

**Interim Evaluation of Birmingham City Council's Local
Innovation Fund
Final Report, February 2018**



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Section 2: Introduction

Linxs Consultancy was commissioned in October 2017 to carry out an interim evaluation of the Birmingham City Council Local Innovation Fund. Since the programme was launched in late 2016 (the first proposal was approved in December 2016), there have been 159 proposals submitted across the City, with 118 being recommended and taken to Local Leadership Cabinet committee for approval.

It should be noted at the outset that many of the projects funded have either not commenced delivery, or are at a very early stage, having been approved in mid-late 2017. This should therefore be considered to be a snapshot report with a final evaluation to follow in 2019. Rather than assessing project impact, this evaluation focuses on assessing the following key elements:

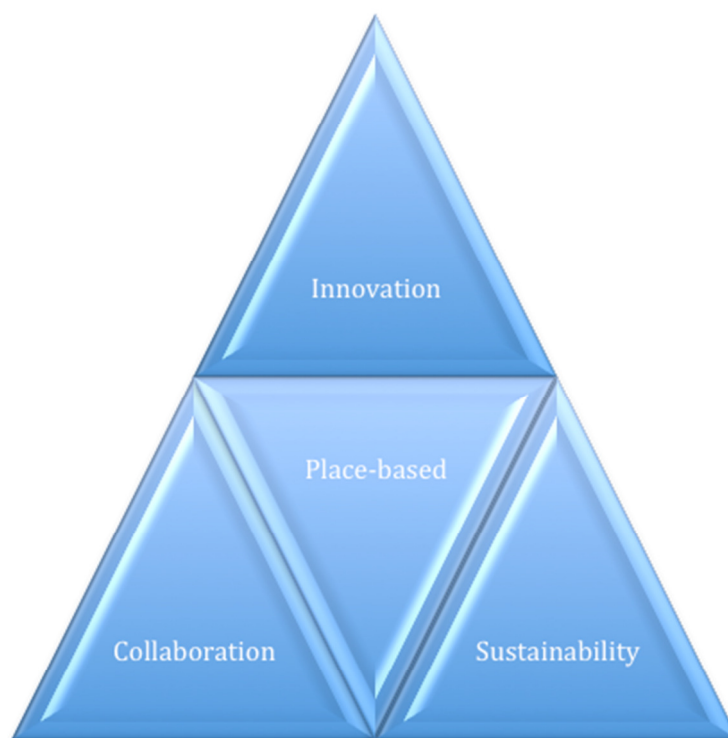
- ❖ Critique of the Local Innovation Fund model (hereafter LIF), and the supporting role of the Neighbourhood Development Support Unit (hereafter NDSU);
- ❖ Process analysis, ascertaining the views of local Councillors, project leads and NDSU representatives on the proposal development and submission stages;
- ❖ Examination of the extent to which proposals and early delivery can be considered 'innovative', assessed against multiple criteria;
- ❖ Identification of emerging good practice and areas which may be suitable for future replication; and
- ❖ Summary of lessons learnt to date, both in terms of ongoing management of the LIF regime, and for the possible rollout of future ward based funding.

To ensure the broadest possible consultation framework within a limited timeframe, a multi-methodological approach was taken, comprising:

- ❖ Semi-structured interviews and group sessions with the NDSU team;
- ❖ Online survey open to all Birmingham City Council Councillors, which received 21 responses (just in excess of one sixth of all Elected Members);
- ❖ Supplementary drop in session with Councillors;
- ❖ Document review of hard copy LIF proposals;
- ❖ Online survey with project leads (24 responses which represent 20% of recommended proposals). The online mechanism logs the length of time taken to complete survey responses. Whilst on occasions questionnaires can be answered with brevity, it was encouraging to note that respondents took a considerable amount of time to articulate lengthy responses, with the average time spent being 32 minutes;
- ❖ In depth assessment of a sample of 12 projects (10% of recommended proposals), ensuring a geographical spread across the city, including 1:1 semi-structured interviews with project representatives. At the request of the NDSU team this number was increased to 13.

Section 3: Background and Context

The establishment of LIF was approved by Birmingham City Council's Local Leadership Cabinet Committee in September 2016. It was held to be in accordance with the Council's business plan commitment "to develop a new approach to devolution within the city, with a focus on empowering people and giving them influence over local services."¹ The key elements of LIF are:



Fundamentally the ambition of LIF is to introduce a radical shift in local democratic decision-making including a move away from the previous Community Chest approach of one-off grant funding. Rather the aim is for Elected Members to work in their local leadership role in conjunction with residents, community groups and other organisations that have an interest and stake in the area to prepare proposals. There is also a requirement that all three respective Ward Councillors sign off the proposals, with the Local Leadership Cabinet Committee providing scrutiny and final approval. Each ward received an even allocation of £48k, constituting a total available outlay of £1.92 million.

Proposals are intended to be 'innovative' with a concomitant emphasis on 'doing things differently', through investment in transformative and active citizenship programmes, enhanced partnership working and subsequent reduced reliance on Birmingham City Council services. It was instigated to represent a key citywide opportunity to mobilise the voluntary sector and develop an appropriate place-based model for the deployment of area-based funding, fitting with the overall City Council cultural change programme.²

¹ Birmingham City Council Public Report to Cabinet Committee – Local Leadership (20th September 2016).

² *ibid*

As with many local authorities Birmingham City Council recently has had to operate with pressures on its budgets. Within this context new funding streams, such as LIF, are uncommon and an extension of LIF was reported to be unlikely without accessing external funding sources. It is partly for this reason that the sustainability and transformative aspects of LIF were included.

Along with aligning with local ward priorities LIF proposals are expected to meet at least one City priority and one specific LIF outcome. These are outlined in the table that follows

Birmingham City Council Priorities	LIF Outcomes
Children – A great city to grow up in	Supporting citizens’ independence and well-being
Jobs and Skills – A great city to succeed in	New approaches to investment (e.g. time banking, different ways of managing public assets)
Housing – A great city to live in	Supporting active citizenship and communities stepping up to the challenge and stimulate innovative asset based approaches in neighbourhoods
Health – A great city to lead a healthy and active life	Clean Streets
	Improving local centres

Supporting documentation from the NDSU team provides categories of possible innovations, as well as detailing approaches which would not normally be considered appropriate for LIF funding, most notably when focused around equipment expenditure and staffing costs rather than partnership working and neighbourhood development per se. An example of this material is provided overleaf:³

The NDSU has now been in operation for in excess of 18 months. Historically districts in Birmingham retained the budgets for services, and staff worked for districts; but individual services are now line managed centrally by a Birmingham City Council officer. Support for neighbourhood development, local democracy, funding and ward action did not fall neatly under the remit of any particular service however; these elements came together in the NDSU. The importance of the role of the team is that it, therefore, has a cross-directorate and pan-Birmingham remit, and is potentially the only unit operating as an interface between residents, local partnerships and the Council. With the impending ward changes reducing the number of Elected Members, including the introduction of single member wards, it becomes even more critical to have a viable and effective support structure for neighbourhood development, Voluntary and Community Sector (hereafter VCS) support and local democracy.

³ Neighbourhood Development Support Unit: Guidance on Good Practice

Local Innovation Fund – Guidance on Good Practice examples for spend

GOOD INNOVATION – WHAT WORKS AND WILL BE SUPPORTED

The LIF is about partnership working – encouraging groups to come together to test out new ways of doing things, It is about moving away from dependency and having less reliance on the City Council. It is about action.

- Development of local community planning – community audits, surveys, mapping to improve outcomes and actions, e.g. supporting community led regeneration
- Investment in community enterprise - community hubs and community networks, local markets, food assemblies and BID development
- Pop up community learning workshops ,peer to peer support initiatives, knowledge and skills exchange
- Support community ownership and management of assets such as Community Asset Transfer
- Support communities and agencies to come together to develop Neighbourhood Companies, Co-operatives or other forms of community enterprise
- Action to remove red tape e.g. local charters or break down barriers e.g. meet service provider days
- Identifying and supporting specific neighbourhoods where innovation by community groups will be encouraged
- Strengthening Communities – capacity building, peer to peer mentoring, skilling up local residents, learning
- Match funding with other appropriate local funds i.e. Police – Active Citizens and Community Safety – Mobilising Communities and cross ward proposals
- New forms of community led engagement and involvement, particularly enabling young people to address the challenges they face.
- New ways to allocate resources e.g. Real time community change, participatory budgeting, time-banking,
- Community led initiatives – support to active citizens and groups doing it for themselves e.g. Street Champions, Street Associations etc.
- Links to District Community Challenges
- Community managed events and activities

MAY BE WANTED AND USEFUL BUT DOES NOT MEET CRITERIA FOR LIF FUNDING

(Generally more emphasis on equipment and doing to rather than with)

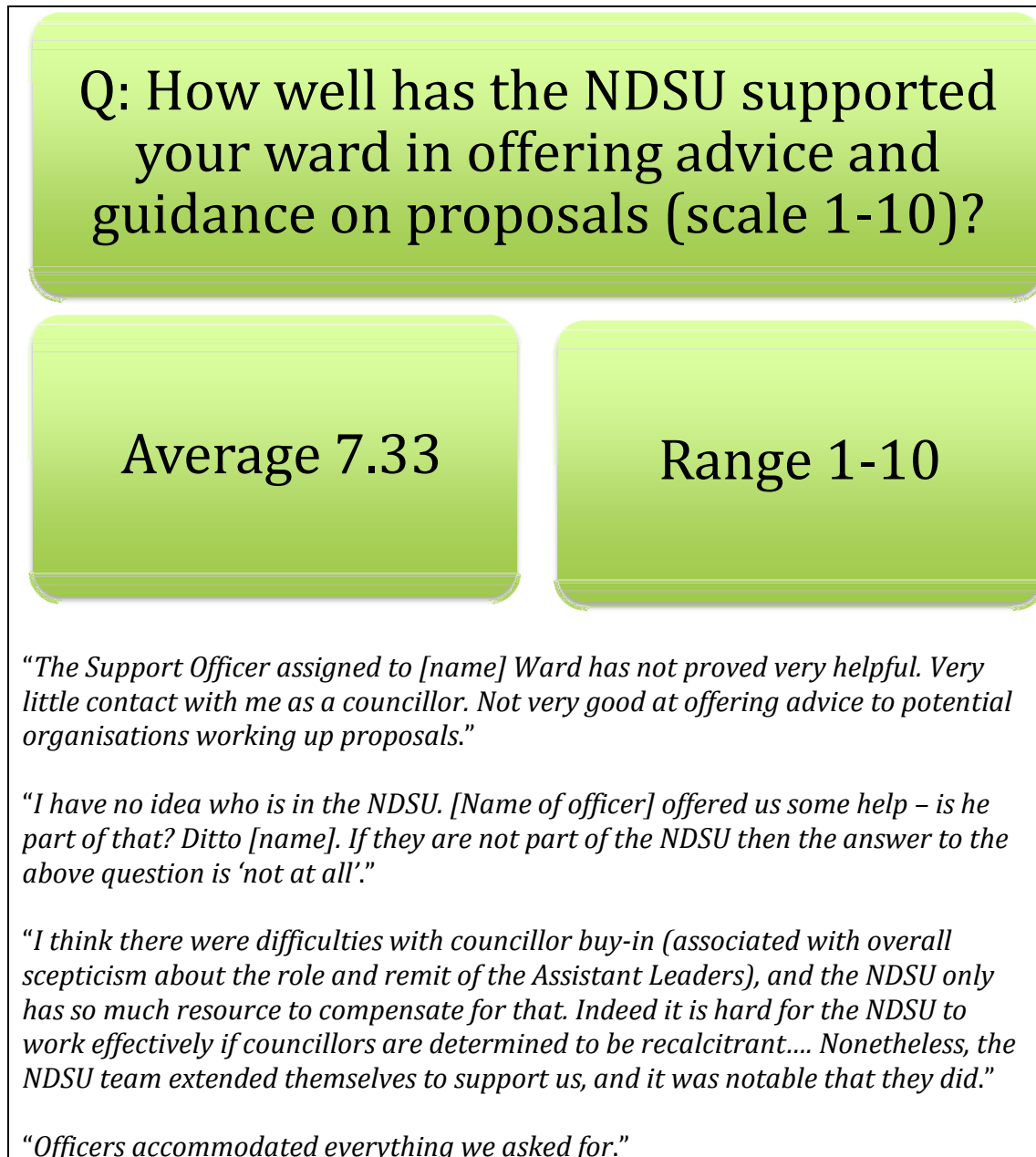
- One-off equipment e.g. CCTV, Gating, Lamp posts, Hanging baskets, Christmas lights
- One –off events (unless linked to supporting new neighbourhood led networks)
- On-going costs
- Contracted Staffing
- Commissioning Reports
- Monies used to replace lost revenue budgets or core funding

Section 4: LIF Process Assessment

The analysis in this section is focused upon the administration and implementation of the fund.

Role of NDSU

In relation to the NDSU's role in administering LIF, Councillors were asked within the survey consultation to rate the support they were receiving from the team. The results and associated comments are displayed in the graphic below:



Whilst the average (7.33) is positive, of greater interest is the polarised range of response from 1 (not at all) through to 10 (very well). There could be a number of potential reasons for this discrepancy:

❖ *Resourcing*

The NDSU originally had 4 designated Community Support and Development Officers and 3 Governance Managers split geographically across the City. Following the completion of a secondment arrangement, the number of Community Support and Development Officers has been reduced to 3, meaning the workload has been spread across remaining staff. The consultation revealed that this has caused relationship issues in some areas, due to a new representative being introduced without full knowledge of the local dynamics and contacts. It should also be noted that the under resourcing restricts the unit from being able to dedicate sufficient time to individual specialisations, for example maintaining an up-to-date knowledge of funding streams and building good practice libraries, elements which should be considered essential for most effective delivery.

❖ *Identity*

The strength of the NDSU as a cross-directorate team is also paradoxically its fundamental weakness. The unit recognises the need to do more to promote their existence, function and achievements across the City. Indeed various stakeholders commented on the existence of an invaluable relationship and respect for the supporting role provided by the individual officer, but this appears to be a legacy of their (former) ward and district roles, and not a recognition of the NDSU as an entity in its own right. The second comment in the graphic on the previous page is a particularly good example of this.

❖ *Role*

There was also a perception expressed during consultation amongst members of the NDSU that certain Elected Members wanted them to exceed the boundaries of their role and be more active in directly facilitating ward events and taking the lead in writing proposals. The team were keen to stress the importance of their remit as **supporting** and not **steering** local democracy.

This supportive role has been multi-faceted in the administration of LIF, and at times appears crucial. One officer described how there were concerns in one particular ward that LIF related ward meetings would be dominated by supporters of one specific organisation. The officer explained how he/she had adopted an interceding role to ensure that other organisations and community groups were given the confidence and platform to develop proposals, which were ultimately successful. Another NDSU representative described the importance of the role in being able to support Elected Members to reject proposals, because they were clearly outside of the scope of LIF criteria, but subsequently to work with those groups in question to apply for alternative funding (for example, a Lawn Tennis Association proposal for tennis provision and training in Sutton Trinity).

During 1:1 and survey consultations with LIF project representatives, there was almost universal approval for the support they had directly received from the

NDSU throughout the process. Criticisms were procedural rather than relationship based: issues relating to systematic delay and perceived 'red tape' are described in a later section, see below pp.17-18). The following comments illustrate the value placed on the support received:

"[name] has been amazing. They helped me to see how our local projects could be linked without being totally submerged into one another. I was really concerned beforehand."

"I was helped enormously by being able to talk to a City Council officer about the process. It could be improved by better opportunities to talk with our local Councillors about our application as it developed."

"[The process was] fairly straightforward with assistance and guidance from the District Community Support and Development Officer."

Role of Elected Members

Local Councillors play a vital role in the implementation of LIF with their local leadership role. For LIF to work as envisaged Councillors should be actively involved throughout the process from identification of community concerns, development of projects, encouragement to develop collaboration/innovation through to the recommendation that projects should be approved and receiving reports back on progress.

❖ Preparation for LIF roll out (Understanding the Concept)

Due to this there was therefore a potential for LIF not to be implemented as intended if Elected Members did not embrace it fully or did not understand their role completely. In order to mitigate this, and prepare Local Councillors for their responsibility to collaborate on developing LIF proposals, the NDSU provided two dedicated training sessions, as well as five information sessions for officers and the provision of on-going support materials.

However, sign in sheets reveal that only 40/120 Elected Members attended either of the two sessions, leaving a gap in knowledge to be filled (if sought) by colleagues and the NDSU team. The following comments from both project leads and Elected Members show how this gap translated into varied practice:

"Some councillors don't get their new role as community leaders or sort of neighbourhood managers."

"LIF depends on the ability and quality of local members."

"Not convinced that all councillors got the difference and the external scrutiny."

"LIF was too complicated for people to understand. The only people who knew it well were the officers working on it full-time."

"Councillors understood Community Chest. They do not understand this."

"We found out about LIF through a ward meeting announcing LIF funding. Our Councillors have been very supportive, but as the process has gone on it has become clear that their knowledge of what LIF is and how it works is very limited."

compared with:

"The information provided [about LIF] was clear. I connected with Local Councillors to clarify details."

"We obtained feedback from Councillors on our proposal and the selection process. They really understood it, particularly [name]....allayed our fears and the whole process was very transparent."

There was also great variety reported in how Councillors undertook the need identification process in their wards. Whilst the needs identification should be tailored to local circumstances and personal preferences, the differences in approaches could be, in part, due to this knowledge gap. Elected Members highlighted the following different processes which they adopted:

"Ward meeting to initially discuss fund followed by a meeting with one of the Assistant Leaders came and discussed fund. This was followed by a ward meeting that split into workshops to identify ideas and commonalities. Once main ideas and delivery groups identified then we undertook a series of meetings to develop applications"

"We brought various organisations and local people together with our Flip Chart. The residents were able to say and describe how they will be able to shape the ward. There were different workshops on different subjects and areas in the ward. At the end of the day, it was clear as to what is needed in the area and how it could be achieved."

"Feedback from local residents reviewing what worked well and what didn't work so well in the Ward. Reviewed comments from Ward forum meeting, PACT meetings and (named organisation) members. Visited groups that use the local community centres. Visited local sheltered housing schemes. Contact with local schools and places of worship."

"We told community activists in the ward (at a special Ward meeting and Saturday morning conference) about the money and they came forward with project ideas."

"Emailed to all known groups in the ward, advertised on social media, not hard to get potential projects to come forward."

"We used ward meeting and had meeting to decide which bids were appropriate."

"I was aware of a need in my Ward. The LIF had already been noted by a local charity (name provided) and I became aware of their interest. I joined the 2 thought streams up and we proceeded together."

It was further reported that that not all Local Councillors understood what was meant by innovation, i.e. that it was about people within neighbourhoods doing things for themselves. This confusion is highlighted by the following response to the Councillor survey:

"Why do we have to have innovation, if by now we don't know what works and supports the development of active local communities when will we ever know? The endless desire for innovation merely has the impact of making good projects dress themselves up as 'innovative'."

Whilst this may be a reflection on the relative abilities of Councillors to grasp the opportunity fully and understand the concept, it should be noted that it was also argued that the understanding of innovation could have been enhanced if more case studies had been provided. This represents a clear conundrum for the NDSU; the creation of a series of such examples could actually have led to greater replication rather than creativity based on local need.

Nevertheless, a further suggestion was that officers with suitable vision and experience could have held 'blue sky' sessions with ward fora (or similar) to assist in explaining what was meant by innovation and encouraging suitable proposals to be developed:

"We did get a case study on job creation but more would've helped even if they were fictional. It was a bit lacking on innovation for an innovation fund scheme. It would've been useful if a person with imagination like (Officer name provided) could've got some proper ideas together and brainstormed them together."

It was suggested this could be in the form of a 'how to' guide which would encourage Councillors to undertake a more detailed process of identifying appropriate proposals. It was recognised by this Councillor that this would result in the process being more resource and time intensive but could result in proposals being more closely linked to local need.

Notwithstanding the above limitations, that some Elected Members and wards truly grasped the concept is highlighted by a response from another Councillor who said:

"LIF has been a really good idea – encouraging us all to work in a much more creative and joined up way – Councillors, residents, local organisations."

This statement clearly demonstrates the potential for the scheme to be transformative in terms of modes of operation where the opportunity is understood and grasped fully.

❖ *Collaboration not competition*

LIF had at its core a desire to strengthen neighbourhoods through support and capacity building, as well as establishing new models for the operation of locally based services. This desire came from the way in which local issues and needs are identified, through to designing an appropriate project to the delivery of that project itself. Developing collaboration between projects also could reduce the amount of competition between them and encourage them to seek common ground.

A number of projects did follow this model. Comments were made from Councillors that LIF should be seen as a way to embed this collaborative approach and that it could be a model for the future sustainability of local services. In addition collaboration between services was proposed as a potential way to improve commissioning arrangements in the future; making them more in tune with local priorities. Indeed one Councillor stated that they would like to see this collaboration being forced upon organisations in the future, while a further Elected Member suggested that some officer resource could be dedicated towards developing collaborative approaches.

The notion of a co-operative council, principally developed by Oldham Council, was seen as a further policy driver in relation to the LIF process. This notion is linked to the collaborative principle but is not pre-requisite in achieving it. This principle was seen as being a key element to the most imaginative and innovative LIF proposals but also fitted in with the broader ethos of the City Council in embracing the 'Our' concept of service design and delivery (i.e.: 'Our Council', 'Our Park' etc.) and of the wider cultural change programme.

A particular aspect of collaboration which the LIF process developed was the need for all three ward councillors to provide the final sign-off on projects. This aspect was reported as being especially valuable in wards where councillors had mixed political party allegiances. This approach was stated to:

<p><i>"Force collaboration and co-operation and avoided exclusion of one councillor from the process." (Elected member)</i></p>

This approach was reportedly different to some previous local discretionary funds, for example local highways funding, where the majority party could decide.

❖ *Timing of individual ward processes*

There was clearly a lack of urgency in some wards in coordinating events to identify local community needs and develop proposals. In October 2017 over a third of the total available spend (£750k) had not been allocated, leading to a last minute rush to submit proposals. This has negative implications against the time required to generate interest, identify community concerns and develop innovative and collaborative project ideas. Party politics and character conflicts

between Elected Members were cited as contributory factors, as was the timing of the unexpected General Election which included the 'purdah' period.

It should, however, be noted that the NDSU highlighted a range of wards as truly embracing the LIF model and used it as an opportunity to develop a shared view of citizenship, transcending party politics and cultural backgrounds.

❖ *Transparency*

A number of respondents (including project leads, NDSU staff and Local Councillors) indicated that, despite purporting to be a local democratic process, it has not operated with full transparency in their respective wards and has been compromised, to an extent, by Elected Member self-interest with regard to their own 'pet projects' vis-à-vis organisations or individuals they did not approve of:

"[Elected Members] just fund projects they like."

"[Resident Association] put forward a really transformative proposal which has been blocked due to Councillors' championing their own project. It is an example of a good blocked project, whilst some that are not even 'projects' have been funded. The resident association were encouraged to apply, worked with the NDSU and were blatantly blocked. Having gone through the process it fuels the fear of another funding source being seen as parachuting and communities being done 'to' rather than 'with'."

"I knew of an organisation who wanted to bid but did not apply because he knew the Local Councillors did not get on with him. He laughed when I asked him, but I know he does really good work locally and could have put together an important project. Councillor bias is a strong factor."

"The main problems aren't with the NDSU team. It is with my colleagues in (Ward name provided) holding up the process and the lack of transparency with the final proposals. I wasn't really involved. It was taken over by the ward chair's wife."

❖ *Legacy of Community Chest*

An issue that was presented in the consultations, especially from the Elected Members, was the legacy of a previous funding stream, the Community Chest, which was also ward based. However there are fundamental differences with LIF seen in the focus on innovation, the development of proposals between Elected Members and community groups, and the scrutiny process outside of the ward. Crucially the role of Councillors is to *support and not approve* proposals. These factors have created some confusion, or even resentment towards LIF, from some Elected Members as "Community Chest was much loved."

Scrutiny is provided systematically by the NDSU, who support the ward proposal processes and advise on the extent to which projects meet the LIF criteria, Birmingham City Council Assistant Leaders, who receive each proposal and advice from the NDSU, and the Local Leadership Cabinet Committee itself, which

provides final approval for each project. It was reported that some ward members did not appreciate this scrutiny and thus were not fully supportive of LIF. This was despite the fact that ultimate decision-making could not occur at ward level as Councillors do not have the delegated power required. The view is summarised by the following comment from an NDSU officer:

"LIF is out of the control of Elected Members vis-à-vis Community Chest. Some have really struggled to grasp the difference and the increased democratisation. What Members really do not like is that they do not have the final power to approve projects. It goes via Cabinet ultimately."

In addition the focus on innovation, and the need for proposals to be developed in conjunction with community members, was reported not to have been fully embraced or understood by all Councillors. This was highlighted by the following comments from Elected Members:

"Community chest...was better able to fit with ward plans and provide solutions to problems that existed."

"LIF was too complicated for people to understand. The only people who knew it well were the officers working on it full-time."

The potential for LIF to be innovative though was recognised by some; this is highlighted by the following quote:

"LIF has been a really good idea – encouraging all of us to work in a much more creative and joined up way, Cllrs, residents, local organisations".

In summary one Local Councillor stated that:

"Community Chest was easy for members to do but is also different in nature to LIF. There is no reason, if resources allowed, that you couldn't have both as they do different things".

Q: How well do you feel that LIF approved projects dovetail with ward plans (scale 1-10)?

Average 6.19

Range 1-10

In comparison to the other quantitative questions in the Elected Member survey, Councillors were less inclined to feel that LIF proposals were directly advancing ward priorities. There was also a broad disparity in the responses, with the whole range from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very well) represented. A key background factor here is that many existing ward plans at the time of proposal development were three to four years out of date, and the current batch are only now just being produced.⁴ It should be considered a missed opportunity that the ward planning and LIF proposal development periods were not in synergy and seen as an intertwined and mutual process, as this would have helped to ensure the marriage of innovation and vision, enhancing the potential legacy value. Instead, it was reported that many areas clearly failed to engage with the empirical data and profiling (provided by the NDSU) and fell short in developing robust planning processes. Many proposals are more functional than visionary accordingly:

"Proposals are very much, 'this is the issue...this is the resource' rather than 'this is the vision for our ward(s)...these are the organisations who can be developed and have the capacity to deliver against these objectives which will help the vision to become reality." (NDSU Officer)

The development of new wards from May 2018 could provide a further opportunity to incorporate the lessons learnt from the LIF process, including the identified needs, into new ward plans.

⁴ In some areas of the city Neighbourhood Plans have also been, or are being, developed in part in response to requirements from the Localism Act.

Alternative LIF models

It was noticeable within all stages of the consultation process that many respondents questioned the LIF framework, both in terms of resource allocation and the sole focus on innovation per se. The £48k even allocation per ward resulted not only in it: “feeling too much like another manifestation of Community Chest; funding that was supposed to be objective became politicised from the get go,” (NDSU representative) but it also was seen as failing to recognise the disparity of deprivation and associated relative need for transformation across the City.

It should be stated, however, that a number of participants in the evaluation were supportive of the even split of resources. This in particular related to the belief that all wards should receive something no matter what the actual need was. This belief was highlighted by the following quotes from a variety of Councillors:

“I recognise that the same amount per ward meant it didn’t match real need but it was needed politically.”

“It was a good idea to give all wards the same and not have it based on need.”

“The philosophy of every place matters was good and I’m supportive of all wards having some resource.”

Meanwhile there was a perception that the emphasis on innovation was “too adventurous” and represented too much of a shift away from resourcing current “good projects” and local practice, as the following comments from varied sources demonstrate:

“...too much reliance on new projects instead of supporting existing work.”

“There are micro organisations who need support, and that are important for grass roots community development. These could have benefited greatly from the funding but they (and their Councillors) do not necessarily understand how they contribute to the bigger picture. Such funding would not necessarily have been innovative but it is necessary. Only way this could work within the LIF framework is through an expansive umbrella bid which brought the micro together into a cohesive proposal, but examples have been few and far between.”

An alternative model which could have addressed these issues would have been to allocate a smaller discretionary grants pot to each ward (£15-20k), allowing for ‘quick wins’ and the support of development work at the micro level. The ‘innovation’ pot could then have been retained centrally within the NDSU team. This would have encouraged wards to work together, and given the NDSU the flexibility to work across political boundaries, by joining up areas and organisations seeking to advance similar transformative agendas. Such a model would have seen the NDSU role as **enabling** citywide capacity building rather

than just **supporting** localised activity, and was indeed suggested by the NDSU as the preferred model of delivery when LIF was conceived.

Developing Proposals – The View from the Projects

During the consultation process, project leads were given the opportunity to comment on their experience of the proposal design stage, and how this could be improved in the future. Experiences were generally positive, as the following selection of comments demonstrates:

"The proposal stage was straightforward."

"Yes, we found the process very user-friendly."

"The information provided was clear."

"The form was straightforward and the targets were clear."

"The process was clear with additional support when needed. I think the process is fine as it is."

"The application process is sound."

Some project leads reported that they found out about the scheme either from existent contacts they had with officers or indeed via internet searches for potential funding schemes. This highlights that information about LIF was readily available through traditional routes for interested community groups who were seeking to develop local initiatives.

"We only found out about it due to contacts in the Local Authority."

"I found out about LIF through a Google search as part of my process of searching for funding sources."

However, there was a perceived lack of clarity within the information and advertising which had impacted upon parties' understanding of LIF purpose and process:

"At first it wasn't clear that the process was actually open for proposals. We thought it was awarded through consultations with local residents."

"There was little clarity in the process of putting together the proposal as we had no criteria or definition of innovation."

Communication was also raised as an issue in relation to a lack of feedback or updates on the proposal submission process:

"It has taken a long time to go through and had no communication about the outcome....had to keep chasing for information."

"There were long periods of silence. It felt more like a commissioning process. That's ok for us. We are used to it as a professional organisation, but would it put off community organisations?"

This latter point about the potential impact on community groups is particularly concerning. Indeed, another respondent contacted the NDSU directly to outline their concerns. They described how they had applied for funding in multiple wards across their district, and had experienced vastly different levels of communication in each. Moreover they had also struggled with the time demands that the proposal process placed upon a voluntary organisation:

"[F]ormal communication between each ward varied widely. There appeared to be an expectation that we would attend numerous meetings to discuss the same item, and then received little, if any, response. One of the wards we applied to offered immediate feedback, one took several months but finally offered formal feedback, whilst we are still awaiting any response of any kind from the other two wards. This is extremely disappointing given the time and effort we have put in to applying for bids to these wards, and given BCC's expectation of us attending meetings to often duplicate existing work...BCC can sometimes come across as lacking understanding of how community organisations and charities operate (particularly around staffing levels). [Name of group] for example, is entirely voluntary, and so taking time out to attend regular evening meetings and respond at short-notice is not as straight-forward as can be the case of a paid role in another organisation. Showing sympathy towards this would soften a willingness on many community groups' part to engage more meaningfully with BCC."

Primary recommendations from respondents centred around bureaucracy, with project leads feeling that the proposal administration process could be improved by establishing more formalised timescales, reduced delays and less document resubmission including post-approval responding to issues such as registering organisations on the City Council's vendor system. These points were raised by multiple respondents, as the following comments demonstrate:

"Once the application was finally approved and was with the City for payment, we were asked to provide the same documents over and over and were still being asked for the completed Conditions of Grant Form weeks after we'd received the first payment. It would be a good idea if the whole process was time-lined for applicants so we'd know how long it will take before we can start a new project."

"I had a feel that the process could have been slightly crisper. Maybe more formal deadlines, contact points. But generally it was clear enough to work out what it was and where to get information from."

"The decision process was far too long. It needs to be shorter."

The NDSU team themselves found the conditions of grant aid (hereafter COGA) bureaucracy equally frustrating to administer, and consideration could be given to reducing some of the burdens of due process in order to allow co-production and true devolution to flourish.

It was also suggested that Councillors and officers should be more inclined to visit projects and community groups physically so that they had a better understanding of the intentions and purported benefits of proposals in real terms, rather than within abstract paperwork. For example one project lead stated:

“This interview is the first time I’ve been questioned in any depth on our project and what we’re planning to achieve. I would’ve expected a more robust process in relation to the evaluation of bids as long as smaller organisations can be supported through that process so not to put them off.”

This ethos has been taken on board by the NDSU team, and projects are now being routinely visited in order to offer support and observe progress towards outcomes.

It should be noted that a small number of project leads consulted (three) suggested that the proposal development stage was compromised through attempts by Elected Members to manipulate proposals in furtherance of their own agendas. One respondent felt “bullied” into working with another organisation which they believed would significantly dilute the impact of their proposal and actually hinder partnership with other existing agencies. They subsequently redrafted an alternative proposal and proceeded to pay tribute to the role of the NDSU officer in demonstrating how a collaborative approach could be worked through. A further respondent highlighted their negative experience in the following way:

“The idea for the LIF proposal came from the community. The Councillors got their hands on it and manipulated it for their own agenda. Councillors have too much power. They tried to modify the bid to include a capital cost, which would have actually limited the project’s potential for social change and impact on people’s lives. They did not comprehend this at all. We should have been able to deliver cross-border too, with other organisations, but this was also prevented due to Councillor interests.”

Section 5: LIF Project Assessment

A review of hard copy proposals as at October 2017 revealed that the purported focus of the majority of LIF projects centres around Active Citizenship and Communities Stepping Up (90%) and Citizens' Independence and Well Being (82%). By contrast less than one fifth concerned cleaner streets (18%). In terms of City priorities, proposals were most often aligned with Health (81%):

City Core Priorities	Proposals (%)
Children – A great city to grow up in	64%
Jobs and Skills – A great city to succeed in	58%
Housing – A great city to live in	14%
Health – A great city to lead a healthy and active life	81%

LIF Priorities	Proposals (%)
Citizens' Independence and Well Being	82%
New Approaches to Investment	27%
Active Citizens and Communities Stepping Up	90%
Clean Streets	18%
Improving Local Centres	47%

The table on p.21 demonstrates spend by ward, including the number of projects and financial range of support. It is ordered by average spend and shows a broad difference between wards seeking to support 1-3 larger transformative proposals, and those approving smaller activity. In the South of the City, Weoley and Northfield have funded 19 projects between them; around 16% of the total number of projects across the whole City, with an average spend of just £5k per project. During consultation NDSU officers questioned how truly transformative projects can be with such minimal resourcing (see the discussion of LIF 105 - Weoley below on p.35), and expected all LIF proposals to be for a minimum of £10k as a rudimentary benchmark.

It was noted above that the politicisation and strict geographical equality of LIF administration resulted in wards looking inwardly, in most instances, rather than focusing on pan-ward collaboration. This is borne out by the fact that just 9 approved proposals were multi-ward in orientation. Two project leads also noted that they had been prevented from working across wards by Councillors at the proposal submission stage (for example, see p.35 above).

Comments made from the Councillor consultations indicated that cross-ward proposals were not easy to develop, partly due to current administrative structures not supporting this but also partly because the time required for this type of proposal was greater than those just featuring on one ward. These cross-ward proposals would need to be discussed by ward councillors/committees across all the relevant wards which would create these delays. This delay in discussion, and subsequently in approval, was reported to have created an issue for some potential projects. The time resource needed by these voluntary

organisations in these instances was cited as being a particular issue both due to the frustration of not knowing but, perhaps more importantly, because volunteer time is not always available (as described earlier).

Previously when districts across Birmingham were in place, as outlined earlier, administrative structures were in place that could have assisted this cross-ward co-operation (for example ward advisory groups). If similar cross-ward schemes were to be used in the future the issue of suitable administrative functions may need to be reconsidered.

On a positive note the 118 approved projects are drawn from a wide cross-section of organisational types, including residents' associations, community and voluntary groups, local partnerships, and a small number of professional organisations. The NDSU stated that though 'usual suspects' (those in receipt of previous Local Authority grant funding) had unsurprisingly been approved, it was clear that funding had also gone to those who have not previously applied for Community Chest or Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, including collaborations of smaller groups. The NDSU team sampled 56 of the projects, and determined that 20 of these had no previous history of such funding, equating to 35%.

Ward	Total Spend	Number Funded	Range (min)	Range (max)	Average
Bartley Green	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
Bordesley Green	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
Edgbaston	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
Ladywood	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
Longbridge	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
Oscott	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
Quinton	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
South Yardley	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
Sutton New Hall	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
Sutton Trinity	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
Tyburn	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
Washwood Heath	48,000	1	48,000	48,000	48,000
Billesley	48,000	2	24,000	24,000	24,000
Brandwood	48,000	2	24,000	24,000	24,000
Erdington	48,000	2	18,000	30,000	24,000
Hall Green	48,000	2	13,000	35,000	24,000
Sparkbrook	48,000	2	15,000	33,000	24,000
Springfield	48,000	2	20,000	28,000	24,000
Stockland Green	48,000	2	8,000	40,000	24,000
Sutton Four Oaks	48,000	2	8,000	40,000	24,000
Sutton Vesey	48,000	2	12,495	35,505	24,000
Acocks Green	48,000	3	13,361	20,730	16,000
Harborne	48,000	3	5,000	25,990	16,000
Kingstanding	48,000	3	16,000	16,000	16,000
Nechells	48,000	3	5,000	28,000	16,000
Selly Oak	48,000	3	10,000	28,000	16,000
Shard End	48,000	3	10,439	19,000	16,000
Sheldon	48,000	3	7,150	29,000	16,000
Bournville	48,000	4	3,000	25,000	12,000
Hodge Hill	48,000	4	10,000	15,000	12,000
Kings Norton	48,000	4	3,000	30,000	12,000
Moseley and King's Heath	48,000	4	8,700	18,250	12,000
Aston	48,000	5	8,500	12,000	9,600
Lozells & East Handsworth	47,952	5	4,500	26,000	9,590
Perry Barr	46,800	5	3,800	15,000	9,360
Stechford and Yardley North	43,130	5	2,500	13,316	8,626
Soho	38,500	5	6,000	12,000	7,700
Handsworth Wood	48,000	7	3,000	12,786	6,857
Northfield	48,000	9	2,000	10,000	5,333
Weoley	48,000	10	2,000	7,858	4,800

Analysis of Selected Projects

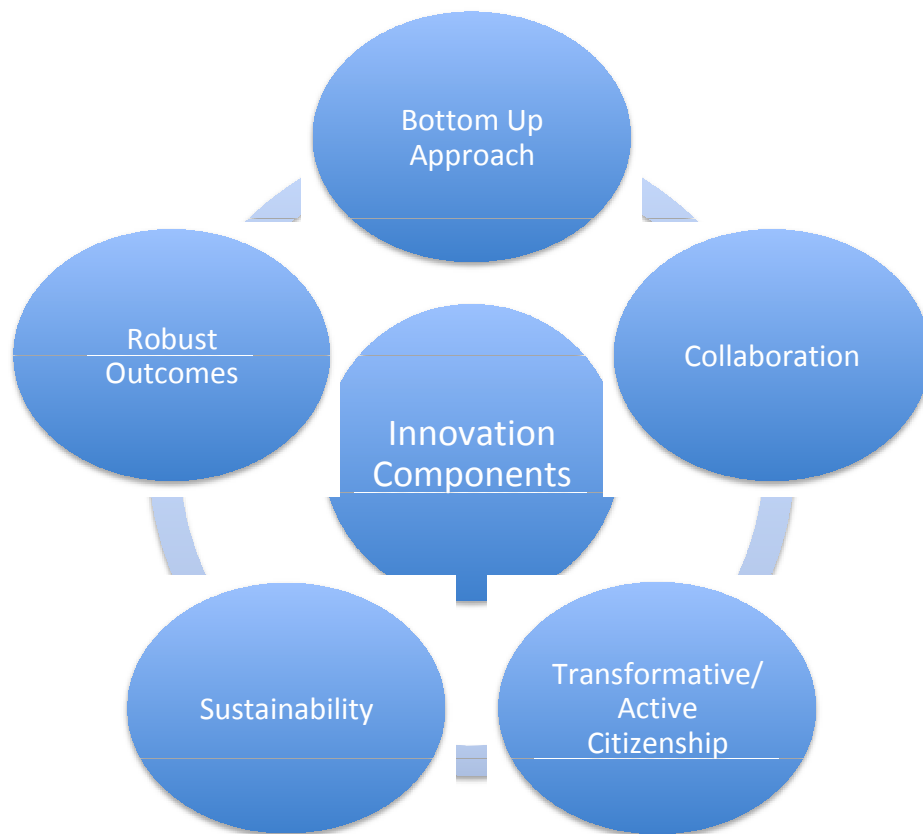
This section now proceeds to examine a cohort of 13 projects which were subjected to a more in-depth analysis, including 1:1 consultations with project leads. Further supportive evidence from the wider project survey is also provided where appropriate. The projects in the list were selected to contain a wide geographical spread, whilst also reflecting a range of organisational types:

LIF NO.	Ward	Project
1	Tyburn	Outreach & Engagement Project: Creation of a tailor made 'pop-up' outreach project to take advice, volunteer and library services to vulnerable individuals in a non-traditional way.
2	Sheldon	STAG 2: Introduction of a speed reduction programme across Sheldon roads by purchasing, erecting, monitoring and managing of speed warning signs and data collectors.
4	Edgbaston	Edging Forward Together: Creation of a community HUB in Edgbaston (Calthorpe) aimed at linking local organisations together, linked to developments at the Botanical Gardens.
6	Kingstanding	Raising Achievement in Kingstanding: Developing a social enterprise that enables young people to gain skills and vocational qualifications in horticultural services, used to offer a free gardening service for elderly and vulnerable residents.
19	South Yardley	Hobmoor Community Centre: Bringing together community assets into a central hub for well-being and community development, empowering them to reach into the community and become more effective in the delivery of core priorities.
23	Soho	Bringing People Together: A further development of Community Development Trust in Soho building on the previous Community Reach partnership. The aim is to deliver a range of activities to aid the stimulation of the local economy.
33	Lozells and East Handsworth	Destination Reach (Aspire) includes the provision of an outreach service to link residents in HMOs to training and employment opportunities. The service includes providing minibus for transporting the individuals to the various activities.
48	Handsworth Wood	HWCDT – Jobs and Skills: the development of a local Community Development Trust with a particular focus on developing activities to encourage local employment/training and well-being.
51	Selly Oak	SENSE: Creation of a sensory story-telling and reading service for children and families from the local community, complementing existing community services at the

LIF NO.	Ward	Project
		TouchBase Pears building and integrating disabled and non-disabled participants.
52	Shard End	Community Buddying: Development of a community buddying and sitting service within Shard End, including the formation of a Social Enterprise.
60	Washwood Heath	YESS: Provide skills and training for young people to aid them in accessing employment and education delivery via a consortium formed of 7 local groups.
64	Perry Barr	Preparation for Neighbourhood Plan by 3Bs Neighbourhood Forum
105	Weoley	Pickleball 35: introduction of the new sport of Pickleball into the area focussed on over 35s. Delivery of early years sporting activity in alliance with local early years' providers.

The intention of the analysis is to assess the extent to which LIF projects can be considered innovative, and a five stage criteria has been designed for this purpose. As demonstrated in the diagram overleaf, an innovatory project should be:

- ❖ Based on a strong bottom up approach;
- ❖ Have a clear collaborative approach to identification of need and delivery;
- ❖ Be transformative in purpose and/or promote active citizenship;
- ❖ Be able to demonstrate its potential for sustainability; and
- ❖ Have SMART outcomes such that successful innovation can be tangibly demonstrated.



Analysis on each of these components is provided below drawing case study examples from the 13 selected projects, bolstered by examples from the survey and document review as described above. In each section tables are provided that show an objective assessment of the extent to which this cohort of projects can be considered to meet each of the components, based on an analysis of the proposal and information/clarifications providing during the 1:1 interview. For clarity of presentation a five stage traffic light system has been utilised. Areas with a green/amber combination should not be considered to be of concern, but do not appear, from the available information, to be quite as strong compared to green status projects for each criteria.

❖ Bottom up Approach

LIF NO.	Ward	Assessment
1	Tyburn	Green
2	Sheldon	Green
4	Edgbaston	Green
6	Kingstanding	Green
19	South Yardley	Green
23	Soho	Green
33	Lozells & East Handsworth	Orange
48	Handsworth Wood	Green
51	Selly Oak	Green
52	Shard End	Green
60	Washwood Heath	Green
64	Perry Barr	Green
105	Weoley	Orange

The intention of LIF is to provide a focus for new style ward meetings and act therein as a catalyst for meaningful community engagement between residents, groups and organisations and Elected Members in their local leadership role. One would therefore expect good LIF projects to be able to show their focus is 'bottom up', i.e. that the rationale for the project stems from community identified local need and that work has been carried out by and with residents and grass roots organisations in the area to understand fully the characteristics of the issue and the dynamics of change required. In furtherance of this the project should then be able to demonstrate a strong collaborative and partnership approach, working with residents and local organisations to maximise the potential for sustainability and successful outcomes, thus linking together the core innovation components.

During consultations, a query was raised by a couple of respondents as to whether LIF, rather than funding community groups, had been "hijacked" by professional organisations with full-time bid writers with the knowledge of how to 'tick the right boxes'. They believed the marketing of the scheme as £2m available for local projects probably peaked the interest of some existent larger organisations. Whilst the projects that resulted from these organisations may well have met a local need the ethos of LIF may not have been completely realised:

"The £ multi-million charity have a professional sales bid writer who spend their time hunting down the little pots of cash that spring up. They knew the hot buttons to hit but it was not a community-generated project." (Elected Member)

The concern with such cases is not only the possible limitation of available funding to smaller groups, but also the potential for initiatives to be (and be seen as) doing 'to' communities rather than 'with.' Based on an examination of the

proposals the number of professional organisations is limited; but it is particularly crucial that where they have submitted proposals that they are able to demonstrate a transparent and thorough bottom up process to mitigate such concerns. There are two such organisations within the cohort of 13, namely SENSE and Aspire, though it should also be noted that the former proposal was very much community driven with SENSE fronting the community asset approach.

It is a positive to note that most of the cohort were able to evidence a strong approach to this element:

Examples

LIF 52 Shard End - This proposal identifies the need as the high volume of vulnerable adults socially isolated through an inability to leave their own homes. The extent of the issue was known based on two years of active listening events with different aspects of the community, recognising the value of a project which sought to support such vulnerable individuals by offering volunteer support and carer support networking.














LIF 2 Sheldon – As will be seen later, in most other aspects this project does not satisfy innovation criteria, but the issue of excessive speeding (and requests for Speedwatch) were documented as constantly arising in ward and neighbourhood meetings. It does not have the high level community engagement of some of the other best examples, but the issue does have a sound evidence base stemming from speed monitoring and technical analysis, as well as local community, Counsellors, Police and Highways feedback: “It is the number one concern in Sheldon.”

LIF 6 Kingstanding - This project is based on a fusion of identified community needs as well as a pilot exercise. Consultations had shown a high number of elderly residents who were struggling to maintain their gardens and experiencing an overarching sense of social isolation. Residents had also reported being threatened with eviction for their unkempt gardens. Meanwhile, a survey conducted by Kingstanding Regeneration Trust (KRT) with young residents revealed the fear of unemployability due a lack of work experience and vocational qualifications, with approximately 25% of 16-24 year olds in the area estimated to be not in education, employment or training (NEET). Engaging with residents and partner agencies through the Kingstanding Interagency Partnership and Local Delivery Group, the project was subsequently designed to train local NEET young people to provide a free gardening service for the elderly.

In relation to LIF 33 – Lozells and East Handsworth, this scheme was developed based on the organisation’s previous work, especially with residents from HMO properties. This analysis did include consulting with their Citizen Ambassadors, local residents who have been involved with their schemes who now act as a bridge to residents and as ambassadors for them, who stated that the need identified was real. However the scheme in itself was predominantly one which

had already been developed ahead of the LIF process; indeed it was described by one participant of the evaluation as “the wrong solution to the right problem.” LIF 105 – Weoley, links were made with a number of providers and potential clients in the area but these links were testing the ground for a planned scheme rather than developing and responding to an identified local need.

❖ Collaboration

LIF NO.	Ward	Assessment
1	Tyburn	
2	Sheldon	
4	Edgbaston	
6	Kingstanding	
19	South Yardley	
23	Soho	
33	Lozells & East Handsworth	
48	Handsworth Wood	
51	Selly Oak	
52	Shard End	
60	Washwood Heath	
64	Perry Barr	
105	Weoley	

As noted above, this is the second key element of an effective bottom up approach, with community groups and organisations working together to meet priorities. Collaboration across the cohort of projects is generally strong, as the table above demonstrates.

During the project survey, respondents were asked about the status of their partnership working. The majority indicated high levels of collaboration, with an average of 8.21. However, as the caption overleaf shows there was a wide range (1-10) with 2 LIF project leads actually rating their level of partnership working at below 3 out of 10, despite it being a fundamental aspect of the LIF approval process. By contrast half of the projects surveyed felt they were working ‘very well’ with other organisations (10 out of 10), and 20 out of the 24 respondents at 8 or above.

Q: How well is your project working in partnership with other organisations (scale 1-10)?

Average 8.21

Range 1-10

Examples

LIF 19 South Yardley – The Hobmoor Community Centre Hub provides a focal facility for the asset based development of ten different community organisations, mobilising them to extend provision and work cooperatively, and provide a positive range of activities and services to the local community. Specifically the LIF funding has enabled the centre to expand its network, notably provision on Oaklands Park. This has included delivery of affordable summer holiday arts and sports provision which has successfully transcended cultural boundaries, attracting 185 young people from 34 different schools, and representing 5,500 hours of physical activity.

LIF 60 – Washwood Heath, here a number of voluntary organisations, or social enterprises, were already in existence in the ward; many having similar aims and carrying out related work. They heard about the existence of LIF from a range of networks including from a Facebook page focussed on local issues and concerns. Following a ward meeting, where the scheme was formally announced and where the groups were present, these groups decided to come together as a consortium, and were encouraged to do so, as they could see that they had these complementary skills. Part of the rationale for this decision was to reduce competition between them but it was also due to recognition that the project could make more of an impact by working together.

As part of the process of developing the proposal all groups undertook research with their clients to establish local priorities and needs including undertaking with people using the local soup kitchen and utilising research undertaken from people leaving the local prison. A new social interest company has been formed to act as the umbrella organisation which will oversee the project as it gets established. The project lead stated that:

“LIF has enhanced partnership working and has brought 7 groups together for the first time.”

The partnership also has further plans to collaborate with local businesses both to identify potential placements for the client group but also to seek ongoing sponsorship support for the project.

It should be noted however that at the time of writing the COGA for this proposal had still not been returned. The final evaluation will need to examine closely how well the collaboration’s aspirations expressed here have translated into ongoing practice.

Worthy of note too as a positive example of collaboration outside of the thirteen selected project cohort is the Erdington Planters Greening Project (LIF 3) which engages NEET young people to plant and maintain trees, plants and foliage within Erdington Town Centre, with a view to progressing participants to further training and employment. The project has thus far demonstrated high levels of collaborative practice with local partners to recruit willing young trainees to be immediately engaged with, enabling the project to deliver rapidly and provide momentum. Moreover, it was particularly interesting to note a collaborative approach to problem solving when original plans proved unfeasible. Dealing with adversity can be the true test of the value of partnership working, as the following survey comment illustrates:

“The need to be flexible and find solutions to green the town centre has been challenging for both partners. Erdington High Street has been the victim of poor planning in previous decades which has created narrow pavements, a huge array of street furniture and a lack of parking spaces. This meant that initial plans for pop-up-planters could not be fully implemented due to a lack of space in an overcrowded environment. This has delayed work. However both partners have worked together to find an alternative solution by focusing on identifying including the green and pedestrianised areas, where new green spaces can be created that make a real impact and difference to the feel and perception of the town centre.”

Both LIF 23 – Soho and LIF 64 – Perry Barr are governed by forums; the former by a Community Development Trust (hereafter CDT) and the latter a neighbourhood forum. These groups, by their nature, are collaborative with a range of organisations and residents taking part, helping to shape their activities and delivering specific strands of work. A specific example (whilst symbolic) of collaborative working was provided by Bringing People Together whereby all meetings and forums are now held ‘in the round’ enabling practice to be shared more. They also are holding market place events whereby local people can interact with local businesses and organisations with the aim of sharing knowledge, and boosting involvement with their work.

In contrast, LIF 2 (Sheldon) does not represent a collaborative project, relying entirely on the capacity of two individuals to deliver without any associated community engagement framework. Partnership working is only present to the

extent that it is the intention of the scheme to provide data for statutory agencies. There is also a concern in relation to LIF 33 (Lozells and East Handsworth) which appears primarily to have a unilateral delivery focus (one organisation working to tackle a specific need) rather than being focused on working with, or empowering local people and groups. This is borne out by the following survey comment, where the emphasis is on information giving rather than a joined up approach:

“Aspire have arranged a stakeholders’ meeting to enable us to update them on all projects and Destination Reach.”

Whilst they did consult with their Citizen Ambassadors, and learning providers, in the design of their proposal this process was principally reported to be validating the need for the project as much as instigating views on unmet need in the area.

❖ Transformation/Active Citizenship

LIF NO.	Ward	Assessment
1	Tyburn	Green
2	Sheldon	Red
4	Edgbaston	Green
6	Kingstanding	Green
19	South Yardley	Green
23	Soho	Green
33	Lozells & East Handsworth	Green
48	Handsworth Wood	Green
51	Selly Oak	Green
52	Shard End	Green
60	Washwood Heath	Orange
64	Perry Barr	Green
105	Weoley	Orange

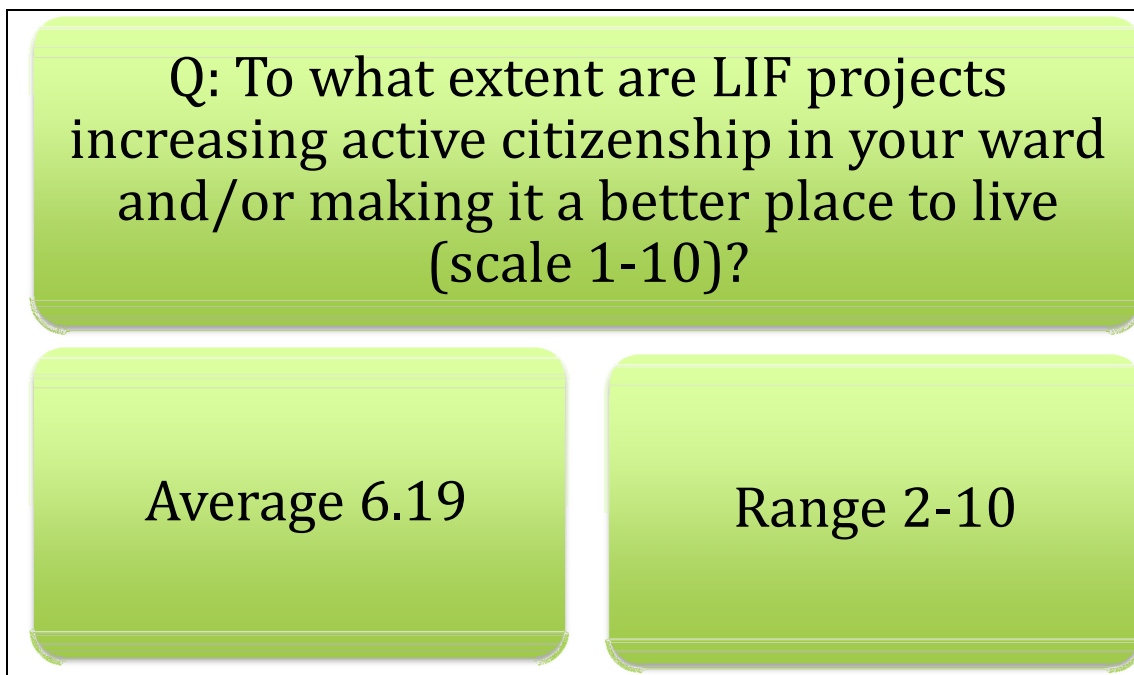
The analysis of proposals and consultations with projects/NDSU representatives reveals numerous projects which seek to transform local service delivery and promote active citizenship, including proposing a high social value return on investment through volunteering hours. Such proposals have truly embraced the purpose and scope of LIF, and are showcased within the good practice examples which follow. The table above also demonstrates that many of the projects selected for in depth analysis scored highly against this criterion.

However, if we consider community engagement as a spectrum, ranging from information giving (unilateral delivery) at one end, through to true collaboration and citizen empowerment at the other, it is also fair to state that there are numerous examples of approved LIF projects which are much more towards the bottom end of the spectrum:



Such projects were routinely RAG rated as amber or red by the NDSU team to support the scrutiny process, flagging concerns around suitability. As noted above they provide examples which are more ‘functional than visionary’ and more suited to the preceding Community Chest regime. There is an important distinction here. It is not the intention of this report to state that these projects are not worthwhile or do not purport to address important community concerns, but that their delivery framework and rationale was not innovative and therefore more suited to alternative funding regimes. Again examples of these projects are presented on p.34 below.

This dichotomy is well borne out by the Elected Member survey question contained in the caption below, with the average and 2-10 range showing that Local Councillors saw the potential for active citizenship stemming from their LIF approved projects as highly varied:



Due to the wide range of good practices demonstrated by LIF projects to date, the following examples are split thematically:

Examples

Community Hubs

Within the cohort there were clear examples of innovative hub approaches, designed to strengthen neighbourhood networking and capacity to deliver across community groups and local partner organisations. These include LIF 4

(Edgbaston), LIF 19 (South Yardley) and in part LIF 51 (Selly Oak). LIF 42 (Bartley Green) is a further example from outside of the sample.

LIF 4 – Edgbaston. The Calthorpe Estate in Edgbaston covers a wide geographical area, crossing into Harborne and Quinton Wards at its peripheries. It has a vibrant and well-established residents’ association which is the primary driving force behind the hub proposal. The area is considered to be generally affluent, but does suffer from micro areas of deprivation. Its population profile is also in a state of flux, with new demographic groups moving into the area (including the expansion of University accommodation) which has, in particular, increased the levels of young people in the locality. The estate, however, lacks a traditional centre and therefore there is perceived to be a paucity of communication between existing residents and groups, and an increasing sense of social isolation. The proposal centres around the creation of a virtual hub, bringing together diverse sections of the community through enhanced communication (social media) and community activities. Also key to the model is the use of existing assets to maximise engagement and structure delivery such as the Botanical Gardens. The Quaker Meeting House has also been used to provide a community arts group and workshops, and is being developed into a community venue.

A further strength of this project is also its mix of innovation with a ‘back to basics’ approach to delivery, most notably around local problem solving. For example, due to the joining up of existing groups through the hub network, a common issue relating to community safety and the need for increased surveillance has been identified. This has been shared with statutory agencies and the local MP as a community concern, rather than just being the isolated reports of disparate residents.

Communities Stepping Up

There are numerous examples of active citizenship whereby community organisations are delivering projects, or managing assets, which complement existing public services such as environmental improvements, social care, jobs/skills and library services. As a sustainable legacy, many of the volunteers involved are developing skills (including qualifications) for their endeavours. There are also examples of projects that are utilising a time-banking approach, encouraging beneficiaries to give back voluntary hours in the future:

LIF 6 – Kingstanding. As noted above, this project works to deliver an environmental service for vulnerable adults, using unemployed young people as the delivery mechanism. They are provided with work experience and training which is supporting participants to gain entry level vocational qualifications that will enable them to work in the construction industry. The following case study was provided by the project lead, and provides a real demonstration of the significant impact upon the life trajectory of this individual:

X was approached by an Employment advisor during an outreach session at Perry Barr Job centre; he was in receipt of benefits and in a spiral of

unemployment. X did not enjoy school and held no formal qualifications. He was invited to attend an Expression of interest session whereby he decided to sign up for our LIF program. X stated he wanted to “do better with my life” and to “help people”. Initially X found it very difficult to be organised and punctual.

X lacked employability skills. Day one of work experience he did not attend until 11.30am. Upon his arrival he was sent home and advised that arriving three hours late on his first day of a new job would result in instant dismissal. Since the incident X's time keeping was impeccable. He was hardworking, organised and reliable. X began to understand the skills and healthy attitude required for sustainable employment. X flourished on site, stating he “loved everything about it”. He requested that we extend the Work experience time frame as the support he had received from Kingstanding Regeneration Trust has influenced his mind set and “makes me want to work.”

X has gone on to attend and qualify in three additional accreditations with Kingstanding Regeneration Trust. He is now applying for work within the Demolition industry. X now feels he has a focus and knows where he wants to go in life.

There is also a strong potential for replication associated with this project, for example by training young people to look after the City's parks and open spaces, thus supporting Local Authority provision and developing social responsibility.

LIF 1 – Tyburn. This pop up support service offers mobile provision for residents missing out on integral services (e.g. financial advice, health, employment and library services) due to physical disability or other vulnerabilities, providing a resource to complement the public sector and challenge social isolation. The primary delivery mechanism is through the recruitment and training of 20 volunteers from the community to run the service alongside partnership organisations. The purported social value return on the volunteer time investment (based at £10 per hour) is anticipated to be in excess of £31k:

“The creation of a team of active citizens cannot be highlighted too strongly. We at the TRA believe that our work and the impact we have made in our area is due to the fact that at the heart of our work is that it is managed, co-ordinated and assessed by local unpaid residents. This project will help train and develop a whole batch of local champions empowering them to make genuine change.”
(from proposal)

Indeed the consultation process revealed that one of the volunteers has subsequently been employed directly by the Castle Vale Tenants and Residents Alliance as a financial inclusion officer. The project lead commented that:

“She is now a different person who goes over and above. She had been unemployed for years but has so much determination, compassion and empathy crucial for our work. She will be an absolute role model.”

LIF 52 – Shard End. The project lead was keen to stress that their project is not just ‘another care agency’, but rather a programme to create social capital through a volunteer hub, training local people to act as community buddies for vulnerable residents in need of assistance and experiencing social isolation. The project is working towards the development of a social enterprise model which will help to fill the widening gap in provision associated with NHS and public service funding cuts. The social value return on investment, costed against the £11 an hour for a skilled carer support worker, is considered to be 21k per annum (in excess of the £19k LIF allocation).

There is also strong local collaboration with LIF 17 – Shard End, which is a community caretaking project, to offer low cost gardening and decorating services to those unable to maintain their own houses and boundaries. Similarly this has a strong volunteer emphasis:

“Using volunteers from the community who naturally want to help others in the garden/home. Most people would at the drop of a hat help a neighbour if they thought they were not able to mow a small lawn. It’s finding those people and getting them to give regular time to help someone in their community.”

Other projects worthy of note include the extension of library provision around jobs and skills at Witton Lodge Library (LIF 20 – Oscott), including a possible future asset transfer from Birmingham City Council; the community asset transfer of an outdoor gym on Laurel Road to a community organisation on a long lease (LIF 77 – Handsworth Wood), and LIF 44 Bournville (Community Matters) which is providing peer to peer support for small community and voluntary organisations. The encouraging element is the time banking ethos, should the project deliver as intended, which will see recipients becoming future volunteers offering future advice to the voluntary sector.

Health Interventions

Examples in this category are aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles to reduce the future burden on health care services. These include LIF 31 - Springfield (Healthy Village), LIF 7 - Kingstanding (Health and Wellbeing Navigators), LIF 48 – Handsworth Wood and LIF 5 - Kingstanding Food Community. In the last of these projects the Well Being Centre asset is being developed to showcase nutritional information and advice on conventional and complimentary medicines. This will be supported by an in house dining service run by a team of 32 volunteers and freelance cook, providing a seasonal menu tailored around available allotment produce.

Examples of projects which are more functional in orientation and lower on the community engagement spectrum include the following. It should be noted that in many of these cases there appears to be a reliance on capital costs and staff/worker funding as opposed to clear capacity building:

LIF 2 – Sheldon. Within the cohort this proposal showed the lowest level of community involvement, and does not appear to fit neatly with any of the specified LIF outcomes. The funding is also used to support capital expenditure and maintenance of speed monitoring equipment, rather than any sense of community development.

LIF 65 – Perry Barr. This provides capital funding for an outdoor gym in a local park, requiring ongoing funding for safety checks and equipment maintenance. This can be contrasted with the asset transfer model within the Laurel Road project above.

LIF 67 – Stechford and Yardley North. This project provides a small scale (£2.5k) Holiday Kitchen project providing meals and social activities for families with primary school children during the summer vacation who are normally entitled to free school meals. There is little doubt that it represents a worthwhile project with a focused need, but it is short-term in design and therefore lacking a longer term vision or sustainability:

“To repeat the project we will require staff costs for which we will need funding.”

LIF 71 – Acocks Green. The rationale of this project is to engage with young people (aged 11-18) to identify how they wish to use their leisure time, hence forming the basis of future funding applications. The mode of operation is to fund a youth worker (with support workers). Greater emphasis could have been placed on upskilling local residents, for example by the use of peer researchers, as a more engaging and community led project.

LIF 98 – Lozells and East Handsworth. This project purports to create “a sustainable network of community stakeholders working as a collective in the delivery of coordinated services across the ward.” Whilst it is ambitious in its aspirations, the project appears speculative in design (especially given the small level of funding requested at £2.5k), and lacking clear direction and purpose:

“The outcome is to get at least one collaborative project addressing one key theme affecting residents in their area.”

LIF 105 – Weoley. The organisation has put in place plans which could enable activities which are funded by LIF to be continued after the project life. These relate to a desire for Early Years providers to embed the schemes into their services, providing links to a local football club, and that those using Pickle Ball will be charged a modest amount to continue using it. However the potential for a small amount of resources to transform the well-being of the community is questionable. Whilst more local residents may take part in sport and exercise, including Pickle Ball, given the scale of the funding, the impact is likely to be limited.

❖ Sustainability

LIF NO.	Ward	Assessment
1	Tyburn	Green
2	Sheldon	Amber
4	Edgbaston	Amber
6	Kingstanding	Green
19	South Yardley	Amber
23	Soho	Green
33	Lozells & East Handsworth	Amber
48	Handsworth Wood	Amber
51	Selly Oak	Green
52	Shard End	Amber
60	Washwood Heath	Amber
64	Perry Barr	Green
105	Weoley	Amber

The table above shows the assessment of sustainability of the thirteen projects from the in-depth cohort. Ratings here are unsurprisingly lower than previous categories, partly given the difficulty of demonstrating sustainability and proving legacy value so early in the project delivery cycle. However it should be noted that even at this stage 8/13 projects have been given at least a green/amber rating; based on a coherent strategy to preserve activity through community capacity building and the development of social capital. LIF 2 Sheldon shows no real plan for sustainability beyond the lifespan of the equipment to be purchased, with reliance on two individuals for delivery. LIF 4 Edgbaston is currently rated amber; though the project is clearly working to network local community groups and volunteers within the virtual hub and therein develop capacity, there is an acknowledgment of the need to attract alternative funding going forward, coupled with some incoherence around the exact legacy beyond this:

“Beyond the networking and nurturing our legacy will be certain projects, possibly young people resources.”

The project survey reveals a general confidence in the sustainability of the approved initiatives, with an average rating of 8.46. Half of the respondents also rated the likelihood of long-term continuance at ‘very likely’ (10 out of 10):

Q: What is the likelihood of your project being continued after this period of funding?

Average 8.46

Range 5-10

Whilst it is very early in the project cycle to assess sustainability objectively, the ideal LIF project is one where there is a vision and coherent plan to leave a legacy which enhances social capital, embedding the skills and infrastructure through which delivery can be perpetuated. This represents true capacity building, and is not solely reliant on future funding applications (if at all). Analysis of existing LIF projects, both inside and outside of the in depth sample, reveal a good number of projects which do indeed seek to sustain in this way:

LIF 1 - Tyburn. The initiative is being preserved by the establishment of a trained team of volunteers, integrated into Castle Vale TRA. This team is able to sustain and develop the dynamic pop up delivery model, and therein act as community champions, sharing their learning in and outside of the organisation:

“LIF and our volunteers have magnified our understanding of the community and how to work in it. We have embedded that learning within the organisation and are stronger for it. We will continue to take the learning forward and change our own way of working for the better. Our organisation has transformed over the years and LIF has been fundamental to this.”

The stipulated output was the recruitment of a cohort of 20 volunteers, with the project on course to actually exceed this target within the LIF funding cycle.

LIF 6 - Kingstanding. The legacy of the gardening scheme will be the creation of a social enterprise which will continue to provide training and employment opportunities for NEET young residents. The project lead did acknowledge however during consultation that they have now stopped advertising because of over subscription, and whilst the model will continue into the next financial year, further funding would be required in order to maintain the high level of delivery. This includes a pipelined Big Lottery application to work with young people with mental health concerns.

LIF 23 - Soho. Bringing People Together itself has developed from a previous initiative, Community First. Their proposal also includes a plan for the CDT to develop into a Charitable Trust both as a way of delivering some of the planned new services but also to be able to access a wider portfolio of funding sources. An element of the project will be holding 'Market Place' events whereby local businesses, organisations and people can share their schemes and services with the hope of boosting uptake and sharing good practice.

LIF 51 - Selly Oak. This is a community driven asset based proposal which seeks to extend the range of community services available through the SENSE TouchBase Pears facility in Selly Oak (originally this was primarily intended to offer provision around SENSE's core activity of looking after deaf and blind adults and children). However, the centre has developed into a valuable community resource, providing a venue for a range of charitable organisations, community activities and library services. It operates as a social enterprise model, hiring out rooms and charging for activities which are subsequently reinvested, with the projection that the facility will become self-sustaining within three years. Neighbourhood planning has seen large developments of housing locally, increasing the percentage of young people in the locality. The LIF funding specifically is being used to provide an outreach service, aimed at increasing resident involvement in the centre, and integrating non-disabled and disabled children in 'sensory exploration' activities, complementing the services provided by Birmingham Libraries. Sustainability stems from the continued viability of the centre, and the integration of the outreach role into the existing SENSE staffing team in the long-term.

LIF 52 - Shard End. In a similar vein to the preceding examples in LIF 1 and LIF 6, this initiative is seeking to increase the capacity of local residents to support vulnerable adults by training 20 volunteers to act as community buddies. At the time of writing 9 had already been trained, leaving the project on course to meet this output. The project is working towards turning the volunteer resource into a social enterprise. To ensure sustainability there is an intention of charging for the sit in service in the future (this will be at a level considerably lower than the regular £24 an hour professional rate) and would be reinvested into the enterprise model.

LIF 64 - Perry Barr. 3Bs will be using the LIF funding to help develop their neighbourhood plan which is required as part of the Neighbourhood Planning processes from the Localism Act. This plan in itself should act as a catalyst to identify future development options and activities including those relating to the Commonwealth Games which will take place in the local area. Inherent to the process is the need to gain community involvement in the development and acceptance of the neighbourhood plan and indeed the proposal comes from an existent neighbourhood forum in the area.

LIF 70 Billesley. This proposal seeks to establish a Participatory Community Trust for the Billesley & Highters Heath Ward. Part of the grant is being used to set up the Development Group in terms of managing and organizing the project. Membership is being drawn from the Billesley & Highters Heath Community and local service providers. The Development Group aims to work with all local organisations and groups to establish a community fundraising vehicle for the Billesley & Highters Heath Ward. It is intended that the rest of the allocation is to be used as social capital to support local projects and up skill the community. This will make it easier for the community to start new projects and subsequently increase the capacity for people to make collective decisions as a community.

LIF 110 Sutton Trinity. This project establishes a community intergenerational play café inside Sutton Coldfield Library. The strength of the proposal relies around infrastructure development, with the creation of a charity (FOLIO) and community interest company. The LIF funding is acting as seed funding that will establish the project, and lead to the generation of ongoing income for FOLIO to sustain the café moving forwards.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are LIF projects which were either very short-term and unlikely to be replicated without further funding (e.g. LIF 67 – Stechford and Yardley North, see p.35 above), or lack a clear resource for sustainability. The following comments demonstrate this issue:

“I am seeking other sources of funds...to continue this project.”

“We hope the completed report will form the basis of additional applications to Trusts and other funding bodies to attract larger amounts of funding into the Ward.”

“Statistics will be gathered and the initial success will indicate extension of the project. If extended then further funding will be required. We intend to apply to various funding streams to sustain the project long term.”

❖ Outcomes

LIF NO.	Ward	Assessment
1	Tyburn	
2	Sheldon	
4	Edgbaston	
6	Kingstanding	
19	South Yardley	
23	Soho	
33	Lozells & East Handsworth	
48	Handsworth Wood	
51	Selly Oak	
52	Shard End	
60	Washwood Heath	
64	Perry Barr	
105	Weoley	

As part of the in-depth assessment, stipulated project outcomes were examined for suitability. This is the area where we believe that most proposals could have been developed further, hence the broad amber flagging in the table which follows. There needs to a robust way of proving longer-term impact through outcomes, embedding sense-checking through the process (though admittedly this can be difficult to articulate for a transformative visionary project).

In a high number of proposals there is a confusion between outputs and outcomes. Outputs are intrinsic in nature and important for monitoring progress, demonstrating that a project is delivering to beneficiaries as intended, but they are not a real extrinsic measure of longer-term social impact. Examples from the proposals, which are described as key outcomes, include the following:

“The number of people given advice and guidance = 350.”

“50 children and families will attend the Sensing Stories sessions.”

“20 volunteers will be recruited.”

“The number of people who are isolated and have accessed the support service – 500”

These are fundamentally output measures. If met, they demonstrate that a project is delivering as intended, but they do not in themselves articulate the change or sense of development which is being brought to the local area by their successful completion.

The clearest proposal in terms of outcomes from the thirteen examined in more depth was LIF 6 Kingstanding. This presents a robust combination of ‘building

block' outputs, outcomes and (crucially) plausible methods by which to assess the outcomes. It could have been enhanced further by adding target measures to the outcomes, enabling the project a way of demonstrating the extent of change (and indeed to show that outcomes have been exceeded). As further examples both LIF 60 - Washwood Heath, and LIF 23 – Soho, have developed clear ideas on how to ascertain the impact of their LIF funding. In the case of LIF 60, these include plans to assess, from their client monitoring, progress made and change that has occurred with the young people which they work. Once again, however, there is no clear articulation through specific targets as to how these will be seen as being achieved:

LIF 6 – Kingstanding (proposal extract)

We will deliver the following outputs that will be measured by monthly monitoring of the service.

30 young people NEET will complete a 3 week work focused training programme.

30 young people NEET will achieve 4 construction industry entry level vocational qualifications.

20 young people NEET will enter full time employment within 6 weeks of completing the training programme.

10 young people NEET will progress to further training, education or part-time employment within six weeks of completing the training programme.

80 elderly or vulnerable residents will benefit from having received a free gardening maintenance service.

60 gardens belonging to elderly or vulnerable residents will be improved.

80 elderly or vulnerable residents will receive additional sign posting advice and professional support to help them to maintain their independence and wellbeing.

10 residents will receive training and learn new skills to enable them to volunteer on the project.

We also aim to achieve the following longer term outcomes that we will monitor through one to one interviews, resident surveys, our user group and focus groups.

Young people NEET gain accredited vocational qualifications and transferable skills enhancing their chances of gaining employment.

Young people NEET achieve improved emotional wellbeing and resilience, enabling them to focus on gaining qualification and entering and staying in employment.

Young People NEET enter work, further education or training enhancing long-term employability and improving their quality of life.

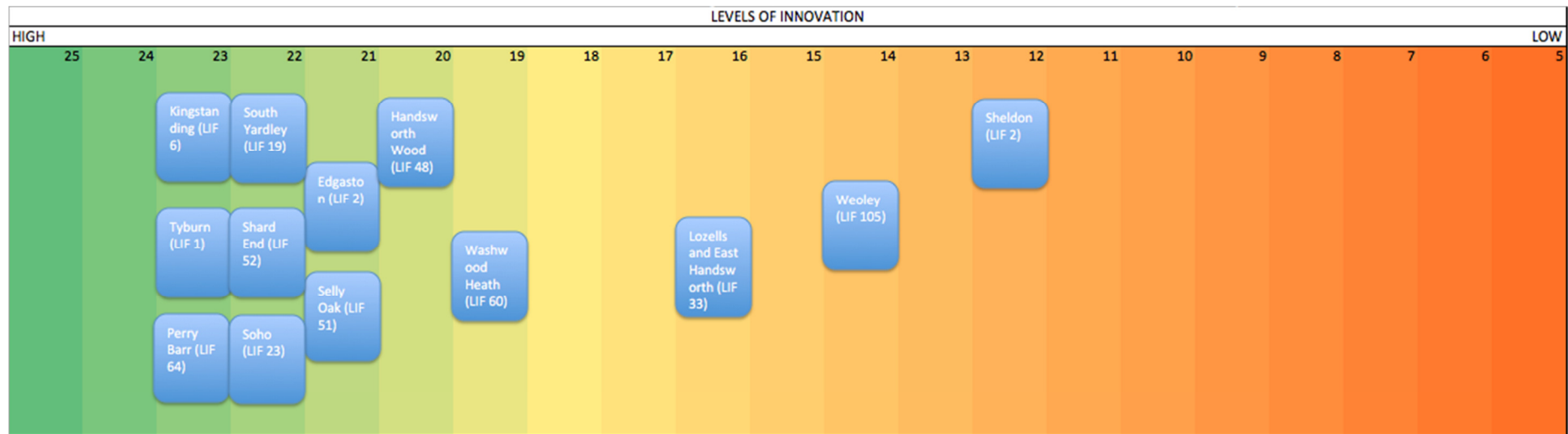
Elderly and vulnerable residents are supported to engage with the wider community and support networks enabling them to improve and maintain their independence and physical and emotional well-being.

Residents gain new skills and work experience through volunteering opportunities enhancing their employability skills.

Residents and young people gain a sense of community pride and ownership and experience better community cohesion through inter-generational working that has a positive community impact.

Summary

Overleaf is a summary chart showing the thirteen projects examined in-depth on a scale of innovation based on the preceding assessment sections. This chart has been designed to display a composite analysis of the projects:



Section 6 – Key Findings

Provided in this section are a number of key findings based on the preceding analysis in the earlier sections. These findings are designed to highlight areas of interest from the analysis. They can be used by local decision-makers to help shape both the continuing implementation of LIF as well as the development of any future innovation and locally based programmes.

Outcomes

As was seen in the analysis a significant area of LIF where proposals were less advanced is in relation to the setting of appropriate outcome measures and targets. It is recognised that this is not a straightforward process in relation to community engagement and innovation projects. However the vast majority of the projects that were assessed in this interim evaluation did not have sufficient measures that would enable social change to be assessed, and highlight real achievements made. Many projects included outputs as outcomes and/or did not include any robust method by which stated outcomes could be measured. This points to a need for more advice and assistance being provided to the NDSU, Elected Members and projects on this issue. In the ongoing development of the projects funded under LIF this could involve the sharing of better practice examples such as seen in LIF 6 - Kingstanding.

For the future, consideration could be given to the use of Social Return on Investment measures. The use of these principles and measures are more suitable for schemes of this nature than more traditional ones such as, for example, percentage reduction in crime.

Furthermore consideration also could be given, when assessing the suitability of projects in an innovation/transformation scheme such as this, to the use of a project assessment model such as the five component model used in this report. These five components (based on a strong bottom up approach, have a clear collaborative approach to identification of need and delivery, be transformative in purpose and/or promote active citizenship, be able to demonstrate its potential for sustainability and have SMART outcomes such that successful innovation can be tangibly demonstrated), if used to assess and monitor proposals, would highlight areas of concern which then could be developed further by the project. In addition such a model could be used by projects themselves as a self-assessment process throughout its life as a way of capturing areas of improvement, lessons learnt and achievement. The Social Accounting and Audit method of judging progress made is a further potential tool which could be used in this regard.

Ward Plans

In many cases the LIF proposals were compiled without an up-to-date ward plan having been produced. This was, in hindsight, a missed opportunity to create synergy between the projects as a delivery method responding to local issues and need. Not least this meant that more effort was required from local

Councillors in establishing need and local issues in a structured manner. Yet many areas clearly failed to engage with the empirical data and profiling (provided by the NDSU) and fell short in developing robust planning processes.

As new wards are introduced in 2018 consideration should be given to developing these ward plans promptly, drawing on existent local plans such as those drawn up for neighbourhood planning purposes, so that any future schemes can be based soundly on local issues and concerns. Consultation activity could then be based upon gaining local involvement in the design of activities and interventions.

External Scrutiny

A key element of LIF was the external scrutiny of each proposal that was provided both by the NDSU and the Local Leadership Cabinet Committee. Such scrutiny both has the purpose of fine-tuning and amending proposals as well as providing the final accountability measure in the spending of public money. Whilst not all ward Councillors were fully supportive of this scrutiny many participants welcomed this element of the programme.

Particularly with the introduction of single member wards this external scrutiny of any similar schemes should be continued both to improve project design but also as a critical accountability safeguard.

Role of NDSU

The NDSU has played a pivotal role in the creation and administration of LIF, and should remain a central component of any future place-based funding streams. Project leads often articulated the valuable support they had received from the team in developing and submitting proposals. It is also clear that, at times, the NDSU officers have had to be extremely proactive to ensure that LIF ward meetings and the project identification process has been fully transparent and democratic. Their role in helping groups to identify alternative funding sources for projects not suitable for LIF is also worthy of note. The NDSU helps to provide an effective support structure for neighbourhood development, local democracy, priority setting, monitoring of existing grant funding and ward level governance; a role that will become even more crucial following the reduction of the number of Elected Members.

It was apparent on a number of occasions that respondents had a beneficial relationship with the individual NDSU support officer, but little awareness of the existence and function of the NDSU as an entity. The identity of the NDSU is an issue which certainly needs to be addressed, and the team is currently undertaking steps to raise its profile

Provision of Support and Guidance

As with any new scheme or way of working there will be an element of learning that will occur 'on the job' especially where the scheme itself is trying to

encourage place-based innovation. A variety of guidance documents and workshops were held at the outset which were designed to assist Councillors with their role and provide information for potential groups and organisations. However comments were made that more practical worked examples of what was meant by innovation and 'how to' guides such as on assessing need and setting targets would have been appreciated even if the examples were fictitious. Such support also is likely to have been beneficial for projects. Explaining more clearly exactly what was meant by place-based innovation, collaboration and sustainability, for example, may have been aided with such worked illustrations. However, there is an inherent risk that examples could be simply copied or modified in some areas, stunting creativity and local assessment of real needs. On balance, the number of extra examples should therefore be limited.

Process Issues

Many participants commented that the process used by LIF, including the proposal form, was relatively straightforward and self-explanatory especially when compared to other funding streams. However a variety of people raised concerns principally relating to the time taken to develop and approve projects, the multiple provision of information and that some contract documents and procedures were overly onerous. Clearly due process has to be followed when public money is being allocated and spent. It is not unreasonable that voluntary organisations receiving public funds should be expected to attain a minimum set of standards and 'professionalism'. However further consideration could be given to ensure that the demands on small, often voluntary, organisations and groups (many of whom will not have accessed such funds before) are not off-putting. As far as is possible the time taken to approve projects should be reduced or at least a realistic timetable provided to projects reducing anxiety and maintaining enthusiasm. It is recognised in this instance that some events outside of the control of the City Council, for example the General Election, did mitigate against this.

Sharing of Emerging Practice

As was demonstrated in the previous section there are many examples emerging from the funded projects of innovation and good practice. These can be drawn from each of the five innovation components used in the project assessment framework. They are also drawn from across the city and represent very different project types. The sharing of these specific examples are likely to be of value to similar projects.

It was reported in the process of undertaking the evaluation that plans were in place to bring projects and Elected Members together to share this good practice, to discuss lessons learnt and to build up networking opportunities. These events should be encouraged as again they are likely to be of benefit for the ongoing implementation of LIF but also to be of value for future work. These should be in addition to regular ward fora monitoring of their projects as the local accountable body.

Models of Funding and Scheme Design

Much analysis and reflection has been undertaken on the model of funding utilised by LIF, in particular the equal distribution of resource across wards. A range of disparate views were provided, both in support of the model and also offering possible ways in which it could have been designed differently. Consideration could be given in future to incorporating some of these elements, especially the retention of a centralised pot to facilitate citywide capacity building and drive transformative collaborative work beyond administrative boundaries. This would include designing processes to make collaboration between wards which share issues and priorities more straightforward.

In addition the historical legacy of the Community Chest did clearly impact on the way in which LIF was received and delivered, including the types and scale of projects that were developed. In an ideal world there is place for both a discretionary fund to support one-off local activities and priorities, and a more transformative scheme to try and develop new ways of working whilst addressing local need. Such a model was originally proposed by the NDSU team when LIF was being created. However, with resources limited the funding of more functional and small scale activities as explored earlier through LIF is questionable. If a future scheme is instigated with the aim of being transformational, consideration could be given to having a minimum level of funding unless there are exceptional circumstances which are clearly articulated.

Next Steps

Learning from this interim evaluation has already been taken on board by the NDSU and is being put into action. This includes arranging two networking events in the near future, allowing all project representatives to meet and share their own experiences and good practice to date, as well as findings from the evaluation. It is also important that this report is considered to be a snapshot, and that a final evaluation is conducted over the next year, particularly with regard to assessing project impact against outcomes and sustainability.