

# The first five years of the Fair Share Trust Programme

An evaluation for the Big Lottery Fund

## Executive Summary

2009

SALLY DOWNS CONSULTING

with

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BDOR

SHARED PRACTICE



Evaluation of the first five years of the  
Fair Share Trust Programme

Executive summary of the final evaluation report

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## Executive Summary

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### Background

- 1 This report is about the Fair Share Trust (FST) programme, which goes beyond the task of grant making by working to build strength and capacity in local communities. FST uses a Panel of local residents and local organisations to decide on local funding priorities and to attract suitable applications. One of its greatest qualities is that there is sufficient time to get the process right.
- 2 It is inevitable that some places find it easier than others to make the most of the opportunities provided by the programme. Where Fair Share is at its most successful, the results are inspiring. The longer-than-average time frame for Fair Share (up to ten years) means that all areas have the chance to build the capacity that makes it easier to develop and run projects – and to win the funding to do so. There is a justifiable hope and expectation that the wide-ranging benefits will extend beyond the life of the programme, with the potential to leave a Fair Share legacy of substantial magnitude.
- 3 The programme operates in areas where low success rates in obtaining Lottery funding in the past were combined with high levels of deprivation. It is a £50 million programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund (BIG), and is much more than a temporary redistribution of resources. The programme is subtle in its way of working and ambitious for its outcomes.
- 4 There are 79 FST target areas, known as FST ‘neighbourhoods’, spread across the UK. At the outset of Fair Share, the vast majority of neighbourhoods were characterised by relatively under-developed voluntary and community organisations, weak partnership working between statutory and voluntary sectors, and frequently by past neglect.
- 5 The programme uses a new and distinctive approach to grant making. Its most important features are:
  - It is a devolved programme. BIG has put the Fair Share budget of £50 million into an independent Trust fund, administered and developed by the Community Foundation Network (CFN). In its turn, CFN has delegated delivery at the local level to local Agents.
  - It responds to aspirations in the voluntary and community sector (VCS) for longer term funding by operating over a period of 10 years, except for Scotland where it is seven, and Northern Ireland where the period varies between neighbourhoods.
  - In many locations, it is targeting very small neighbourhoods.
  - For programme beneficiaries, there is a ring-fenced local ‘pot’ of money. Decisions on how the money is to be spent are made locally, with the involvement of local people.
  - It is a ‘process’ programme. Processes used to identify projects for funding and ensure appropriate delivery are as important as the projects themselves. Both processes and projects have outcomes of value to the FST programme.
- 6 BIG is one of few bodies able to fund work which explores new ways to make grants on this scale. Without a commitment to innovation, new approaches cannot be investigated and new things achieved. It is a cause for celebration that the parties to the FST have been willing to move beyond their normal ways of working, and that local communities are generally responding so positively.

## **Programme aims**

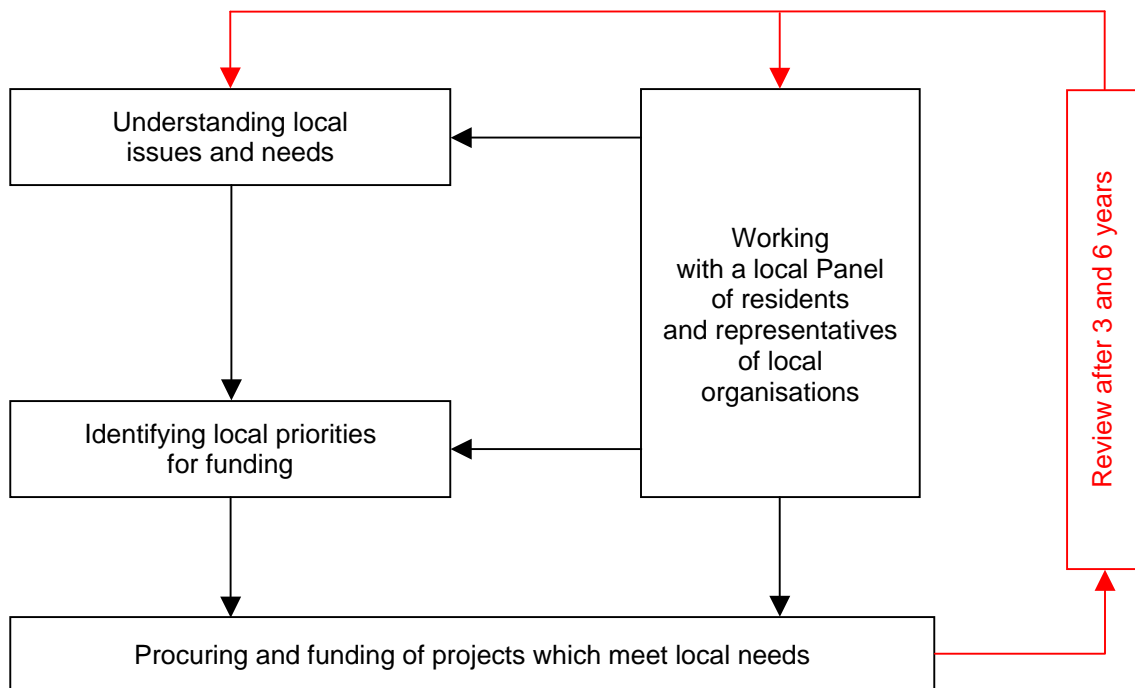
- 7 Amongst its complex aims, the following programme themes can be identified:
- To increase the ability of communities living in the target neighbourhoods to win Lottery funding now, and in the future.
  - To fund projects which are run by and for disadvantaged people.
  - To bring about lasting change in the lives of people living in the target neighbourhoods.
  - To build capacity and social capital.
- 8 The evaluation specification also highlighted that FST should support its aims by involving local people in decision making.

## **The evaluation**

- 9 The evaluation relies primarily on two sources of empirical data which together provide depth and breadth:
- Case studies in eleven FST neighbourhoods (2004-2008): These have involved face-to-face interviews and workshops with all relevant parties in the Fair Share process. There have been three phases of work, giving the evaluation team a picture of programme evolution, and its results over time.
  - A survey of local Agents (2008): This used a self-completion approach and achieved a 72% response rate, which is sufficiently large to enable general conclusions to be drawn from the sample, and provides a broad picture of the work of the FST to set alongside the depth of the case studies.

## **The approach to delivery**

- 10 Overview A process programme is one where how things get done is as important as what gets done. It contrasts with grant programmes where the principal focus is on getting the money spent on projects. The FST programme works with the grain of community activity. It engages local people in the task of identifying local needs and priorities, it provides a local 'pot' of money, and it involves local residents and representatives of local organisations in grant making. It does this in ways which build the capabilities of local organisations and strengthen links in local communities within the FST neighbourhoods.
- 11 Arrangements for delivery differ across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. All involve a local Agent for each FST neighbourhood and funding of local projects through ring-fenced, local money. In Northern Ireland, the overall approach is modified to ensure that FST funding both addresses local needs and complements other local interventions.
- 12 A complex programme like the FST, which must be accountable locally and nationally, needs guidance on approach to delivery. This is provided by CFN. The guidance requires local Agents to adopt a process with four key elements (see figure 1). No part of the process can be omitted. They are interlinked, and our evidence suggests that the more joined-up the process, the better the outcomes are likely to be.



**Figure 1: Key elements in the Fair Share process**

- 13 The local Panel The FST approach involves local Panels in grant making. The local Agent appoints Panel members, with the aim of achieving representation of a wide spread of local interests. They help to identify needs, determine priorities for funding, work with Agents on the sorts of projects to be funded, identify groups to work with, and attract applications. They make recommendations on all applications to the programme in their neighbourhood. Strictly, Panel members give advice rather than make decisions on applications. However, Agents have found ways to work which fully engage Panel members in a collaborative and consensual decision making process, so the responsibility is shared.
- 14 Panel members take their role in grant making very seriously. They work to ensure that projects meet local needs and deliver value for money. They are concerned to ensure probity and transparency, and feel accountable to their local communities. Steps are taken to ensure that applications do not get favoured treatment if Panel members have an interest in them.
- 15 The evaluation shows that Panels derive their legitimacy through their commitment to this process. In contrast, the relationship between the Panel and the local community appears to be less developed. In some neighbourhoods, the strength of Panel working could be further enhanced through greater engagement with the community. Benefits could accrue, for example, to transparency, more effective dissemination of information about Fair Share progress and success, and wider involvement in Fair Share activity.
- 16 There are substantial challenges in making the Panel process work well. Achieving and maintaining a Panel composition close to that recommended to Agents by CFN is proving difficult, particularly in engaging young people, and residents who are not already involved in other local organisations such as tenants' and residents' associations. Other

disappointments include tensions between Panel members, difficulties in retaining Panel members' commitment, and limited emphasis on communicating with, and involving, the wider community. Nonetheless, more than two thirds of Agents with comparative experience see FST as better than other programmes that make use of a Panel.

- 17 Overall, the evaluation concludes that use of a local Panel is one of the key FST success stories.
- 18 Local needs and local priorities In the FST programme, grant making is linked to an understanding of local needs, local service provision and the capacity of local organisations to grow and deliver new services in the neighbourhood. The FST process required a 'Neighbourhood Assessment Document' (NAD) at the outset of the programme, and needs assessment in various forms feeds into the setting of priorities and underpins grant applications that fit those priorities.
- 19 A 'Neighbourhood Priorities Document' (NPD) acts as the strategic framework for grant making. Like the needs assessment, the first was prepared at the outset of the programme, with a life of three years. It proved challenging to decide priorities to last for three years at the start of a process that also involved bringing together a disparate Panel, finding effective ways of joint working, and moving on to making recommendations for funding.
- 20 To be strategic, there needs to be clarity of purpose so that actions can be directed to appropriate ends. Sometimes, broad wording of NPDs has meant that almost anything could be funded and so the strategic worth of the document is limited. This is especially the case where open grant-making is the predominant approach to project funding.
- 21 A priorities review at the end of three years and six years is built into the FST process. The majority of Agents appear to have taken the task literally, with a straightforward and sometimes brief review of the priorities set at the outset of the programmes. Others have used it as an opportunity to undertake a thorough review of their overall direction, explore their priorities, think about future grant making, engage with the wider community, and build capacity. This is an approach in keeping with the spirit of the programme.
- 22 A ten-year programme needs at least one mid-term review. With nearly five years to go, there is every reason to now look at all aspects of the programme at the local level. There is still time to re-direct and re-focus activity if the review shows that more could be achieved through adjustments to the way of working and the intended outcomes.
- 23 Project procurement To varying extents, Agents have devised approaches to project procurement which ensure a good fit between priorities and projects funded. Local needs are the key determinant. At the same time, the approach can focus on using local organisations for project delivery, thereby building additional local capability. The opportunities to create linkages are substantial and, at its best, these are being utilised in a strong and creative manner.
- 24 Commissioning has proved an effective approach to procuring projects. It is pro-active, and, at its most developed, can drive the Fair Share process. It involves:
  - A proper consideration of needs.
  - An identification of gaps in services, facilities and activities to meet those needs.
  - Prioritisation of needs/gaps which enables the Panel to decide what they want to fund.
  - Identification of potential delivery organisations, ideally ones that are from the neighbourhood or nearby, which will be contributing to the area in the longer term.

- A process of developing the capacity of those providers so that they are able to submit project proposals to fill the gaps.
  - Full engagement of the local Panel in the process at every stage.
- 25 In this way, grant making is part of the strategic approach looked for by CFN and is a contribution to capacity building.
- 26 In England and Scotland open grant making is more prevalent than anticipated. Some neighbourhoods are making use of tactical, one-off grants, but in other locations the open grant approach is modified, particularly through use of negotiation to ensure a fit between proposed projects on the one hand and a neighbourhood's needs and priorities on the other. This makes important links back to the Neighbourhood Priorities Document (NPD). The more specific and justified the NPD can be, the better any open grants will be because there is something specific against which to judge them.
- 27 The results show that, if managed with a transparent and rigorous process, FST approaches to project procurement stand comparison in terms of accountability with more formal methods, yet are normally quicker and always more user-friendly. This is a critical point in disadvantaged communities where capacity and confidence building are so crucial.

### **Other factors in the success of the FST process**

- 28 The approach to delivery devised by CFN is underpinned by a number of other factors which contribute to the success of the FST process. These are:
- a locally owned 'pot' of money Fair Share has demonstrated the energising impacts of a pot of local money. Local applicant groups feel that Fair Share is a real opportunity, and that through it they can gain access to funding. The shared FST experience can build links between groups and help them to identify ways of supporting each other or working together in the future.
  - capacity building Capacity building is an aim of the FST programme, and is part of the FST process in the great majority of neighbourhoods. The importance attached to it varies. Sometimes it is a relatively narrow and focussed activity which is a means to an end (good grant applications and project delivery). At the other extreme, there are a small number of neighbourhoods where it is the sole or very substantial focus of the programme, with increased capacity being an end in itself. It is focused principally on community organisations, but includes individuals from within the local community (e.g. through the Panel, through opportunities opening up as a result of Fair Share, and through events and other Fair Share activities).
  - extended timescale Building capacity and drawing in new groups takes time, and FST provides an extended timescale in most of the neighbourhoods. If it had been a three or five year programme, there would have been insufficient time for the process to mature, with local Agents moving into finishing mode before successful outcomes could fully develop and emerge. An important early lesson linked to timescale is that a complex programme such as the FST requires a substantial period of time at the outset to put in place the necessary management and guidance arrangements.
  - local focus The FST programme is a strategic approach to funding at the very local level. The delivery model is able to be locally responsive. In combination, the local delivery model and the local pot of money underpin many of the positive outcomes. This gives the programme an exceptional quality, enabling it to work *with and for* the neighbourhood, rather than quickly doing things *to* the neighbourhood and its residents.

Observable benefits include growth in confidence, local ownership of resulting projects, formation of new networks, and increased capacity in local organisations and in individuals. None of this would have happened without investment in the local process.

- well-defined strategic vision The success of the approach appears to be greater where there is a well-defined strategic vision. The case studies that are achieving the most have a clear idea of what they want to achieve, and some decided to go slowly until they could develop a strategic vision. They thereby avoided decision making and spend for the sake of it.
- flexibility The guidance from CFN to Agents combines a consistent framework for local Agents with a flexibility which enables them to devise local responses to local circumstances. This flexibility is a crucial success factor in the FST process. It allows the Agent and the Panel to ask the important question “what will work here?”. Whilst working within the same broad model, neighbourhoods are able to respond to their own opportunities and to bring about change.
- informality and responsiveness of the process The quality and style of the process enables engagement in the programme, and makes it comprehensible to participants at the neighbourhood level. Where other programmes are disappointing in their legacy, we expect that the FST will have a significant and continuing impact in the local communities because they have been able to really work with, adapt and respond to the programme.

### **Projects funded through the FST**

- 29 Across the FST programme, 10% of awards have so far gone to new groups or previously unconstituted groups, 30% to groups that have not previously had significant funding, 36% to established groups that have previously had significant funding, and 17% to other categories (principally providers of public services). Some areas are finding it difficult to attract enough applications of an appropriate quality. This may change over time as the benefits of capacity building work feed through.
- 30 Judged by our case studies, the FST programme is so far dominated in numerical terms by smaller awards, with nearly 40% being for £40,000 or less. Interesting use is being made of awards of £10,000 or less to help deliver strategic approaches to Fair Share, with a particular focus on activity which enables embryonic groups, either through access to training (capacity building) or to enable them to test out an idea for future service provision. In contrast, there are few awards of over £100,000, but they make up nearly half the funding allocated. There is a risk that these larger projects may meet their own aims but skew overall achievement of a neighbourhood's priorities and its contribution to the programme's strategic aims unless they are very well targeted.
- 31 Just over a quarter of projects are about capacity building, nearly 10% involve capital spend, and the remainder are about the delivery of services and activities to a wide range of beneficiaries. These include health projects; skills, education training and employment projects; lunch clubs and day time activities; drama, music and films, credit unions and debt counselling; and much else.

### **Meeting BIG's objectives**

- 32 Overview Two matters need to be considered when reviewing the programme's success in meeting BIG's objectives. First, given the size of the local pot of money, and the very large scale of the problems faced in the FST neighbourhoods, the objectives for the

programme are extremely ambitious in that they include matters such as sustainability and building social capital (see paragraph 7). However, it is already clear that, whilst FST monies are relatively small in relation to the problems, they can have a transforming effect. Secondly, any funder such as BIG expects that its programmes will meet its objectives. However, the objectives for the FST are not clearly worded. It is strongly recommended that future programmes pay greater attention to this matter so that programme objectives can be understood more fully, which is an essential pre-requisite for their achievement.

- 33 Winning funding All FST neighbourhoods have Lottery monies through their FST awards. There is also evidence of match funding for FST awards, with an order of magnitude of half as much again, along with further help in kind and support from volunteers. A small number of Agents are finding that new funders are being attracted to FST neighbourhoods as a result of their observations about, or experiences of, Fair Share. At a very small number of locations, there are concerns about their ability to achieve full spend of the FST funding by the end of the programme.
- 34 Organisations that have had support and guidance with respect to making grant applications report significant benefits. Some are already demonstrating their successes, whilst others are happy that they will benefit from their enhanced abilities in future. What we can see now is that the quality of the FST funding experience is considerably better for groups than many other regimes they have considered in the past, and they regard their FST success as a strongly enabling factor when they make future applications.
- 35 This is an era of reducing funding for the VCS. There is less certainty about continuing success in the current circumstances. However, our case studies show that community groups feel better placed to get funding in the future from a range of sources. The findings suggest that the achievements of the FST programme will be valuable in an era of scarcity of funding, as well as in times of plenty. The capacity for growth and development will not be lost entirely, and the FST programme will have equipped more groups to continue and thrive even in the most difficult circumstances, and to survive until funding becomes more available again.
- 36 Whilst continuation funding is not yet an issue for many of the projects, some are already finding other sources of funding. However, the current funding climate means that many may struggle. We anticipate that will be particularly the case where open grants have been used without significant capacity building.
- 37 Capacity building Capacity building is used in this report to mean activities and support that strengthen the skills and abilities of people, groups and organisations to take effective action. In the FST programme, the focus is principally on capacity to seek, obtain and manage funding for projects.
- 38 Amongst community groups, new capacity is emerging. This relates to practical issues such as governance and insurance, personal capacity such as skills and morale, and matters such as communications and networks. Project participants report access to training and qualifications. Corporate benefits for groups include increased capacity with respect to administration, compliance with legislation, forward planning, and aspirations for future activities. Such benefits accrue most strongly to new or less experienced groups. Currently such groups are only a small proportion of successful project applications, but these outcomes will strengthen if more funding goes to such groups during the remainder of the programme.

- 39 The wider voluntary and community sector is also benefitting from Fair Share. Whereas in many programmes, funded projects are far apart, in the case of the FST many are in close proximity. Being part of an approach that produces a local sense of common purpose is enabling and empowering. There is enhanced understanding between organisations working in the neighbourhood, with new linkages and networks forming. In some neighbourhoods, direct capacity building is being done in the sector, with strengthening of infrastructure organisations which will outlast Fair Share and operate beyond the boundaries of the Fair Share neighbourhoods.
- 40 Real change is happening. Groups are filled with enthusiasm for the tasks they have taken on, and are more confident in their abilities. They have an enhanced sense of their own worth. They have aspirations to work with others to build on Fair Share's achievements, and many are already doing so. Through Fair Share, local people are being involved in activities which link them to others.
- 41 Meeting the needs of the disadvantaged The programme is successful at engaging disadvantaged people and meeting their needs. All projects benefit people who are disadvantaged in some way, and many also target a specific need group, with a marked focus on young people and ethnic minorities. There is less evidence that disadvantaged people are getting involved in starting and running projects, but clear evidence of growth in social cohesion resulting from the Fair Share processes and projects that bring people and groups together.
- 42 Social capital and quality of life Whilst building social capital is one of BIG's objectives, it is not often an explicit focus for the groups that are running projects funded through Fair Share. Furthermore, both growth in social capital and improvements to quality of life are long term changes which take time to emerge, so it is particularly significant to note that there is already evidence of outcomes in these areas. Perhaps most critically there are encouraging signs that people feel that their neighbourhood is improving. One of the most commonly quoted outcomes is a sense that anti-social behaviour amongst young people is reducing.
- 43 As a result of Fair Share, people are getting to know each other better, and there are many examples of growth in 'bonding' social capital, where people intensify the positive linkages between them. There is also some evidence of people coming together across cultural, social and age divides, and building the much more difficult 'bridging' capital. Certainly at the project level, there is increased optimism and a sense that "together we can make a difference".
- 44 With four years remaining, it can be expected that these outcomes will strengthen and extend before the programme is complete.
- 45 In the context of Fair Share, there is an interesting tension between building social capital and capacity building. Where a large number of projects in a neighbourhood are focussed on capacity building, and only a few on funding for community groups/ organisations to carry out their own projects designed to meet local needs, then there may be fewer opportunities to develop social capital. Theory suggests that, in the longer term, there will be downstream benefits that flow from the concentration on capacity building, and the development of social capital may be one such benefit, but it is too soon for evidence of this to emerge.
- 46 Community involvement BIG wanted the FST programme to include community involvement in decision making, though its expectations in this respect were not transparent. The evaluation has looked at the extent to which local people are part of

decision making within the delivery of the FST programme and are being consulted on local needs and priorities.

- 47 Everywhere, there is involvement of local people in the work of the Panel, with up to four local residents being Panel members. In addition, more than three quarters of FST neighbourhoods are working on wider community involvement. This is primarily through information giving and some consultation. Involvement of the community throughout the process is rarely to be found, and collaboration is limited to direct work with the Panel. The evaluators see this as a missed opportunity.
- 48 In many of the FST neighbourhoods, there is still time for a greater emphasis on engaging the local community. This would further strengthen the programme in terms of building social capital, accountability (and Panel legitimacy), and longer term sustainability.
- 49 Sustainability CFN guidance to the local Agents provides useful clarity over sustainability, by reminding Agents that *'lasting impact does not imply that projects which continue in perpetuity are the most valuable. It is the programme's outcomes – capacity building, social capital and liveability – that the programme aims to sustain.'* As outlined above, these outcomes are already becoming apparent, and more benefits of this kind are anticipated before the programme end.
- 50 Contributions to sustainability come from a number of directions which include:
- Capacity building work to support community organisations and the voluntary sector on matters relating to their own sustainability. The skills and capabilities that result contribute to lasting outcomes in the FST neighbourhood, and are transferable when beneficiaries move elsewhere. Without capacity building, sustainability is less likely to be an outcome of the programme, and this is recognised in the approaches being taken. There are opportunities for it to be further enhanced during the remainder of the programme.
  - Investing in key local organisations to carry on with capacity building work when Fair Share is over.
  - The emphasis on 'strategic funding' set by CFN. Agents and Panels are encouraged to think about the long term impacts of the projects they fund. These impacts apply both at the individual project level, and to them in combination. A strategic approach to funding, linked to local needs and aspirations, is more likely to produce lasting benefits than individual, one-off awards.
  - Award recipients. When Fair Share makes awards to local groups – and particularly to less experienced ones – it builds their capacity and builds linkages between them. This in turn strengthens the local voluntary and community sector and helps build social capital. Awards to experienced groups, and especially to statutory agencies and the deliverers of public services, are unlikely to have the same level of impact.
  - Growth in optimism. Fair Share is leading to higher morale and hopes for a better future. There is a clear sense that "we can make a difference". It derives from the engagement and achievement being secured through the FST process. This will underpin sustainability.
  - The FST process. The process is local. Where it is working at its best, it is owned by the Panel and (parts of) the wider community. It is enabling local groups to deliver projects which meet their own needs or those of their target beneficiaries, and it is engaging the local community, thereby extending benefits through widening social capital. The evaluation has identified that contributions to sustainable outcomes from the process would be enhanced by extending the work with the local community.

51 In Scotland, work on exit strategies is explicitly tackling the issues of sustainability and legacy, and ensuring that the final stages of funding through the FST programme are very carefully targeted to build long-term, sustainable achievements. In addition, CFN has commissioned guidance for Agents on sustainability which is close to completion.

### **A lasting legacy**

52 In a programme that operates at the local level, it is inevitable that some neighbourhoods will achieve greater success than others. Furthermore, the changes and developments that accompany Fair Share do not grow uniformly. There can be both set-backs and sudden spurts of positive change. All this is typical of a community based programme. So, whilst achievement levels vary, the evaluation report dwells largely on the best that is being achieved. This is because there is so much to learn from it. There are a number of areas of under-performance identified, some of which can be remedied and some of which derive from challenges inherent in grass roots working. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the FST model is clearly fit for purpose, and presents an inspiring approach to grant making.

53 Significant benefits are already apparent from the programme for local people, the local VCS and local quality of life. At this point in the programme, these are indications rather than outcomes that have proved to be lasting, and it will be important to continue evaluating the programme to establish how far these are followed through.

54 Although the deep and complex problems of disadvantaged areas will not be solved during the course of the FST programme, its processes are expected to have contributed to more sustainable community and voluntary sectors, and more resilient communities.

55 Local legacy and local benefits The most obvious signs of longer term impacts are at local level and include the following:

- *Legacy for local individuals.* Local people have developed skills, confidence and ambition which they will take into the rest of their lives, whether at work, in other voluntary activities or in their domestic lives.
- *Legacy for the local VCS.* The FST programme has provided investment both to the VCS infrastructure and to support new and existing community and voluntary groups. Both of these strands of investment have helped strengthen the local VCS in ways that will survive, even if the funding is removed.
- *Legacy for local quality of life.* The FST programme has delivered local facilities (such as parks, play spaces, arts facilities) that will exist in the longer term. There are questions about the extent to which limits to future funding will reduce the value of these facilities if they are not maintained, staffed, promoted etc. But new facilities exist, and that is an important legacy in communities where the FST programme is the first chance they have had to see their areas improve and to have been part of making that happen.

56 A model for public involvement in grant making? Fair Share is based on consensus building in the grant making body and is embedded in identification of local needs. It focuses on meeting those needs, rather than the priorities of the project applicant.

57 At this stage in the FST programme, we have observed the value of a local process. It is a good model for areas of disadvantage because it enables moves towards local action in ways that empower local people by ensuring they are part of the solution to problems. Community groups can have ideas and then set about getting the money. Motivation and commitment are much stronger as a result. Furthermore, positive outcomes accrue to the

local community, strengthening satisfaction with achievements. Development of this sensitive approach to grant making in small neighbourhoods is, in itself, an important legacy from the FST programme.

- 58 Benefits from the use of such an approach would apply in a range of settings, and not solely in areas of disadvantage, though it would necessarily need tuning to local circumstances. The evaluation results are emerging at an opportune time, because Fair Share experiences have a wider contribution to make to the successful implementation of recent government initiatives at the local level. The FST model is exactly the type of innovative yet proven, partnership-based yet locally rooted, format for managing local funds that empowerment initiatives need as a matter of urgency.

### **Action needed in the FST programme**

- 59 Our findings from this evaluation suggest that many local Agents and local Panels could further enhance the achievements of the FST by investing resources and effort in communicating more widely and more effectively with the wider local communities in FST neighbourhoods and beyond. This is partly in order to better meet needs for local accountability. It is also about refreshing and revitalising the programme by reaching out to new groups and interests. This would extend the programme's success in building capacity and enabling growth in the confidence and experiences which underpin social capital.
- 60 The FST programme is over half way through. The evaluation perspective is that now would be a good time for a more comprehensive local review of where the programme has got to, how the Panel feels about achievements, and consulting/communicating with the wider local community to show-case achievements, publicise the game plan for the second half, and generate support for (and modifications to) that game plan.
- 61 Local Agents and Panels could also use a review to consider the current spread of grant recipients in their neighbourhood, and whether more could be gained for long term sustainability through awards to new and inexperienced groups, with linked capacity building.
- 62 Now is the time to work nationally and locally to build sustainability and create clear exit strategies. There is experience to draw on from Scotland, where planning has been going on for some time to prepare for the closure of the programme there in 2010, and the CFN guidance on sustainability will be available shortly. Exit strategy planning needs to consider what happens when all the funding is spent, the continuing role of local Panels (or not), and the impacts of local Agents no longer being able to provide the level of support they have been making available through the FST programme.
- 63 It would also be very helpful to increase collaboration between local projects, building on the local review mentioned above. That review would enable the projects to find opportunities for joint working that could increase the value of their activities but it would also be valuable for the projects to identify the wider learning from their experience to feed into improved local services, facilities and activities in the longer term.

### **Lessons for future funding programmes**

- 64 The evaluation has revealed a number of lessons from the experience of the FST programme. At the national programme level, overall objectives need to be very clear but also very high level, so there is full scope for local innovation, flexibility and relevance to

local circumstances, within a clear set of aims that provide strategic direction and inspiration.

- 65 It takes time and a significant investment of resources to build capacity and community involvement. However, a programme of funding that includes those features has enormous additional benefits in terms of relevance of local projects, as well as building local skills and confidence, social capital, sustainability and resilience. The 'process' of involvement is as important as the 'product' of funded projects.
- 66 A 'local' pot of money ensures that local community groups feel that the money is 'theirs' and that they have as much chance of getting their projects funded as larger, more experienced, organisations. This can increase the 'reach' of the programme into those parts of the community previously excluded from conventional programmes.
- 67 Processes of procurement that emphasise commissioning around an understanding of local needs and negotiation between applicants result in more appropriate local projects that fit within local priorities and meet local needs, as well as resulting in more robust projects because they have been through a process of challenge and revision. These forms of project 'procurement' rather than conventional grant application processes may be good models for the future.
- 68 Community involvement needs to build on people's existing interests and willingness to participate. It is important that decision making groups (e.g. the FST Panels) attract a good mix of local interests, particularly local residents who understand and are motivated to improve their areas.
- 69 Future funding programmes that include community involvement need to ensure there is sufficient and appropriate support and resources. The FST programme suffered in the early days from having underestimated the need and demand for support (from local Agents, community development workers etc), and is now benefiting from investing more heavily in these support services.
- 70 Decision making on grant applications and getting funding to projects can be streamlined and therefore quicker and easier if there is significant investment of time and money at the beginning of the process to build the appropriate community involvement and understanding of the processes. Early 'upstream' investment of time and money can result in real savings later in managing funding programmes.

### **Next steps for evaluation**

- 71 This is the final report of this evaluation. Many of the changes hoped for from Fair Share take time to emerge, and the findings in this report are necessarily provisional. It is hoped that BIG and CFN will continue to evaluate the initiative so that a fuller range of outcomes can be observed and conclusions more fully justified. Not least, the question of 'lasting' impacts needs to be explored.
- 72 In any future evaluations, it will be important to closely link monitoring, learning and evaluation activities, so that these activities become mutually reinforcing while reducing the burden on those providing data (especially local Agents). It would also be beneficial to increase opportunities for sharing and reflecting on experience so that knowledge about this approach continues to be better and more widely understood.