



# Invest Local

## The First Three Years



This is a summary of the findings from the first evaluation report of the Invest Local programme. The evaluation has been produced by People and Work ([peopleandwork.org.uk](http://peopleandwork.org.uk)).

The evaluation aims to:

Help communities get as much as they can from Invest Local.

Understand whether Invest Local is doing what it set out to do.

Look at whether Invest Local's way of working is a good way to help communities make their areas better.

Help BCT to work as effectively as possible.

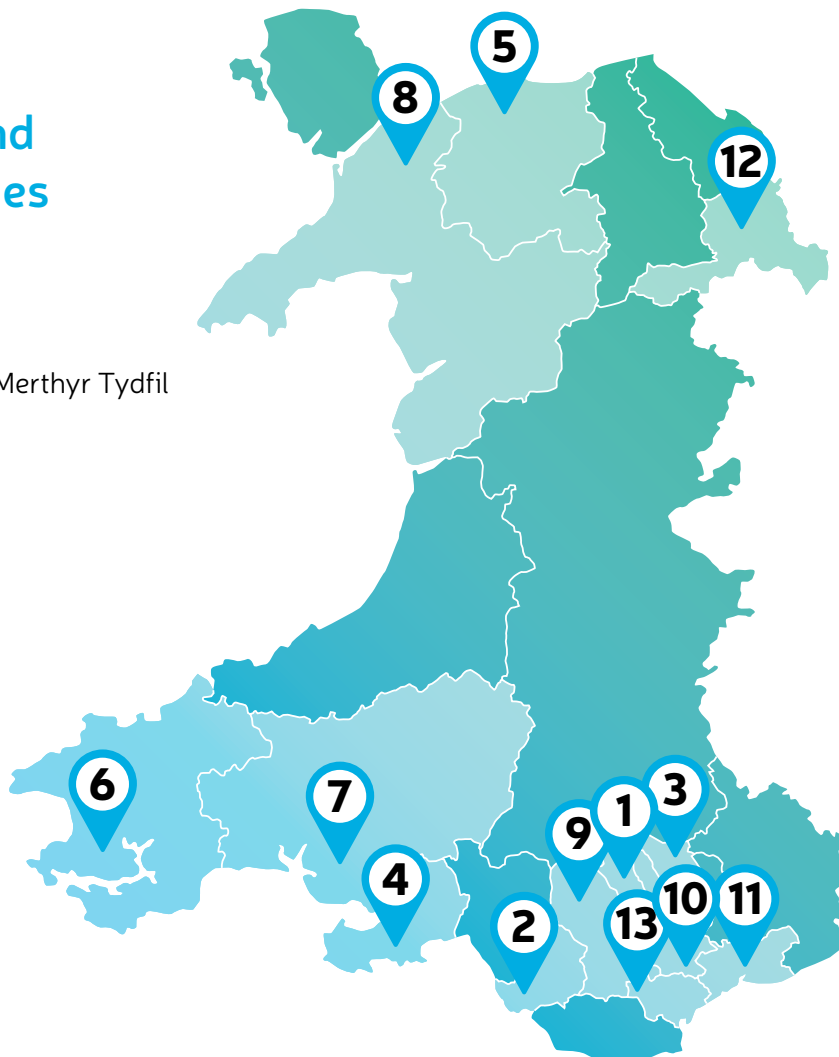
To request a full version of the evaluation report, email [info@bct.wales](mailto:info@bct.wales), or download a copy from our website: [www.bct.wales](http://www.bct.wales)

# What is Invest Local?

Invest Local is a ten-year programme of funding and support for 13 communities across Wales.

## The 13 communities are:

- 1 Aberfan, Merthyr Vale and Ynysowen, Merthyr Tydfil
- 2 Caerau, Bridgend
- 3 Cefn Golau, Blaenau Gwent
- 4 Clase, Swansea
- 5 Glyn, Conwy
- 6 Hubberston and Hakin, Pembrokeshire
- 7 Llwynhendy, Llanelli
- 8 Maesgeirchen, Gwynedd
- 9 Penywaun, Rhondda Cynon Taf
- 10 Phillipstown, Caerphilly
- 11 Pillgwenlly, Newport
- 12 Plas Madoc, Wrexham
- 13 Trowbridge and St Mellons, Cardiff



# How it works

Invest Local is funded by a £16.5m endowment from the National Lottery Community Fund. Each community has up to £1million to invest, and the community decides the priorities for the local area, who they will work with and how the money will be used.

**Offer**  
Each community is offered funding (£1million) and support (an Invest Local Officer to support the community, opportunities for Shared Learning with other communities and projects).

**Forming a Steering Group**  
The community forms a steering group made up of people who live and work in the area.

**Getting Going**  
The steering group run events, activities and small projects to promote Invest Local and consult local people about their priorities for the area.

**Driving Change**  
The steering group looks at the community's priorities, and comes up with projects to meet these priorities in their Driving Change plan.

**Shared Learning**  
Throughout the programme, Invest Local offers opportunities to share knowledge and experiences with other communities.

# Plas Madoc: Investing in an Organisation

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

We are Plas Madoc's (the local steering group's) funding for new boilers for the centre has proved a strong investment in a key community asset. The new boilers save the centre almost £20,000 in running costs each year – money that has been used to develop the centre and provide more activities for the people of Plas Madoc.

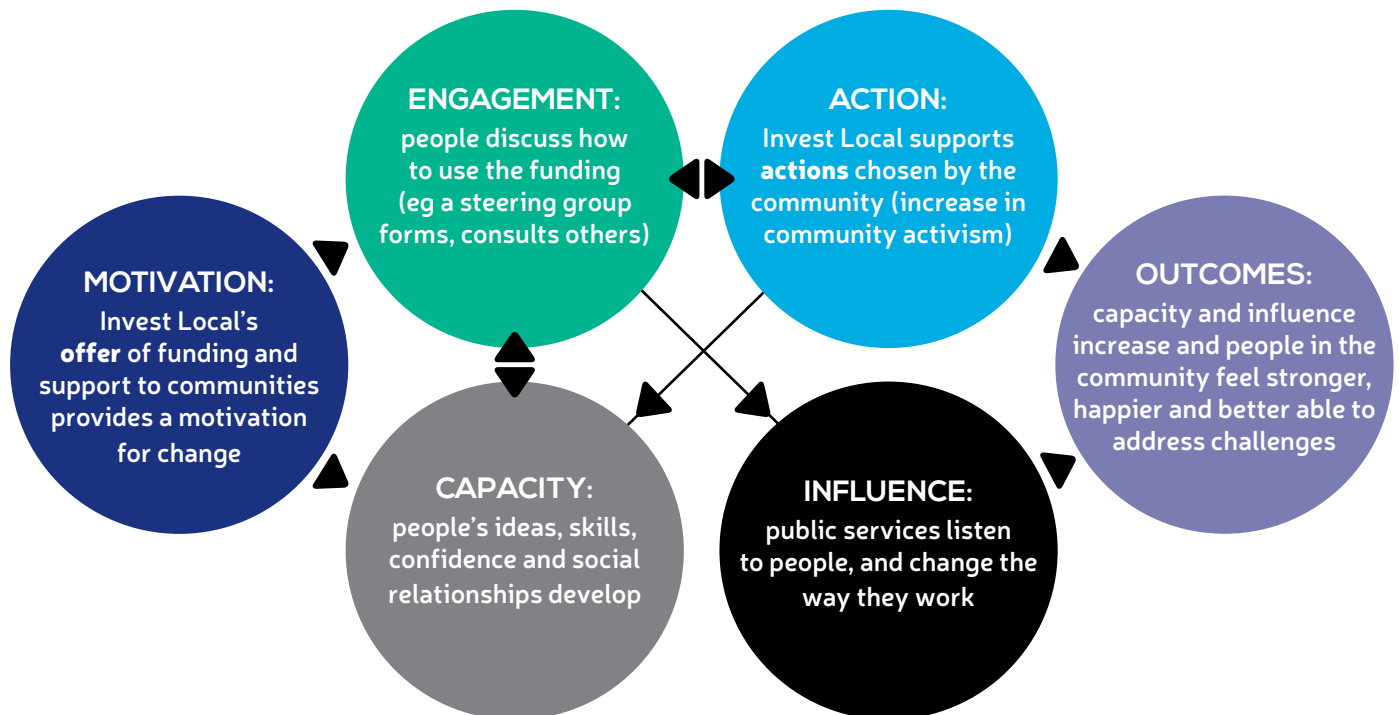
These include a family wellbeing day, free yoga classes, bingo nights, a kids' drama club, a "brunch and munch" club, and one of the squash courts has been converted into a community room that local groups can access free of charge.

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



# Theory of Change

This is a simplified version of Invest Local's Theory of Change, which shows how the programme is expected to work and create change.





## The programme blends aspects of:

- traditional place-based community development programmes (like the first phase of Communities First)
- traditional grant giving programmes (like People and Places)
- asset-based community development programmes (like the Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities in Wales projects)



# Invest Local's context

The key external factors that have impacted upon Invest Local are:

**1**

Austerity (including cuts to public services and welfare reform).

**2**

Poverty.

**3**

Mistrust of community development programmes after previous experiences of programmes that were felt to have failed.

**4**

Qualities of each community (eg size, or what groups, organisation and activities are already in the area).

These things have all shaped the priorities that communities identified and have made community engagement with the programme more challenging.



## CASE STUDY

# Cefn Golau MUGA

**The Invest Local Group in Cefn Golau, Tredegar (Blaenau Gwent) have created a new MUGA (Multi-Use Games Area) for the community.**

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



## CASE STUDY

# Clase Park

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

More things for children and families to do was a top priority for residents, and the local park was highlighted as an important community space that needed to be upgraded and improved.

The project has involved families from the community throughout the process. The group visited lots of different parks across South Wales, and brought ideas and photographs back to local children and families. Working together, the community came up with a list of equipment and facilities that they would like to see in the park.

The group asked three different park designers to come up with final designs for the park, then local children from Clase Primary School had the final say on which park got the go-ahead.

The Clase4All group took ownership of the whole process – from working closely with Swansea council on the project to liaising with contractors during the build of the park.

# Hubberston and Hakin Community Centre

Hubberston and Hakin community centre was on the brink of closure when the Invest Local programme arrived in the area. Local people decided to use some of the funding to save this vital community asset.

Eight local people formed a CIO and took over the lease of the building from the council for a six-month trial. That was a success, so the building is now totally owned and run by the community. Today, the centre has become a vibrant community hub with wellbeing at the heart of its activities. It's home to a popular local daily playgroup, hosts a regular luncheon club for older people in the area, and also offers everything from youth club sessions to table tennis through U3A.



# Invest Local's 'offer' to communities

## and the communities' response

### All 13 communities agreed to be part of the programme

The offer of 'up to £1million' was enough to inspire a group of people to form a – usually quite small – steering group in each community, so that Invest Local could get going. This was an important factor that got the programme started in each community, and local volunteers have committed an impressive amount of time and energy to the groups.

### Engaging the wider community was difficult

Invest Local steering group members feel that £1m is a large enough sum of money to make a difference that local people can see or feel.

However, beyond the steering groups, Invest Local did not create a wider interest or excitement across communities. In almost all areas, steering groups struggled to fully engage the wider community, in terms of both the total number of people and hard to reach groups.

### BCT staff are more involved than originally anticipated

BCT originally intended to provide very 'light touch' support, to help steering groups get up and running. However, in some places, BCT staff are doing a lot more 'traditional' community development than expected, because of the scale of the challenge and the weakness of existing organisations in some

areas. This has stretched the Invest Local Officers, as they have limited time to work with each community. Local residents running the Steering Groups want to lead the process, but in some cases have decided they need some paid support. As a result, many communities have decided to use some of their funding to employ a development worker based in the community, who can coordinate and progress projects and plans and help more people get involved.

## Processes can be challenging

At the start, some of the programme's processes created challenges. One of the few requirements of Invest Local is that as many people as possible from the community need to have their say in how the money is spent. However, the scale of community engagement undertaken to create the first Driving Change plans, slowed progress and sapped many steering groups' energy.

BCT took a flexible approach that recognised the challenges of community consultation, allowing groups to develop plans even when community engagement was weaker than hoped. BCT continues to support and encourage steering groups to engage more people and 'hard to reach' groups.

BCT initially used a traditional trustee-led assessment process for agreeing funding bids. However, community members felt that this undermined the programme's message that: "local people will decide how the money is spent and how key decisions are made".

BCT have taken a more flexible approach to the level of community consultation that can be done by steering groups, and have made the 'endorsing' of the plans more co-productive – key decisions are taken by the local steering groups and BCT provide a 'light touch' check.





## Clase Food Projects

**The Clase4All group wanted to run a weekly drop-in for people from the community to get together.**

They decided to set up a breakfast morning, where people get a breakfast roll and a drink for £1, and can meet and chat to neighbours and friends. They used just £50 of funding to start the initiative, and the breakfast morning is now totally self-sustaining. It has grown in popularity and now has become a weekly one-stop-shop for local people - the local housing officer is available to give advice, there is a collection point for the local credit union, and the group have also set up an independent food bank.

A local resident was running a food bank from her house for families living on her street in Clase. Demand was increasing, so the Clase4All group decided to take over the food bank. They run it alongside the breakfast morning – in a relaxed, friendly environment – to remove some of the stigma of accessing the food bank.

They have also chosen to run it independently from larger food bank charities, so that it's easier for local people to access without the need for a referral or proof of circumstance. The group receive regular donations from Tesco, local churches and the local Lions Club.

The group also run a surplus food share project – collecting left-over food from Greggs and the Coop to support local families and prevent food going to landfill.



# What difference is Invest Local making?

## **Increasing the consciousness, confidence and capacity of communities**

The programme's offer to communities motivated people to get involved, and through their involvement in steering groups, increased their understanding of the programme, and empowered them to take action. However, at this stage, this is largely limited to a small group within each community (groups range in size from around 8 to 30 core members who regularly attend meetings).

Invest Local has also built local capacity through direct investments of money in local groups and organisations and by strengthening links between different local groups and organisations (eg through their involvement in steering groups).

## **Investments are mainly a mix of support for local organisations and small projects**

The investments made by steering groups so far include a mix of:

### **Investment in the capacity of valued local organisations**

This involves supporting organisations to continue delivering and improve their services, like Plas Madoc Leisure Centre (page 3) or Hubberston and Hakin Community Centre (page 8).

### **New facilities for local areas**

These are much less common, but examples include Clase's new park and Cefn Golau's Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA).


### **Small activities and projects**

Examples of this include reinstating a Christmas tree

in Caerau, bringing back the Penywaun carnival, or running community events like Plastonbury (in Plas Madoc) and Glynfest (in Glyn).

## **By investing in local organisations, the programme is supporting the delivery of services**

As the example of Plas Madoc illustrates, the investments made may often not appear glamorous or innovative, but they are in line with the priorities local people identified and would generally be difficult to fund through existing grant giving programmes. And in Caerau, the investment in Dyffryn Chapel, means the community space can now be put to much better use and address local priorities (see case study on page 14).



**Some groups have also been able to use Invest Local funding to help attract 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.

**The groups have limited influence over external organisations at this stage**

There are some examples of steering groups influencing the actions of external organisations working locally; for example, some groups have sought to influence local authorities. However, at this stage, influencing external organisations has rarely been a priority for steering groups; the ability of Invest Local groups to build these relationships has been mixed; and not all external organisations have been open or receptive to influence by steering groups.

**Investments are starting to make a difference to people's lives**

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

# Caerau Friends Group

**Invest Local Caerau have health and wellbeing as one of their priorities for the community, and members of the steering group wanted to set up a support group for people with dementia and their carers.**

Funding received by Dyffryn Chapel for a new heating system and disabled access toilets meant that the chapel could host such a group.

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

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





# Conclusions

## 1. Invest Local is making good progress

After a slow start in most areas, the programme is now making good progress. Steering groups have formed in all 13 areas. Groups are growing in confidence, and more people from the community are getting involved. Nine areas have agreed Driving Change plans and the rest will follow in 2020.

## 2. There is not just one way to success

Invest Local doesn't progress in the same way in each area. Groups are working with different assets, opportunities and challenges, and have focused on different priorities.

However, things that have helped the programme progress across the 13 communities are:

- a 'natural' community that is not too big or small (for example, the large size of some communities can make community engagement particularly challenging, while smaller communities have limited assets that the programme can mobilise and build upon)
- a 'good enough' consultation to get started
- an effective steering group with clear priorities, opportunities to invest in (that support those priorities), and the decision-making structures and capacity needed to plan and deliver; and
- effective support from BCT

## 3. Steering group members are becoming confident community activists

All 13 communities have seen a growth in community capacity and action. As the Invest Local programme has progressed, steering groups have grown in confidence and awareness. The collective skills of the groups, as well as long-term funding, support from Invest Local Officers and shared learning, have empowered the groups to take action to make their communities even better. Some groups have also become a focal point for wider local action and influence.

#### 4. A variety of people are involved, but this needs to grow

A range of local people and groups have engaged with the programme. Although the number and diversity of residents who have been involved is fewer than hoped, it has been 'good enough' for the programme to move forward.

A key challenge for the next stage of Invest Local is to engage the wider community. A problem for most groups is that without projects to show, it is difficult to get people involved, but without getting people involved, projects cannot start.

As more activities and projects develop through Invest Local, this should attract more local people to the programme. And more people, ideas and skills equal more projects.

#### 5. Communities are choosing to make the good stuff even better

In their first Invest Local plans, many communities have invested in strengthening the local area's existing assets, leading to an increase in community capacity, wellbeing and resilience. The investments made in, for example, buildings and boilers, may not always appear glamorous, but they reflect the community's priorities, strengthen communities' assets (making them more sustainable) and generally could not be supported by other funding streams.

