

Community Renewal Fund



LGA webinar 'Learning from the Community Renewal Fund'



CRF in North Somerset: Distinctive Features

- £2.8m for four projects of similar size
- Thriving Places (placemaking and decarbonisation), Supporting Business, Works Together (employment and skills), Community Hubs
- Unique profile of rural and coastal communities, small pockets of urban deprivation in Weston, with many people living here but working elsewhere (particularly Bristol and Hinkley Point). Relatively prosperous overall
- One big further/higher education player, often in a competitive relationship with the council in the past
- Under-developed voluntary sector and voluntary sector infrastructure/support
- A strong appetite for economic development, particularly focused on council-led enterprise zone beside the M5
- Key sectors: visitor economy, creative industries, logistics
- Growing council commitment to Net Zero and, building back greener and embedding climate literacy

Development and implementation

- North Somerset submitted 6 CRF applications. The four council-led ones were successful
- Delivery partner commitments in the applications were translated into Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between each partner and the council
- In most cases, alongside agreed payments, individual delivery commitments were identified. But not always..
- Thriving Places project is comprised completely of feasibility studies and plans undertaken by external consultants
- Business and Skills projects have flat structured partnership groups that work directly with the council-led project management resource
- Community Hubs has complex arrangements, managed by local VCS infrastructure support, a second tier by the community team at the council, which then reports to the project management resource in the council
- Our project management consultancy started work at the end of November 2021. The external evaluators Wavehill started at the beginning of January 2022.

Challenges for us

- **The 6-month delivery requirement.** Actually this focused minds intently. All partners made a massive (and successful) effort to start the delivery phase by early February.
- **Clarifying and assigning outputs and outcomes** for each partner (time lag), especially after discovering that some intended outputs and target groups did not meet the Annex A criteria
- **Receiving a whole new set of output monitoring requirements** ahead of the February interim monitoring report
- Meeting the **extensive evidence requirements for outputs and outcomes** as set out by DLUHC – we have instituted 2-month monitoring reports and gradually the data is getting cleaner and more consistent
- **GDPR and data gathering and sharing in a partnership** – have ended up with two systems running in parallel. But seems to work!
- Some teething problems associated with **capacity building the voluntary sector** – small organisations receiving substantial budgets and responsibilities for the first time..

LEARNING

For us

- Better record keeping to retain continuity from bid to delivery
- More accurate contract/agreement making with partners
- More streamlined project management
- More effective costing for ancillary roles such as communications and finance

For DLUHC

- Try not to rush so much – you'll get better quality results!
- Set a realistic timeframe for delivery
- Check consistency of bid information against your criteria before approving
- Don't introduce new monitoring requirements after the projects have started – and at short notice

Is CRF working?

YES!

- The outputs and outcomes generated by CRF are definitely of great benefit to the people of North Somerset
- The ways in which we achieve better lives for people have been refined, by better joined-up partnership working and.. the sharing of skills and approaches that are proving successful and effective
- Partners across the district, outside of their own projects have been galvanised to look at fresh ways of achieving new ambitions – together
- **EXAMPLE:** VCS/Community hubs were already involved in engaging people outside the system in improving skills and confidence (employment/skills). Now the groups are more actively involved in placemaking plans and associated climate literacy initiatives, as well as starting to look for support in developing community/business training and opportunities.

The delivery partner perspective..

CRF funding has enabled us to provide a unique work experience placement matching service with employers and those seeking work. The funding enabled us to support employers who had been struggling to recruit after the pandemic or who needed an extra pair of hands due to staff shortages.

The grant enabled employers:

- To offer paid hours after the placement
- Pay for mentors to support participants who had additional needs in the work place (great inclusive impact!)
- Expand their business or buy items like tools and clothing for participants

For participants the placement gave them

- A valuable and meaningful experience and the opportunity to try a different sector
- A boost to their confidence and something positive to add to their CV

It has been a wonderful opportunity which supports both employers and participants to try each other out prior to making further job commitments

However.... the project is very time and admin intensive.

The requirement to carry out three surveys throughout the placements proved to be too demanding for many of the participants who did the minimum hours in their placement.

The reporting requirements involved completing long and intensive spread sheets.

Gaining original 'wet' copies of paperwork from 70 participants and 70 employers has been very time consuming too. Making visits to employers to sign them up to the project and provide support is also time consuming.

Providing in-work support to both employers and participants also takes up lots of time but is essential to ensure clear communication and that relevant support is given.

The payment monitoring and processes are also very labour intensive.

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Questions

