact of rising employment upon both income and wellbeing ([WCPP, 2022](#)).

¹⁷ A period of unemployment increases the risk that an individual will be unemployed and/or earn less in the future, an impact described as scarring (Arulampalam et al., 2001).

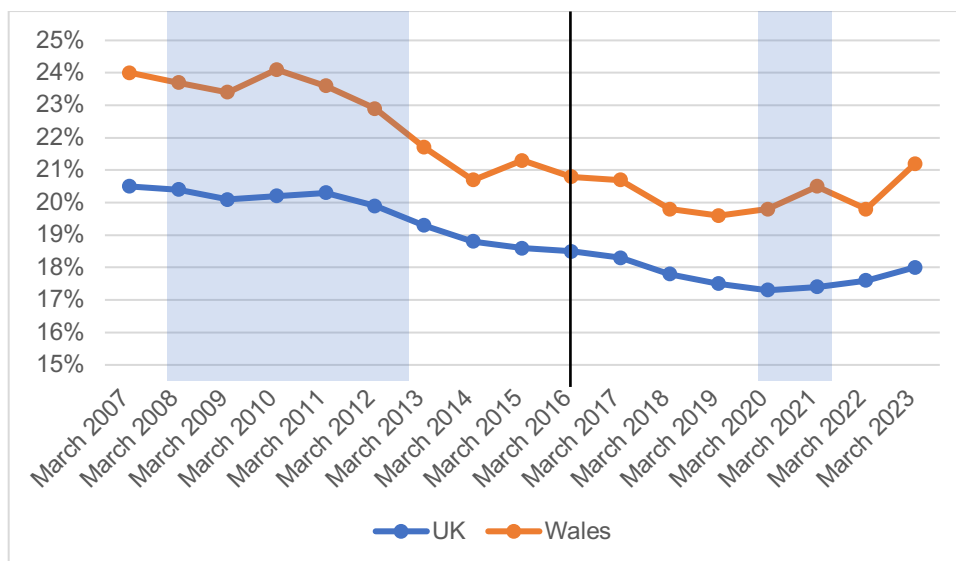
3.20. As charts 3.2 and 3.3 illustrate, employment rates in Wales have increased since the Great Recession, following the international financial crisis in 2008 (and continued to increase after 2016) ([ONS, 2018](#)). This is likely to have helped increase wellbeing in Invest Local communities. However, economic inactivity, which had been falling, has risen following the COVID-19 pandemic and this may offset some of the positive impacts of rising employment.

Chart 3.2: employment rate in Wales and the UK, March 2007 to 2023.



Source: [StatsWales](#)

Chart 3.3: economic inactivity rate (excluding students) in Wales and the UK, year ending March 2007 to 2023.

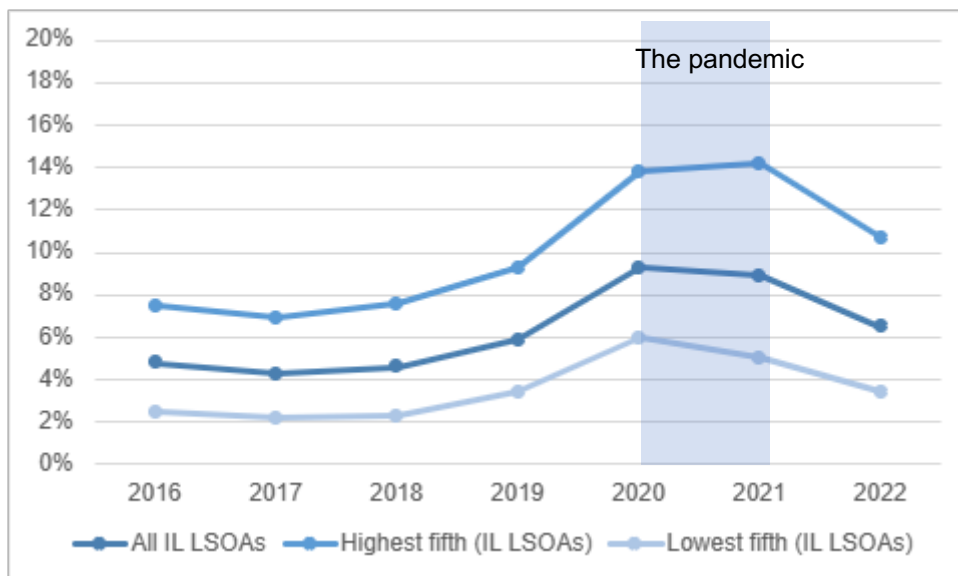


Source: [StatsWales](#)

3.21. In order to ascertain if these national trends are mirrored in Invest Local communities, chart 3.4 shows that, within the Invest Local areas, the proportion of those claiming out of work benefits¹⁸ was relatively steady for the first few years of the programme. This increased during COVID-19, although there are early signs showing a decrease after this period.

The chart also shows how within the different Invest Local areas there is a wide range in terms of the proportion of people who are claiming out of work benefits; for example, Invest Local areas in the higher fifth (quinary) have proportionally around four times more claimants than areas in the lower fifth and this remains consistent over the period shown. Moreover, the Invest Local areas on average have a far higher proportion of claimants than the average in their local authorities.

Chart 3.4: average percentage of working age adults (aged 16-64) in Invest Local areas (LSOAs) claiming ‘out of work’ benefits.

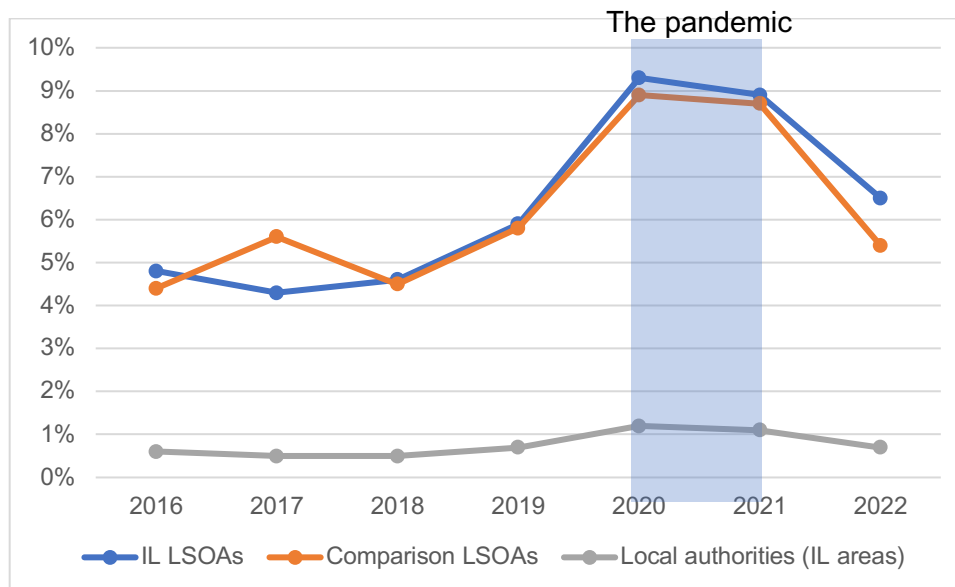


Source: [NOMIS](#)

¹⁸ “The Claimant Count measures the number of people claiming benefit principally for the reason of being unemployed” (NOMIS). This includes those claiming Jobseekers Allowance and Universal Credit.

3.22. Chart 3.5 shows that increases in the numbers of people claiming out of work benefits in Invest Local areas and the 70 comparator areas was very similar. In both, rates increased in the period 2018-2020, peaking during the pandemic, before falling somewhat in the final year. It is important to note that the increases predate the pandemic and were much higher than overall increases in the local authorities in which the Invest Local communities are located. Indeed, rates in these areas are four to five times higher than the overall rate for the local authorities they are located in. This may indicate the greater vulnerability of these communities to external trends and shocks as during this period, despite very sluggish economic growth, employment in Wales was increasing.

Chart 3.5: the average percentage of working age adults (aged 16-64) claiming out of work benefits in the Invest Local areas, comparison areas and IL local authorities.



Source: [NOMIS](#)

Education and skills

3.23. Education and skills are another key determinant of people’s and communities’ wellbeing and resilience, for example:

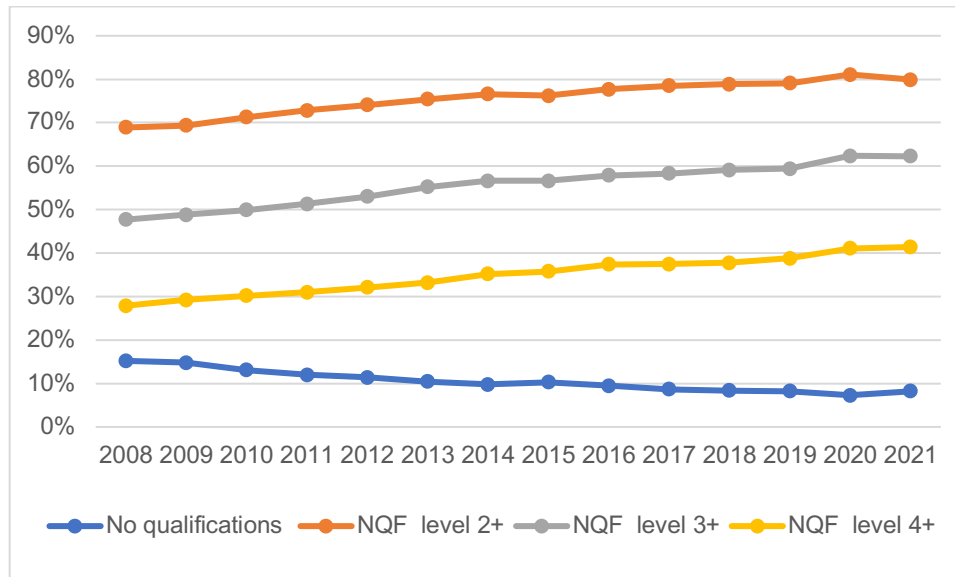
- levels of education and skills are linked to people's economic opportunities and employment ([Schuller, 2017](#));
- levels of education are key indicators of the likelihood that a person will continue in education (ibid; [Smith et al., 2019](#)). Participation in learning can be enjoyable, can give people a sense of purpose, can enable social interaction and support progression ([What Works Wellbeing 2017b](#));
- parental levels of education are linked to children's educational attainment ([Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003](#)); and
- levels of education are linked to people's likelihood of volunteering and also their capacity to lead and support community action (Brodie et al., 2010; [McGarvey et al., 2019](#)).

3.24. Although there is an association between each of these factors, and education and skills, each factor is only one of a range of factors shaping each behaviour (such as volunteering) or outcome (such as educational attainment); for example, as figure 4.2. illustrates, the reasons why people choose to volunteer with programmes like Invest Local are complex and not simply reducible to their levels of skills or qualifications.

3.25. The increase in the proportion of the working age population with qualifications since 2016, illustrated by figure 3.6, suggests this will have had a positive impact upon wellbeing and resilience in Invest Local communities. However, it is important to stress that the proportion of adults with qualifications broadly decreases as age increases, so as fewer young people with no qualifications leave school, and older people with no qualifications retire, the proportion of the working age population with qualifications increases. The impact of having no qualifications upon wellbeing may be lower for older people who are retired, as it will no longer impact on their likelihood of being in employment, and of the quality and type of work they do. However, their employment histories will affect the pensions they receive and having no or low qualifications will continue to affect other aspects of their life.

For example, (if qualifications are used as a proxy measure of skills) poor essential skills, such as literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, may mean they find it difficult to access services.

Chart 3.6: the proportion of the working age population in Wales with no qualifications, qualifications at level 2+, level 3+ and level 4+, 2008-2021.



Source: [Welsh Government \(2022a\)](#)

3.26. In order to ascertain if these national trends are mirrored in Invest Local communities chart 3.7 below shows that, on average, in Invest Local areas the proportion of people aged 16 or over with no qualifications decreased by around 10 percentage points between 2011 and 2021.

3.27. However, it is important to bear in mind that around a third of people in Invest Local areas still had no qualifications in 2021. Moreover, there were marked differences in the size of decline across Invest Local communities, namely:

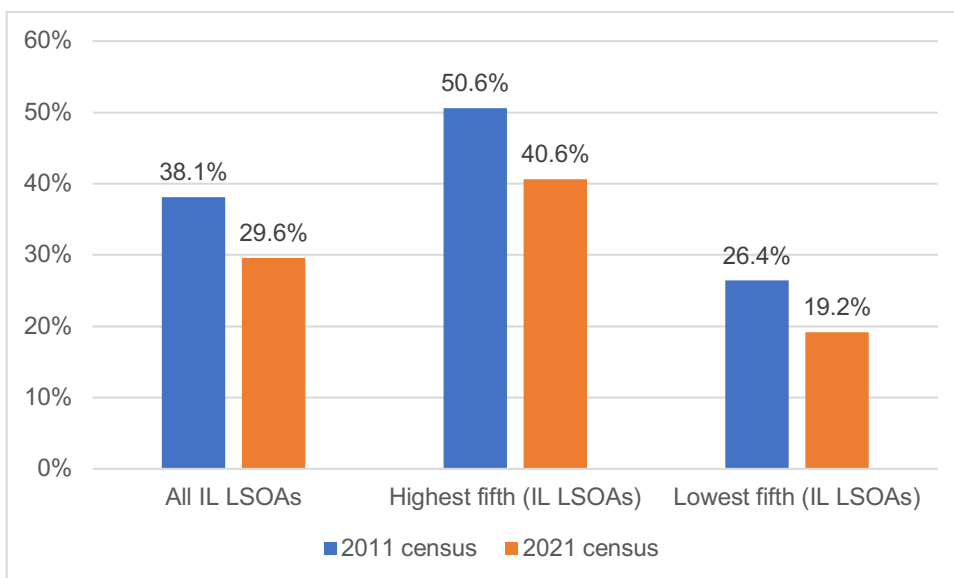
- in the top fifth (quintile) of Invest Local areas (the seven Invest Local LSOAs with the highest proportion of people with no qualifications in 2011) the decline in the proportion of people with no qualifications was ten percentage points; and

- in the bottom fifth (quintile) of Invest Local areas (the seven Invest Local LSOAs with the lowest proportion of people with no qualifications in 2011) the decline in the proportion of people with no qualifications was seven percentage points.

3.28. The differences between the top and bottom quintiles is probably because the Invest Local LSOAs with the highest proportion of people with no qualifications in 2011 started from a lower baseline (if measured in terms of the proportion of people with no qualifications). Because the increase was larger in these areas, they are likely to have experienced a larger increase in wellbeing since 2011, compared to those Invest Local areas with the lowest proportion of people with no qualifications in 2011.

3.29. However, overall levels of wellbeing are still likely to be higher in those Invest Local areas with the lowest proportion of people with no qualifications in 2011, as the proportion of people with no qualifications was still lower in these communities in 2022.

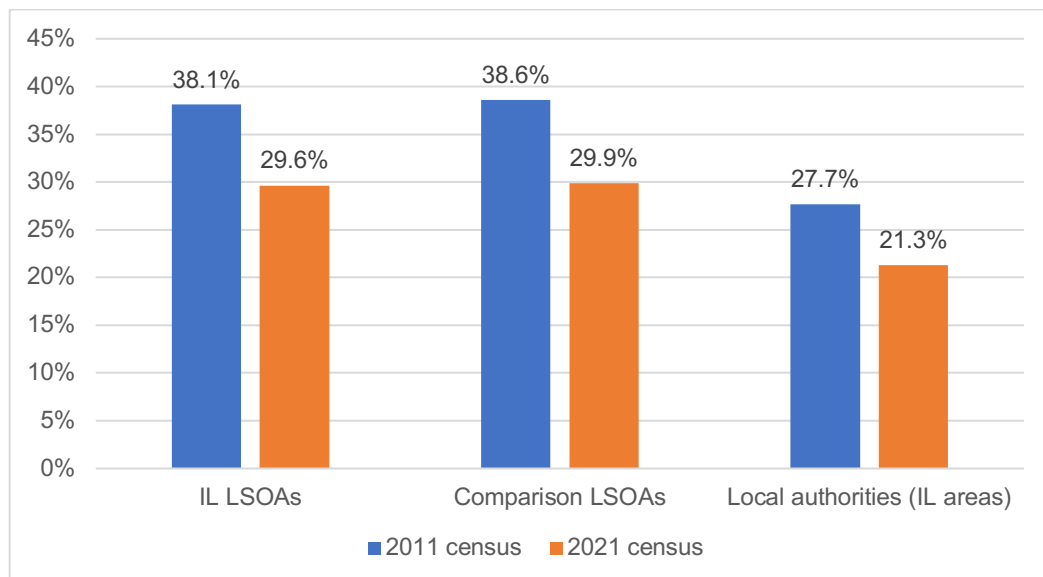
Chart 3.7: average percentage of residents (aged 16 or over) in LSOAs reporting ‘no qualification’ in the Invest Local areas.



Source: Census (2011 and 2022)

3.30. Chart 3.8 shows that the decline in the proportion of people aged 16 and over with no qualifications in Invest Local areas and the 70 comparator areas was very similar (at 8.5 percentage points and 8.7 percentage points respectively) and larger than the overall fall in the local authorities in which the Invest Local areas are located (6.4 percentage points), although again this was from a lower base.

Chart 3.8: average percentage of residents (aged 16 or over) reporting ‘no qualification’ in the Invest Local areas, comparison areas and IL local authorities.



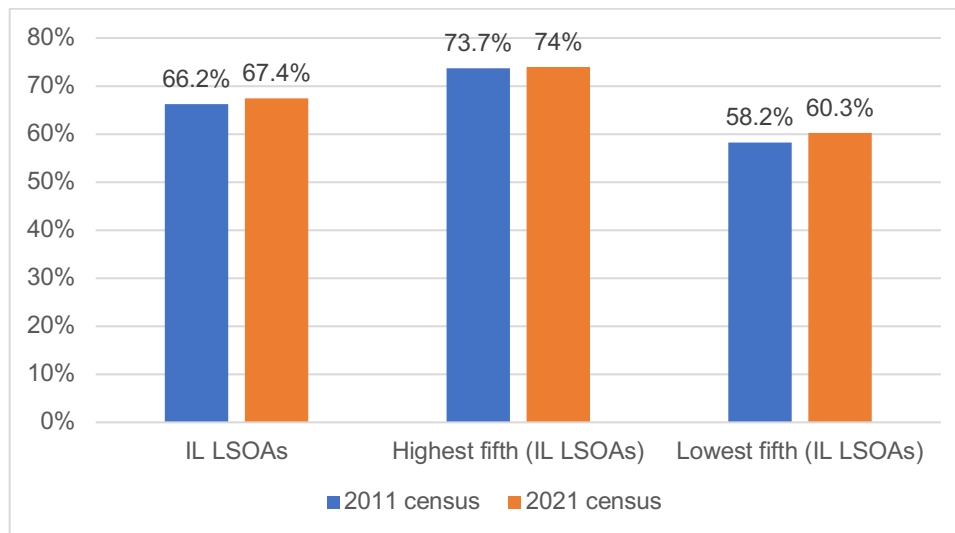
Source: Census 2011 and 2021

Health

People’s level of health and their satisfaction with their health is another key determinant of people’s wellbeing ([What Works Wellbeing, 2023](#)) and resilience. There has been an increase in the percentage of residents who feel positive about their general health in all geographical areas from 2011 to 2021, suggesting a positive impact upon people’s wellbeing and resilience. This is a surprising finding, given the challenging context.

3.31. In order to ascertain if these national trends are mirrored in Invest Local communities, chart 3.9 shows that on average around two thirds of residents (aged 16 or over) in Invest Local areas reported that their general health was either “very good” or “good”¹⁹. It also shows that, overall, across all Invest Local areas, residents’ feelings about their health improved slightly between 2011 and 2021. However, as with trends in the proportion of people with no qualifications, the gains were larger in the lowest fifth (quintile) of Invest Local areas, probably because they started from a lower baseline.

Chart 3.9: average percentage of residents (aged 16 or over) in Invest Local areas reporting their general health as “very good” or “good”.



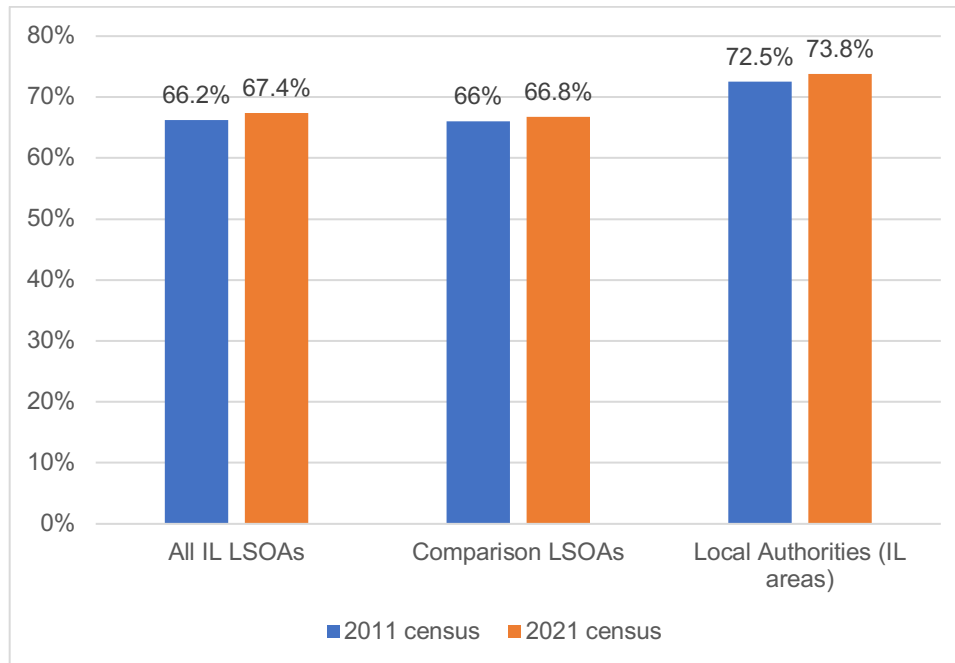
Source: Census (2011 and 2022)

3.32. Chart 3.10 shows that the improvement in how Invest Local residents felt about their health between 2011 to 2021 (an increase of 1.2 percentage points) was broadly in line with the improvement in how residents of the 70 comparator areas felt (an increase of 0.8 percentage points)²⁰, and how residents of the 13 local authorities in which the Invest Local areas are located felt (an increase of 1.3 percentage points).

¹⁹ The census asks, “how is your health in general” and provides a 5-scale option as a response (very good, good, fair, bad, very bad).

²⁰ The difference between the two (0.4 percentage points) is probably too small to rule out chance as an explanation for the difference.

Chart 3.10: average percentage of residents (aged 16 or over) in Invest Local areas (LSOAs), comparison LSOAs and IL local authorities reporting that their general health as “very good” or “good”.



Source: census 2011 and 2021

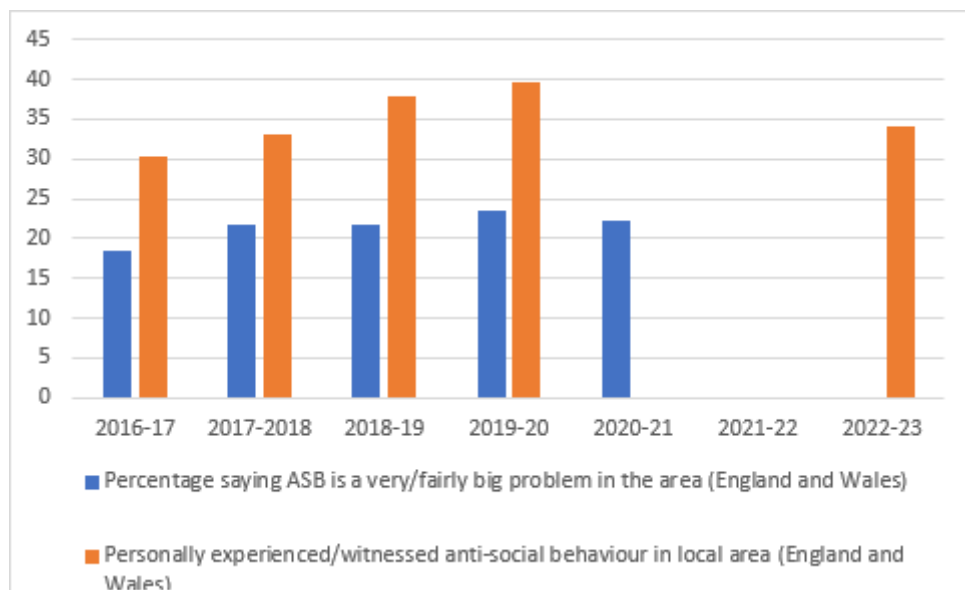
3.33. As outlined above, these are surprising findings and stand in sharp contrast to other metrics. For example, across Wales increases in life expectancy stalled around 2011 and fell in 2020 as a result of the pandemic ([WG, 2022a](#)). Moreover, the long-term increases in life expectancy have not translated to higher levels of ‘healthy life expectancy’ (the years someone spends in good health). Indeed, these have declined somewhat, a trend “driven, in part, by inequalities faced by those living in the most deprived areas in Wales, who are most likely to report ill health” ([pp. 16-17, WG, 2022b](#)). Although, in the context of the programme, the strong link between deprivation and ill health may be partly offset by the younger age profile of Invest Local communities, as older people are much more likely than adults of working age to report having poor health²¹ ([WG, 2022a](#)).

²¹ In 2020-21, 84% of adults aged between 16 and 44 reported having “good” or “very good” health compared to 67% of adults aged 65 and over ([p.9, WG, 2022a](#)).

Crime and anti-social behaviour

3.34. People’s experiences and, perhaps more importantly, their perceptions of crime and antisocial behaviour in their area, are another key determinant of people’s and communities’ wellbeing ([What Works Wellbeing, 2023](#)). As chart 3.11 illustrates, levels of anti-social behaviour (which is one of the most commonly reported crimes) have remained high in England and Wales, although there is some indication in the latest British Crime Survey data, that the numbers of people who have actually witnessed or experienced antisocial behaviour has declined.

Chart 3.11: percentage of people in England and Wales who say antisocial behaviour (ASB) is a very/fairly big problem in their area and the percentage of people who have experienced or witnessed antisocial in their area between 2016-17 to 2022-23. *



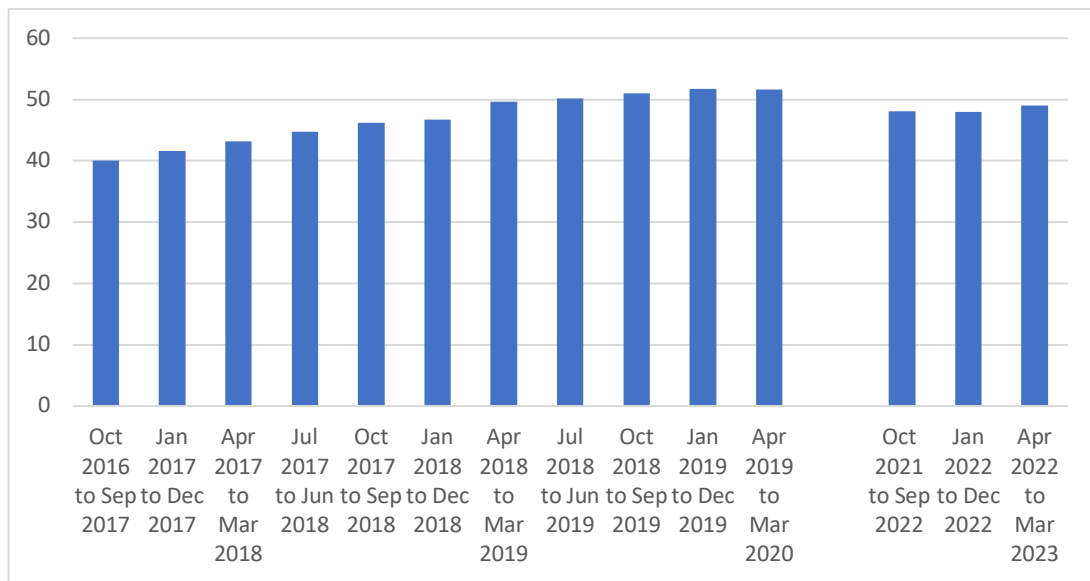
Source: *British Crime Survey*.

*Data for 2021-22 is not available due to the pandemic. ²²

²² Face-to-face interviews were suspended between March 2020 and October 2021 and data from telephone interviews in this period is not considered directly comparable.

3.36. As chart 3.12 illustrates, people’s perception that crime is increasing has increased since 2016, although this has declined somewhat since the pandemic.

Chart 3.12: percentage of people in England and Wales who say that crime has gone up 'a little' or 'a lot' in the past few years, 2016-17 to 2022-23. *



Source: *British Crime Survey*.

*Data for 2021-22 is not available due to the pandemic.

3.37. Analysis of recorded crimes, which is regarded as a much less robust measure of actual levels of crime than the British Crime Survey (and therefore not presented here in charts), suggests that:

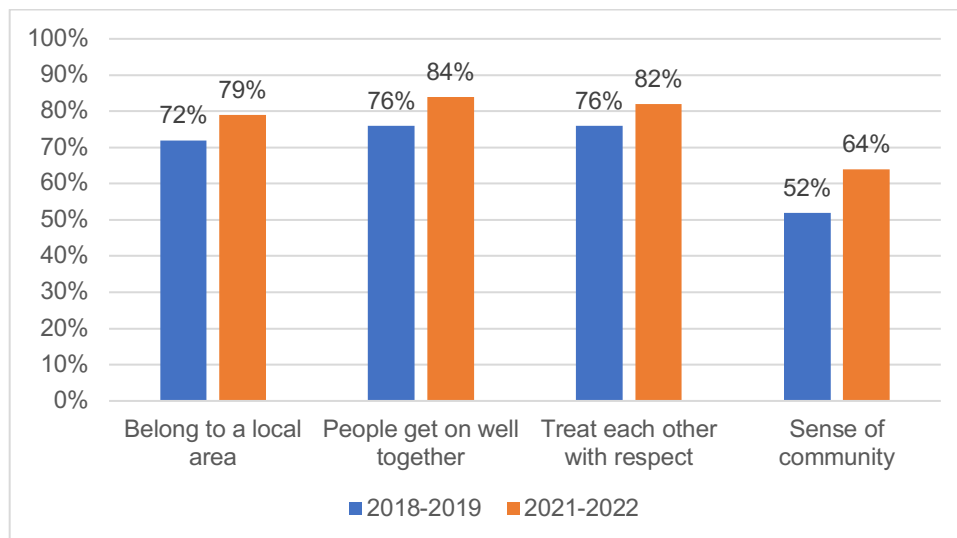
- as would be expected, reported levels of crime and anti-social behaviour are higher in Invest Local areas (which are more socioeconomically disadvantaged), compared to overall rates in the local authorities they are located in;

- reported levels of anti-social behaviour increased during the lockdowns and overall levels of reported crime have increased since lockdowns²³; and
- changes in the reported levels of crime and antisocial behaviour over the last seven years in Invest Local areas, are similar to changes in the matched group of 70 LSOAs.

Trust and social capital

3.38. Sense of belonging and trust in others are also determinants of people’s and communities’ wellbeing ([What Works Wellbeing, 2023](#)). National data shown in chart 3.13 suggests an improvement in these measures over the periods 2018-19 and 2021-22, thought to be linked to the effects of the pandemic (see e.g. [OfHD, 2020](#)). Unfortunately, local level data on belonging and trust in Invest Local communities is not available.

Chart 3.13: selected measures of community sentiment, 2018-19 and 2021-22 in Wales.



Source: [Welsh Government \(2022d\)](#)

²³ Levels of crime and anti-social behaviour tend to be higher in more social-economically disadvantaged areas. For more details of this and the impact of the pandemic, see [Kirchmaier and Villa-Llera, 2021](#).

Overall levels of wellbeing

3.39. Each of the factors listed above, together with other factors such as:

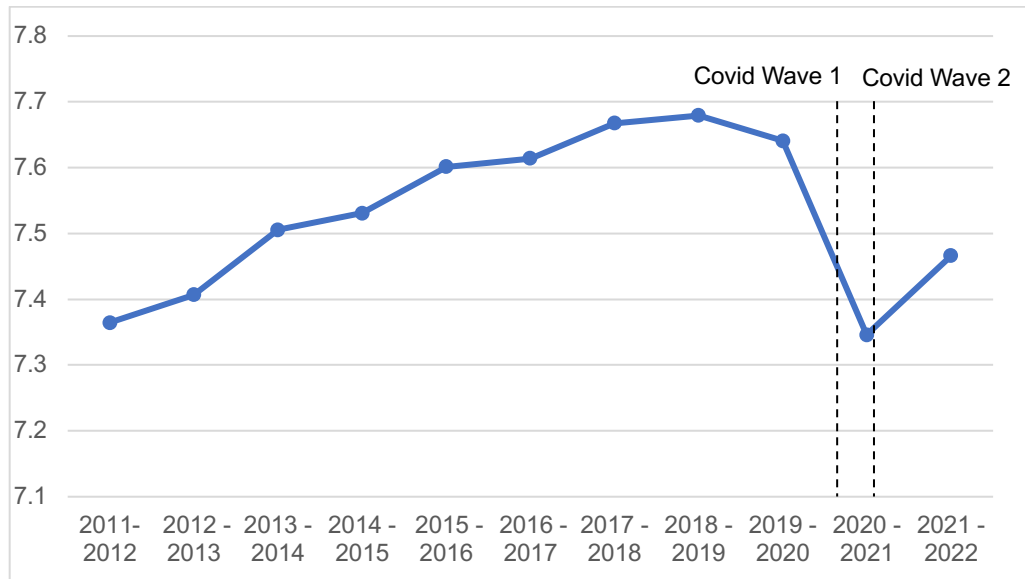
- trust in government and levels of political engagement;
- air and water quality and access to green spaces;
- leisure activities, including volunteering and participation in arts, sports and cultural activities;
- the quality of personal relationships; and
- the quality of housing and access to services

All of these factors help to shape an individual's subjective wellbeing, including people's satisfaction with life and the levels of happiness or anxiety they experience, and also the character of the communities they live in ([What Works Wellbeing, 2023](#)).

3.40. As chart 3.14. illustrates, overall wellbeing in the 13 local authorities where Invest Local communities are based had been increasing since 2016, before dropping sharply following the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted above, mental health and wellbeing declined sharply for some groups, such as young adults, adults with pre-existing mental or physical health conditions, adults who lost income or employment, adults living in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods and some ethnic minority populations ([ONS, 2022](#)).

While local level data on Invest Local communities is not available, given the data outlined above which suggests that on most measures trends in Invest Local communities mirror the national trends, it is reasonable to expect a broadly similar pattern in Invest Local communities.

Chart 3.14: life satisfaction rates (10 being best) amongst Invest Local authorities²⁴ residents from 2011-2022 (financial years).



Source: [ONS \(2022\)](#)

What does this mean for the programme?

3.41. Overall, it is reasonable to infer that, at a programme level, these external factors and forces will have had a mixed impact upon Invest Local communities. There are fewer people with no qualifications and people feel healthier and more connected to their communities. However, more people are claiming out of work benefits, and it is likely that levels of poverty, antisocial behaviour and crime have increased since 2020.

3.42. The positive changes in these measures are likely to buoy up overall levels of wellbeing and resilience, while negative changes are likely to drag overall levels of wellbeing and resilience down. Changes in levels of poverty and in particular, economic activity are likely to be key determinants of changes in overall levels of wellbeing in Invest Local communities.

²⁴ This includes Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, Conwy, Gwynedd, Merthyr Tydfil, Pembrokeshire, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Swansea and Wrexham.

This is a key challenge for a programme which was intended to be a community development, rather than an anti-poverty programme, and which cannot control key drivers of poverty such as education and skills, the quality of people's employment, welfare benefits and the cost-of-living. Overall, it is likely that levels of wellbeing are likely to have decreased since 2020. The evaluation will continue to monitor trends in these indicators over the remainder of the programme's lifetime.

- 3.43. It is therefore clear that the period 2016-2023 has been a very challenging one. The declines, changes and crises have created an extended period of insecurity and instability for many people, described as a "permacrisis".²⁵ It is likely to have been particularly keenly felt in Invest Local communities which were purposely chosen because they could be characterised as communities that had been "left behind" because they suffer from a high level of socioeconomic deprivation, are disproportionately impacted by economic decline and/or welfare reform, and have not benefited from additional funding, such as National Lottery funding, in the past.

As section 4 outlines this, coupled with the legacy of cuts in public funding and the legacy of mistrust left by earlier community development initiatives that were felt to have failed in some communities,²⁶ shaped these communities' response to the programme.

- 3.44. Moreover, as sections 4, 5 and 7 of this report outline, this context (shaped by these national trends and shocks), also shaped the opportunities and challenges each Invest Local steering group was presented with and Invest Local helped to provide the impetus and resources for communities to act in response to these opportunities and challenges.

²⁵ "Permacrisis" was the Collins English Dictionary "word of the year" in 2022.

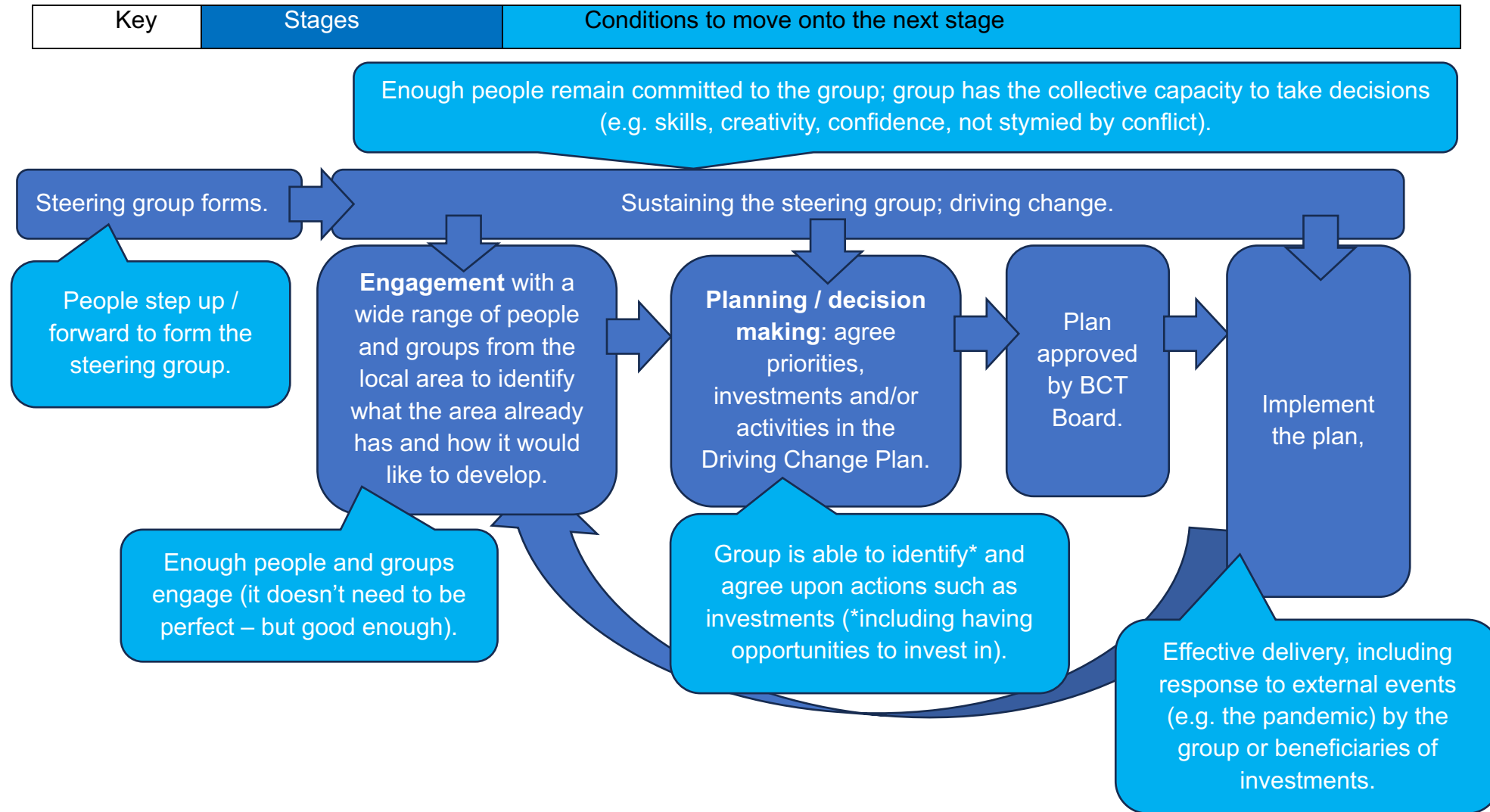
²⁶ The most obvious example was Plas Madoc, where several staff of the Communities First project were jailed for fraud. However, there are also communities where earlier initiatives, such as Communities First, were felt to have left a positive legacy.

4. Communities' response to Invest Local's offer: community engagement and steering groups.

4.1. Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the Invest Local process and the critical conditions/dependencies for getting going and moving forward. This section considers in particular:

- steering groups' collective capacity to act (including the challenges they faced, such as conflict, which weakened this capacity);
- the reasons why it has been difficult for steering groups to engage the wider community; and
- the challenges that threaten the sustainability of steering groups.

Figure 4.1: the Invest Local process and critical conditions / dependencies



The offer of £1m, formation of a steering group and initial consultation.

- 4.2. As the first evaluation report ([BCT, 2019](#)) outlines, the offer in 2016 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. Initial engagement with the wider community, through consultations and events, was often difficult, but “good enough”.²⁷ These were important achievements, enabling the programme to start in each community.

Steering groups: to govern is to choose

- 4.3. The role of steering groups is to manage Invest Local activities in their area, in line with the programme’s overarching principles including “wide consultation across the community, engagement with as many community members as possible, openness and transparency, agreement and consensus” and enable individuals and community groups to take a lead role in improving their own community²⁸.

In many ways the effectiveness of Invest Local depends upon, and is determined by, the effectiveness of the steering group. Some were dealt more difficult hands given, for example, a legacy of mistrust, the weakness of community groups and/or a community without clear boundaries which, as the first evaluation report ([BCT, 2020](#)) outlined, slowed their progress. However, as this phase of the evaluation illustrates, some groups have been able to “play their hand” better and achieve more than others who might have started off in a more promising position.

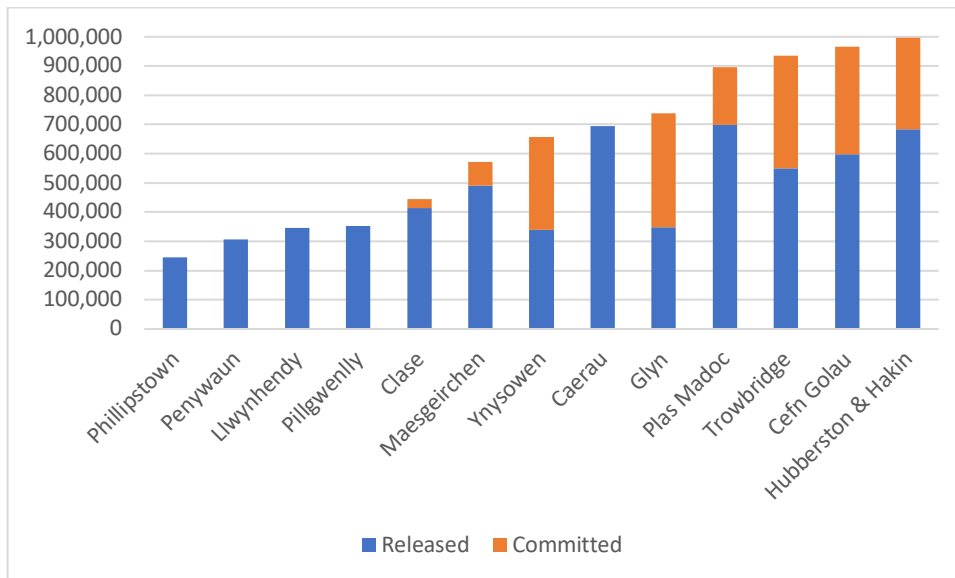
- 4.4. The funding offered to each community has been large enough to enable them to invest in a range of opportunities. However, both the funding and steering groups’ time and mental bandwidth is finite. Therefore, steering groups have had to prioritise what to act upon, what to invest in and what to try to influence.

²⁷ There were large differences between areas though, with substantial engagement in some areas and very minimal engagement in others.

²⁸ Building Communities Trustee Ltd Business Plan for delivering the Invest Local Programme.

4.5. As chart 4.1 illustrates, at this stage of the programme, the rate of investment varies considerably, and the 13 steering groups have allocated between around a quarter to nine tenths of the £1m available to them. As this section illustrates, while groups have tended to focus upon broadly the same priorities, the speed at which they have invested in these priorities differs, given differences in their collective capacity and the opportunities to invest with which each steering group was presented.

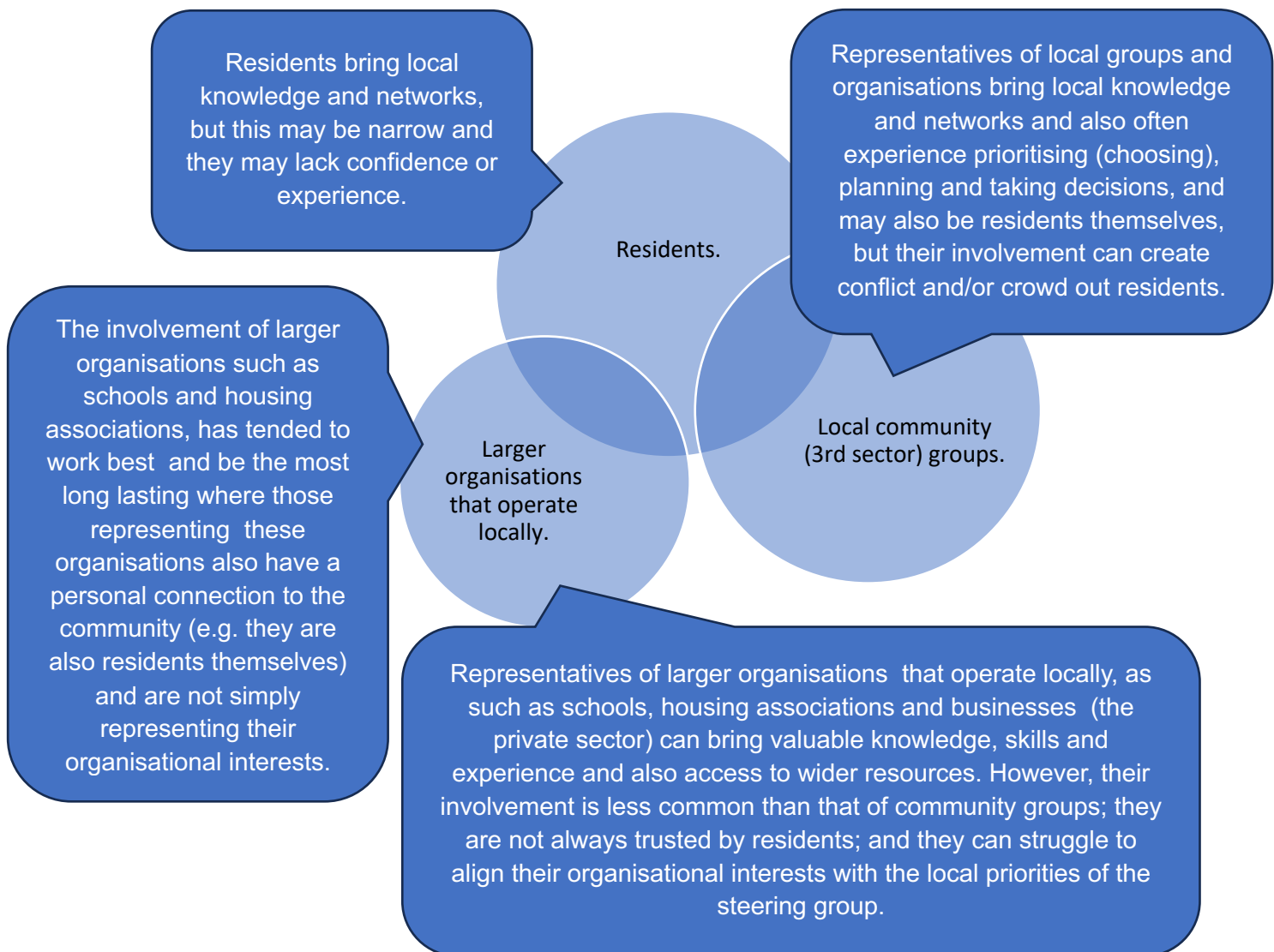
Chart 4.1: the total value of investments released and committed in each community (November 2023).



4.6. Invest Local is a collaborative enterprise and the collective capacity of steering groups to choose which issues to prioritise or focus upon, and what to do (how, what, when, with whom etc.) is critical. Having the right mix of people, skills, and personalities (such as doers, planners, thinkers, leaders, and reflectors) is crucial to create effective teams. This is an inherent challenge for the programme and for communities who do not have the luxury of being able to choose or assemble teams. Instead, the composition of steering groups depends on who in the community and beyond (e.g. representatives of external organisations) chooses to put themselves forward to become part of a steering group. As outlined below, this has sometimes contributed to conflicts that have reduced steering groups' collective capacity.

4.7. As figure 4.2 illustrates, most steering groups bring together a mix of people with lived experience (e.g. as local residents) and/or professional experience (e.g. from the public, private or voluntary sectors²⁹) or political experience (e.g. councillors), bringing a range of skills, knowledge, and contacts (access to networks) together. Many members wear more than one hat, they may be both a local resident and also represent a local group or, less commonly, be a resident and represent a public sector organisation, such as a school.

Figure 4.2: the different types of steering group members



²⁹ Much of SG capacity stems from individual members' previous experience, in employment and/or involvement in other local organisations like the Scouts or Guides or groups like Men's Sheds.

Residents

- 4.8. Lived experience is vital, but each resident’s own lived experiences will be unique. Living in a community does not mean they understand the experiences of all those who live there or how best to build upon their strengths³⁰. Requiring the steering group to engage with the wider community is intended to help ensure that others’ voices and experiences are heard. However, given the range of factors that can discourage people’s engagement, outlined in figure 4.3, this has proved challenging.

- 4.9. The skills and knowledge of local residents inevitably differs. Some bring experience as entrepreneurs, managers of community development projects or councillors. Others have less or little experience of working in community or public settings. Not all, at least initially, had experience of, or confidence in, identifying priorities for their community or of developing plans and taking decisions on behalf of that community that could involve spending hundreds of thousands of pounds. As the example below illustrates, some also lacked experience working with and/or influencing potential partners.

A resident-led group that has had achieved a great deal but is struggling to progress further.

One of the Invest Local groups has achieved an impressive amount since 2016, with a mix of ambitious flagship investments and support for local groups and services that, in the judgment of the evaluation team, offers a well-balanced programme of projects and activities. The group is very much led by residents and has really good ideas. However, interviewees report that in the absence of a paid community development worker, they just do not have the time to do what is needed, which is holding them back. It also appears that at times the group lacks the confidence to fully engage with potential partners, such as the local council.

³⁰ For example, knowing what might change or improve your own life does not necessarily mean you know what would change the community’s.

4.10. Indeed, one community has only recently had members of the community join the steering group, which had previously mostly been composed of members from external organisations with few local residents. However, at the time of writing (Autumn 2023) this had recently changed, and residents now make up the majority of steering group members. Interviewees reported that although these residents feel “a huge amount of ownership”, as result of disruption caused by a paid staff member leaving, conflict within the group and new members (residents with less experience of making decisions at this level) joining, the group became more “risk averse” and were initially unsure about whether to proceed with their ambitious plans. At the time of writing, they had appointed a new paid worker and there was confidence that the group would move forward again.

The role of local groups and organisations

4.11. Representatives of local groups and organisations can help steering groups identify investment opportunities and give them collective confidence to act (and invest). Where, as in a couple of Invest Local areas, few local groups are involved (in part because there may be few local groups to involve), their absence is felt. As the boxed text above illustrates, it has not held the residents of one of these communities back from making bold decisions. However, it may have limited their confidence working with and influencing partners such as the council. In another community though, the resident-led group has struggled and, as one interviewee put it, the small group of residents “don’t have the connections [needed] to do anything strategically”. However, another interviewee questioned this perspective and said that the problem was more the lengthy processes they must go through before they can implement new projects. For example, an expression of interest to develop a parcel of land was submitted to the local authority. Over six months later, it was reported that they were still waiting for a response. As with all the communities, the situation is dynamic, and by Autumn 2023, it was reported that there was now collaboration between the steering group, a local voluntary sector partner and the local authority.

4.12. Equally the involvement of local groups and organisations can pose challenges as:

- there can be conflicts of interest (real or perceived) particularly when, for example, organisations who are represented on steering groups are key beneficiaries of Invest Local investments;
- organisations can feel in competition with each other. This can create conflict, or mean they feel compelled to support each other in order to secure support for their own priorities;
- organisations can dominate discussions and crowd out the voices or the continued membership of residents. For example, in groups dominated by local organisations, it may be harder for local residents to identify their role in the group; and
- there has been resentment of local organisations that left the steering group once they had secured funding for their own organisation.

4.13. Moreover, tensions can develop when steering groups try to collaborate with local groups and organisations. For example, in one area, relationships with community centre staff were reported to have been very negative and often hostile, with disagreements between the two parties as to what is allowed in a community space.

The changing role of local organisations in steering groups

In one community, where the steering group is [mostly] composed of a large number of local organisations, interviewees suggested that initially everyone involved with the steering group was advocating for their own project and that this was born of necessity, as “... they all desperately needed money.”

Nevertheless, there was also agreement at the start that funding for the local community centre was the priority.

The length (ten years) and size (£1m) of the programme's commitment to each community may have been important here in giving organisations confidence that if they supported other priorities, it would not be at the expense of their own organisational interests. Moreover, in this and a number of other communities, thanks to investment from Invest Local, groups have become more secure and sustainable over time. This has meant that people who are involved with these groups have been able to take a broader, community-wide view and advocate for investments on the basis of their overall community benefit, rather than their own narrower interests; as one interviewee put it:

"They [local groups and organisations] were looking in but now they are looking out. Now they can see the community rather than just their own project, but also how their project fits into the community."

- 4.14. The synergistic partnerships that can develop between the steering group and local groups and organisations is explored further below. In this model, local groups and organisations offer local knowledge, links, and capacity and, in effect, become the delivery arm of Invest Local, while the steering group provides funding, support and opportunities to network and coordinate action to support the whole community. However, where there are few local groups involved, steering groups have had to find alternative ways to deliver Invest Local.

The role of external organisations

- 4.15. The involvement of public and, in a few cases, private sector organisations that work locally, like schools, health services and local businesses and larger voluntary sector organisations, such as housing associations, has been mixed. Like local groups and organisations, they can bring valuable knowledge, skills and experience and access to wider resources (e.g. funding, wider networks). As the boxed text below illustrates, the involvement of people with business experience in one group has been particularly valuable.

The confidence to take decisions

One of the steering groups includes a number of members with business experience. They are from the local community and very focused on the community. Their experience gives them confidence to take decisions and their confidence rubs off on others in the group. Two new members also joined the group who might not have if they had felt they would need to take decisions about large amounts of money without the support of people used to doing so.

One of these members has also provided valuable resources that have helped to speed things up, as his accountancy team drew up the business plan for one of their local developments. It is likely that a plan would have been prepared without this support, but it would have cost money and taken longer.

- 4.16. However, steering groups have generally struggled to engage representatives from larger organisations, such as schools, local authorities, and local health board services. This reflects a number of factors, including:
- the legacy of mistrust between residents and these organisations in some areas;
 - the difficulty some larger organisations have found in identifying their role in Invest Local, and a mismatch between their organisational goals and those of Invest Local, which can create a more transactional relationship, in which their engagement is driven by their own goals and which ends when these goals are fulfilled; and
 - the impact of austerity, which has increased pressure upon services and reduced their capacity to engage and also the resources they can offer. Indeed some, such as schools, have looked to Invest Local for funding.

Working in partnership

- 4.17. Rather than directly involving them in steering groups, the involvement of external organisations as partners has sometimes proved fruitful, for example:
- as outlined in section 7, the Pill Unity steering group was supported by the local authority Central Hub Team staff and the Environment and Leisure department with the development of their allotment space – the Pill Unity Gardens (along with other partner organisations);
 - similarly, in Phillipstown, Maesgeirchen and Clase, the steering group has worked with the local authority, with differing degrees of ease, to deliver improvements to local facilities (parks and a skate park);
 - in Cefn Golau, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, who are the local fundholder, are reported to have played a key role in supporting Cefn Golau Together by, for example, providing strategic development support that has been instrumental in bringing in funding from the local authority and the Police and Crime Commissioner to support local activities;
 - in Penywaun, collaborations with Hirwaun YMCA (and the local authority who fund the youth workers who deliver the sessions), have led to the delivery of open play sessions in the community and a youth provision plan was under development in the summer of 2023;
 - as the boxed text below illustrates, a new joint funded project is being established by MaesNi working in partnership with the local authority; and
 - in areas like Caerau, Pill and Glyn, steering groups are increasingly being seen as local partners by organisations like Skyline³¹, the Urbanists³² or the local authority, who want to engage with the community. This has provided access to new opportunities and also provided access for greater influence, which is discussed further in section 7.

³¹ Skyline was a feasibility study into landscape-style community land stewardship in the South Wales Valleys, commissioned by Natural Resources Wales.

³² Commissioned through the One Newport partnership to develop the Pillgwenlly Masterplan, in response to the challenges faced by the community.

The Maesgeirchen Support Hub Project

The support hub project developed from the PROTECT pilot project, initially developed by the local authority and the local health board, and funded by the Welsh Government, in response to the impact of COVID-19 on the community.

The Hub aims to continue the additional support that had been available during the pandemic and offers financial help with food and fuel, digital, financial, and mental health support and covers 16 hours of MaesNi's staff time each week. Given the success of the pilot, the model has been rolled out across the local authority, illustrating the influence of Invest Local.

- 4.18. However, relationships with those larger organisations working locally, who should be natural partners such as school, local authorities, or housing associations, can sometimes be difficult where, for example, there is a legacy of mistrust between a community and potential partners. Moreover, in general, partnerships with local groups and organisations have proved more important and more impactful than partnerships with external organisations.

Partnerships for delivery

- 4.19. It was envisaged by BCT that the role of steering groups would be to manage or oversee the programme, rather than directly deliver projects and activities in communities. Two models of partnership have since developed. The first involves forging a synergistic partnership with a local organisation that is, or is seeking to become, a local anchor organisation³³ that can deliver a range of services and support in the community. In this model, Invest Local provides the funding and its partners help bring local links, knowledge, and the capacity to deliver services and support.

³³ Anchor organisations are “community-led or controlled”, “multi-purpose organisations” that have strong local links and support a range of local actions in the community, such as support for social and leisure activities, advice services, food projects and local environmental work ([BCT, 2023](#)).

Two of the areas have been able to do this (the presence of a viable partners is an obvious precondition for this option).³⁴ The second model involves forging similarly valuable and synergistic relationships with a range of community groups (rather than a single anchor organisation). Three of the steering groups have been able to do this (and again, the presence of viable partners is an obvious precondition).

- 4.20. In a small number of communities, the absence of viable potential partners means that steering groups are in the process of trying to establish themselves as nascent anchor organisations, and are more focused on delivering themselves, rather than relying upon partners to deliver. This is both more ambitious and more challenging, and has increased the demands upon steering groups. However, it may increase the impact of the programme, as the baseline level of capacity in these communities, has tended to be lower.

What happens when the Invest Local funds are exhausted?

As an ever-increasing proportion of their funding is invested or committed, steering groups are looking and thinking about a future where the money has run out. As well as ensuring investments leave a sustainable legacy, some are exploring the potential of securing new income streams.

Hubberston and Hakin Hands Together has now become a company limited by guarantee (CLG) and is exploring ways to attract or generate additional funds for redistribution to the community, such as Gelliswick Project discussed in section 7. While Together for Colwyn Bay's long-term vision is to create a Colwyn Bay Development Trust which will include community organisations owned and managed by the local community, with the aim of achieving the sustainable regeneration of the ward. It would also aim to address more widely some of the economic and social issues in Colwyn Bay.

³⁴ This model blurs the distinction between of the partnership (steering group) and the partners as partners are usually members of the steering group. Nevertheless, there is still an important distinction to be drawn, in terms of responsibilities for delivery, between the partnership (steering group) and its partners).

- 4.21. In addition, paid workers (funded by local steering groups) have often proved essential in providing steering groups with the capacity needed to engage with the wider community and to help deliver services and support. As outlined above, this appears to be a factor in holding back some groups which do not have paid workers, from progressing further.
- 4.22. As section 7 outlines, these partnerships and paid workers, help steering groups deliver the communities' priorities and, by increasing local capacity, have helped increase communities' resilience.

Working with local groups

The Hive Caffi is run by volunteers and makes up to 100 meals a week for people living in Maesgeirchen. It was particularly busy during the pandemic but has continued to respond to different needs as a result the cost-of-living crisis. Invest Local initially provided grants for equipment and it is now supported by Invest Local and local authority support hub funds. It is marketed as open for everyone and anyone that turns up, offering a welcoming space to socialise and eat together and is seen as a real a success for MaesNi and the community.

The Hive Caffi Garden is an environmental/gardening project which was initially given a community garden pack by Keep Wales Tidy which included a shed, soil, compost, seeds etc. They were also given a temporary worker to kickstart the project. It supports any member of the community who wants to get involved to grow food, helping them learn how to nurture plants, trying to ensure that they take responsibility for maintaining the space, as well as producing food to be used in the Hive Caffi. The garden is the home site of MaesNi's environmental group who are now aiming to expand the group and are looking for more green spaces in partnership with ADRA housing association and Gwynedd Council. This is also seen as a successful project that has not required much ongoing support from Invest Local.

- 4.23. An ongoing partnership is not the only relationship that Invest Local groups have with local organisations. There are examples (discussed in section 7) where, for example, Invest Local has provided the initial investment to enable a group to get going, sustain itself or expand, and the group is now operating independently. Steering groups are generally keen to encourage this; as one interviewee put it, groups “Are on different places within that journey” and some still need support, but others are thriving on their own.
- 4.24. However, as noted above, funding local groups can cause problems (such as conflicts of interest, competition, and disagreement) and some steering groups can bridle when groups are not felt to be contributing to the steering group’s collective plan and vision; for example:
- there has been frustration that some local groups and organisations’ relationships with steering groups are felt to be too transactional, too focused on accessing funding, with limited reciprocation in terms of, for example, support for the steering group, community engagement and/or planning;
 - in a small number of communities, relationships with a key partner have broken down, hindering progress; and
 - there have been difficulties in getting grant recipients to provide adequate feedback on how the money was used and the difference it has made.

Taking difficult decisions

- 4.25. Choosing what to prioritise, how to mobilise and strengthen existing assets and exploit opportunities in order to address “wicked problems”³⁵ like poverty and social exclusion that damage people’s and communities’ wellbeing and resilience, is inherently challenging.

³⁵ The term was popularised by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber to describe a social or cultural issue or concern that is inherently difficult to solve, such as poverty (Rittel & Webber (1973).

Moreover, although Invest Local aspires to keep decision making processes simple, in practice, these processes can be lengthy, complex, and opaque, compounding the wicked problems' inherent difficulties, given factors such as:

- the number and range of the individuals, organisations, or agencies in the orbit of the steering group;
- a concern about the impact of decisions (such as voting yes or no to an investment) on a steering group's members' personal standing and relationships in a community, particularly in smaller, close-knit areas;
- the sometimes informal or ad hoc processes for making and recording decisions (including processes for how disagreements, which can block decision making, are resolved); and
- the ways that individuals can dominate the process, which can mean personalities can shape, bend, and occasionally eclipse formal processes.

Managing conflict and mistrust

4.26. Debate and disagreement when deciding upon priorities, and how to address them is healthy and to be expected. However, too much disagreement and/or a lack of trust between members can stymie decision making and progress.

This can happen when a number of overlapping causes collide, including:

- competition (over money, power, influence, status) and/or the suspicion or feeling that some individuals or groups are getting an unfair share;
- differences of judgment about, for example, what should be prioritised and how best to address priorities; and/or
- personality clashes due, for example to differences in character or temperament, differences in values and beliefs, or unresolved misunderstandings.

4.27. In six communities there have been serious issues between some members of the steering groups which have resulted in a breakdown of relationships for a period of time. In some areas this has been a long running challenge, while others it has been more intense, but also resolved more swiftly.

- 4.28. For the period it was unresolved, conflict has slowed or at times effectively stopped decision making until either members of the group resigned or a conflict resolution process was initiated to help the group move forward. The stresses and strains this creates have sapped steering group members' energy, led some members to resign and increased demands upon ILOs.

The steering group's engagement with the wider community

- 4.29. Although the offer of up to £1m was large enough to keep steering groups going and continues to attract interest in the wider community as:
- interest can often be expressed as criticism, cynicism or scepticism, particularly in smaller more close-knit communities, where awareness of the programme and awareness of which members of the community sit on steering groups, is higher;
 - in larger communities, awareness and understanding of the programme is often patchy at best; and
 - all areas have struggled to encourage the wider community to actively engage with the programme.
- 4.30. There are a number of reasons for this. As outlined in section 3, pressures created by the difficult economic and social context since 2016 have inevitably led some people to turn inward and focus upon their own lives and livelihoods, rather than those of their communities. For example, as one interviewee put it “Families struggling with damp houses and struggling to put food on their table, are struggling to take on new roles [helping change their community]”. This helps explain why in the UK, “people from the most deprived areas are half as likely to volunteer as those from the least deprived areas” ([NCVO, 2021](#)).
- 4.31. It was widely reported that the pandemic disrupted delivery of the programme and reduced community involvement. In many areas, older people who were previously active became less engaged, and people stopped volunteering.

Equally, in some communities, while the pandemic disrupted existing plans, it created a renewed impetus for action, which heightened the profile of the programme and created new links and connections with residents and local groups. Nevertheless, the physical and emotional labour involved also left many exhausted, and it has been difficult to sustain this level of activity, particularly since lockdowns and the furlough scheme ended.

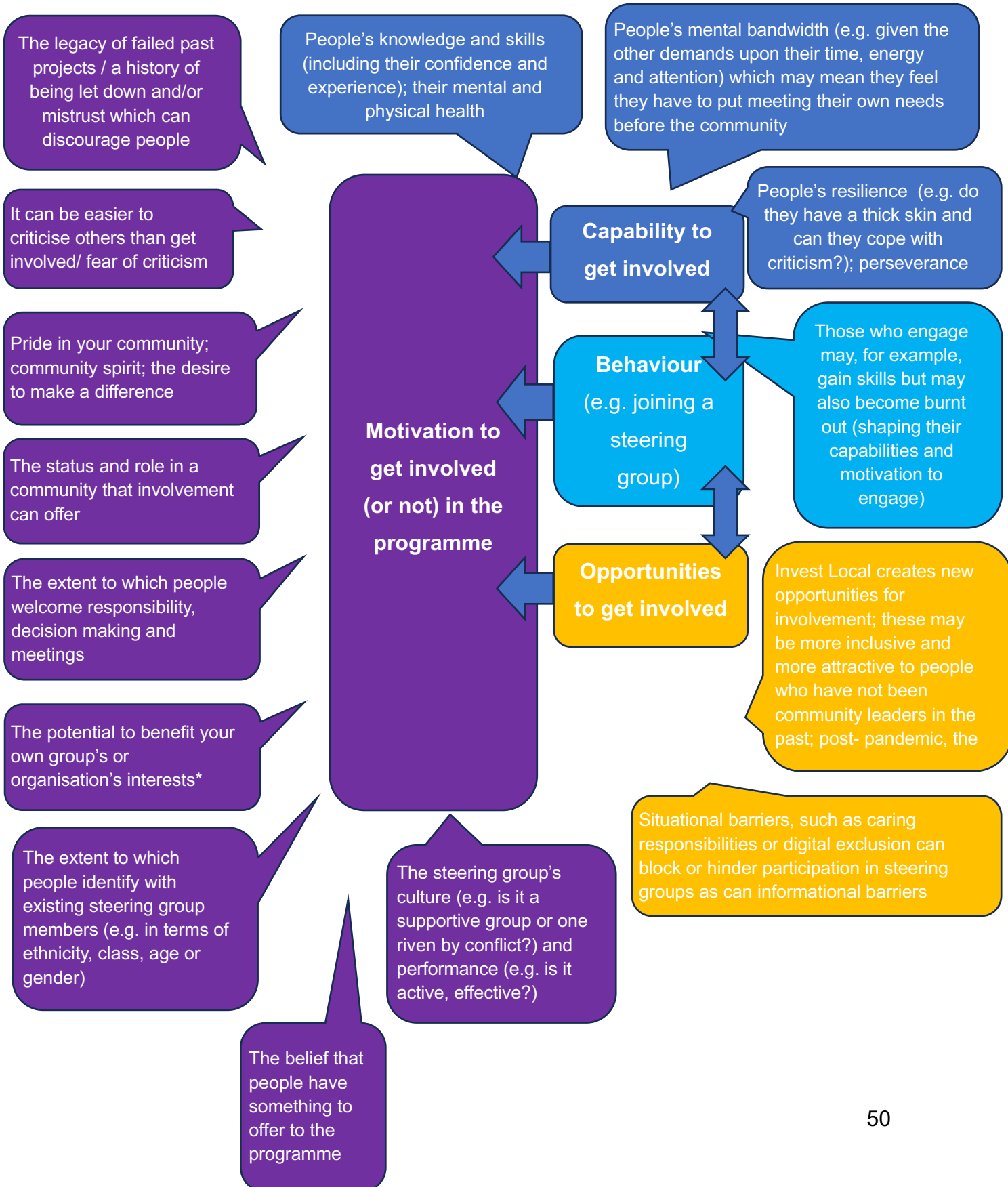
- 4.32. Alongside pressures on individual lives and livelihoods, the legacy of cuts in public funding and the legacy of mistrust left by earlier development initiatives that were felt to have failed in some communities³⁶, have also shaped attitudes. For example, in one community, an interviewee observed that (in their view) it was a community that feels “Stuff has been taken away from it”. They cited examples such as closure of community buildings, spaces and play equipment that was judged unsafe and removed by the local authority, but not replaced, leaving a play area “desolate”. In this context, they observed that the offer of money could “Bring out the worst in people” and invite suspicion about “Who’s controlling the money? Who it was for and who would benefit?”
- 4.33. In addition to these macro drivers, as the first evaluation report explored, the sheer size and diversity of some communities has been a huge challenge, and as figure 4.3 illustrates, there are a range of individual, psychological reasons why some people choose to engage, and others do not.

Figure 4.3 uses the COM-B Model ([Michie et al., 2011](#)), which posits that a behaviour, such as engaging with the Invest Local programme, requires:

- the **opportunity** to do so – or absence of constraint or barriers, such as caring responsibilities;
- the **motivation** to do so; and
- the **capability** to do so.

³⁶ The most obvious example was Plas Madoc, where several staff of the Communities First project were jailed for fraud. However, there are also communities where earlier initiatives, such as Communities First, were felt to have left a positive legacy.

Figure 4.3: examples of the different factors shaping people’s capability, motivation, and access to opportunities to get involved in steering groups and to sustain their involvement.



* Although this may lead to a transactional involvement and representatives of groups who got involved, secured funding, and then dropped out, were criticised.

4.34. Community spirit is generally reported to be high in Invest Local communities, in the sense that if someone is in trouble or in need, friends and neighbours will rally around. However, for the reasons outlined above, it has not meant that large numbers of people have wanted to, for example, regularly turn out on a cold wet night to attend a two to three hour steering group meeting.

4.35. The limited engagement of the community with steering groups has meant that the wider community was variously felt (reported) to be “apathetic”, suspicious, or critical of steering groups and the programme. For example, as one interviewee put it: “There is a lot of negativity in [name of community omitted]” given the history of what were felt to be failed initiatives, which left people feeling “This was...promised, and then nothing happened”. As a result, individual members of the steering group would repeatedly be asked questions (in the community) like “What’s going on in the meeting then?” and “Where’s all the money gone?”. As they put it, “The one or two of us who get involved, just hear the moans and groans of those outside; they’d rather stand outside and moan and groan than get involved”.

Rather pessimistically, they concluded that “[Name of community omitted] has always been this way” and saw little prospect of change. It was also felt that sections of the community “Just want what they can get [out of the programme and they’re] not interested in the community”, which it was felt, made it very hard to engage in a programme like Invest Local. Similarly in another area, an interviewee explained that some people and groups mistakenly viewed the programme as providing a “piggy bank” or “pot of money” and were frustrated, when they discovered that the steering group had a more strategic intent on how to use the money.

- 4.36. As a result of these experiences, steering groups are often very frustrated that their efforts to engage the wider community have fallen on deaf ears. As one member of a steering group ruefully put it, “If there was a magic potion to get people more involved, I’d love to get my hands on it.”
- 4.37. Steering groups are generally broadly representative of their communities, although the number of people representing organisations can skew this somewhat. Most groups have a reasonable gender balance and, particularly in more ethnically diverse city areas, include representation from people from different Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups. However, many groups recognised that they were not as representative of their community as they would like to be, most notably in terms of age, given the difficulties with engaging with young people.
- 4.38. As the boxed text below illustrates, it was also striking how many members of steering groups in smaller more close-knit communities described how people had criticised individual members of the steering group who, as a result, could feel embattled, but were unwilling to engage with the programme themselves to try to shape it. This is important, as negativity bias means that we tend to remember criticism far more readily than positive comments (Kahneman, 2011) and, if coupled with absence of positive feedback, may encourage defensiveness on the part of steering group members. This in turn can inhibit critical reflection, which is discussed further in section 6.

Keyboard warriors.

Interviewees in one community explained that, in general, residents’ perception of the programme was that it has focused too much on young people (with for example, a junior garden club and a sports and snacks programme) and not enough upon the older members of the community.

They went on to describe a community fun day which they had organised which was really well attended and people had really enjoyed it.

Nevertheless, they reported there were complaints from a few individuals in the community who were very negative about the programme and did a lot of damage as “keyboard warriors”; for example, at the fun day, the steering group went to great lengths to ensure that every child on the estate had something to eat, even when they turned up late. However, these individuals were still complaining that some attendees had not been fed.

It was also reported that the group organised a trip to the seaside for the children on the estate during the school summer holidays, which was felt to have gone well. Despite this, two community members were reconsidering their position on the steering group because of what they saw as unnecessary criticism from a few individuals about the trip and the lack of any feedback from the rest of the community.

- 4.39. The danger with blaming the community for apathy (or similar) is that groups do not fully reflect upon how their own practices and processes might discourage or exclude people; for example, in one area where it was reported that people do not readily volunteer, there appeared to be a lack of transparency, which invited questions about the openness and accountability of this group. This is likely to be a key barrier to building trust in communities. As the OECD identifies, the five drivers that influence trust are “integrity, responsiveness, reliability, openness, and fairness.” (OECD, 2017). Equally, ensuring this requires time and resources, and the small size and heavy demands upon steering groups, discussed further below, can mean they struggle³⁷. Efforts to make decision making process more transparent, open, and reliable, can also make them more formal, more cumbersome and potentially less responsive and can increase steering groups’ workloads.

³⁷ It was noted by one interviewee that holding steering groups to the same standards the OECD proposed for governments, with far greater resources at their disposal, would be unfair.

4.40. Some groups in the community were considered particularly challenging to engage, such as:

- vulnerable and/or isolated people, who are not very visible in the community and not known to local groups and organisations (and who may differ in each community);
- some newer or more transient groups, such as those with insecure housing and/or finances, economic migrants and rehoused asylum seekers or refugees, who might face cultural or linguistic barriers and could be more difficult to engage than the more settled populations who tend to have a stronger connection to the area; and
- some groups which are stigmatised and/or whose behaviours are considered antisocial (again, these differ from community to community). For example, in some city areas, tensions with migrants from eastern Europe and, in particular, Roma people were reported, while in some communities certain streets or estates were singled out as challenging.³⁸

Reaching out to under-represented groups.

Steering groups were very aware of the challenge of engaging different groups in the community and have tried different approaches to reach out to under-represented groups.

For example, in Plas Madoc, men reported they were reluctant to get involved in the traditional social activities, such as “crafty brew” (craft making over a cup of tea), We Are Plas Madoc are therefore exploring establishing a group where men can share their DIY skills as part of a community engagement strategy intended to increase the number of volunteers and steering group members.

³⁸ For example, one part of a community was said to be known locally as a “criminal estate”.

Support from BCT

- 4.41. The role of the ILOs is “to support communities to lead the programme in their areas and develop local plans for investment”. They are also responsible for helping “local groups to learn from other community groups and organisations, and to influence and engage organisations who can help them achieve their goals”³⁹.
- 4.42. As the first evaluation report ([BCT, 2019](#)) outlines, support from ILOs was effective in supporting engagement and the formation and functioning of steering groups (including their structure, practice, communications and planning).
- 4.43. The pragmatic approach taken by BCT on what levels of wider community engagement are required before Driving Change Plans can be approved⁴⁰ was ensuring that they are “good enough” and this has been very important in enabling steering groups to move forward. This has continued and, despite the difficulties in securing widespread community engagement outlined above, new Driving Change Plans have been approved.
- 4.44. However, ILOs have been stretched, as they have limited time to work with each community and the level of support they have had to provide, and continue to provide, to communities is often greater than that originally anticipated ([BCT, 2019](#)). This can include support with administration (such as taking minutes of meetings), community consultation and planning, monitoring and evaluation, and managing conflict. While this support is clearly valuable, and demonstrates the breadth of ILO’s skills, these challenges inevitably made it harder for them to also take a more strategic role with the group.

³⁹ [Job Description: Invest Local Officer](#).

⁴⁰ As outlined in section 1, Invest Local stipulates that “a wide range of local people need to have their say in how the money is spent” and this is one of the few conditions attached to funding. [BCT Programme Guidance \(n.d\) Consulting Your Community](#),

- 4.45. There can be a tension between the programme's ethos that "local people will decide how the money is spent and how key decisions are made" and the involvement of ILOs in intervening to address disagreements or conflict between local people. Asking ILOs to choose which local people to "side" with, would place them in an invidious position but can also stop them intervening decisively to help resolve conflict. In response, in three communities, the Wales Restorative Approaches Partnership (WRAP) have been engaged to lead an independent conflict resolution process.
- 4.46. Shared learning and support around communications has been valued but the take up, particularly of shared learning, has been patchy. It is rarely mentioned by interviewees⁴¹ and evidence of the impact upon steering groups' consciousness and capacity has been modest. As one interviewee reflected you "Need time for shared learning" and in part, the low take up of shared learning opportunities appears to reflect the heavy demands upon steering group members. This has meant that many people, particularly those in work (other than those working for steering groups), have found it difficult to make time for shared learning, on top of their other commitments to the programme.

Sustaining steering groups to drive change

- 4.47. The time and energy that a small group of people have committed to steering groups on a voluntary basis is very impressive. Although not all those who founded steering groups have remained, enough people have stayed in each community to provide continuity and sustain groups. Members of the groups are motivated by trying to improve their communities and the continued access to funding has given groups a reason to keep going, even when they face challenges, as it gives them the means to take action.

⁴¹ For example, one interviewee said that BCT had enabled mutual learning between communities which had allowed Invest Local projects to influence each other. They spoke of a visit to another Invest Local project where they had been able to share best practice and influence the other group. and in one group at least one respondent was very complimentary about the site visits and occasional training. They have also held a learning event (the first since the pandemic) involving a local youth organisation. The event seems to have inspired the group and expanded their thinking and they are now contemplating the idea of a youth worker.

In contrast, we can hypothesise that, without access to guaranteed funding, groups might have disbanded. For example, if they were forced to bid competitively for funding from programmes such as the Lottery’s People and Places programme, this would involve more work in preparing applications, less flexibility in how funding could be used and no guarantee that the funding would be granted. This would also limit the ability that Invest Local gives to groups to respond swiftly and flexibly to local needs and opportunities.

- 4.48. Changes in the membership of groups have often been positive as, while the departures of some members have meant that skills, knowledge, experience, and contacts have been lost, new members have brought fresh energy, skills, and perspectives. In some cases, the departure of members has eased conflicts within groups. The size of groups can also be fluid. For example, in five communities the size of the steering group has increased. However, in two communities the membership of groups remains small and in other areas, has either fluctuated or dwindled since 2016. In part this was due to the impact of the pandemic when some people had to step back because they were self-isolating, shielding and/or struggled with the move to meeting online.

A flourishing steering group

In one area, interviewees report that “creativity” has been identified as a way to engage residents, support wellbeing and create a vibrant community. This is reported to be a common theme throughout the group’s work and informed their response to the cost-of-living crisis. Specifically, they have wanted to ensure that their support does not feel like “charity” and have tried to differentiate themselves from the “council, third sector aesthetic” so that people do not feel as though they are receiving “handouts”. How they have branded certain activities and events has been important for them. This has contributed to the recent increase in the number of steering group members (now up to 30 members) which interviewees reported makes the group “more functional” and generally working well.

Long COVID: the legacy of the pandemic

- 4.49. The COVID-19 pandemic sharply increased the pressure and demands upon steering groups. The impact of the pandemic and communities' responses is discussed in detail in an earlier report (BCT, 2021)⁴² which celebrates local responses to ensure people could access food and social contact during a very challenging period. It also highlights the new assets and opportunities created through, for example, the surge in community activism and the forging of new relationships during this period.
- 4.50. The pandemic's legacy continues to shape steering groups, for example:
- the pandemic disrupted communities' Driving Change Plans, or the development of new plans, which were generally put on hold for several years;
 - the demands of the pandemic response almost "broke" some groups, who lost, or came very close to losing, steering group members, paid staff and/or volunteers⁴³ who were exhausted and burnt out;
 - however, the pandemic was also the making or remaking of some groups, as they established new networks and links and a new much higher profile in the community;
 - the pandemic may have strengthened some community assets, such as social capital but also depleted other assets, such as human capital (where, for example people's mental or physical health suffered); and,
 - as section 5 outlines, by shining a spotlight on old and newly emergent local challenges and inequalities, the pandemic highlighted new priorities for steering groups.

⁴² "The Impact of Invest Local upon Communities' Resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic".

⁴³ For example, in Clase the community had been reluctant to re-engage and many previous volunteers did not come back, partly because of fears of catching COVID.

4.51. The cost-of-living crisis that followed soon after the pandemic means that fears of burn out remain in several communities. As a result of this, one group have arranged outside supervision for paid staff and volunteers, while in another community it was reported that questions have been raised about who is looking after the volunteers who are supporting people most affected by the crises. The combination of “volunteer fatigue”, given the ongoing demands and the pressures the current crisis has put upon volunteers’ time and energy (using up their mental bandwidth) has often made it difficult to retain and/or recruit volunteers. This in turn constrains groups’ capacity to deliver events themselves, creating a vicious cycle where events are part of a group’s strategy to engage with the wider community.

The demands upon steering group members

- 4.52. The pandemic has not been the only reason why some people have stepped back. It also appears to reflect the factors outlined in figure 4.3. such as:
- the lack of positive feedback steering group members are given, for example, for the time it takes for investments to deliver and the lack of support or appreciation from much of the wider community. Moreover, as outlined above, a small number of vocal people criticising the group can leave members feeling uncomfortable, disillusioned, or demotivated. This in turn impacts on their willingness and enthusiasm to be involved in the future;
 - the conflict between members of the group, which has not only increased the emotional demands upon members as they have struggled to cope with this but which, in six communities, became so severe that decision making effectively ground to a halt for a period of time, and in some cases, threatened the survival of the group;
 - the frustration with the pace for change, which can be slow and the formality of meetings, which is not to everyone’s taste; and
 - the demands the programme places upon volunteers in terms of their time, the complexity of the decisions they have to take and the burden of responsibility they feel can sap their energy.

As a result, some people inevitably step back, and the small size of groups increases the demand upon individual members and inherent fragility of groups.

The burden of leadership

The struggle to engage the wider community can increase the pressure on steering group members. Groups rightly feel a sense of responsibility for using the money effectively but, in the absence of wider community support or direction, they can be fearful of making and tackling decisions and spending money.

For example, one steering group was made up of a core group of just eight volunteers. The group felt that the community expected “a lot” from them and that more residents needed to step forward to help. They felt that there were several complaints about issues in the community, but rarely would people step forward and volunteer. This had led members of the group to feel that the community expect too much of them, creating a sense of responsibility and being overburdened by too few people being willing to help.

- 4.53. Although difficulties have tended to sap groups’ confidence, as the example below illustrates, successful investments have helped strengthen groups’ collective confidence; for example, a steering group was described by one of the evaluation team as “A group that makes decisions, tries different kinds of interventions, and stops them if they’re not working.”

Growing confidence

In one community an interviewee spoke about how the success of the group has led to the growing confidence and commitment of the steering group.

This, they argued, made the group something of a pace setter within Invest Local and well able to invest funds effectively. As one member of the steering group put it: “Can we have another million pounds please?! We could spend it over and over. I know that in some other Invest Local areas they have hardly spent anything. We will spend it. We are not scared to spend it. It took a while, but we committed. We have learned so much about ourselves and about other people. That is valuable and I hope people appreciate that. People have worked so hard.”

The future of steering groups: floundering, fragile or thriving?

- 4.54. Although six groups are thriving, success is not a guarantee that a steering group will continue. One of these have achieved a huge amount but remains fragile due to their reliance upon a small number of volunteers and another has struggled due to a recent conflict, but appeared to be recovering at the time of writing. A further three steering groups are making good or steady progress but have been held back by conflict and/or by limited capacity in the absence of paid workers⁴⁴.
- 4.55. The remaining four groups are currently somewhat stalled or stuck as a result of a combination of different factors such as:
- conflict within the group;
 - the absence of paid staff, who could support the steering group and provide additional capacity, to for example, engage the wider community and/or partners, and deliver activities;
 - difficulties and delays linked to their work with partners, including weakness; and/or
 - limited engagement with the wider community, a lack of strategic vision, and a lack of confidence and experience within the group.

⁴⁴However, in one of the communities, the group have now agreed to employ a community development worker and are now working out the details of what they want the worker to do, which is an encouraging sign.

5. Communities' response to Invest Local's offer: actions supported by the programme.

5.1. This section considers the reasons why steering groups choose to act to:

- ensure there were places to go, such as community buildings, things to do, such as social and leisure activities, and people to talk to, including both friends and also professional sources of advice and support;
- address shocks like the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis; and
- strengthen communication and engagement in communities.

Opportunities for action, investment and/or influence

5.2. Steering groups' choices were not made in a vacuum and, as section 3 outlines, the character and characteristics of each community differs so that each community presents its steering group with a different set of assets, opportunities, and challenges. The priorities that emerged from community consultation were generally broad and, like "motherhood and apple pie", are easy to support but generally did not give steering groups specific direction on what to do or how to do it⁴⁵.

5.3. Invest Local gives communities (and by extension steering groups) freedom over how to use the funding and what action to take⁴⁶. However, in practice, Invest Local communities and steering groups have tended to focus upon ensuring there is somewhere for people to go, something to do and someone to talk to in each community⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ There were a small number of exceptions to this; for example, in Clase the Play Park appears to have had a symbolic role as well as a practical function. It was something the community had been proud of that was slowly falling into disrepair. There was therefore a strong and widely held view, which was made clear by the consultation, that many people in the community wanted to restore the park to the position it had once held as a flagship facility for the community, that they could be proud of once more and that would provide facilities for children and young people and attract people from surrounding communities.

⁴⁶ The main constraint is that the funding must not be used for political or illegal purposes.

⁴⁷ This phrase is associated with youth work, and while there are similarities to a youth work approach, there are also important differences. For example, investing in places to go, such as community spaces, was generally to enable others (i.e. local groups and organisations) to use the space, rather than enabling the funding organisation (in this case the Invest Local steering group) to use the building itself, for its own purposes (i.e. delivering youth work).

This in turn meant that the opportunities for action presented to each community depended in particular upon the range and strength of (i) local groups and organisations and (ii) local community buildings and spaces that the steering group could work with and/or invest in. This meant that the nature of the community was important.

For example, housing developments like Trowbridge and St Mellon's or Clase have very different physical possibilities to town centres like Glyn, Pill, or Victorian villages like Ynysowen and Caerau, with the nature of community buildings and green space offering different opportunities and constraints.

Some areas, such as Caerau, have focused upon sustaining existing places and spaces (as there is a lot there already), while others, such as Cefn Golau, have focused upon creating new community spaces (because there are felt to be too few community spaces). This is considered vital because, as one interviewee observed, without suitable community spaces, "Nothing can happen". Moreover, it is felt that buildings will leave a physical legacy once the money is exhausted. However, in some communities such as Colwyn Bay (Glyn) the difficulty of finding a suitable building to invest in is hindering the group's ability to realise its goals of establishing a community hub.

**Why do places and spaces to go, things to do
and/or people to talk to matter?**

Access to community groups, organisations, places and spaces can be particularly important in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, because people tend to be less mobile with more limited access to private transport and often public transport, and also tend to have greater difficulty paying for travel than more affluent communities ([Lucas et al., 2019](#)).

As one interviewee observed, being in an isolated location with few transport links means people are “stuck there”, which puts pressure on the steering group to make things happen locally. Another described the importance of local provision for families who might rarely leave the estate. Similarly, local access for people to talk to, to fulfil social needs and/or access information, advice and guidance or support, can be particularly important for people in more disadvantaged communities.

Moreover, as one interviewee put it, it was vital to have community spaces that help “connect” people.⁴⁸ In response, a number of communities have linked this to efforts to promote intergenerational work and/or promote community cohesion and change the way people think about community. The cost-of-living crisis has also increased the importance of warm and welcoming places, where people can meet.

The priority attached to community building and groups also reflects the impacts of austerity and consequent cuts in public funding for provision of, and/or support for, community groups, organisations, places, and spaces. This has meant communities have seen local groups and services cut back, which has increased the need for local investment to fill or repair the gaps.

In areas where there was more community activity at the start of the programme, the challenge was often about sustaining and improving existing community buildings and groups. Steering groups could support community groups directly through funding, and/or indirectly by investing in the community buildings they relied upon. However, in areas with less community activity at the start of the programme, steering groups face the dual challenge of not only establishing new community buildings, but also filling new community buildings with activity. As one interviewee put it, the potential created by a new space, was both “exciting and daunting.”

⁴⁸ This is an example of “social’ infrastructure” which has been defined as “the crucial organisations, places and spaces that enable communities to create social connections – to form and sustain relationships that help them to thrive.” ([The British Academy, 2023](#))

- 5.4. The identification of these opportunities, particularly in the early stages of the programme, was shaped in part by membership of the steering group. As outlined above, a number of members represented local groups, organisations and/or community spaces looking for funding. As outlined in the first evaluation report, in the early years of the programme the urgency to invest to help save valued local groups and organisations provided a real impetus for groups to move forward and get their first Driving Change Plans approved.
- 5.5. In addition:
- investing in established local groups and organisations helped ensure delivery and reduced the demands upon steering groups. Therefore, it could also provide opportunities for “quick wins”, as partners offered the capacity to deliver that steering groups themselves often lacked⁴⁹; and
 - investing in physical assets also offered the opportunity to make investments more visible and was often felt by steering group to be a “long term”⁵⁰ investment, that would outlast the programme.
- 5.6. However, as outlined in section 4, investing in existing groups could also create conflict within steering groups and may also have meant that the flexibility that Invest Local funding offered was arguably not being fully utilised, as it was used to support existing organisations (by funding improvements to buildings and/or activities), rather than new initiatives; examples of this are provide in section 7. Equally, this approach is in line with the asset based development ethos of Invest Local, as investing in existing buildings and groups can be more resource efficient and less controversial than investing in or establishing something new.

⁴⁹ As section 4 outlines, synergistic partnerships have developed in several areas between the steering group and a local group or groups. In most cases this is quite deliberate planning

⁵⁰ The group have funded solar panels for Grace Church which is an important community focal point. These should help make the building more sustainable and help sustain important local groups over the long-term.

- 5.7. As the profile of the programme has grown, more proposals for activities and/or investments from those representing local groups, organisations and/or community spaces, who were not members of steering groups, have been put forward to steering groups. Small grant schemes have supported this and, as section 6 outlines, there is some evidence that this has also supported the development of new groups.
- 5.8. Investing in established local groups and organisations was not the only path that steering groups could follow. Two groups had few opportunities to make large investments in local organisations, and instead identified their own opportunities and made bold investments in community assets (a play group and MUGA respectively). Maintaining these investments has inevitably increased the demands upon steering groups particularly where, as in the case of Clase, they do not have paid workers to augment the group’s capacity.

Strategic and responsive approaches

As section 4 outlines, some areas have focused upon strengthening community groups and organisations and in doing so may have a clear strategy to strengthen community capacity – but are delivering this through a more responsive approach, that is shaped by the opportunities presented to the group. Others have a similar aim (i.e. to strengthen community capacity) but could be argued to have taken a more strategic approach focused upon:

- a smaller number of strategic investments in an aspirant anchor organisation, such as WAPM in Plas Madoc or Hope St Mellons in Trowbridge and St Mellons; or
- in a symbolic “flagship” physical asset, such as Clase Park or Cefn Golau’s MUGAs.

There are potential benefits and also risks and dangers to each approach (and some steering groups exhibit elements of each approach). For example, flagship investments can become a symbol of change but can also become tarnished over time; for example, following vandalism of Clase Park, a member of the evaluation team likened it to a new phone that, after being dropped, still works but has a cracked screen and is no longer as shiny and new as it once was. In contrast, funding lots of smaller groups and activities may be easier and less risky (as it puts fewer eggs in the same proverbial basket). However, it may also increase the risks that activity is disjointed or uncoordinated. Therefore, as outlined in section 4, while not wanting to control local groups, steering groups are keen to keep in contact with, and to continue working with, local groups after they receive an investment.

Responding to shocks: impact of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis

- 5.9. The second main area of action has been steering groups' responses to shocks, most notably the pandemic and, more recently, the cost-of-living crisis. These have exacerbated long term trends (discussed in section 3) and put concerns about mental health and wellbeing firmly on steering groups' agendas. This, coupled with the encouragement and support from BCT, which released additional funding⁵¹ in support, meant that the priority steering groups gave to tackling issues like poverty, social exclusion and isolation increased in all 13 areas. The crises helped shine a spotlight on issues that often predated the crisis, and were often accentuated by it; for example, as one interviewee summed it up: "... The mindset [of the steering group] changed when we had this cost-of-living crisis. You could see people were just shocked at the deprivation and poverty in our community. A lot of people had no idea we've got kids who have not got beds or curtains. And it sort of changed their attitude."

⁵¹ £10,000 was made available to each community.

Responding to the cost-of-living crisis

Steering groups responses to the cost-of-living crisis have included:

- publicising, funding and/or supporting warm places;
- continuing, extending or establishing initiatives to provide access to free or subsidised food, such as food pantries and food banks;
- providing access to hardship funds; and
- publishing and supporting access to information, advice, and guidance services.

For example, in one area, one interviewee described how the youth club was now providing meals for young people as a matter of course, at a cost of around £50 per night; they said: “... We are providing ... meals for young people because we know when they get home, that might not happen, or the kind of sustenance they need might not be there”.

The Community Development Worker is also working with the local school and the youth club to deliver support through the school. They provided Winter Warner Packs (hot water bottles, gloves, and flasks) via the school in 2022-23. An interviewee said: “That’s something three years ago we would never have needed to do. There might have been the odd person in need of help but not on the scale we are seeing this year”.

This illustrates the ways in which while steering group members were generally aware of poverty and deprivation in their communities and the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis may have accentuated them, the crises have also shone a spotlight on these issues and raised their profile in communities and steering groups.

These more targeted initiatives developed to tackle this, have complemented the wider work focused upon ensuring people can access welcoming and warm places and groups, and can help them find companionship, and when they need it, information, and advice.

5.10. Nevertheless, as section 7 outlines, the targeted spending on responses to shocks remains far smaller than that devoted to community buildings and groups. In part this is because, while it may be possible to ameliorate the effects of poverty by, for example, providing free or subsidised food, it is much more difficult to address the root causes of poverty. However, it was also because:

- during the pandemic, additional funding to support emergency support was provided by a range of sources, and taken up by many local groups and organisations; and
- the emergency support that community groups can provide, is inherently cheaper than capital investments.

5.11. Moreover, even if not specifically targeted at the poorest and most socially excluded, ensuring there are places to go, things to do and people to talk to can also help ameliorate the impacts of poverty and social exclusion. As one interviewee put it, having access to free or inexpensive opportunities on your doorstep helped make “life more affordable” and “worth living”, helping people cope with the challenges they faced in their lives.

Community communication and engagement

5.12. The third main area of action has been community communication and engagement. This aims to build awareness of, trust in, and support for the programme and secure wider engagement, which it is hoped will strengthen the programme and reduce the pressure upon steering groups and has been strongly encouraged by ILOs.

As outlined in section 3, the legacy of, for example, previous community development programmes and initiatives that were sometimes felt to have failed to deliver, and the succession of storms and crisis that have battered communities, fostering optimism that positive change is possible, and building trust that it will happen, is taking a long time.

- 5.13. Nevertheless, as section 7 outlines, the spending specifically targeted at communication and engagement, remains far smaller than that devoted to ensuring that there are places to go, things to do and people to talk to.

In very large part this is because communication and engagement have tended to be much less expensive than capital investments. It is hoped that ensuring that there are places to go, things to do and people to talk to will demonstrate to the community that Invest Local is working and encourage others to engage with the programme and the steering group.

What did groups struggle with or choose not to act upon?

- 5.14. Although, as outlined in section 4, community consultations generally did not give steering groups a specific direction to act in a particular way or address a particular area, and there were a small number of issues raised through consultation that have proved too difficult to take forward.

This was sometimes linked to the steering group's collective capacity and /or their appetite for risk (discussed in section 4). However, even for the strongest and most adventurous steering groups there have been issues that have proved too difficult to address, for example, attempts:

- to address unemployment foundered in one area due to difficulties in identifying how the programme could add value to local authority employment support services; and
- attempts to develop community transport schemes in several areas have, as the boxed text illustrates, struggled.

- 5.15. Therefore, not everything that was identified as a priority by communities or steering groups could be easily addressed by Invest Local.

The community transport challenge

Several areas identified addressing community transport as a priority or potential area for action. However, it has proved difficult for Invest Local groups to tackle, with for example, local community transport groups being difficult to engage with (largely due to their lack of volunteers).

As one group described, their transport scheme was a disappointment as it has been a “rocky road” and was felt to have been their only project that has been “struggling”. They reported that the service needs to be provided seven days a week, which has been difficult to sustain using paid staff and volunteers. However, it is hoped that the employment of new drivers and a coordinator will help address this.

6. What difference is Invest Local making to community engagement, capacity and influence?

- 6.1. The programme’s Theory of Change (see figure 1.1) identifies the intended outcomes of the programme. This section outlines the evaluation’s assessment of the difference Invest Local is making to community engagement, capacity and influence

The formation and continuation of steering groups

- 6.2. As outlined in section 4, establishing and sustaining a steering group in each community has been an important achievement. It has strengthened steering group members’ skills (increasing community capacity) and, as outlined in section 5, the programme has enabled and encouraged new community action through the offer of long term and very flexible funding, support and shared learning. Nevertheless, as outlined in section 4, a number of groups remain stuck or fragile.

- 6.3. The programme's long term (10 year) commitment has proved vitally important, as it allows for the likelihood that groups will at times stutter or struggle and that it will take time to build trust in, and engagement with, a new programme and group.

Wider community engagement and capacity

- 6.4. The strength of steering groups is only one narrow measure of community capacity, and it is not appropriate to measure the impact of Invest Local in fostering community action by the numbers of people actively involved in local steering groups.
- 6.5. Looking beyond steering groups, Invest Local has enabled community action by providing relatively easy and swift access to funding. This has enabled community activists, in the sense of people who lead or contribute to action locally to sustain or develop local groups.

As one interviewee put it, "Lots of people [in the community] have vision and ideas" the question of us is "How do we help them?" The example of Smyrna in Ynysowen provides a good example of how Invest Local can support local people with great ideas and talent and connections (human and social capital) but who do not have access to the financial capital needed to realise their vision.

Supporting local community action: Smyrna in Ynysowen

Smyrna is a former chapel but put to one side any preconceptions of a large, dilapidated, rambling building with big unusable spaces – Smyrna is the opposite. It is well-maintained, bright, and full of light, with just one medium-sized room which is in excellent decorative condition, together with a kitchen.

Invest Local helped Taff Rocks secure a three-year lease on Smyrna through a Community Asset Transfer from the local authority. This was a big step for Smyrna's trustees, who are artists and lacked significant business experience, and were described as "learning as they go along". The short-term lease has made it difficult to secure funding, which is why Invest Local funding for 3 years for running costs, together with some funding and support (such as rates relief and a peppercorn rent) from the local authority was essential. The local authority is now looking at placing solar panels on the roof to reduce energy costs in the future.

The space is the base for Taff Rocks, which runs its rock painting activities from here and the room is available for hire. Current uses have been for birthday parties, gender reveal parties, parenting classes run by the local authority, a contact centre for parents who need supervised contact with their children and Invest Local steering group meetings.

There is currently about 18 months left on the lease, and the local authority has suggested there will be an opportunity to negotiate a longer lease in the future – and Smyrna now has 18 months to become sustainable. The evaluation team spoke to one of the founders of Taff Rocks who is one of those passionate, talented people whom you often find at the heart of a successful project, and who is keen to ensure that Smyrna continues as a community space. She explained that the plan is to achieve this from additional grant funding supplemented by room hire.

The next step is to produce several thousand leaflets and distribute them to every household in the community, advertising Smyrna's offer of room hire. The funding for this (£2,000) has been provided by an anonymous donor which is perhaps a sign of the good will that exists towards Smyrna. It is hoped that the leaflet drop will attract additional users and help establish Smyrna. She says she is looking to develop additional classes at Smyrna in particular but is mindful that she needs to avoid duplicating what is available elsewhere in the community and taking away customers from other existing groups. This co-operative approach is likely to help with long-term sustainability by generating further goodwill in the community.

- 6.6. By helping forge new connections between people (e.g. through their involvement in steering groups), Invest Local has also contributed to the establishment of new groups such as the Caerau Men's Shed (see boxed text), although in terms of impact, this is generally much less common than funding and support for an existing group.

Caerau Men's Shed

The Caerau Men's Shed was established in 2017 as a result of discussions between members of Invest Local Caerau (ILC). It has outgrown the original community space it used, and now has over 50 members, mostly aged 40 and over.

Operating out of what were abandoned workshops, it is a place of friendship and activity. Some people go to use the well-equipped workshops, and support the Shed's social enterprises that include, for example, selling planters and benches (largely using recycled and reclaimed wood and materials) and Christmas trees, while others just go for "A natter, cup of a tea and a biscuit", as one interviewee put it.

More significantly, members of the group regularly and openly talk about mental health which is a really interesting development for men of their age and background. Members of the Shed are also proud of what they give back to the community through, for example, donations of Christmas trees to the local primary school and Special Families Maesteg, which supports the families of children with additional needs.

ILC has helped the Men's Shed by, for example, funding tools and equipment to help it get going and expand its social enterprises, but it is only one of many funders alongside private donations, funding from The Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund, the National Lottery Community Fund and smaller grants from the local authority and Tesco.

Although the shed is thriving and has ambitious plans to try to raise the money needed to buy the site, they face challenges, most notably the increase in energy costs, and when visited in 2023 were struggling to work out how they could raise the money needed to replace their van, which had just failed its MOT, and which they depend upon for many of their activities. In response, Invest Local Caerau provided a small grant to help them buy a new van.

- 6.7. Nevertheless, as outlined in section 5, sometimes competition for Invest Local's funds has led to conflict between local groups. Moreover, while access to funding provides the means to act, the social conditions that foster or encourage community leadership to emerge and flourish and the individual psychology of community leaders are major influences in a process that is more complex than the mere availability of funding.

An insight into this was provided by one interviewee, who shared another story about two volunteers who had come to him with the idea of establishing a parent and toddler group in the village. However, when they explained the need for a bank account, a process of governance for the project (that would

protect them as well as ensure transparency about fees collected etc.), he could see their energy and excitement deflate. More positively, as the example of the NXTGEN Youth club illustrates, the model of access to funding plus a community development worker can help local residents realise their vision.

NXTGEN Youth — Together for Colwyn Bay

NEXTGEN Youth has been an important development within Colwyn Bay (Glyn). There is no regular statutory youth service provision from Conwy Council in the area⁵² and the NEXTGEN Youth Club is used by around 80 children and young people aged 10-17 and in any week, they can expect between 20-40 young people, depending on the weather!

The club is an example of the Community Development Officers supporting members within the community to establish something themselves.

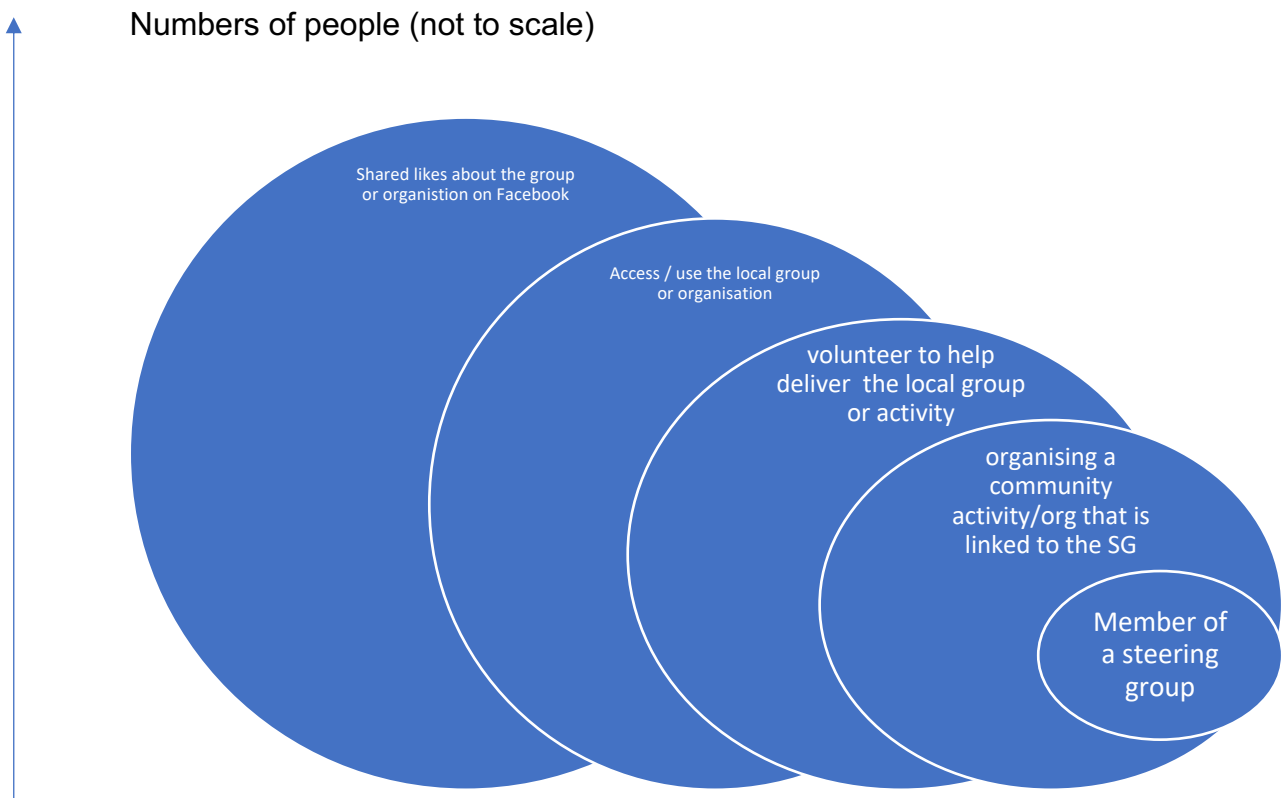
Together for Colwyn Bay provided the start-up cost and financial support with the weekly running of activities (£40 a week). Interviewees reported that this was a good example of asset-based community development in action, where they have managed to play to the community's strengths and potential. There were people within the community who had wanted to start a youth group as this was something they knew about, and their work and commitment was described as "amazing", and with the help of the steering group and community development officers they started the club.

Interviewees reported that the youth club is having a "big impact" on young people in the area, given the numbers of young people they reach and the support they offer to young people who sometimes have quite complex mental health issues, such as social anxiety and coping with experiences of being in care.

⁵² There is some council led youth provision, but what they offer is not weekly and, as one interviewee put it, "It doesn't offer a place for young people to hangout."

6.8. By investing in and supporting local groups and organisations, the programme has also helped create new opportunities for people to volunteer (e.g. in food pantries, a food bank⁵³ and at events), creating opportunities for other people to get involved without having to commit as much time and energy as community leaders do in establishing and running local groups. As figure 6.1 illustrates, while relatively few volunteers will have the motivation, capability, and opportunity (e.g. in term of having the vision, confidence, skills energy and time) to set up and run a community food pantry or bake sale, many more volunteers may happily volunteer a few hours to help out.

Figure 6.1: Examples of differing levels of involvement



⁵³ The programme has not created new food banks, although it took over and expanded one and food banks or food pantries in buildings and/or run by groups supported by Invest Local, may be said to have benefitted indirectly.

- 6.9. Nevertheless, even allowing for different levels of involvement, as section 4 outlines, it has still often been difficult to recruit and retain volunteers; for example, as one interviewee described it, “people don’t volunteer on their estate”. They said that people had volunteered in the past in other roles, but now felt that “we’ve done our share, but now it’s time [for others] to do theirs”. However, other interviewees (in the same community) offered a more nuanced perspective, explaining that the type of volunteering people were prepared to do “Wasn’t what’s needed”. They explained that they could call on a group of volunteers to run an event or open the Community Centre and that residents will turn out for bake sales, bingo, and the clairvoyant show, but they will not get involved in decision making and they were not at all interested in being part of the steering group.
- 6.10. This reluctance is likely to reflect the factors outlined in figure 4.3. such as a lack of confidence in joining a formal meeting settings and taking responsibility for decisions involving hundreds of thousands of pounds. This means that while people may want to volunteer (so the problem is not a lack of ‘community spirit’), they may not want to volunteer by taking part in steering groups. Equally, over time, peoples’ confidence, and appetite to get involved in the programme and steering groups can change, as the examples of groups which have grown over time illustrate.
- 6.11. Nevertheless, the number of people volunteering can be felt to be small in some communities and, as one interviewee observed, often it is “The same people volunteering their time”. This increases the workload of small numbers of people and increases the risk of volunteering fatigue and exhaustion or burn out. This has increased the reliance upon paid workers in a number of areas and, as one interviewee put it when describing all that had been done in the area, this “wouldn’t have happened without a community paid worker”. This can create challenges, and it was, for example, reported that having paid workers could discourage volunteers from doing things and taking responsibility, on a “why do something when someone is paid to do it” basis.

Equally, as the example of Cefn Golau illustrates, paid workers can (and should) complement, rather than simply replace, the work of volunteers.

Cefn Golau – complementing volunteers with a paid worker

In Cefn Golau, volunteers were responsible for restoring and improving the landscaping around the community house. The project was working well and secured funding for tools from Keep Wales Tidy. The project was disrupted by the pandemic and in February 2023 a Growing Coordinator, part funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner, was recruited to work with volunteers, children, and young people to tend and grow plants in the community house garden.

The recruitment of the gardener has provided the steering group with exciting possibilities as well as helping coordinate the efforts of several children and adult gardeners who have enjoyed being involved in this part of the project to date. As a result, this intervention is evolving into a much bigger project, described as either a Community Allotment or Community Growing Space by different interviewees.

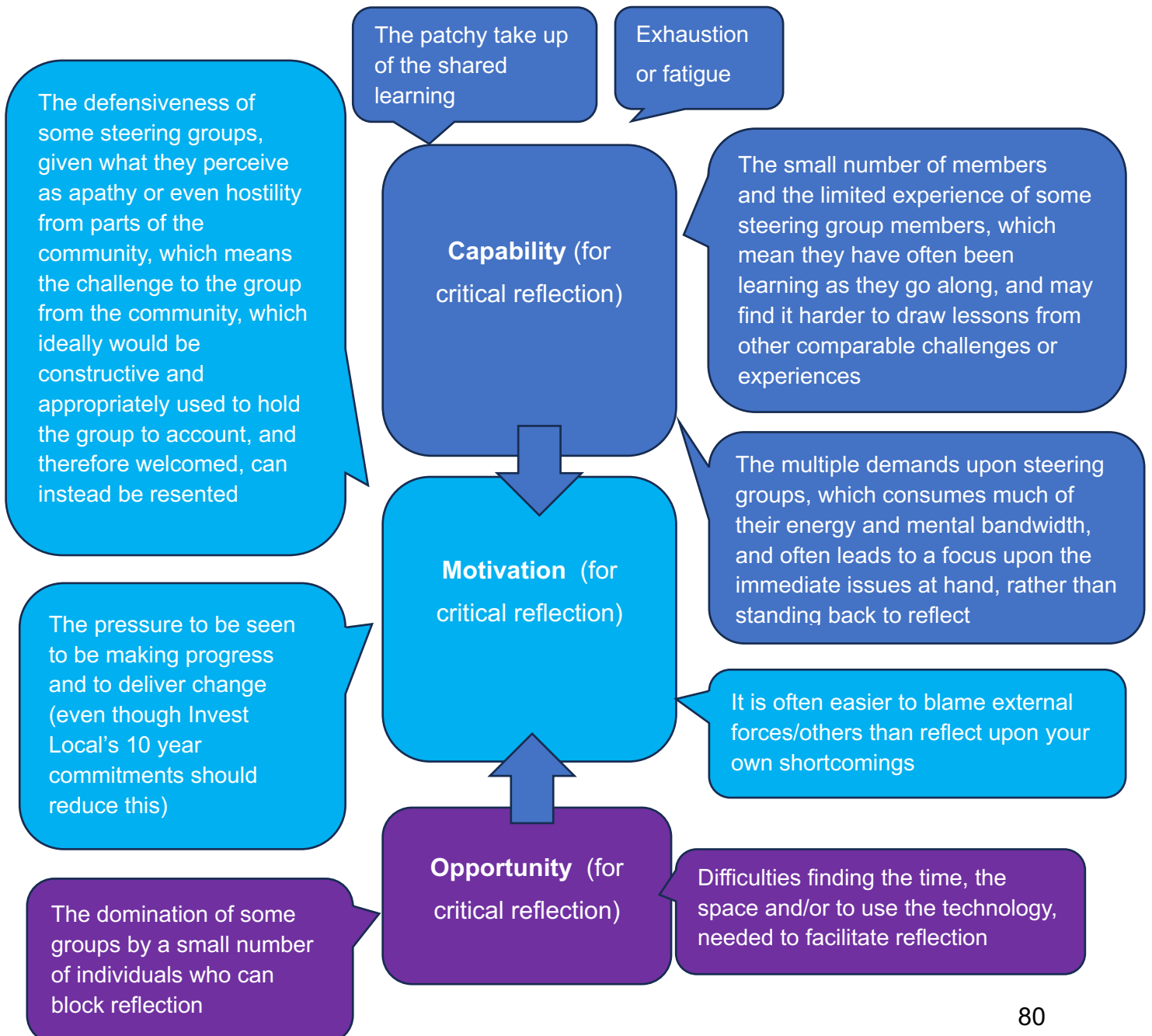
There are plans to create an interdependency between some of the food related projects being run or planned by Cefn Golau Together (e.g., food parcels and a food pantry) and the environmental improvements.

Consultations have also been held and a decision made to fence off a large parcel of land adjacent to the proposed Community Centre where the gardener / engagement officer will create a variety of growing spaces with volunteer support, to meet the interests of those involved.

Consciousness: action and reflection

6.12. As the examples in this and the next section illustrate, Invest Local has helped ensure that steering groups have the capacity to act (given the access to flexible long term funding and support from an ILO). However, the impact upon the consciousness of the group has often been more limited, with arguably much more action than critical reflection in some communities. As section 4 outlines, this is linked to a number of factors including those outlined in figure 6.1 (which uses the COM-B model) ([Mitchie et al., 2011](#)).

Figure 6.1: barriers to critical reflection



Generating resources

- 6.13. Much of the action has been underpinned by the £1m funding made available to communities. This raises questions about what will happen when the money runs out. As the boxed text illustrates, a small number of groups have invested, or are planning to invest, in projects intended to generate financial return.

Commercial Investments and Ventures

Invest Local Caerau (ILC) invested in the Nantyffyllon Community Sports and Social Club (CASSC) which lies just outside of Caerau. The rugby club is benefiting from a wide-ranging development programme with new facilities being built. Invest Local is supporting this by funding an artificial playing surface for the club's indoor training barn. As Caerau's first Driving Change plan identifies:

This will not only benefit people playing rugby when outside pitches are unusable during the winter but will be available for a wide range of other sporting and similar activities and should also be a significant revenue raiser for the club as they hire out the premises to other sports and social clubs. ([ILC, 2016, p.10](#)).

In return for this investment, ILC will receive a share of revenue raised (approximately 10 per cent) over 10 years which could then be reinvested into community projects in Caerau.

Hubberston and Hakin Hands Together are working with the Gelliswick Development Group who developed and submitted a business plan to Pembrokeshire County Council for the community asset transfer of land at Gelliswick. The group propose to develop and operate the land as a Social Enterprise in the form of a Community Benefit Society.

The project is located on a former campsite and adjoining land now in the ownership of Pembrokeshire County Council and the proposal is to re-open a campsite accommodating up to 30 touring caravans, six glamping yurts/tents, six shepherds' huts and four eco-lodges. This would be operated on a commercial basis. The site will also include community amenities, a wellbeing, rural crafts and camping area for the local scouts and school, public toilets and showers, a shop, picnic tables and an amenity building.

A Community Benefit Society⁵⁴ is being established to manage the project and administer the surplus for community benefit. The business plan which has been prepared suggests the campsite should generate substantial surpluses. The aim is to sustain in future years a similar level of funding for the community as that which has been provided by Invest Local since 2016. Although this is a very ambitious target, even if, as seems likely, they fall short, it is hoped that it will still provide an important income stream for the community.

If successful, this project would represent a major achievement likely to lead to significant and sustainable community benefit over the long term. As one interviewee observed, in their view, the prime sustainable benefit will be a well maintained and accessible public green space, which has always been an important community priority. They felt that it will also bring additional local economic activity, such as jobs and spending in local businesses from tourism. In contrast, they expected that grants to local organisations from the surpluses would provide an important legacy but will be relatively small.

⁵⁴ Further information about community benefits societies is available at <https://cwmpas.coop/what-is-a-community-benefit-society/>

- 6.14. 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.

Influencing others

- 6.15. The programme has provided steering groups with influence over others, through its control of funding and by helping establish the steering group's profile and connections, providing a platform for seeking to influence others. This includes (as outlined in section 4) working in partnership with others, such as the local authority, and representing the interests of the community to others, such as the Skyline project and the Urbanists.
- 6.16. However, as section 4 illustrates, relationships with what should be natural partners, such as schools, the local authority and housing associations, can sometimes struggle to get going, or break down, sometimes slowly, when for example, budget cuts make it difficult to justify the time and investment needed to sustain partnerships.
- 6.17. Moreover, it is also reported that sometimes the resources at a steering group's disposal can sometimes reduce a community's influence over external partners. As one interviewee explained, the community "doesn't benefit from local [community] council Christmas tree lights" as "we're expected to find the money ourselves to do this because they say that we have our own money". The interviewee said that "they've challenged this as it is unfair". They feel that this is another example of the community and county borough council disregarding the community which "expects us to look after ourselves". They feel like the steering group "don't have the authority or the resources to do this" and that maintaining what has been considered a "challenging relationship" with the community and the county borough council is a constant concern.

- 6.18. More broadly, a number of interviewees reported doubts about whether local people felt they could influence decisions, either locally or in wider society. They said this applied particularly to people on low income as “.... they feel disconnected from being able to have influence. They feel that people with higher incomes do have influence, but us at the bottom, we just carry on working as we do”.
- 6.19. As one interviewee summed it up, (despite the programme and progress made) the “Council sees areas like this as a problem” and they felt that as a result the area was “neglected” by the local authority. They have examples of actions “promised” by the local authority, but which had not been fulfilled and said they “know that in another [more prosperous] part of the [name of area omitted] they [the local authority] would have done it. Examples were also given of where a local council (including community, city or county council) viewed Invest Local as a “piggy bank” (as an interviewee put it) and directed groups to seek funding from the programme, without engaging with it.
- 6.20. Equally as outlined in section 5, there are also examples where the Invest Local group is working in partnership with the local authority and the local authority is investing money that augments the programme’s investment. An interviewee also observed that because steering groups control their own money, this gives them more negotiating power with public bodies than other programmes would.

Sustainability and sustainable funding

- 6.21. Invest Local has provided a flexible long-term source of funding for communities, which has allowed them the resources to be creative with their ideas. However, the funding is finite and there are concerns about what happens when all the funding is spent.

- 6.22. Looking forward, it is likely that groups will need to compete for funding from funders such as the National Lottery Community Fund, and/or establish social enterprises to sustain activities. Investments in bricks and mortar such as community buildings and play facilities, may have a longer legacy but will still need maintenance to sustain them. In response, steering groups and (if they have them) paid workers have encouraged groups to become more sustainable. However the experience of other programmes suggests this can be difficult, particularly when there is need to fund operational costs of a community space, service or group (see e.g. [WCVA, 2021 Community Foundation Wales, 2020](#)). Indeed, a key message from the Community Foundation Wales’s “big conversation” with the third sector was that their “biggest challenge” related to funding. Too often community groups and organisations struggled to access the core funding (for, for example, energy, pay and buildings) need to survive, and given the lack of long term funding, it was difficult to plan for the future ([Community Foundation Wales, 2020](#)).
- 6.23. In response, one steering group has employed a dedicated funding officer, another has employed a mentor and sustainability expert (paid for separately by BCT) who will help them assess the sustainability of their provision and what can be achieved, and several others have considered this. There are encouraging signs here, as a number of local groups and organisations (linked to the programme) have strengthened their capacity to secure third party funding. For example, a couple of groups have secured six figure lottery grants (separate from Invest Local). Nevertheless, overall, it has often proved difficult to build local groups’ and organisations’ capacity to submit successful funding applications and this type of role can overlap with the support offered by community voluntary councils and by funders, like the National Lottery Community Fund themselves, and BCT works with both of these when looking at supporting fundraising.

- 6.24. It is also unclear whether the increase in community capacity and influence will continue. As outlined in section 4, some groups have forged synergistic partnership with local groups and others plan to establish themselves as groups that will continue after the end of the funding.
- 6.25. The model in which partners deliver on behalf of the steering group, should in principle, mean the partners can continue, even if the partnership (steering group) dissolves, when the funding runs out (or starts to run out). For example, if their capacity has been strengthened (by their involvement with and support from Invest Local), local groups and organisations should be better placed to secure other types of funding to sustain community spaces, places, and activities. Although there are encouraging signs, there is no guarantee of this.⁵⁵ It is less clear if the collective capacity and connectivity fostered by the programme (and the partnership) will continue. There are dangers that when, for example, there is no longer Invest Local funding to draw people to the table, steering group members may struggle to prioritise this work over other demands upon their time and attention.
- 6.26. The sustainability of the model in which the steering group itself delivers, is perhaps more open to question. It raises the question about if, should and how can the steering group continue once the programme ends. Because this model has been adopted where community capacity was weakest, they need to not only establish community spaces, but will also need to ensure that they are used (and continue to be used). Creating a space that is then filled with activity, is likely to be easier in communities with a wide range of existing groups and organisations looking for space (which can also be supported by the programme if needed). However, where there are fewer groups to start with, the steering group potentially faces the dual challenge of both creating and filling new community buildings.

⁵⁵ They will for example, have an established track record and experience. However the skills needed to fundraise are different to those needed to run community buildings and/or groups, and it can sometime be harder to secure funding to continue an existing activity that to it is to secure funding for something new and innovative.

6.27. Therefore, as one interviewee explained, BCT identifies the sustainability of community activity in Invest Local areas as the single biggest priority for the next four years; and the challenge of ensuring that groups have the mental bandwidth to focus upon planning for the future as well as the present, as one of the biggest challenges facing the programme.

7. What difference is Invest Local making to individual people's wellbeing and resilience.

7.1. This section considers Invest Local's impact upon community wellbeing using a theory driven approach focused upon assessing the impact of the groups' different investments

The impact of investing in community buildings

7.2. As figure 7.1 illustrates, investing in community buildings⁵⁶ can help secure somewhere to go, something to do and/or someone to talk to, albeit indirectly, as the investment in a building enables its use by groups and organisations. As the example of Hubberston and Hakin 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 Places⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The investments generally aimed to reduce running costs by, for example, improving energy efficiency (and environmental sustainability) and/or improving facilities (kitchens, toilets) making buildings more accessible, more usable and/or more attractive to users. For example the Interim report identifies, 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, who 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 health.

⁵⁷ The People and Places programme funds "projects where people and communities are working together and using their strengths to make positive impacts on the things that matter to them the most" ([TNLCF, 2023](#)) (and therefore has similarities with Invest Local aims and approach). However, the application process is more complex and much longer than the process most Invest Local steering groups adopt. Steering groups also have the benefit of local knowledge of the area and often of the groups applying for funding. Moreover, despite programmes like People and Places, the key message from the Community Foundation Wales's big conversation with the voluntary sector was that "biggest challenge" related to Funding ([Community Foundation Wales, 2020](#)).

Saving the Hubberston and Hakin community centre

The community with the support from a range of partners, stepped in to manage the community centre after its closure was announced in 2015. BCT supported the volunteers who wanted to take over the community centre with swift flexible funding to do a feasibility study and develop a business plan while Pembroke Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) and Cwmpas helped them set up as a charity. The Invest Local steering group then supported the community centre's revitalization by providing funding for improvements to the community centre (new roof, kitchen, toilets and internal refurbishment) and on measures to improve energy efficiency and reduce running costs⁵⁸. As a result of the work of volunteers and support from partners, the centre is now managed by a local committee, is in good repair, with much lower running costs (making it more financially sustainable). As one interviewee summed it up:

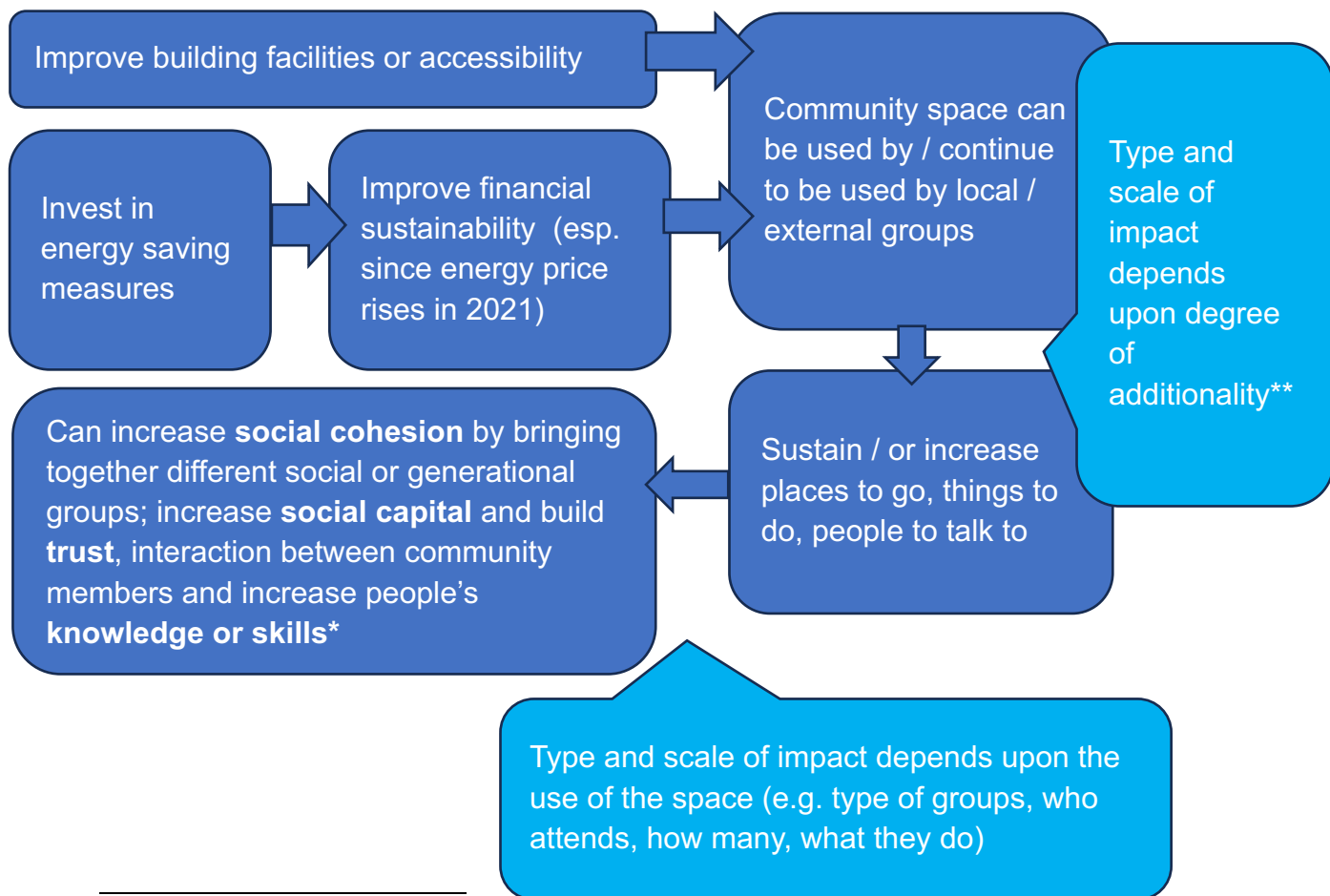
“So, the community centre? Absolutely, you know it was under threat of closure when we first started and now it's fully functioning, it's over-subscribed.... it's running on its own. So that is a real achievement”.

⁵⁸ Invest Local funding supported measures to reduce running costs and benefit the environment that will help make the centre more sustainable and prolong the benefits it delivers for the community. These include: equipping the centre with a modern, more energy efficient boiler, 18 solar panels together with a storage battery. All lights are now energy efficient LED and zoned to switch off when a room is not in use.

The centre is now operating at full capacity and serves as a base for numerous activities to benefit the community. It provides activities to reduce isolation for older people, to benefit pre-school children and their parents⁵⁹, and for older children and young people. It also brings together families from the affluent and less well-off areas of the community.

In response to the cost-of-living crisis, the building has been made freely accessible for the local population for coffee mornings, mobile phone charging and social interaction over the winter months.

Figure 7.1: impact chain of investing in community spaces (buildings)



⁵⁹ The centre runs 10 sessions for pre-school children, the equivalent of five full days a week. It is reported that about 50 children attend, 80 per cent of them from Flying Start areas. These sessions help with child development and enable parents to access support from staff and to support each other.

*Source: [What Works Wellbeing: Places, spaces, people and wellbeing](#)

** i.e. would groups have stopped using the space without the investment?

Would new groups have started using the space without the investment?

Table 7.1: examples of investments in community buildings

Examples of investments	Who benefited? How?
Replacing Plas Madoc Leisure Centre (PMLC) boilers (£100,000) to avert the risk of closure.	The community: this was a valued community asset, as well as the pool and leisure centre facilities, PMLC offered the only large community space in Plas Madoc.
Refurbishing the kitchen and installing new equipment and solar panels in Caerau Development Trust (CDT) (£33,331)	Adults in the community: (CDT) is considered one of the key community organisations in the village. It provides a central venue and café for community activities, provides very low cost venues for community groups, such as the dementia group, and a space which can be used by services, such as the credit union. The investment in solar panels has helped increase the sustainability of the programme, reducing energy costs by 35-40%. A more recent investment in the IT suite is helping tackle digital exclusion and is used by 20-30 people aged 30 plus a week.
Improvements in Hubberston and Hakin community Centre (£70,000+)	<p>The community: this was a valued community asset, which was saved from closure and is now fully booked. (see boxed text on page 75 for details).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many activities at the community centre aim to reduce isolation and loneliness and promote physical exercise, particularly amongst older people (e.g., gentle exercise and music for all, U3A doubles table tennis, walking netball), although some are also appropriate for all ages (e.g., yoga for all, Tai Chi). - Activities for pre-school children and parents are offered by the Little Fishes Parent and Toddler Group

	<p>for two hours each week and the Little Acorns pre-school group is a long-standing tenant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invest Local has funded a youth worker which has enabled a youth centre to be run from the centre. - Adult Learning Pembrokeshire also runs sessions at the Community Centre.
<p>Refurbishment of Pill Millennium Centre to improve the sports facilities, toilets, windows, and lighting (amongst others) (£56,000)</p>	<p>The community: this was a valued community asset, used by a very wide range of local and statutory groups and organisations, providing a base for sports leisure and social activities, after school clubs, health and wellbeing and advice and support services.</p>
<p>Philipstown Community House and Community Centre (£71,361)</p>	<p>The community: the Community House is a hub for various activities and services, providing a space for people to gather, socialise, and engage in social, leisure and learning activities. The availability of the Community House has allowed for essential services like a weekly credit union and Citizen’s Advice service to continue operating and a monthly food bank, providing support to the community members.</p> <p>The Community Centre is a large indoor asset with significant indoor space and serves as a resource for various activities and gatherings that need to be inside. However, activities in neither venue are well advertised.</p>
<p>The Cefn Golau Community House (£28,250)</p>	<p>The community: the investment paid for an IT suite, improvements to the facilities to ensure it is accessible and fit for purpose and a part-time Partnership Co-ordinator to develop and maintain agency presence and service delivery. Although small, the Community House is used as a meeting and office space for Cefn Golau Together and other organisations (such as landlord and tenant meetings), a space to organise activities such as food parcels, easter egg hunts, celebration days or day</p>

	trips to Porthcawl, the food pantry and a storage space for donations.
The Beacon Centre in Trowbridge and St Mellons (£10,000)	The community: the Beacon Centre was initially built with EU funds by a local church as a community centre. However, it got into financial difficulties, and was reported to be perceived as a church rather than community building and therefore "not for us". The building is considered a vitally important community space, as the housing association community building was knocked down and replaced with a smaller, less usable building. While the local authority Hub, was reported to be not felt to be a true community building, in the sense of one 'owned' by and for the community, that is a community space that where people go to socialise and connect. The small initial grant paid for repairs to the roof. Management of the centre has now been taken over by Hope St Mellons and additional funds, have supported steps to make the building more attractive and welcoming. There are ambitious plans to (with the support of Invest Local) further develop and open up the building, and ensure it is felt to be a true 'community' building.
Penywaun Community Centre (£80,000)	Penywaun has a small number of community organisations and most of the community activity happens through the Community Centre. The centre, which was in a very poor state of repair, hosts community activities such as a playgroup, bingo, and older persons coffee mornings and surgeries and sessions for service providers such as employment support services, Trivallis (the local housing association) and the police. Following a survey of the building (funded by Invest Local) the investment of £80,000 covered the costs of general refurbishment works including kitchen, toilets, hall, windows, doors, and improved heating system.

The impact of investing in community groups and organisations

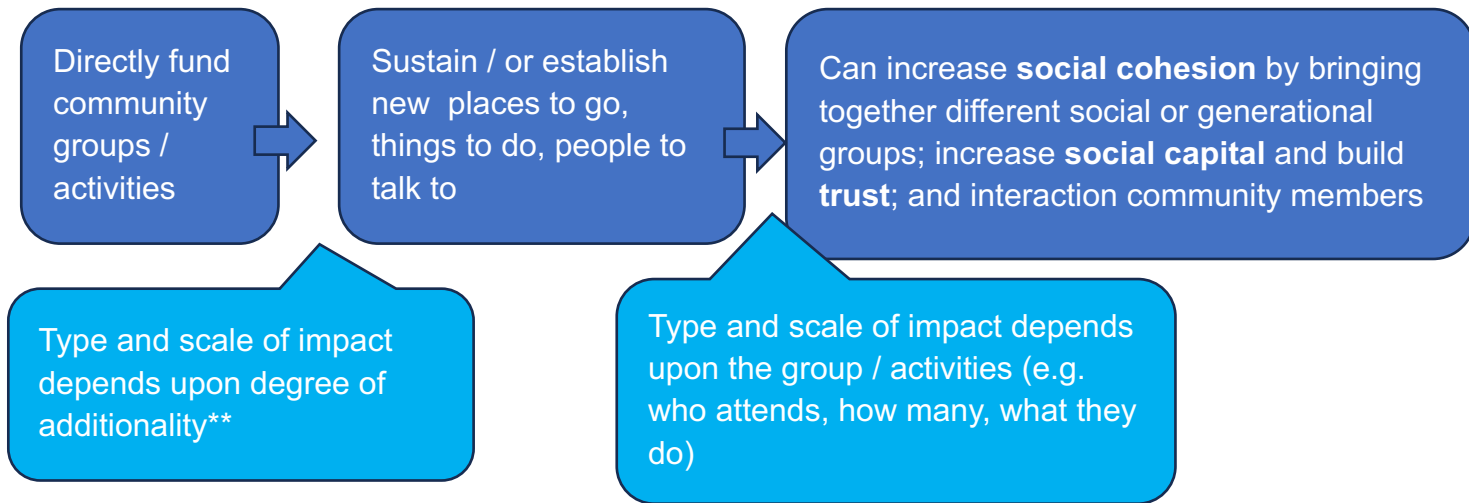
- 7.3. As the example of Together for Colwyn Bay's Repair Café and figure 7.2 illustrate, investing directly in community groups (rather than indirectly in the space they use) it vital in ensure that there are social, leisure, arts and crafts and sports and play activities on people's doorstep, and, in some cases, also access to support that goes beyond that offered by friends and companions (such as advice and support from a credit union or counselling service).

Together for Colwyn Bay's Repair Café

Repair Cafés are free meeting places and encourage repairing things together. The café meets on the fourth Sunday of every month. It's an ongoing learning process whereby visitors bring their broken items from home and together with the specialists they try to repair them in the Repair Café. Although people can bring things to repair, they can also simply enjoy a cup of tea or coffee and potentially help with another person's repair job.

The repairers in the Colwyn Bay café are local residents with expertise, including technical and computer support, bike fixing, general electrical repairs and sewing. One of the repairers reported that they had been very lonely before volunteering as a repairer. She had spoken to a friend who had suggested that she attend, and she has been repairing ever since. In terms of impact, this had helped her combat increasing loneliness that she had been feeling since the COVID-19 lockdowns and living far away from family. One of the attendees who had moved to the area during the pandemic also felt the same. Both the Repair Café and the Toastie Club were a way for him to meet new people after his wife died during the pandemic. He said that he attended the Repair Café even when he did not have anything to repair. There was a sense that the café was used for several reasons; to socialise, to share skills, to get to know the area, to meet friends as well as repairing their stuff. On the afternoon a member of the evaluation team visited, the Café was well attended, with about 25 visitors from different generations.

Figure 7.2: impact chain of investing in community groups / activities



*Source: [What Works Wellbeing: Places, spaces, people and wellbeing](#)

** i.e. would groups have stopped without the investment? Would new groups have started without the investment?

The value of someone to talk to

As section 3 outlines, meaningful social contact and not experiencing loneliness or social isolation⁶⁰ is a key driver of people’s wellbeing. As well as meeting psychological needs, having someone (or a number of people) to talk to creates social capital and, for example, access to information, support and resources. As a community development worker in Pill described, the “stay and play provision for those with young children” was not only a place for fun, it also provided people in the community with “a space where they feel safe to talk and reach out”. Importantly, as she explained, this “can bring to light the need for help that could otherwise go unnoticed” (Adapted from [BCT, 2023](#)).

⁶⁰ A distinction can be drawn between “loneliness”, “a measure of a person’s feelings about the quality of their relationships” and “social isolation” which is a measure of the quantity of relationships ([WCPP, 2020](#)).

Table 7.2: Examples of investments in local groups, organisations, and activities

Examples of investments	Who benefited? How?
<p>Clase coffee mornings and breakfast club (£6,000 for the breakfast club)</p>	<p>These activities aim to bring people together, reduce isolation, instil a sense of community, and encourage access to other services and activities which tackle poverty and cost-of-living issues more directly. They tend to benefit adults and particularly women.</p>
<p>Hubberston and Hakin Youth Club (£10,500 funding a year)</p>	<p>The investment has enabled Milford Youth Matters to return the youth club back to Hubberston and Hakin. It runs at the community centre (also supported by Invest Local) and is visited by up to 70 young people (mostly aged 14-18) a night. An additional £19,600 supported the employment of a Youth Work trainee.</p>
<p>Together for Colwyn NEXTGEN club (£40 a week)</p>	<p>The investment has enabled them to fill a gap in the provision for young people within the community. Around 80 young people aged 10-17 directly benefit. See case study on pages 66-67 for further details.</p>
<p>Three years funding for The Land Play Project in Plas Madoc</p>	<p>The Land provides open access adventure play for children and young people from five years and over and also provides additional support for parents. They have recently employed a play officer who provides advice on play, behaviour issues and general support.</p>
<p>Funding for a new boxing ring for the Caerau Boxing club (£7,337)</p>	<p>The new ring helped safeguard the boxing club, a valued local asset, which is used mainly by young adults in Caerau.</p>
<p>Caerau Men’s Shed</p>	<p>The project supports over 50 mostly older men, bringing together men from different social backgrounds together, and providing friendship, a sense of purpose and wellbeing (see boxed text on page 68 for more details).</p>

<p>Caerau Credit Union (£7,656 in the first year)</p>	<p>The funding for staffing and running costs helped the Credit Union sustain their office in Caerau, start a savings club in Caerau Primary school and provide drop-in clinics in local community organisations. By 2022, it had 522 members in Caerau and 237 juniors borrowing £150-200k per annum. It has increasingly focused on support for those in debt; and they were making 230 “interventions” with 100 people, nearly all of whom are now debt free.</p>
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Phillipstown Warm Arted Arts and Crafts Group

Interviewees in Phillipstown had a highly positive opinion of the art classes⁶¹, which receive financial support from the Invest Local group, Phillipstown Forever. They praised the art classes for their role in helping people who had difficulties or challenges such as those with limited mobility and/or who felt lonely or isolated. They felt the group gave these class participants’ lives some routine and opportunity; for example, one participant, who previously did not have any qualifications, pursued a GCSE in Art.

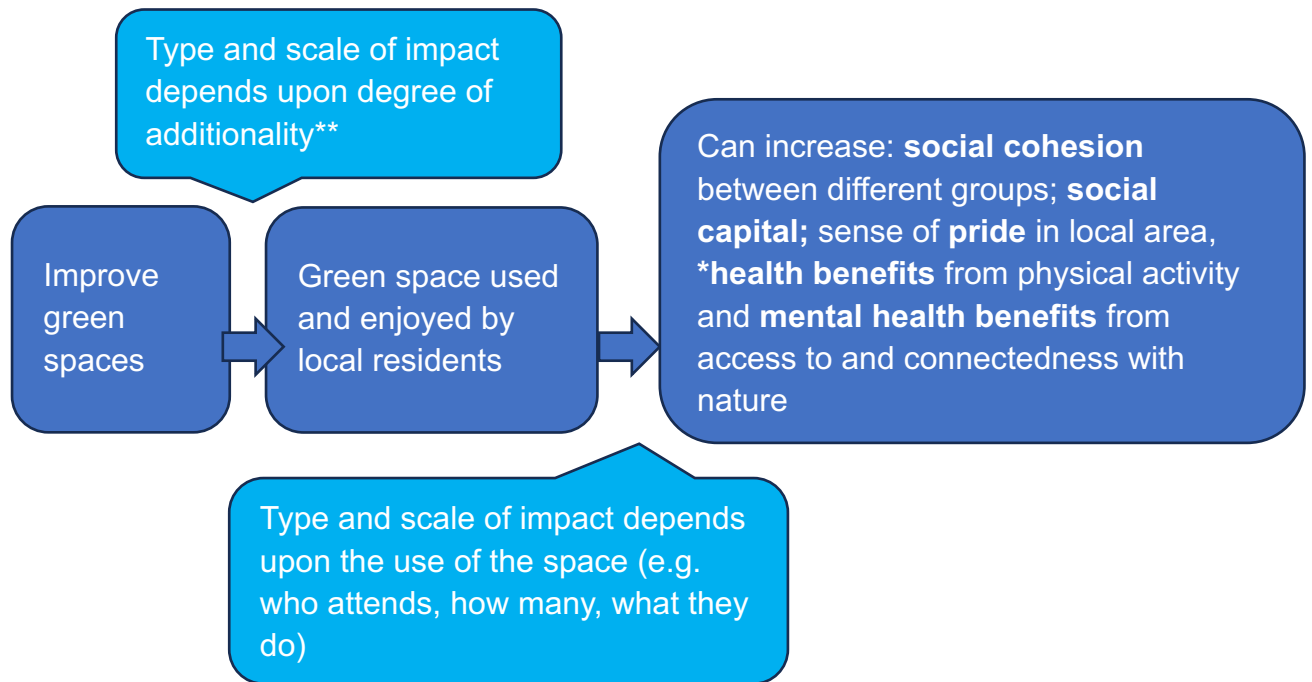
The art group members and coordinator were praised by the interviewees for fostering a supportive and social environment, with participants socialising together and supporting one another outside the class. The interviewees believed that the art classes have made a substantial difference to the wellbeing, health, and the lives of those attending regularly.

The impact of investing in green and outdoor spaces

- 7.4. As figure 7.3 illustrates, investing in green spaces can also help secure somewhere to go and something to do and to enjoy.

⁶¹ This project supports two classes – one class of approximately 10 primary school children who live in Phillipstown and in surrounding communities and an adult class of women and one man of approximately pensionable age and a bit younger from Phillipstown.

Figure 7.3: impact chain of investing in places to go: green spaces



*Source: Mental Health Foundation (2018) [Nature: How connecting with nature benefits our mental health](#)

** i.e. would the space have been used and enjoyed without the investment?

Table 7.3: examples of investments in green and other outdoor community spaces

Examples of investments	Who benefited? How?
Clase Park (c. £300,000)	Clase Park had a reputation for good quality play, even before it was improved, with quite a few park users travelling to it from outside the area. The improvements were intended to be a flagship project that would provide a visible demonstration of progress. Most of the equipment was commissioned and has been installed but there were problems with the contractor. Progress was slow and even now, one side of the centrepiece climbing frame is missing. The park is a very visible

	symbol of change and is well used and liked, but has suffered from vandalism, which has somewhat taken the shine off the project.
MaesNi Play Park (£110,000)	A complex project to deliver, because different organisations owned the land, the play equipment was very old, and a third organisation had responsibility for maintaining the Play Park. This caused frustration for the steering group as it was intended to be a very visible demonstration of progress to help build trust in the early stages of the programme. However, it was successfully completed in Summer 2020 and is well-used and well-liked by local children.
Investment in allotments in Pill (£46,000)	Having redeveloped the allotment site, Pill Unity has worked with local residents and groups from Probation, the local Flying Start Nursery, youth groups, and the Newport Yemeni Community association. Pill Primary school has committed to integrating the Pill Unity Garden space into their school learning and have each year group accessing the site on a regular basis. As well as the wellbeing benefits that flow from physical activity in green spaces it is creating opportunities for social interaction and gaining skills and knowledge.
Cefn Golau multi use games area (MUGA) (£54,620)	The site is used to deliver the Sport and Snacks Project aimed at children 8 – 12 with activities such as skateboarding, golf and other activities promoting healthy living and youth provision.
Investment in Afon Gwreiddiau’s Community Growing Initiative in Ynysowen (£53,300)	Unused and unloved land was reclaimed and structures such as a polytunnel and planters installed to create a community garden. This was intended to be a flagship project and a number of events were held over the first couple of years. However, the project stuttered, some of the money was returned, and when

	visited in 2023, the allotments were abandoned, and the structures have fallen into disrepair.
MaesNi Community Hive Garden	This is a thriving community green space and the main home site of MaesNi environmental group. It supplies homegrown produce for the local community Hive café which provides free nutritious meals for residents of the estate and a thriving hub for residents to use as a positive social space.
Meadowlane Primary School play and nature equipment £3000	The project aims to provide high quality outdoor learning resources and experiences for primary school children, including the opportunity to grow vegetables and learn how to use different vegetables to make healthy meals, such as soup.
Philipstown skate park (£40,000, + £40,000 match funding from Caerphilly CBC)	The project is aimed at younger people within the community. Interviewees expressed mixed views about its impact. Initially, there was some negative feedback from the community, such as the time it had taken to establish the park, but it eventually turned into what many felt was a great asset for the young people in the village. It is reported by some interviewees to be well-used by children and young people, indicating its popularity and success in providing an active and social space. One young person questioned during the site visit described the park as “a beast!” It was also reported that a number of skating orientated activities had been organised during the summer of 2023 and had been well attended. However, another interviewee reported that they did not see a lot of activity on the site, which suggests that there may be some room for improvement or further engagement with the community to fully realise its potential.

The impact of investing in things to do

- 7.5. As figure 7.4 illustrates, investing in things to do such as local events, can provide something for local people to do and to enjoy. As the example of Plas Madoc illustrates, the range of activities can be wide, and can help reach different groups in the community

Community Connections in Plas Madoc

Community events were started in 2016 and are part of WAPM's participation strategy. They are seen by the group as a way of "getting rid of stigma" surrounding Plas Madoc as a community, "increasing pride in the community" and "building relationships" with the wider community. This was based on the perception that Plas Madoc has traditionally been viewed by those living in the surrounding area as "rough" and "dangerous". However, members of the group expressed that although they were "poor in money but were rich "because we have a wealth of opportunities".

The most recent events arranged after the pandemic were done to "bring the community together again" and to try and "get some sort of normality back" and have included:

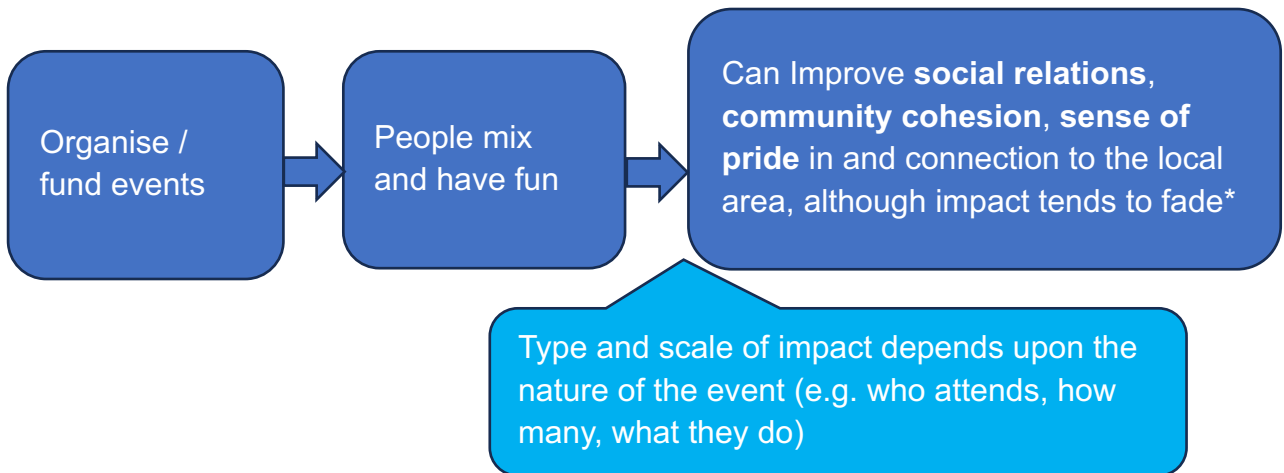
- Traditional Summer Fayre in August 2022
- Plastonbury Festival
- Bingo
- Community Rounders
- Community litter picks

In addition:

- Events such as Bingo and community rounders have been organised to aim to increase intergenerational participation which the group feel is important for inclusivity and wider participation.

- Thank Me it's Friday: a wellbeing and confidence building group who meet on a Friday evening for meditation and self-care before the start of the weekend.
- Family games night – run by volunteers, especially men.
- Crafty Brew - Plas Telford (extra care housing) a health and wellbeing group that supports mental health through crafts and peer support whilst having a cuppa and toast.
- The Plas Madoc Kettle Club run by the AVOW Play Team (The Land), an informal group where parents/grandparents/ carers can meet up and have a chat over a hot drink. People can also access support, advice and have opportunities to attend free training.

Figure 7.4: impact chain of investing in things to do: events and symbols



*Source: [What works wellbeing: Places, spaces, people and wellbeing](#)

Table 7.4: examples of investments in community events, activities and symbols

Examples of investments	Who benefited? How?
Ynysowen Events and Social (YES) (£32,000)	YES was set up as a sub-committee of the Invest Local steering group to plan the location and installation of over 60 sets of LED Christmas lights which were distributed carefully throughout the whole of the community. This was important to promote a sense of inclusion as some parts of the community feel overlooked. The lights proved a great success, and this generated enthusiasm. A key volunteer took the lead and the YES sub-group decided to organise other events. They revived the Aberfan Carnival and ran it successfully in 2022 and 2023, The group has now become the “go to” organisation to organise events in the community. These events are bringing people together across generations and strengthening links between organisations as they take place in various community spaces.
Access fund for the Posh Club, Trowbridge and St Mellons (£1,000)	In total 470 older people attended the Posh Club (although not all were supported by the access fund). The event was considered a great success, offering fun as well as strengthening inter-cultural/ethnic links.
Summer ‘Pony Club’ activities, Trowbridge and St Mellons (£2,500)	The project aims to provide a welcoming and free space for people with mental health difficulties. The funding was used to cover the cost of equipment like shovels, pitch forks, hats and gloves and PPE along with a food and petrol budget. The club was initially open for three weeks but was forced to relocate because the family that owned the site the project used was unhappy with the number of visitors. Since relocating, they have had over 500 visitors from the community and they have teamed up with organisations like Autism Life centres and Orbis care.

<p>Hope St Mellons mural, Trowbridge and St Mellons (£500)</p>	<p>The funding was used for community consultation workshops with an artist and covered the artist’s time developing the very colourful community mural for Hope St Mellon’s pantry. It was reported that the project involved 40 adults and 120 children.</p>
<p>Plastonbury, Plas Madoc</p>	<p>A yearly event which was particularly successful in 2022 in bringing the community together after the pandemic. It’s an event with live music, stalls and rides, that is felt helps change people’s perceptions of Plas Madoc and helps build social cohesion amongst those who live there.</p>
<p>Everyone’s Birthday, Colwyn Bay</p>	<p>A community picnic to celebrate all the birthdays missed during lockdown was initially organised. The whole community who had been isolating during the pandemic and this provided an opportunity for people to come together and socialise safely, as well as increasing the profile of Together for Colwyn Bay. It has now evolved into a yearly event: the Big Picnic in August.</p>
<p>Penywaun Coffee Mornings between the Community Centre and St Winifred’s Church (c. £400)</p>	<p>Coffee mornings, which were intended to help people get together, reduce isolation, and stay warm. However, the numbers of people attending have been very small.</p>

The impact of action to ensure people’s basic needs are met

7.6. Invest Local was intended to be a community development rather than anti-poverty programme. Addressing the root causes of poverty, is the sort of wicked problem that it is difficult for the programme to address.

However:

- unless basic needs for, for example, food, shelter and warmth are met, it is not possible to address higher levels needs (and enable people to experience wellbeing) (Maslow, 1943);

- struggles to meet basic needs can consume people’s “mental bandwidth”⁶², making it more difficult to cope with other challenges (and reducing their resilience) (Shafiri and Mullainathan, 2013); and
- the pandemic and, more recently, the cost-of-living crisis, sharpened the salience of this issue in communities and spurred additional action (this is discussed in section 5 and illustrated by the example of Cefn Golau below)

7.7. The impacts of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis have also translated into a broader concern about people’s mental health and wellbeing.

Action to tackle the cost-of-living crisis in Cefn Golau

The Cefn Golau Together group started a weekly food parcel distribution service providing essential sustenance to the community during the pandemic and continued because of the cost-of-living crisis. The current demand is for 70 parcels every fortnight. They believe they could potentially handle 120 parcels every fortnight if necessary.

The service is currently funded by a grant from the local authority). Because this is not felt to be sustainable in the long term, Cefn Golau Together are now shifting to a food pantry subscription service as a more sustainable solution. In addition, in response to the cost-of-living crisis, the group provided energy efficiency advice and encouraged smart meter use to help people manage costs.

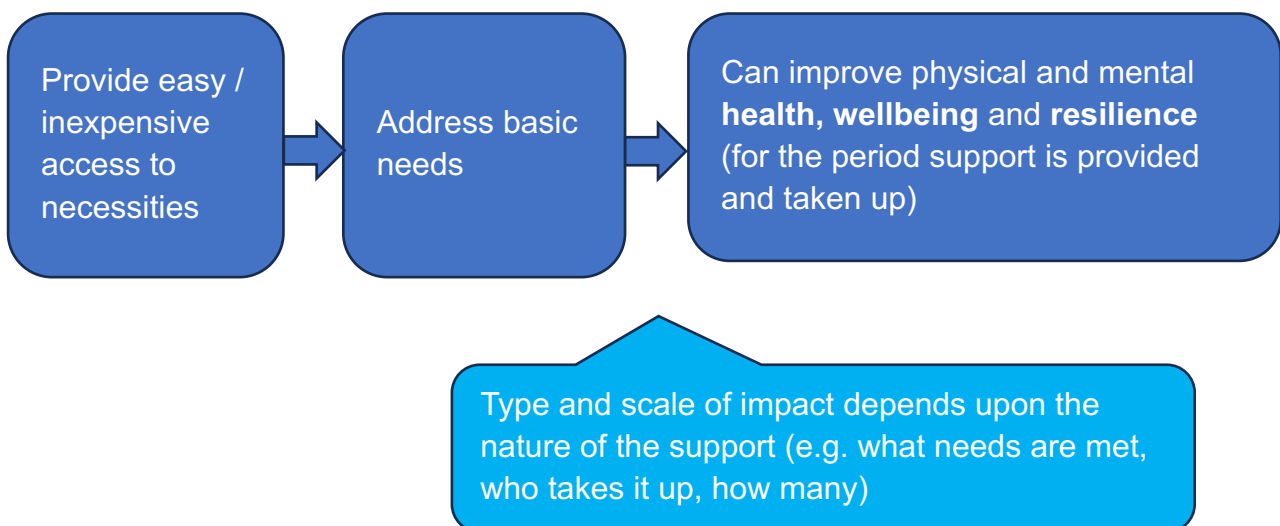
7.8. As well as action and investments specifically targeted at poverty, the programme can also help alleviate the effects of poverty by, for example:

⁶² The concept is derived from the work of Shafir and Mullainathan (2013), who highlighted the demands that poverty places upon people’s mental energy and capacity, identifying that scarcity means that the poor are more likely to make mistakes and bad decisions than those with higher incomes.

- supporting inexpensive or free and warm and inviting places to go⁶³, things to do and places to eat (such as the Together for Colwyn Bay Toastie Club);
- improving access to information, advice and guidance, including financial advice, which can be supported by sustaining the community spaces that advice services use, referring people to these services and, in a few cases such as the Caerau Credit Union, directly funding these services; and
- providing access to free or subsidised food and goods through, for example, food banks and pantries.

7.9. As figure 7.5 illustrates, action in these areas can help improve people's health and wellbeing.

Figure 7.5: impact chain of addressing poverty / access to food (e.g. during the pandemic)



⁶³ Since the cost-of-living crisis, there has been increasing focus upon opening up access to warm places, albeit places often not advertised nor marketed as 'warm spaces', instead the focus is generally upon spaces for socialising and activities, eating, coming together (which are also warm and welcoming).

The Family Toastie Club

The Together for Colwyn Bay Toastie Club runs weekly and is open to all and offers a cup of tea or coffee and a toastie in a warm space where people can socialise as well as eat and drink. The steering group were keen to ensure that the club does not have the “feel” of a “food bank”, which they felt might discourage people, and they emphasise the social side and provide toys and activities for children. The tea, coffee and toasties are free of charge although members are welcome to give a donation. The club has grown and over the summer months, weather permitting, it will be a picnic rather than toastie club.

When visited in the summer of 2023, the club was well attended, with around 30 individuals including different generations, pensioners, parents, and children and four members of the Together for Colwyn Bay steering group who were volunteering there.

Together for Colwyn Bay also use the club as an opportunity to advertise local clubs and events and one interviewee reported that the toastie club has been the “start of many new projects” such as the NEXTGEN youth club, discussed above. They have used it as a way of linking people together, networking between individuals and organisations.

Because the building (Dewi Sant Church) is provided for free, the budget for the club itself is around £40 per session, which is often fully covered by donations.

The response of the COVID-19 pandemic

- 7.10. The response of steering groups to the pandemic is discussed in detail in an earlier report (BCT, 2021) This identified that, in most areas, Invest Local steering groups played a central role in either mobilising and/or supporting the local response to the pandemic.

For example, groups took leadership roles helping plan and co-ordinate emergency relief efforts and/or helping fund other local groups' emergency relief efforts. This helped enhance the local response which would probably have been less well funded and/or co-ordinated in the absence of steering groups.

Table 7.5: examples of investments to ensure people's basic needs are met and promote mental health and wellbeing

Examples	Who benefited? How?
Coronavirus Action St Mellons & Trowbridge (C.A.S.T) £4,000	The community, and in particular those who were self-isolating or had young children. The funding enabled a team of 60 volunteers to help 296 residents with delivery, prescription collection and moral support by phone and doorstep, deliver 341 activity packs and provide 13 household items for families who were struggling, including two families helped to move house when becoming homeless.
WAPM – Food pantry	The community, residents are able to buy 10 items for £3. This is a new venture and therefore difficult to assess impact
MaesNi – Hive Caffi	The community, and particularly older adults (rather than young people). The cafe offers a free meal for up to a 100 people a week living in Maesgeirchen. It was particularly busy during the pandemic but has continued to respond to different needs as a result the cost-of-living crisis. It's open access to anyone who wants to come along.
Funding for the Adlerian Society in Hubberston and Hakin	The Adlerian Society provides one to one counselling for local people struggling to cope with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. It supported 61 clients at over 400 hours, as well as training for eight parents in self-esteem and public confidence, and six parents in family dynamics/parents, children, and young people.

<p>Together for Colwyn Bay Toastie Club</p>	<p>A weekly toastie club for all members of the community to have tea/coffee and a toastie (see boxed text on page 91 for details)</p>
<p>Food projects in Clase</p>	<p>Clase4All has supported several initiatives to provide affordable food; these include support for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ the food bank, open at the same time as regular coffee mornings which include Bingo mornings at the community centre. The activities also aim to reduce isolation, instil a sense of community, and facilitate access to other services. □ Bocs Bwyd, run by a local school from its grounds, which sells carrier bags of food for £3 (much less than the cost in the shops). About 20-25 bags are distributed each week. □ a food growing project at Solva Park Gardens a Gower based community supported agriculture project in partnership with Cae Tan, a local community group. The project aims to help address food poverty, promote wellbeing, train local people in food growing and help restore a connection between local people and the land⁶⁴.

Small and big spends, big and small impacts

7.11. Comparing the value for money of different types of investment is difficult, for example, some investments:

- are matched by other resources (including funding⁶⁵ and people’s time), which can multiply their apparent impact;
- reach large numbers of people, like some community events, but may have relatively limited or transient impact upon people, while others, such

⁶⁴ The Cae Tan Growing internal evaluation reports that there have been 46 participants including single parents and grandparents, who have grown over £1000 worth of organic food in 45 square metres of newly created organic growing space.

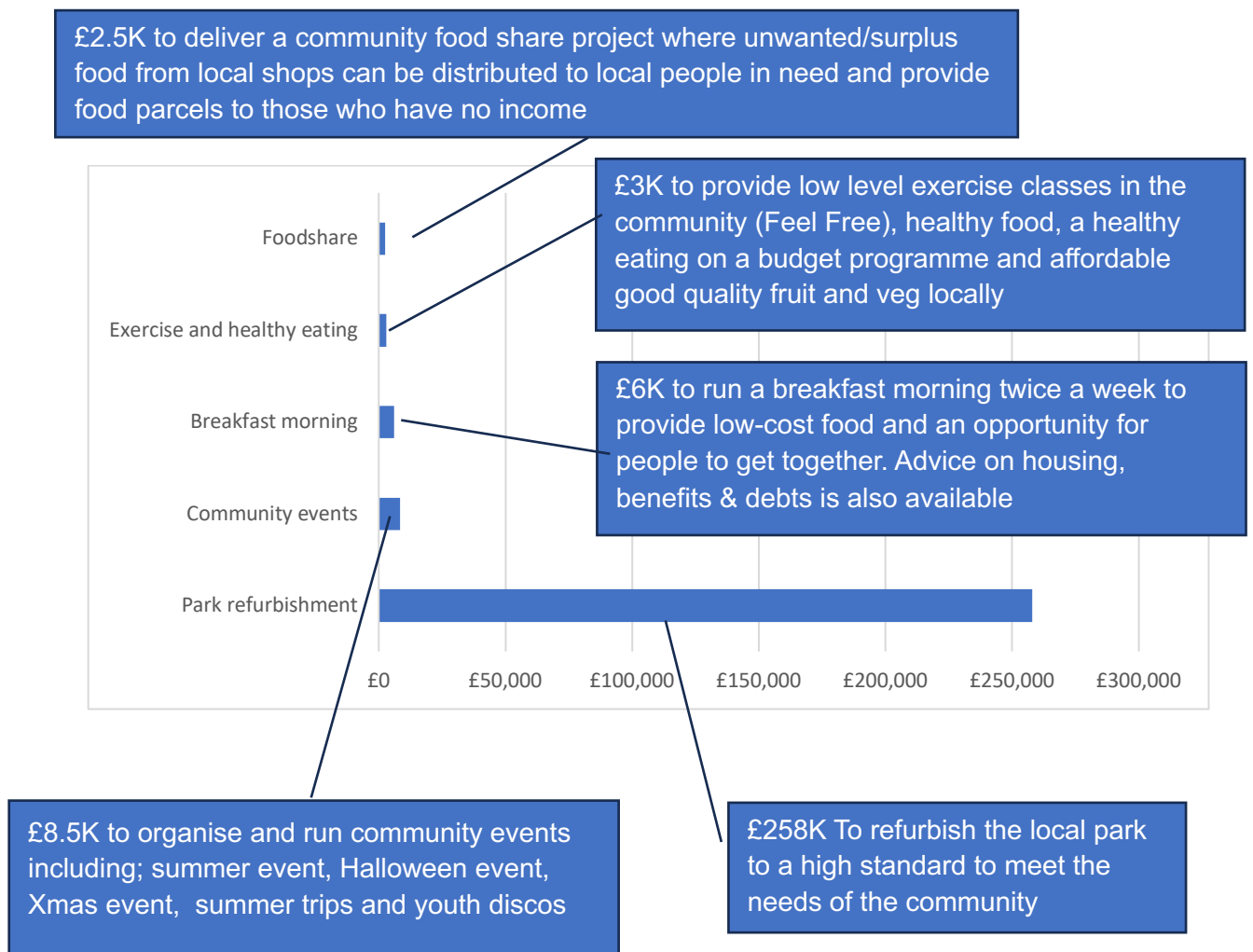
⁶⁵ This can include or example, grants or support from charitable trusts, local authorities, the National Lottery Community Fund, Children in Need and bodies specific to an area, such as the Milford Haven Port Authority.

as sponsorship of individual young people to enable them to participate in sports events, benefit far smaller numbers, but can have much greater impacts for those they support; and

- such as capital investments in physical assets, can be very costly, but can also be expected to be sustained beyond the lifetime of the programme, while investments that cover operating costs can be much cheaper, but the impact may end as soon as the funding ends.

7.12. Chart 7.1 illustrates this, outlining the differing size of investments in Clase’s first Driving Change plan and the boxed text illustrates the breadth and diversity of activity in Maesgeirchen.

Chart 7.1: investments in Clase’s 2019 Driving Change plan



Supporting “anyone and any group who asks to make their vision happen!”

As MaesNi put it, their ethos is supporting “anyone and any group who asks to make their vision happen!”. The group has a clear strategic vision and is committing much of its funding to capital investments but has still managed to respond to local opportunities to support a very impressive range of community activities that support its priorities. These include for example:

Activities for children and families	Community events and symbols	Investments in community spaces	Support for local groups and the wider community
Fun packs to families A skate and scooter day for kids Taking two buses of families to the bunny farm and Criccieth beach Halloween Party – PMP (Partneriaeth Maesgeirchen Partnership) Environmental after school club based in the school grounds	A COVID Christmas Stitch and Bitch to make CAD Christmas decorations at MSparc hub in Ogwen 2 Christmas Winter Wonderlands – PMP Street Party Cinema night Weekly tea and crumpets Tattoo shop animal party Two Arts sessions with Bangor Arts	Adapting the green space behind Ty Cegin to grow food to be used in the Hive. Ongoing sessions with the garden and environment group building shelter and maintaining garden, on-site Caffi/ cook and eat projects Installing “friendship” benches/planters at various locations around estate.	Funding for Partneriaeth Maesgeirchen Partnership Support for Ty Penrhyn House Growing for Change Gardens on Cae Tan-y-Bryn (e.g. developing business plan, planning application and networking) Support for Showzone events and group with set-up, space,

	<p>Initiative (life-size self-portraits and box city)</p> <p>Wellbeing programme of events and activities over coming 6 months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Hive Caffi BBQ and Weekly Hive Café kit and food 	<p>Negotiating with Adra/North Wales Housing re: adopting some grassed areas to develop herb/wildflower areas, hedges, and copses of trees.</p> <p>Supporting Letters Grow workshop series • Garden Guardian Allotment's fire-damage recovered Refurbishment and (re)opening of the central Play Park</p>	<p>funding, and a bank account</p> <p>A Fruit and Veg affordable bag scheme</p> <p>Support for Letters Grow with funding, space and running activities and setting up a bank account</p> <p>Football coaching training</p> <p>Football club mower fixed</p> <p>Providing the Boxing club with kit and laptop for lockdown training online</p> <p>First aid training for groups</p> <p>L2 Play qualification for groups</p> <p>Training/courses for resident volunteers including Safeguarding; Community first aid; Mental health awareness;</p>
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			<p>Literacy, IT and Makaton</p> <p>Pandemic response including: emergency food, PPE, fuel, helpline and matching volunteers (food, prescriptions, shopping, crash-fund)</p> <p>Workers 'walking lunch' – connecting agencies working here</p> <p>Bike maintenance workshops</p>
<p>Adapted from MaesNi's Driving Change plan</p>			

The impact upon community resilience

- 7.13. The nature of Invest Local communities, which were chosen for their vulnerability, given their high levels of deprivation and exposure to economic decline and welfare reforms means that, in terms of resilience, they started from a low base.

- 7.14. The strengthening of local assets, particularly community groups and organisations and community infrastructure, such as community buildings has, as outlined above, benefited some groups in the community, helping people on a day to day basis and reducing their vulnerability. Nevertheless, interviews suggest that communities remain reactive, buffeted by external events and forces and struggling to influence them.

- 7.15. The resilience of communities has been tested by two external shocks in particular, the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. The flexibility and development of local decision-making groups and networks of local organisations mean that even relatively small amounts of funding, such as £10,000 emergency relief funding for the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, could make a real difference. The impact upon community resilience is discussed in more detail in the report: the Impact of Invest Local upon Communities' Resilience during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- 7.16. Austerity, sluggish economic growth, the pandemic, and cost-of-living crisis (discussed in section 3) may be the most visible, but they are not, and will not be, the only trends and shocks people and communities have to cope with. The development of local capacity, through, for example:
- the skills and knowledge residents have gained, through, for example, their involvement in steering groups; and
 - the strengthening of local organisations and increasing connectivity between groups and organisations,
- discussed in section 6, has been crucial in building what is hoped to be the sustained capacity to respond to current and future shocks and trends.

8. Conclusions: is Invest Local working?

Is Invest Local empowering people and communities?

- 8.1. As outlined in section 1, the combination of trusting communities and helping build their capability to act (e.g. through access to funding, support and shared learning) is what distinguishes Invest Local from many other community development programmes. As figure 8.1. shows, the Invest Local programme aimed to empower communities, by giving them both the freedom and the capability to change their communities for the better.

Figure 8.1. The Invest Local ethos



Adapted from Celebration and Evaluation – Seven Years of Invest Local

- 8.2. As Figure 8.1. illustrates, the freedom and the capability to act are both necessary to deliver positive change and are intertwined. For example, in simple terms, the offer of (up to) £1m gives communities both the freedom and capacity to act. At a somewhat deeper level, having access to resources (such as £1m) over an extended period of time, is a precondition for the freedom to act; and the freedom to act, can encourage the consciousness (the combination of critical reflection and action) that underpins the capability to act effectively.

The freedom to act

- 8.3. As section 5 outlines, the Invest Local programme, with its long term (10 year) commitment to communities, and access to flexible funding ring fenced for the community, has clearly given communities the freedom to act. The programme, though, for example the role of trustees and ILOs in steering groups, has offered constructive challenge, asking questions, but it has consistently supported and respected communities freedom to choose. This has meant that:
- residents have played an active part in identifying goals for the area;
 - communities have decided what they think are the best ways to achieve their goals; and
 - residents have developed activities that will bring positive change to their communities.⁶⁶
- 8.4. However, the numbers of residents who have played an active part in this process and exercised the freedom to choose the programme offered, has generally been lower than hoped, and focused primarily upon the small number of people who formed steering groups in each area.

⁶⁶ This bullet points deliberately use (and where appropriate, adapt) the language and approach outlined in Celebration and Evaluation – Seven Years of Invest Local.

8.5. As outlined in section 3, the programme purposely targeted communities that could be characterised as “left behind”, where earlier community development initiatives had failed, sometimes in infamous ways. Given the wider economic and social context, the first phase of the programme (2016-2020), was one of a slow and uneven recovery after the great recession and the second and third phases (2020-21 and 2022-23) have been defined by the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

This has contributed to the:

- the legacy of mistrust left by failed initiatives in some communities and/or feeling of abandonment and scepticism that positive change is possible, as a result of experiences of cuts in provision through the years of austerity; and
- the pressures upon people’s lives and livelihoods, which consumes their energy, attention, and mental bandwidth.

8.6. As section 6 outlines, these macro factors have interacted with individual factors, such as people’s confidence and sense of identification with a community or steering group. Taken together, they have shaped people’s capability, motivation, and opportunity to engage with the programme, and too often, outweighed the incentives to engage that the programme offered.

Therefore, the offer of funding (up to £1m), support and shared learning was large enough to:

- encourage a steering group to form and to secure enough community involvement to enable the programme to “get going”; and
- encourage people and groups to persevere, despite the demands the programme places upon them (in terms of their time, energy and coping with conflict and criticism).

- 8.7. However, it was not large enough to create a groundswell of positive interest and engagement with the programme. In response, although the programme required the steering group to engage the wider community, it has taken a pragmatic approach in judging what is ‘good enough’.

The capability to act

- 8.8. The funding for Invest Local is dwarfed by the budgets of some community development programmes elsewhere, such as the New Deal for Communities (NDC) in England (each NDC area had about £50m to invest over ten years). The Invest Local funding alone, which equates to between £60-700 per resident over the programme’s lifetime⁶⁷, is modest. Therefore, as section 1 outlines, the programme’s Theory of Change anticipated that, as well as directly enabling action, the funding would also be the catalyst for an increase in the consciousness (a combination of critical reflection and action), confidence, capacity, and influence of communities,
- 8.9. As section 6 outlines, the Invest Local programme has clearly enhanced the capacity of communities and their capability to act. The programme has:
- helped build an awareness among communities of each area’s strengths and talents and
 - is helping local people develop the skills, confidence and expertise needed to lead this work both now and in the future. ⁶⁸
- 8.10. Much of the increase in awareness of each area’s strengths and talents appears to be centred upon steering groups, as a result, for example, of the connectivity between local groups and organisations that the programme has strengthened. As sections 5 and 6 outline, many of those who have been involved in steering groups have gained valuable skills, experience, confidence, and connections.

⁶⁷ The size of communities ranges from around 1,500 to 16,000 residents.

⁶⁸ The bullet points deliberately use and adapt the language and approach outlined in Celebration and Evaluation – Seven Years of Invest Local.

Similarly, by providing access to support including funding the programme is helping local activists, not only develop, sustain, or example local groups, organisations, and initiatives, but gain valuable skills, experience, confidence and connections themselves. For example, as MaesNi eloquently put it, they aim to support “anyone and any group who asks to make their vision happen!” This in turn has created new opportunities for those who don’t (perhaps yet) want to lead activities or groups but want to volunteer to support them. The impact of empowering those local residents who have taken part over ten years, may prove to be one of the most important and enduring legacies of the programme.

Capacity and resilience

- 8.11. Communities’ often very impressive responses to the successive shocks of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis have proven the potential power of the Invest Local model. The shocks provided an additional impetus for action in many communities. But it was the strengthening of local capacity (through the development of local decision-making groups and networks of local organisations) that meant that even relatively small amounts of funding, such as £10,000 emergency relief funding for the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, could make a real difference to communities’ resilience⁶⁹.
- 8.12. The response demonstrates how the combination of flexible funds and capacity⁷⁰, enabled steering groups and communities to mobilise the assets more swiftly and effectively they had (such as social, human and physical capital, like networks, volunteers and community buildings) in response to the successive crises they have faced. This in turn, meant that they were able to respond more swiftly and agilely than the public sector often could.

⁶⁹ Although it should be noted that the differences in capacity in each community meant that the effectiveness of their responses also differed.

⁷⁰ As outlined above, this capacity has been built and strengthened through the investments in local groups, organisations and buildings, and the connections and understanding of their communities generated through involvement in steering groups.

- 8.13. The programme model also means steering groups have the freedom and capability to swiftly step in to save a valued local building, organisation, or group at risk of imminent closure or contraction. Examples (outlined in section 7) include, supporting Plas Madoc Leisure Centre (with new boilers), the community centre in Hubberston and Hakin (at risk of closure); and Caerau Men's Shed (after their van, which supports their social enterprises, failed its MOT). In addition, while often creating less urgency to act, the programme model also means steering groups can invest to increase the long term sustainability:
- of community buildings (by for example investing in energy efficiency measures, which have often proven vital in reducing energy since energy prices spiked in 2020); and
 - of community groups and organisations (by, for example enabling them to invest in new equipment and facilities).
- 8.14. This flexibility means local steering groups can use their local knowledge and connections and, for example, provide the core and/or long term funding for local groups and organisations, that can otherwise be very difficult for the sector to access (see e.g. [Community Foundation Wales, 2020](#)).
- 8.15. Equally, the programme's impact upon local capacity should not be overstated. Given the limited wider engagement (outlined above), the impact has been deep, but relatively narrow in scale (and centred on the steering groups and the groups it has supported either directly or indirectly⁷¹). Plus"
- the demands upon steering group members are considerable and sometimes excessive (creating the risk of burn out) and the small size of groups mean they remain fragile⁷²; and
 - steering groups have sometimes struggled to sustain relationships with local groups and has occasionally been riven by conflict between different groups.

⁷¹ Direct support would include investments in a local group or organisation and indirect support, would include investments in the building or community spaces the group or organisation uses.

⁷² This means groups can be vulnerable, for example, when key people step back or leave (e.g. due to illness, disagreements, disappointment and/or exhaustion).

Changing lives: wellbeing and resilience

8.16. Invest Local has made, and continues to make, a difference to people and communities. It is supporting flagship capital investments, such as investments in community buildings or play facilities, and an often impressive range of community groups, services, activities and events. As outlined in section 7, in most communities it is helping:

- small numbers of people to flourish by creating new roles in the community and giving them a new sense purpose, either in steering groups or local groups and organisations supported by Invest Local⁷³;
- a larger number of people (typically in the low hundreds⁷⁴) cope with the twin shocks of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, by providing access to necessities such as food and warmth; and
- a larger number of people still (typically in mid to high hundreds⁷⁵) to weather the generally inclement climate (trends) since 2016, by improving their access to community spaces, services, support and/or opportunities locally, that have been directly or indirectly supported by Invest Local⁷⁶.

8.17. Therefore, the offer of up to £1m, plus support and access to shared learning has been big enough to make a real difference to communities. As outlined above, it has helped people weather the generally inclement climate (trends) and succession of storms (shocks) since 2016, mitigating the impact of these external factors upon individuals' wellbeing (and increasing their resilience).

8.18.

⁷³ The impact here differs from community to community. For example, in some areas with thriving steering groups, many members were already very active in the community, whereas in others, far fewer were. Similarly, the backgrounds of those involved in leading and volunteering for community groups varies.

⁷⁴ If calculated on the basis of the number of food parcels distributed and the numbers of people accessing warm spaces.

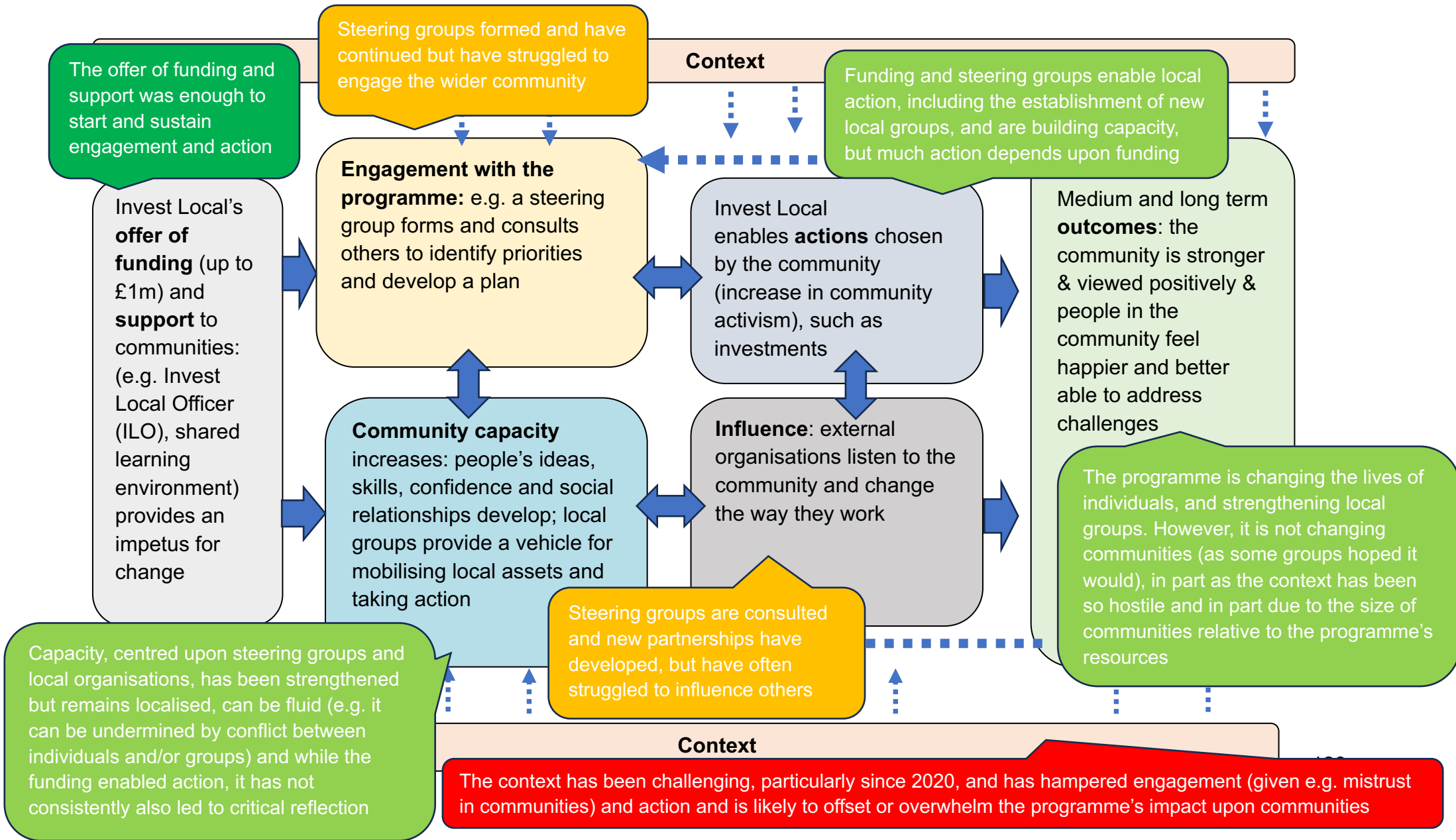
⁷⁵ If calculated on the basis of the numbers of people accessing community spaces and groups either directly or indirectly supported by Invest Local. Larger numbers still would, for example, attend community events or benefit from improvements in community spaces (e.g. such as community murals or litter picks).

⁷⁶ Direct support would include investments in a local group or organisation and indirect support, would include investments in the building or community spaces the group or organisation uses.

- 8.19. However, the scale of investments (in terms of the numbers of people who directly benefited) and the challenging context the programme has faced means that, with the possible exception of the pandemic response in some communities⁷⁷, it has not yet made (and probably will not make) a difference to overall levels of community wellbeing and resilience. As such, Invest Local both demonstrates the power and potential of trusting communities but also that communities do not have the magic solutions to “wicked problems” like poverty, that have eluded other community development programmes.
- 8.20. As such, as figure 8.1 illustrates, in Invest Local has worked, but, with the exception of the strengthening of local groups and organisations, generally at an individual, rather than (community wide) scale. It both demonstrates the power and potential of trusting communities but also that communities do not have the magic solutions to “wicked problems” like poverty, that have eluded other community development programmes.

⁷⁷ During the pandemic, the numbers of people reached and the importance of the support in helping meet people’s basic needs for food and social contact may have been large enough to have shifted the overall level of wellbeing of the community. However, it is not possible to directly measure this, given the limitations of the available data.

Figure 9.1: assessment of the programme's Theory of Change in practice



8.21. The judgment of the programme's success depends in large part upon how expectations for the programme are calibrated. BCT's expectations for the programme were scaled back from the original vision (which was defined before the programme started)⁷⁸, to reflect the resources at their disposal and the scale of the challenge they faced. It is achieving its goals of making communities "stronger" and helping individuals "feel" and "cope better", despite a very challenging context. It is reported, though, to have made somewhat less progress in ensuring that "external organisations and individuals have positive attitudes to and engagement with the community"⁷⁹. Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge that some steering groups have articulated more ambitious goals focused upon changing their communities (and not just individual lives). The evidence here suggests that the scale of the challenges, relative to the resources at their disposal, are limiting the impact they can have.

Reflections on the Invest Local model

8.22. Given the challenges communities have faced, the long term flexible funding enabled by the endowment from the National Lottery has been essential. As this report outlines, the last seven years have been a lengthy and often difficult journey for steering groups as, for example, they have fought to overcome mistrust, apathy or even hostility in parts of their communities⁸⁰; conflict within the group; and the difficulties and delays that can bedevil large investment projects.

⁷⁸ For example, the Trust deed between the Big Lottery Fund and BCT identifies that the "longer term outcomes" are: "the impact of poverty on individuals and the communities in which they live has been reduced and they are more resilient to the impact of poverty and social exclusion" and "local leadership to drive forward the engagement of target communities in local regeneration and resilience has been established and mainstreamed" (p. 20).

⁷⁹ Taken from Invest Local's original theory of change

⁸⁰ For example, in one community, an interviewee observed that in a community that feels "stuff has been taken away from it" (with for example, the loss of community buildings and spaces and play equipment that was judged unsafe removed by the LA, but not replaced, leaving a play area "desolate"), it was observed that the offer of money could "bring out the worst in people" and invite suspicion about "who's controlling the money?" and who it was for and who would benefit?

Both steering groups and other local community groups needed the time and flexibility the programme offered to help them navigate the challenges the last seven years have posed. Nevertheless, despite this long term commitment for the programme, steering groups have often felt under pressure to act swiftly, to save a valued local asset at threat of closure or loss and/or to demonstrate to communities that positive change was possible.

- 8.23. Moreover, the demands the programme places upon the small number of local residents who make up most steering groups are considerable and at times (most notably the pandemic), excessive. While support from ILOs has been valued, the time they can spend supporting each community is constrained. This meant that employing local staff has often been essential to enable steering groups to try to engage the wider community and partners more effectively and also manage and deliver the programme. Similarly, the scope to forge a synergistic partnership with either a local organisation that is, or is seeking to become, a local anchor organisation, or a network of local groups, which can deliver a range of services and support in the community, has underpinned many of the most successful groups⁸¹.
- 8.24. Where neither of these options is viable, a small number of steering groups are in the process of trying to establish themselves as nascent anchor organisations and are more focused upon delivery themselves, rather than relying upon partners to deliver. This is both more ambitious and more challenging and has increased the demands upon steering groups.
- 8.25. Invest Local can strengthen local capacity but it also requires local capacity (including both people with skills, ideas, energy, passion, and time, and also trust and constructive challenge, rather than destructive conflict, between people and local groups) to work effectively.

⁸¹ As outlined in section six, the model blurs the distinction between of the partnership (steering group) and the partners as partners are usually members of the steering group. Nevertheless, there is still an important distinction to be drawn, in terms of responsibilities for delivery, between the partnership (steering group) and its partners).

Working in communities with less capacity is more challenging, takes longer and may be riskier. However, as the example of communities establishing their own anchor organisations illustrates, it also increases the impact of the programme, as the baseline level of capacity in these communities tended to be lower.

- 8.26. Looking beyond the establishment of steering groups and anchor organisations, the programme has enabled direct investments into a range of existing and, sometimes, new local groups and organisations and has often helped strengthen links between local groups and organisations. Moreover, as well as direct investments in local groups and organisations, by investing in community buildings the programme provides the spaces local groups and organisations and, also public and voluntary sector services such as Flying Start and the Citizens Advice Bureau, need to operate from.⁸² This increase in community capacity and infrastructure is, in turn, making a real difference to people's wellbeing and resilience.
- 8.27. However, there are inevitably questions about the long term sustainability of these investments, once the Invest Local funds are exhausted. Therefore, as well as exploring change over time, assessing the likely sustainability of this change will be a key line of inquiry in the next phase of the evaluation.

⁸² These sources of rental income may be particularly important in supplementing grants to sustain community spaces.

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