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Project Evaluation of Community Wealth Building Projects in Hertfordshire

Prepared for the Community Wealth Building Together Programme

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the Community Wealth Building projects, funded by the UK Community Renewal Fund, across the 10 local authorities in Hertfordshire. It is evaluated on the basis of the Secretary of State's Evaluation Guidance. The evaluation is then used to develop and present actions, opportunities, and recommendations in order to take Community Wealth Building work further forward.

The key findings from the evaluation are two-fold. Firstly, focusing on the individual initiatives funded via the Community Renewal Fund across the five programme themes of employment, procurement, grants scheme, planning and feasibility, all of them were successfully implemented and delivered.

With all of them, to varying degrees, overachieving in terms of the outcomes and outputs predicted prior to delivery. Secondly, adopting a more long-term perspective, there is only some evidence of the processes and infrastructure being developed to support Community Wealth Building as regular and widespread activities across the county. In short, although each individual initiative taken in isolation was a clear success, there is still some distance to go before some of the greater benefits from Community Wealth Building can be achieved. However, this is not to say that these won't be achieved, evidence and experiences from other local authorities across the UK highlight that it is a long and challenging journey that does require continued commitment over extended periods, and across the 10 local authorities commendable progress has been made to date. The almost universal acceptance of the importance of social value as a guiding principle in decision making is a crucial step forward, and a continued acceptance combined with an ongoing commitment to the principles of Community Wealth Building should deliver much greater benefits in the future.

On the basis of the evaluation, we have developed a series of detailed and specific recommendations within the report. However, in terms of widening the scope of Community Wealth Building across the county and facilitating the successful delivery of numerous social value initiatives, the following are the key recommendations.

- **Undertake skills audits through a social value and community need lens.**
 - **Identify skills gaps within Hertfordshire public sector procurement spends.**
 - **Develop a county-wide portal for monitoring and evidencing social value.**
 - **Capacity and network building, including engagement of the most important, known, stakeholders, and important representatives of each relevant council. There are several Participatory Action Research Methods that can be deployed to this end.**
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 What is Community Wealth Building

Community Wealth Building (CWB) is a people-centred approach to development with an emphasis on local investment and opportunities. Its central idea is to keep wealth generation local and cycling in the same area as much as possible. This is accomplished through 'anchor organisations', which are companies already setup within the local area, usually with a larger labour force. These organisations are encouraged to review their supply chains and labour force to ensure they originate within the community as much as possible.

Over the past 7 years, there has been strong interest in CWB across the country, with over 100 local authorities currently involved in such initiatives. The rise in interest in CWB was a response to economic austerity measures. Local authorities became frustrated with the current provision and its inability to support the local economy in an acceptable and sustainable fashion and wanted to overcome the limitations of the status quo. Some of these limitations included generous deals for multinationals, outsourcing, and increased reliance on zero-hour contracts that offer reduced job security.

1.2 Hertfordshire use of Community Wealth Building

The project is a collaboration between the ten districts of Hertfordshire, who have committed to pilot Community Wealth Building approaches with a view to a) working with individuals, micro-businesses (0-9 employees), Voluntary Community & Social Economy (VCSE) organisations and communities to strengthen local economies and b) creating the critical mass needed to lever more social value. A key objective of this initiative is to create more accessible training and job opportunities for people who are unemployed and economically inactive.

1.3 Building Community Wealth Together

Stevenage Borough Council, on behalf of the Hertfordshire Growth Board, was awarded Community Renewal Funding (CRF) via the Hertfordshire Local Economic Partnership (LEP) on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council, to pilot various CWB projects working collaboratively with all 10 Hertfordshire councils.

The delivery requirements for this funding were the following:

Outputs

- People – Economically inactive – number of people supported to engage in job searching
- People – Unemployed – number of people supported to engage in life skills
- Business – VCSE – number of organisations receiving non-financial support
- Organisation – VCSE – number of organisations receiving non-financial support
- Grants – number of organisations receiving grants

Outcomes

- People in education/training following support
- People engaged in life skills support following interventions
- People in employment, including self-employment, following support
- Jobs safeguard as a result of support
- Investment attracted as a result of support
- Decarbonisation plans developed as a result of support
- Feasibility studies developed as a result of support

2.0 Evaluation Process

The evaluation of Community Wealth Building (CWB) activities within Hertfordshire to date was undertaken via a combination of analyses of documents (phase 1) and semi-structured (group) interviews with key stakeholders (phase 2). The first phase focused on developing a clear understanding of what is happening with CWB in Hertfordshire and the second phase will focus on understanding the how and why these things are happening.

Phase 1 entailed an analytical overview of available documents relating to the implementation of CWB projects across all of Hertfordshire's councils, including the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Hertfordshire Growth Board (HGB). The following documents examined were:

- Original Community Renewal Fund Application
- LEP Project Introduction
- CWB Project Plans
- National Procurement Strategy Self-Assessment
- Centre for Local Economic Strategies Proposal
- Steering group minutes
- Memorandum of Understanding associated with grant schemes
- Business Support Project Brief
- Dacorum Planning Project Proposal

This enabled an initial judgement of the appropriateness of the initial designs of CWB projects in Hertfordshire. In addition, these documents were analysed in relation to their implementation and delivery, including feedback collected relating to the impact of those respective initiatives. The overall purpose of phase 1 was to establish what has happened, and is happening, in relation to CWB within Hertfordshire, and highlighting examples of good practice as well as aspects that could be improved.

Phase 2 was conducted through a series of semi-structured individual and group interviews with stakeholders directly involved in the implementation, delivery, funding, and organisation of the CWB projects analysed in phase 1. The questions used to promote discussion through the interview included the following:

- What community wealth building activities are you part of?
- What are the processes that underpin the development of these activities?
- Please discuss the implementation of these activities, any barriers and enablers?
- How has success been measured? Any evidence of success or failure?

These subsequent discussions focused on the 'how' and 'why' aspects of what has happened and is happening with their CWB projects. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed for common themes.

The results of phases 1 and 2 provided a deeper and more nuanced understanding of successes and constraints relevant to the evaluation's objectives assessing the following:

1. Appropriateness of initial design
2. Progress against targets
3. Delivery and management
4. Outcomes and impacts
5. Value for money
6. Lessons learnt

3.0 Results

3.1 Phase 1 - Planning

An initial evaluation was undertaken on the documentation relating to CWB initiatives across the county as well as the development and implementation of projects emanating from the Community Renewal Fund. This evaluation is ordered around the 5 workstreams identified in the Project Evaluation Brief.

3.1.1 Workstream 1: Employment

The majority of this is built around the employment gateway (www.hopinto.co.uk) and is a useful addition because it addresses some of the labour market friction caused by informational failures. However, previous research highlights that the impact of these type of job portals is only ever marginal on their own and additional measures are required. For the individuals, especially those facing significant barriers to labour market entry, these barriers remain largely in place. Equally, for employers, the recruitment and retention problems that they experience are often driven by internal factors and these are also largely unaffected by the presence of a job portal.

Overall, it is clear that the portal is a very beneficial addition to employment support within the county. However, it is not currently being used to its full potential, most notably in relation to its support for CWB projects.

Recommendations:

- **Available support for individuals and employers needs to be accessible directly via the portal.**
- **Undertake skills audits through a social value and community need lens.**
- **Strengthen linkages between skills audits and skills development providers.**

3.1.2 Workstream 2: Procurement

Although procurement is a central feature of getting CWB off the ground, there is very little evidence of progressive procurement and social value being formally integrated into the award and management of procurement contracts. However, we are convinced that to some extent social value is an informal consideration in the award of certain contracts. Certainly, the extent to which all 10 local authorities have become aware of social value and the potential impact of progressive procurement, suggests that an ongoing process towards more formal integration of social value into procurement decisions is in progress. The one exception, and potential guide for the other authorities, being Stevenage Borough Council, who are further along the line in terms of developing progressive procurement, and they are using the Social Value Portal as a means of evidencing social value from their procurement spend. Although this is a useful tool, it is ultimately somewhat expensive, and we are convinced that a more cost-effective alternative could be developed on a county-wide basis. In addition, there is very little evidence relating to the different aspects of social value. Using the Social Value Portal terminology of Themes, Outcomes and Measures (TOMS) there is no indication as to which TOMS are most important and require greater attention.

Recommendations:

- **Develop a county-wide portal for monitoring and evidencing social value from the delivery of procurement contracts.**

- **Identify the most important TOMS for each local authority and realign the award and delivery of procurement contracts accordingly.**
- **Identify skills gaps within local authorities' procurement spends.**

3.1.3 Workstream 3: Grants Scheme

There was very little within the documentation relating to the development and selection of projects to utilise the available grant funding, and no real indication as to how support for individuals, VCSE organisations and micro-businesses would be delivered. Therefore, this has been explored in depth within the second phase of the data collection and analysis. However, it must be said that although it is difficult to establish, from the available documents, the basis on which projects were selected and then subsequently supported those processes clearly were effective. The overall outputs and outcomes delivered from the CRF funded initiatives were very impressive, with every single project overachieving in relation to their initial anticipated outcomes. In total this led to some impressive outputs from the projects with, for example, the number of people transitioning from being inactive to actively job seeking being more than 3 times the original target of 150, and the number of VCSE organisations supported exceeding the initial target of 60 by almost 50%.

3.1.4 Workstream 4: Planning

There was an exploration on the possibility of engaging with developers to promote a shared prospectus of social value. Specifically, what elements of social value can be brought into the construction industry and subsequent impacts on CWB. Although we found little evidence of documentation of implementation, this was expected as everything was still in the early stages of planning at the time of this evaluation. These early stages can be seen through informal interactions between local authorities, developers, and other stakeholders. In addition, the evidence that was available, related to a Planning Project Proposal presented by Dacorum Borough Council and this was a very thorough and considered approach that could potentially form the basis of good practice to be shared across the county. It created space and opportunity for the views of all stakeholders to be considered, without losing sight of the basic objective of creating social value.

Recommendation:

- **Develop formal processes for integrating social value into large infrastructure projects so that the social value impact can be evidenced, and good practice can be shared across the county.**

3.1.5 Workstream 5: Feasibility

Our role in this process is to reach a judgement on the feasibility of CWB across Herts, which we explore in greater depth later in this report. However, at the outset it is clear, given the number of CWB projects that have been implemented by local authorities across the UK in recent times, that delivering CWB across a wide range of local contexts is possible. Furthermore, given the escalating scale of positive evidence emerging from these initiatives, it is equally clear that CWB can be utilised to have a strong influence upon the development of social value.

3.2 Phase 2 – Implementation, Management and Evaluation

The second phase of the evaluation turns to operationalising CWB and is based upon data collection and analysis conducted over the summer via interviews with key agents in the delivery of CWB and projects emanating from the Community Renewal Fund. The online semi-structured interviews were conducted in July and September 2022 with 18 individuals involved in the implementation, delivery, funding, and organisation of Community Wealth Building (CWB) projects across Hertfordshire. There was representation across all the local authorities aside from Dacorum.

3.2.1 Thematic Analysis of Interviews

The emerging themes revealed by the thematic analysis were categorised as ‘main’ and ‘sub’ themes shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Thematic Analysis

| Main Themes | Sub themes |
|--|---|
| Defining Community Wealth Building | - Terminology usage |
| Operationalising Community Wealth Building | - Short funding timeframe - Funding Fatigue - Reliance on informal networks - Training |
| Measuring Community Wealth Building | - Short- and long-term measurements |

3.2.2 Theme 1: Defining Community Wealth Building

There was general agreement around the broad idea that CWB are focused on the local area supporting the local community, with all participants discussing their projects in regard to their impacts on local people, local organisations, local communities etc. However, there was subtle terminological differences regarding how participants operationalised CWB.

“[Community Wealth Building] is pretty challenging to define ... because some of the understanding and some of their focus is around different words” (Participant 1)

“It was about understanding what community wealth building is, because it means different things to different people” (Participant 5)

Depending on the different workstreams, different key words were used to operationalise CWB.

“Procurement workstream... talking about social value... planning talk about SPD’s planning documents” (Participant 1)

This difference in terminology may have a political dimension, though it was rather subtle with the discussions focusing on benefits to the local authorities.

“Recognizing a conservative controlled county, some conservative [and] ... some Liberal Democrat districts, it's been about good economic growth” (Participant 3)

This is because local authorities have different priorities for CWB projects.

"It's less that people aren't supportive ... but where does it sit on their list of priorities" (Participant 1)

"It's not that they didn't get it, it's just not in their workload" (Participant 11)

In addition, the expected outcomes of the CWB bid may have influenced how the participants operationalised their terminology with a focus on employment outcomes prioritised.

"We are bound by the parameters of the bid... had to talk about employment outcomes, we had to look at skills and training etc." (Participant 3)

In summary, although there is general agreement on what CWB is, there are subtle differences in its operationalisation due to subtle political influences and the outcomes of the bid.

"Different levels of understanding, [and]... engagement but most people ... see that value" (Participant 1).

Recommendation:

- **Although individual local authorities should always be able to develop CWB to closely reflect the context and the needs of their communities, there needs to be a sharing of overarching principles that can be operationalised at the local level.**

3.2.3 Theme 2: Operationalising Community Wealth Building

It is important to understand that each local authority was at a different stage of operationalising CWB, resulting in the need for a more pragmatic approach, with local authorities focusing on improvement toward CWB outcomes.

"[Progress]... comes down to a whole range of things which is about capacity, resource within the team, political will" (Participant 5)

"We need to manage expectations around what is feasible for us to deliver" (Participant 10)

The timeframe of the of this bid was a major constraint on their CWB projects and impacted many aspects of the delivery, from funding fatigue, reliance on existing projects and missed potential.

There was an admission that short timeframes are just the way the government does funding.

"It's what national government have decided to do... its policy decided at central government. So, I think it's been really frustrating for all of us... it's such so short [timeframe]" (Participant 12)

However, many felt that this was not good enough considering the nature of CWB.

"[Community Wealth Building] was unique, we've never had anything like this in the region before" (Participant 12)

"...we've got six months to deliver. This a very short timeframe when tackling generational and systemic issues" (Participant 3)

"There are key things that need to be in place before you can kick off" (Participant 8)

One of the aspects of delivery reported was 'funding fatigue' by both the participants managing the funding bid but also the recipients of the money.

The participants indicated that they are being overwhelmed by the number of funding applications.

"Everyone is a bit knacked with applying for funding" (Participant 7)

"So many funding pots" (Participant 6)

The short timeframe for funding has compounded this issue with the need to always be applying for funding.

"The main problem is funding is generally only lasts 12 months... your always chasing money" (Participant 9)

"It is assuming we have people just sitting here not doing anything... we don't have any spare capacity" (Participant 11)

Funding fatigue was also reported for the recipients of the funds with some participants struggling to find charities and organisations applying for the funding. Some the potential organisations, particularly the smaller, ones did not have enough time to apply for more funding and/or produce the outputs in the timeframe.

"The timeline put people off initially" (Participant 10)

"[Small charities] need the funding so they spend time doing it, but it does take away from service delivery" (Participant 9)

Another reason suggested that there was not enough time to advertise.

"The short-term funding issue because one of the things that we found is that we haven't done as effective marketing of the project as we could have done... which means that it's been difficult at times to attract new clients" (Participant 16)

The interconnectedness of the participants in their local authorities was significant, highlighting the importance of local council in their local communities.

"Ultimately it's about working well connected organisations and having extremely good communication" (Participant 8)

Many of the CWB projects helping the most vulnerable in their communities and participants emphasised that trusted networks of organisations working together was essential to support these individuals.

"The most marginalized in our society... you have such a minimal window of opportunity to get those people engaged" (Participant 18)

"You can lose engagement very easily if you're not working in joined-up ways with partners"
(Participant 16)

As a result of the short timeframes participants favoured the use of their existing networks of trusted organisations to make sure outcomes were reported on time.

"The window was short, and it would have been much harder if we didn't use [current ongoing projects]" (Participant 13)

"[having connections] really does help, you've got to have those connections locally, also the trust you have... they're going to deliver on time and in budget" (Participant 11)

Participants reflected on missed opportunities because of the short timeframes. These opportunities included investing in new projects ideally co-designed with the local community.

"It was too short a process to start something new" (Participant 9)

"If we had more time, it would have been great to have the opportunity to do some more co-design with our local community" (Participant 7)

The use of a competitive application process.

"Potentially we would have given an application process because we were reliant on evidence, they had given 8 months before" (Participant 13)

Finally, increase the amount of training given to individuals.

"What I would like to have done was set the set the scheme up and give the students more time for work experience.... [but] we've got a small amount of time to get the course done" (Participant 2)

Though there were participants that, whilst recognising the short timeframe, concluded their initial approach was likely still the best one.

"The short timeframe was a factor it... if we had longer to consider it, we wouldn't have come up with any very different solution" (Participant 15)

When discussing the process of operationalising CWB projects, there was a mixed response with some participants finding it difficult.

"Unless you've got someone you can lean on to support you through the project certainly in the beginning of it then it is hard" (Participant 2)

"[The procurement framework] is so clunky... it would be difficult for anything to happen" Participant 6

Whilst others found the process easier.

"A really interesting enabler. It's just the fact that money's there, it's earmarked and it removes that whole... red tape" (Participant 4)

Whilst some aspects of the process could be taught, the main factor was the local networks of the participants.

"Some parts are trainable... but a lot of it comes down to the relationships you have with your local organisations" (Participant 7)

"Its all about building good relationships and works professionally, that's really important and that not something you could particularly teach but there is good practice" (Participant 8)

The operationalisation of CWB projects are very successful considering the short time.

"It's such so short [timeframe], we've had to mobilise so quickly these projects. They [the local authorities] did really well" (Participant 12)

"The voluntary sector... [are] very used to having to respond rather quickly in times of crisis" (Participant 18)

However, this success has added to the perceived false narrative that funded services can be turned off and on at a whim.

"The challenge are not just around this funding... it's the expectation that we can just turn our services on and off like a tap" (Participant 17)

It is clear that both the timing and the timeframe for the Community Renewal Funding was problematic. The very short window to identify and deliver the projects meant that almost the entire focus was on the short-term implementation of these projects, with very little thought or action targeted towards creating infrastructure and capacity for future CWB projects. As a consequence, little evidence was seen of increased capability to generate, monitor and evidence social value through progress procurement, targeted employment practices, or any other viable means. It is important to provide context for the results in this section. As the evaluation was taking place either during or just after delivery of the participants CWB projects, the participants overrepresented the operational side of their position (and difficulties with it), whilst underrepresenting the leadership side of their position (steering group member and facilitator of CWB projects). On the leadership side, there was little evidence of existing CWB mandates – prepared plans for implementing CWB systems within their areas that would have helped (but not solve) some of the tight timeframe problems.

Recommendations:

- **The next stage of development for CWB within the county really needs to focus on creating local authority CWB mandates.**
- **The next stage should also focus on capacity and network building, which is an emergent theme as well. It is important to recognise the starting point of each of the local authorities and the subsequent process made from that point. The capacity of each local authority is different so Participatory Action Research Methods is needed to identify, engage with relevant stakeholders to co-design local authority specific plans for capacity building.**

3.2.4 Theme 3: Measuring Community Wealth Building

All participants indicated the success of their CWB projects with many highlighting the added benefit of the funding.

"I think this has been really helpful. It's enabled us to deliver what was asked of us by the organisation so that they can help the community locally" (Participant 13)

"the funding has enabled ... us to be open and to have an open-door policy for more days of the week." (Participant 17)

Measuring success was focused on the short term and relatively straight forward as existing projects tended to have existing measures of success that could be used to fulfil the funding outcome requirements.

"There were already conditions in all our planning now that they have to do" (Participant 4)

"We do measure financial outcomes in terms of if we've helped people gain income" (Participant 16)

Though the monthly monitoring did prove as a challenge for many participants.

"The monthly monitoring was difficult to catch up with" (Participant 11)

However, it wasn't the monitoring itself but rather the accumulation of tasks that participants needed to undertake given the current economic environment.

"I think recognizing the pressure that the public sector is under at the moment, coming out of COVID, Ukraine, the cost-of-living crisis, the impact of that will have on services, the cost of providing services, the cost of everything and then the impact on the population, our own recruitment challenges, retention challenges within the sector and you are almost in a firefighting mode in local government and across the public sector" (Participant 3)

Another consideration for small organisations with smaller amounts of money was if the burden of outcome reporting was worth it for them.

"A lot of those smaller organisations don't always have the resources to give you feedback" (Participant 11)

The long-term measures in contrast had few if any outcome measures implemented.

"No [longer term measurements] at the moment" (Participant 6)

"At that time, we were so focused on getting the money out the door we didn't think about the longer term" (Participant 10)

However, participants did realise the longer-term implications of CWB.

"Getting the right project so we could achieve some of the targets... but I think a lot of our projects looked at the longer term, they're quite sustainable projects" (Participant 7)

"The foundations that we're building here will go beyond the limited impact, limited scale of the project, which is fantastic" (Participant 17)

Recommendation

- **Evidencing social impact, and doing so in a cost-effective manner, is clearly a challenge to the success of CWB. Therefore, this reiterates an earlier recommendation of getting local authorities to have a CWB mandate. This provides the foundation for the next step which is the need for a county-wide portal to monitor and evidence social value.**

3.3 Achieved Outputs and Outcomes

Self-assessment and monitoring from stakeholders involved in the implementation of CWB projects has provided an indication of the achieved outputs and outcomes. Table 2 below provides a comparison with the target values and shows all targets were exceeded.

Table 2: Comparison of achieved outputs and outcomes with the target values

| Outputs | Target | Achieved | % of target |
|---|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| People – Economically inactive – no. of people supported to engage in job searching | 180 | 662 | 367% |
| People – Unemployed – no. of people supported to engage in life skills | 420 | 741 | 176% |
| People employed | 30 | 34 | 113% |
| Businesses - small - no. of organisations receiving non-financial support | 30 | 40 | 133% |
| Organisations – VCSE – no. of organisations receiving non-financial support | 60 | 54 | 90% |
| Grants – no. of organisations receiving grants | 40 | 76 | 190% |
| Outcomes | Target | Achieved | % of target |
| People in education/training following support | 60 | 316 | 526% |
| People engaged in life skills support following interventions | 120 | 527 | 439% |
| People in employment, including self-employment, following support | 35 | 298 | 851% |
| Organisations engaged in knowledge transfer activity following support | 30 | 34 | 113% |
| Jobs safeguard as a result of support | 24 | 90 | 375% |
| Investment attracted as a result of support | £500,000 | £517,099 | 103% |
| Decarbonisation plans developed as a result of support | 20 | 50 | 250% |
| Feasibility studies developed as a result of support | 10 | 11 | 110% |

4.0 Addressing Evaluation Outcomes

4.1 Appropriateness of initial design

The program was designed to collaborate with all 10 local authorities who have committed to pilot Community Building approaches with a view to working with individuals, micro-businesses, VCSEs and communities to strength local economies and create a critical mass to lever more social value. The outcomes were appropriate focusing on creating job training opportunities for the unemployed and economically inactive and creating local opportunities resulting from public interventions, regeneration activities etc. The expected timeframe was 6 months later extended to 8 months. This timeframe is very short considering the nature of the program.

Collaborations across all 10 local authorities were successful with comprehensive communication channels and regular meetings established very quickly. The collaboration focused on building the foundations i.e., sensible facilitation, effective support and political will for the program. Considering the differing levels of understanding and operationalisation of Community Wealth Building across the local authorities, it was appropriate to focus on improving the CWB of a local authority rather than achieving a determined standard.

There was flexibility for local authorities to pursue their choice of individuals, micro-businesses, VCSEs and communities for CWB projects. This was appropriate because these local authorities demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of their local areas, and which potential partners would be able to achieve the outcomes of the program. Given the timeframe limitation available for recruitment, implementation and reporting this flexible approach was necessary to achieve the required outcomes. Many of the stakeholders involved in the implementation, delivery, funding, and organisation of CWB projects focused on fulfilling the bid's requirements, as most of these requirements were related to employment opportunities; so was their understanding of CWB. Others expressed ambition in regard to developing wider structural change to include social value in decision making. This is progress on this point; however, the shorter timeframe has meant these are still in the early stages.

4.2 Progress against targets

The program was a success with all output and outcome targets met and exceeded, details can be found in Table 2.

4.3 Delivery and management

Success of the program was determined by the experience and existing networks of stakeholders involved in the implementation, delivery, funding and organization of CWB projects. They knew what to do and how to do it to get the job done in time. Due to the short timeframe, partners chosen to deliver CWB projects were mainly already known to these stakeholders through past work or by referral. These partners had already proven they could deliver the necessary outcomes in a timely manner, so were relied upon again for this project. In other areas, there were positive indicators, but also significant scope for future development. Firstly, in relation to employment, the Employment Gateway is clearly a positive step, and it should be able to make a greater contribution to CWB in the future if skills audits with a community need and social value focus are integrated into the portal. Secondly, except for Stevenage Borough Council, there were very few activities that were focused specifically on procurement. However, they are somewhat ahead of the other authorities, having undertaken a review of the social value content within their procurement spend. Therefore, moving forward, this could be utilised as the starting point for sharing good practice across all the

authorities. Finally, the exploration of engagement with developers to promote social value within large scale projects was clearly taking place, although predominantly on an informal basis. In this instance Dacorum Borough Council have taken the lead in developing a detailed and formal approach that could form the basis for good practice across the county.

4.4 Outcomes and impact

4.4.1 Partners appetite for the projects and capacity to deliver

Potential partners were very positive and supported the overall aims of the funding, however, the short timeframe and current external environment tampered the appetite to take on these projects. Funding fatigue was a constraint but particularly for smaller potential partners who may not have dedicated fund application writers. Potential partners coming out of Covid, trying to help with the cost-of-living crisis, just want to do their job and not spend a significant amount of their time writing funding applications. The partners that received funding for CWB projects all had the capacity and delivered as evidenced by all output and outcome targets being exceeded.

4.4.2 Use of the Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal by partners

The usage of the Hertfordshire opportunities portal is a benefit for employment support; however, it was not being fully utilized for supporting the CWB projects.

4.4.3 Opportunities and constraints identified by procurement and planning leads

The benefits provided by this funding were highlighted. This included expanding existing services, providing new services, increasing opening days, and increasing the interconnectivity of services. The constraints were primarily centered on the short timeframe between funding availability and expected delivery. This restricted the time organisations had for expressing interest in funding, and dissuaded others (especially small organisations) from applying. Another constraint already mentioned was reliance on trusted partners to get the outputs done in time. This is a symptom of a broader issues with government funding, with many overwhelmed with too many small sized funding opportunities.

4.4.4 Effectiveness of the grant scheme

As indicated in Phase 1, there was little documentation on the utilisation of grant schemes to support VCSE and micro-businesses. However, whatever the processes were behind the selection of the individual projects, they were clearly successful since the project fulfilled and exceeded its output requirements by some distance.

In relation to this, it is worth noting that many of the outputs and outcomes are focused around Workstream 3 – Grants Process. This was the focus of the Steering Group, with subgroups on Procurement & Planning being different workstreams. These didn't have the same output requirements attached and are significantly more of an 'ask', especially given the timeframe, however significant work was undertaken to strengthen the understanding of CWB, especially in the procurement working group (Supply Hertfordshire), who were given training around CWB and an approach to progressive procurement, and provided with a process template on how to develop a social value approach to procurement (progressive procurement. With this being likely to prove to be one of the major benefits over time accruing from this investment. Experiences of implementing successful CWB programmes with many other local authorities shows that changing mindsets within the procurement process is often the catalyst for more wide-ranging and sustainable CWB initiatives.

4.4.5 Reviewing the robustness of the feasibility study

Given the short timeframe between awarding of funding and the expected outputs, phase 1 and phase 2 of the evaluation was taking place before some CWB projects had sufficient data to judge their successfulness. Participants in phase 2 had both an operational role in implementing their own CWB projects but also a leadership role as part of the steering group. As there was not enough to reflect on the broader leadership implications, the interviews tended to focus on the operational challenges that many participants were still experiencing. To resolve this for future studies we recommend that both an immediate shorter-term evaluation and then another 12-month evaluation take place after the projects have been finished.

4.5 Value for money

Whilst there was not enough data available to produce a cost per output analysis, there was sufficient evidence to demonstrate value for money in a wider context.

There was considerable 'buy-in' from all the local authorities demonstrated through a significant use of officer time. These included a Steering Group of 12 senior managers meeting monthly, Supply Hertfordshire of 15 procurement representatives meeting monthly, Hertfordshire Apprenticeship Alliance of 15 human resource representatives meeting 3 times through the project, Hertfordshire Planning Group of 12 senior planners. When considering the background of the ongoing crises and the need to prioritise tasks, the fact that everyone involved has dedicated so much of their time to the program's success demonstrates its perceived value.

Another important consideration is the overachievement of targets. These targets were deemed acceptable by the government for the value of money. As all the targets were surpassed this demonstrates better value for money than originally agreed. As a rough measure of value for money, a comparison can be made with the 'people in employment' outcome that achieved 712% above its target, as a comparison the 'Work Programme' only achieved 19% beyond its target of employment outcomes, despite that programme having access to considerably more resources and funds.

4.6 Lessons learnt

It is clear that, in the short-term, this initiative has been very successful, with all of the predicted outputs and outcomes being exceeded, some of them by a significant distance. However, if a more long-term timeframe is applied, considerably more progress needs to be made on the CWB agenda. The upshot being that, without the CWB processes and infrastructure in place, delivering these kind of outputs and outcomes will always require securing further direct funding. Thus, these kind of improvements to social value could be achieved on a regular basis, without needing to secure funding each time.

Overall, it has been displayed that when funding is available, by adopting a greater focus on social value every one of the 10 local authorities was able to translate this funding into significant and important social outcomes and outputs. Therefore, there is no doubt that the necessary focus, understanding, and motivation is present within each local authority, in order to deliver sizeable improvements in social value. However, the next stage of the process is to embed the necessary infrastructure and processes so that continuing improvements to social value can be delivered without constantly having to secure funding for each project. With this being the means by which CWB becomes a more sustainable and impactful initiative. As a first step there needs to be a set of shared principles that can be operationalised at the local level. To this end, although it tends to be a lengthy process, there are positive signs across the whole county with the understanding of CWB and social value increasing across the officers with responsibility for procurement and community

development. If the level of knowledge and understanding can continue to develop, combined with the necessary support from elected officers, then there is every reason to believe that meaningful CWB can be developed across Herts that has a significant impact upon social value, particularly within the communities where there is the greatest need.

5.0 Summary and Recommendations

Despite some difficulties at the operational level, this programme was very successful having exceeded all its required outcomes. To facilitate the recommendation regarding capacity and network building, it is recommended that the next round of research is centered on Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR methods are designed to engage stakeholders in practical problem solving, where the problems themselves can be characterised as wicked problems defying easy, final solutions. They can be used to address the need for capacity and network building, focusing on the following items:

- 1) Calibration of understanding/ develop a set of shared principles) – what is CWB and social value? This understanding should constitute A) a shared vision that B) can be adapted to each specific location in such a way that addresses specific issues linked with specific stakeholders in each local authority.
- 2) Co-creation of capacity and networks as its own aim. The networking of all the local authorities in Hertfordshire was a success, now we used this in the identification of barriers and enablers to that end, as well as building cohesive and productive networks of stakeholders that include stakeholders who are direct beneficiaries of CWB projects, relevant third sector organisations, and other relevant primary stakeholders. The outcome should be a set of collaborative mechanisms and practices, prior to full scale institutionalisation.
- 3) Sharing of best practices – what every borough or council has done and done well, and what could work for everyone if properly adapted to specific contexts and CWB issues.
- 4) Developing targeted call outs for funding that are predicated on a division of labour characterized by each network stakeholder’s relative strengths, while facilitating the building of further capacities for other network stakeholders and address their relative weaknesses, thus ensuring development of the entire network.

Employment of PAR methods is also useful for collective capacity building and network development and would form the basis of the next round of research and analysis. These methods both build on the insights of the present analysis whilst assisting building on the work already undertaken, particularly in the programme themes of procurement, planning and feasibility to deliver longer term CBW impact.