National Lottery Heritage Fund: Areas of Focus

Year 3 Final Report

July 2022

RSM UK Consulting LLP

Contents

Executive Summary

Introduction

In August 2019, RSM UK Consulting LLP (RSM) was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of The National Lottery Heritage Fund's (The Fund) five-year Strategic Funding Framework (2019-2024) and its impact on 13 'Areas of Focus' (AoF). This report is the third of five annual reports aiming to provide key learnings and recommendations that can be incorporated into the delivery of the Strategic Funding Framework. It also aims to further consolidate our understanding of the AoF programme, testing if the Theory of Change (ToC) is still valid.

Evaluation Approach

The 5-year evaluation has the following aims:

- understand the effectiveness of processes involved in delivering support to Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations with respect to capacity building, networking, partnerships development and volunteers' recruitment;

- assess short and medium-term outcomes, capturing indications of impacts wherever possible; and

- establish 'what works'; enablers and barriers that affect impact and delivery.

The evaluation approach is built around the ToC which shows pathways through which the programme is expected to deliver activities and achieve its intended outcomes. The ToC details short and medium-term outcomes that are hypothesised to lead to long-term impacts and the delivery of five higher level impacts, namely:

1. increased inclusivity.

2. increased investment in areas of focus.

3. improved environment and heritage preserved.

4. increased economic impact of heritage; and

5. more vibrant places.

Based on the timeline for outcomes, and stage of this study, the evaluation has so far focused on processes underpinning the delivery of the AoF activities, capturing indications of outputs and outcomes wherever possible. This report looks to articulate the evidence of the short-term outcomes for the programme (Years 0 – 3).

Evidence in this report is derived and synthesised from multiple strands of evaluation activity, namely:

- desk-based review of key documents, policies, strategies and research papers;

- analysis of performance and investment data across four financial years (FY), FY2018-19 to FY2021-22;

- in-depth case studies of five selected Areas of Focus, as agreed with The Fund, namely: Enfield; North East Lincolnshire; North Lanarkshire; Rhondda Cynon Taf; and Walsall; and

- consultation with The Fund's staff representatives (including Engagement Leads) and wider stakeholders (including local authority [LA] representatives and delivery partners) totalling 26 consultations.

Evaluation Findings

Programme Performance

The following details key findings from an analysis of performance of the AoF programme as of February 2022:

- there has been a positive trend in the number of enquiries, rising from 120 in FY2019-20 to 144 in FY2021-22, despite a drop in FY2020-21 (as a result of the pandemic impacts on open funding) . Significantly, there is a trend emerging that shows an increased proportion of enquiries will progress to the award stage, indicating appropriate engagement activities and messaging;

- a review of the number of applications received from the various AoF against a FY2018/19 baseline identifies a mixed picture. The majority of AoF have seen a negative change from the baseline, but there has been an average increase of 8% across the AoFs of successful applications (i.e., applications receiving funding), indicating that the support received by projects developing an application is improved. There is also evidence to suggest that the quality and relevance of applications is improving, reflected by an increase in the proportion of successful applications;

- spend per capita data shows that the AoF programme is closing the gap with the national average, with a number of areas at or exceeding the national average spend per capita. Although some areas have seen a percentage decrease in the level of investment from baseline, overall, the picture is encouraging;

- for only one AoF was the spend per capita lower than the baseline year, with the vast majority showing strong and positive spend per capita figures. FY2020-21 is significantly above average spend per capita, given the lower total national spend, combined with activities such as the solicited bid;

- there is good progress in relation to volunteers supported through the programme, with Enfield, Newham and Tendring reporting particularly strong performance; and

- whilst the increase in projects being delivered in partnerships is relatively modest at this stage, this may continue to improve over the lifetime of the programme to reflect the partnership building that has occurred in the early part of the programme resulting in successful funding awards in later years.

Short Term Outcomes

This section details the evidence against the Programme ToC. It is expected in the ToC that the programme would been meeting its short-term outcomes i.e., those outcomes that area expected to be delivered between 0 to 3 years of the programme commencing. The following highlights progress against short-term outcomes i.e., those outcomes that area expected to be delivered between 0 to 3 years of the programme commencing. We also identify The Fund's activities that are supporting successful delivery, as well as barriers that still exist. Our ToC is also presented below for reference. Following a workshop hosted by The Fund in which engagement leads of the

AoF and Northern Ireland were invited to review the ToC, the following changes were made to the previous iteration:

- Years 0-3 Outcomes: "Volunteering skills contribute to local employment and economic recovery" added;

- Years 3-5 Outcome: "More volunteers in heritage" updated to "More heritage training, volunteering, and employment opportunities"; and

- Impacts 5+ Years: "More vibrant towns and cities" updated to "More vibrant places"

Theory of Change Diagram (found overleaf)

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes 0-3 years	Medium-term Outcomes 3-5 years	Impacts +5 years
Appointment of local AoF engagement lead	Ongoing direct (one-to-one) support to build bid writing confidence	Increased number of events sharing knowledge about AoF agenda between VCSE, NLHF, local government	NLHF/ETs report increased capacity to engage VCSE	Increased confidence in applicants	Increased inclusivity
Creation of AoF network of delivery partners	Capacity building to VCSE sector incl micro-org	Funding advice sessions raising awareness of funding opportunities	VCSE report increased capability to apply for funding	More applications	Increased investment in AoF
Grant funding disbursed to VCSE sector to contribute to the NLHF strategy	Schools provide a community hub	Increased number of volunteers & community groups supported	Greater visibility of NLHF on partnerships	Raised profile of AoF across other funders	Improved environment / heritage preserved
Creation and funding of heritage LA community post	Targeted Heritage Strategy communications locally and nationally	New strategic partnerships	Better focus on deliverable projects	More heritage training, volunteering and employment opportunities	Increased economic impact of heritage
Volunteers' time incl. community groups and residents	Ongoing local training & advice sessions	Increased number of quality and relevant heritage proposals	Increased prioritisation of heritage	Access to new sectors	More vibrant places

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes 0-3 years	Medium-term Outcomes 3-5 years	Impacts +5 years
	Ongoing cross boundary engagement to build partnerships NLHF bid review and support ETs build the knowledge on barriers to apply for funding and AoF challenges		Increased understanding and acceptance of notion of heritage Improved signposting between funders Volunteering skills contribute to local employment and economic recovery	Increased national and local expertise on Heritage and contributions to local strategy and interventions in areas No value	

Assumptions for inputs	Assumptions for activities and outputs	Assumptions for outcomes
Other funders incl. other NLHF teams offer wide ranging complementary support: skills formation incl. digital and volunteer recruitment	Effective NLHF digital campaign delivers against its objectives Projects objectives are aligned with AoF outcomes Sustained engagement with NLHF Strategy framework	NLHR remains UK trusted entity and regarded as thought leader with respect to heritage Evidence from single AoF/Projects is incorporated into learnings feedback loops and influences NLHF strategic work
NLHF information and guidance documents is relevant, timely and	Projects reach out to underrepresented organisations & individuals	There is motivation from VCSE to promote the heritage agenda and incentives help sustain this

Assumptions for inputs	Assumptions for activities and outputs	Assumptions for outcomes
useful (place framework approach)	Volunteering positively contributes to supporting economic recovering post-Brexit and Covid-19	AoF and local heritage work remain a priority Private sector relationships develop

Risks for inputs	Risks for activities and outputs	Risks for outcomes
NLHF Strategy is not suitable to address AoF objectives or relevant to VCSE organisations	AoF programme not delivered on time Projects objectives do not align with AoF objectives resulting in unconclusive evidence	Heritage is not clearly defined and challenging to measure (absence of baseline/monitoring data) Heritage is not adopted by targeted VCSE organisations Evidence and insights are ignored by stakeholders Projects work with limited numbers of people so scale of change is limited and difficult to infer general findings of 'what works' Limited time and COVID 19 disruptions result in unconclusive evidence of impact

The following findings are profiled against points in the ToC.

- The Fund reports increased capacity to engage VCSE groups: the success of this outcome varies across AoF, but overall, engagement teams have been able to build relationships and support groups to develop projects. This support is often highly tailored to the needs of the organisation. Digital delivery of engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic has been a suitable interim measure, but there is need for increased face-to-face engagement. The community grants schemes, delivered by local partners, have proved a successful tool in engaging with new VCSE groups;

- VCSE groups report increased capability to apply for funding: evidence suggests that there is a greater range of groups applying for funding and that groups are applying for increased amounts of funding. There is also evidence that more groups are beginning to understand the broad range of what heritage can encompass, and in turn, submitting applications that better meet The Fund's priorities;

- greater visibility of The Fund through partnerships: solicited projects with local authorities have been the predominant way in which The Fund has built effective partnerships and increased its profile, gaining capacity for heritage to be included in strategic discussions;

- better focus on deliverable projects: data has shown an increase in application success from The Fund's baseline position, highlighting that g applications are more likely to be awarded funding. Engagement teams are proactively seeking to shape projects to ensure application success, and the support given to those receiving solicited bid funding has ensured that significant amounts of investment is brought into large scale and impactful projects;

- increased prioritisation of heritage: within local authorities, The Fund's investment in heritage strategies and capacity of heritage officers (through solicited bid projects) has pushed heritage up the agenda and engaged decision makers in the benefits of heritage. This has been progressed by local authorities, despite the Covid-19 context and focus on response and recovery, however, it was identified as more of a challenge for voluntary and community groups;

- increased understanding of heritage: there is emerging evidence of The Fund boosting the understanding of their definition of heritage and how broad it can be conceptualised. Key partners are beginning to adopt the Fund's broad-based understanding of heritage. Sharing of project examples / case studies across the breadth of heritage is felt to be a useful next step in helping organisations to understand what heritage refers to; and

- improved sign posting between funders: strong relationships have been built with a number of Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) organisations, who better understand The Fund and its priorities for heritage. This has improved the quality of signposting from CVS organisations and enabled the Fund to tap into existing local networks. There is less evidence of signposting and relationship building with other funders (including lottery distributors).

What needs Improvement?

To be most effective and impactful in AoFs, a number of points have been highlighted where engagement teams can either alter their approach or do more to improve outcomes. These are highlighted below:

- digital engagement: stakeholders and Fund representatives have been unanimous that, whilst digital engagement has provided good reach and acted as an appropriate alternative during the pandemic, it is not a substitute for face-to-face engagement activities, and these should be returned to and scaled up where resources allow;

- budget / capacity constraints: particularly in Scotland and Wales, constraints on budget and capacity have limited the impact within AoFs as there is a greater resource pressure and need to spread resources across these nations. This means that projects in AoF have increased scrutiny and competition to ensure that resources are best managed. Rejecting a potentially fundable project can erode trust with local organisations, and limited staff capacity will impact on the time available for engagement teams to support applications and building the pipeline;

- spotlighting successes: a number of stakeholders felt that more could be done to highlight best practice projects, in order to ensure that heritage remained in the local consciousness and to help potential applicants understand how The Fund's criteria for projects plays out in real life examples;

- engagement with other funders: despite being a short-term outcome, there is limited evidence that the Fund is partnering with other funders. The focus thus far has tended to be on CVS organisations and their networks, with only a small number of examples of the Fund engaging with other providers e.g., Historic England, and Arts Council England;

- engagement with decision makers: strategic influencing has been mainly focused on a mid-level within local authorities, and in examples where engagement teams have sought to influence MPs and MSPs, this has often involved politicians focusing on their own priorities. Shifting political landscapes within local authorities has also been cited as a challenge of political influencing. Where possible, engagement teams should seek to engage with and establish relationships with key decision-making stakeholders. It is felt that local councillors may offer a more valuable local relationship than those slightly more detached;

- profile of heritage amongst VCSE groups: following the pandemic, it remains a challenge to engage VCSE groups in heritage, given their focus on pandemic response and recovery. Increased advocacy and messaging on the co-benefits of heritage for wider priorities should be focused on VCSE organisations, as well as at a more strategic level; and

- solicitation: the benefits of the solicited bid approach are significant (e.g., for influencing, acquisition), but a number of challenges in the approach were identified and should be resolved for this tool to be most impactful. Stakeholders have highlighted concerns that expediting the application process may mean that projects are not fully thought through and effectively planned. Comments emerged that giving a funding cap, rather than encouraging applicants to cost their project, meant that applicants were designing projects to meet the funding cap, rather than designing an appropriate project for the context. Others commented that retrospective claims meant that solicitation is only a viable option for organisations of significant resourcing.

Recommendations

Despite the challenges of pandemic recovery, coupled with budgetary and capacity challenges within some AoF, this evaluation finds that the AoF programme is broadly on track in achieving the short-term outcomes expected at this stage of the programme, whilst identifying a number of challenges and deficiencies to be addressed to ensure that medium-term outcomes and impacts can be realised.

Key implications from this report are profiled below:

- engagement tools: community grants have been found to be a hugely successful tool for engaging new grassroots organisations and upskilling both delivery partners and recipients. Solicited bid development was highlighted as having a significant impact on strategic influencing, but a number of challenges and concerns with the process have been highlighted (such as limited project planning, limited capacity in LAs to deliver). Opportunities to utilise these tools should be identified where appropriate. It is found that digital methods of engagement, whilst effective in the pandemic context, are not a substitute for face-to-face relationship building, and that a face-to-face approach should be prioritised;

- spotlighting successes: feedback has highlighted that The Fund's engagement activities would benefit from sharing stories and case studies of successful and impactful projects. Understanding of The Fund's criteria and an increased prioritisation of heritage are key benefits of sharing stories of projects. This may also influence those in more traditional heritage backgrounds to understand the value of other types of heritage. Mechanisms to capture and disseminate 'case studies' should be considered;

- partnerships and relationships: engagement teams have built successful relationships with CVS organisations that are generating new opportunities by raising the profile of the Fund and increasing signposting. This is something that should be prioritised, and new networks identified. However, there has been less activities to build relationships with other funding bodies. Opportunities for strategic partnerships should be explored;

- advocacy and influencing: developing heritage strategies and supporting heritage staff within local authorities has improved the reach of The Fund into new strategic spaces. Efforts should continue on this level of influencing, but direct relationships should also be made with decision makers. There is also work to be done to advocate for the wider benefits of heritage projects at a community level (e.g., place-making, health and wellbeing, economic development), to help groups understand how they can utilise heritage as part of their work to challenge deprivation and boost wellbeing. Advocacy activities have been successful and effective in boosting the understanding of heritage amongst community groups and partners;

- capacity and expectations: throughout this evaluation, it is evident that resource constraints within Scotland and Wales to deliver funding and projects for their AoF (North Lanarkshire, Inverclyde, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Neath Port Talbot) has been a challenge. Limited engagement team capacity to generate opportunities and relationships, combined with budgetary constraints, has meant that these AoF are unlikely to see the same level of impact as other areas. As such, consideration should be given to the funding and resources available to the regions; and

- future evaluation reports: given the significant success of community grant programmes, it would be beneficial for future evaluations to capture data on applications, awards and investment via community grants. It would also be beneficial to track matched funding secured by successful applicants via the community grants process to aid in assessing leveraged funding and attribution of impacts. This data is currently not available through The Fund's data procedures. In addition, to assess value for money, the evaluation should capture all financial inputs beyond direct project funding awards (including Fund staff costs, RoSS inputs, etc.). The associated employment and economic benefits of upskilling volunteers should be quantified in future evaluations.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Report Scope and Context

In August 2019, RSM UK Consulting LLP (RSM) was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the National Lottery Heritage Fund's (The Fund) five-year Strategic Funding Framework (2019-2024) and its impact on 13 'Areas of Focus' (AoF).

This report is the third of five annual reports aiming to provide key learnings and recommendations that can be incorporated into the delivery of the Strategic Funding Framework. It also aims to further consolidate our understanding of the AoF programme with an updated Theory of Change (ToC).

As with other programmes, the AoF has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, which primarily impacted on the delivery of planned project activity and the implementation of a new internal data management system by The Fund. Covid-19 also impacted on the capacity of The Fund and partner organisations in AoFs, with Fund and Local Authority (LA) heritage staff redeployed to pandemic response activities, and local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations prioritising activities focused on Covid response and community support. Contextual considerations are given in trying to understand what has happened as a result of Covid-19, and to what extent unanticipated learnings can be extracted and solutions incorporated into the ongoing delivery of the Strategic Planning Framework.

Programme Overview

The Strategic Framework aims to generate investment in projects across 13 AoF. AoF are defined as areas which have received less than average levels of funding from The Fund, and that are located within the 25% most deprived wards in the UK.

Key objectives of the framework are to overcome perceived challenges around investing in heritage projects in particular deprivation contexts. As part of its commitment to generate additional investment in the AoF, The Fund is committed to working with key local partners. The aim is to develop and promote active participation of key organisations and / or communities into heritage activities. To do so, The Fund relies on Engagement Teams whose roles is to:

- raise awareness of The Fund and the type of heritage projects it funds;

- support potential grant recipients to create heritage projects, including solicited bids, eligible for funding;

- raise confidence and capability of eligible organisations to apply for funding; and

- explore new ways of raising awareness, understanding, promotion and participation in heritage initiatives.

The AoF activities also benefit from **strategic and tactical campaign activity** aligned to Strategic Framework key objectives. 2022 marks two years of the Digital Skills for Heritage initiative, which has supported already circa (c.) 65 projects. The campaign helped organisations shift their heritage activities online during the Covid-19 lockdown, provides support and training for organisations, and supports organisations with low-confidence to improve their digital skills.

Overview of the Areas

The 13 AoF are listed below and mapped in Figure 1.1:

- Brent (London and South of England);

- Corby (Midlands and East of England);

- Enfield (London and South of England);

- Inverclyde (Scotland);

- Knowsley (North of England);

- Luton (London and South of England);

- Neath Port Talbot (Wales);

- Newham (London and the South of England);

- North East Lincolnshire (North of England);

- North Lanarkshire (Scotland);

- Rhondda Cynon Taf (Wales);

- Tendring (London and South of England); and

- Walsall (Midlands and East of England).

Figure 1.1: Areas of Focus

Evaluation Overview

Evaluation Aims

The 5-year evaluation has the following aims:

- understand the effectiveness of processes involved in delivering support to VCSE organisations with respect to capacity building, networking, partnerships development and volunteers' recruitment;

- assess short and medium-term outcomes, capturing indications of impacts wherever possible; and

- establish 'what works'; enablers and barriers that affect impact and delivery.

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation approach is built around the ToC which shows pathways through which the programme is expected to deliver activities and achieve its intended outcomes. The ToC details short and medium-term outcomes that are hypothesised to lead to long-term impacts and the delivery of five higher level impacts, namely:

1. increased inclusivity.

2. increased investment in areas of focus.

3. improved environment and heritage preserved.

4. increased economic impact of heritage.

5. more vibrant places.

Based on the timeline for outcomes, and stage of this study, the evaluation has so far focused on processes underpinning the delivery of the AoF activities, capturing indications of outputs and outcomes wherever possible. This report looks to articulate the evidence of the short-term outcomes for the programme (Years 0 – 3). The ToC has also been updated on key assumptions and risks.

Evidence Base for this Report

Evidence in this report is derived and synthesised from multiple strands of evaluation activity, namely:

- desk-based review of key documents, policies, strategies and research papers.

- analysis of performance and investment data across four financial years (FY2018-19 to FY2021-22);

- in-depth case studies of five selected Areas of Focus (as agreed with The Fund):

  – Enfield;
  – North East Lincolnshire;
  – North Lanarkshire;
  – Rhondda Cynon Taf; and
  – Walsall.

- consultation with The Fund's staff representatives (including Engagement Leads) and wider stakeholders (including local authority representatives and delivery partners). Table 1.1 summarises consultations completed so far over the period December 2021 to March 2022.

Table 1.1: Evaluation Consultations

Type of Stakeholder	Number of Consultations
The Fund staff	7
Wider stakeholders	13
Project delivery partners	6
Total	**26**

Report Structure

The structure and content of this report reflects evaluation activities and findings available to date:

- Chapter 2 provides the revised AoF ToC with revised assumptions and risks;

- Chapter 3 reviews the policy context, setting The Fund's strategic objectives within their wider policy context;

- Chapter 4 provides an overview of AoF performance and investment trends to date;

- Chapter 5 focuses on findings from the in-depth case studies of selected areas;

- Chapter 6 focuses on emerging outcomes and key strategic learnings; and

- Chapter 7 concludes and identifies a set of lessons for future implementation of The Fund 2019-2024 Strategic Framework.

2. THEORY OF CHANGE

Introduction

This section presents a summary of the ToC developed in consultation with The Fund in the previous 2021 (Year 2) evaluation report.

The purpose of the ToC is to set out a clear understanding of AoF activities, outputs and outcomes over time. It aims to provide an analytical reference point for the evaluation, defining the outcomes that will need to be examined and highlighting key assumptions and risks that the data collection will aim to further understand.

The resulting ToC is presented in Figure 2.1 with the section below describing the causal processes by which AoF programme is expected to delivery its intended results.

Summary of the Theory of Change

As described below, the AoF programme's ToC has six components, reflecting the stages needed to realise the programme key objectives. It also has underlying key assumptions and risks:

1. Inputs – this sets out the necessary means to implement the desired changes.
2. Activities – this sets out how the AoF programme will be implemented, with The Fund as a clear catalyst in capacity building work and support via the engagement leads.
3. Outputs – this shows the expected results from the inputs and activities. By this stage it is assumed that eligible applicants are aware of The Fund and are in touch with the engagement leads.

Outcomes and Impacts

Below details the expected outcomes and impacts in the chronological order that they would be expected to occur. The outcomes are represented at the Area of Focus programme level.

4. Short-term (0-3 years) – immediate outcomes related to capacity and capability work of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations work with respect to heritage, greater awareness of the concept of heritage and cross sectoral work between public, voluntary and private partners.
5. Medium term (3-5 years) – outcomes expected to follow from the ongoing engagement work but also initiatives and confidence of VCSE organisations to create heritage projects and apply for funding.
6. Impacts (5+ years) – this set out the impacts at the area level and include improved heritage preservation, positive economic and social effects as well recognition, in the form of investments, of the heritage agenda. Impacts fall outside the scope of the evaluation timeline. However, the evaluation will consider and report on initial indications of impacts wherever possible.

Updates to the Theory of Change

In March 2022, a workshop was hosted by The Fund in which engagement leads of the AoF and Northern Ireland were invited to review the ToC, identify whether it is still accurate and suggest updates for outcomes and impacts.

Table 2.1 presents the current version of the ToC, with detail of changes to the previous iteration summarised beneath.

Table 2.1: Theory of Change for Areas of Focus

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes 0-3 years	Medium-term Outcomes 3-5 years	Impacts +5 years
Appointment of local AoF engagement lead	Ongoing direct (one-to-one) support to build bid writing confidence	Increased number of events sharing knowledge about AoF agenda between VCSE, NLHF, local government	NLHF/ETs report increased capacity to engage VCSE	Increased confidence in applicants	Increased inclusivity
Creation of AoF network of delivery partners	Capacity building to VCSE sector incl micro-org	Funding advice sessions raising awareness of funding opportunities	VCSE report increased capability to apply for funding	More applications	Increased investment in AoF
Grant funding disbursed to VCSE sector to contribute to the NLHF strategy	Schools provide a community hub	Increased number of volunteers & community groups supported	Greater visibility of NLHF on partnerships	Raised profile of AoF across other funders	Improved environment / heritage preserved
Creation and funding of heritage LA community post	Targeted Heritage Strategy communications locally and nationally	New strategic partnerships	Better focus on deliverable projects	More heritage training, volunteering and employment opportunities	Increased economic impact of heritage
Volunteers' time incl. community groups and residents	Ongoing local training & advice sessions	Increased number of quality and relevant heritage proposals	Increased prioritisation of heritage	Access to new sectors	More vibrant places

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes 0-3 years	Medium-term Outcomes 3-5 years	Impacts +5 years
	Ongoing cross boundary engagement to build partnerships NLHF bid review and support ETs build the knowledge on barriers to apply for funding and AoF challenges		Increased understanding and acceptance of notion of heritage Improved signposting between funders Volunteering skills contribute to local employment and economic recovery	Increased national and local expertise on Heritage and contributions to local strategy and interventions in areas	

Assumptions for inputs	Assumptions for activities and outputs	Assumptions for outcomes
Other funders incl. other NLHF teams offer wide ranging complementary support: skills formation incl. digital and volunteer recruitment	Effective NLHF digital campaign delivers against its objectives Projects objectives are aligned with AoF outcomes Sustained engagement with NLHF Strategy framework	NLHR remains UK trusted entity and regarded as thought leader with respect to heritage Evidence from single AoF/Projects is incorporated into learnings feedback loops and influences NLHF strategic work
NLHF information and guidance documents is relevant, timely and useful (place	Projects reach out to underrepresented organisations & individuals	There is motivation from VCSE to promote the heritage agenda and incentives help sustain this AoF and local heritage work remain a priority

Assumptions for inputs	Assumptions for activities and outputs	Assumptions for outcomes
framework approach)	Volunteering positively contributes to supporting economic recovering post-Brexit and Covid-19	Private sector relationships develop

Risks for inputs	Risks for activities and outputs	Risks for outcomes
NLHF Strategy is not suitable to address AoF objectives or relevant to VCSE organisations	AoF programme not delivered on time Projects objectives do not align with AoF objectives resulting in unconclusive evidence	Heritage is not clearly defined and challenging to measure (absence of baseline/monitoring data) Heritage is not adopted by targeted VCSE organisations Evidence and insights are ignored by stakeholders Projects work with limited numbers of people so scale of change is limited and difficult to infer general findings of 'what works' Limited time and COVID 19 disruptions result in unconclusive evidence of impact

The following changes were made to the ToC as a result of the workshop:

- Years 0-3 Outcomes: "Volunteering skills contribute to local employment and economic recovery" added;
- Years 3-5 Outcome: "More volunteers in heritage " updated to "More heritage training, volunteering, and employment opportunities"; and
- Impacts 5+ Years: "More vibrant towns and cities" updated to "More vibrant places".

3.   POLICY CONTEXT

Introduction

This chapter provides an assessment of the UK heritage policy context, tracking key developments, outlining The Fund's objectives and tracking the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on these objectives, as well as identifying synergies with Strategic Funding Framework priorities and current local and national policy objectives. This section is a new addition to the report from the previous year's evaluation report.

Heritage in the UK

The UK is steeped in heritage, both tangible and intangible. Heritage is highly valued and frequently engaged with. Heritage is an important national asset, contributing to the distinct identity of UK places, driving tourism and the economy, benefiting health and wellbeing and improving learning and skills. Heritage is a devolved policy area, and as such Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are responsible for their own heritage policy, with the UK government responsible for England. Support for heritage is often channelled through local authorities and arm's length and non-departmental public bodies. UK heritage stakeholders include: The National Lottery Heritage Fund; Arts Council England; Historic England; English Heritage; Historic Environment Scotland; Cadw (Wales); the Department for Communities (Northern Ireland); Natural England; Nature Scot; Environment Agencies (across the devolved nations); and the National Trust. These are supported by a large range of smaller funders and heritage organisations. In recent years, public sector support for heritage has included:

- the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Culture White Paper published in 2016. This is the first white paper on culture and heritage in the UK in 50 years and it highlights the Government's support for the cultural sector and heritage activities, announcing policies including Heritage Action Zones, the Great Place Scheme, and objectives to reduce the number of 'at risk' heritage sites and improve Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) Heritage Index Scores amongst the bottom performers;

- tailored reviews of arm's length heritage and cultural bodies (the Fund and Arts Council England). The review of the Fund made a series of recommendations to strengthen their performance in the areas of strategy, accessibility, efficiency and governance;

- the DCMS Heritage statement published in 2017 and updated in 2018, setting the government's direction and priorities for England's heritage. Four priority areas for heritage cover place-making, inclusion, international recognition and creating a sustainable and resilient sector;

- inclusion of guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (England only) on 'conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Within this framework, strategies for conserving and enjoying heritage assets must consider the desirability of enhancing a heritage asset, the wider co-benefits of heritage, and contribution to the unique character of a place. In Scotland, the Draft Fourth National Planning Framework gives guidance on protecting and enhancing local heritage assets, as part of their Distinctive Places planning theme and the Welsh Planning Policy also highlights the importance of historic and natural environment in placemaking;

- as part of the £675 million Future High Streets Fund (England only), £55 million was allocated to the heritage sector, focusing on improving physical and economic condition of towns and

high streets, as well as [improving social cohesion and pride of place](). Scotland's £50 Million [Town Centres Fund](), provides funding for a range of investments to deliver against the themes of the Town Centre Action Plan, which includes 'Proactive Planning', supporting the creation of sustainable low-carbon and connected places *which promotes natural and cultural assets.* The equivalent funding in Wales includes £18.4 million for [Transforming Towns Loan Funding](), to breathe life into old and empty properties;

- DCMS published a framework on [valuing culture and heritage assets](), providing guidance and statistics to support the valuation of culture and heritage, in order to assess fully the benefits and costs of investment in a social cost benefit analysis, allowing for consistency in decision making around the value of culture and heritage;

- the [Levelling Up Fund]() will include a focus on Cultural and Heritage investment, alongside prioritising transport and town centres and regeneration, as a way of place-making and driving economic prosperity across the UK;

- [Scotland's Culture Strategy]() commits to work in partnership with Scotland's national heritage bodies to promote inclusive, internationally recognised heritages which are place-based and contribute to fair work, environmental protection and wellbeing;

- The Welsh Government outlined their [priorities for the historic environment in Wales]() in 2018, to protect heritage assets, preserve skills, promote individuals to enjoy heritage, use heritage to drive economic wellbeing and take a partnership approach; and

- Northern Ireland New Decade, New Approach contains policy objectives for promoting Northern Ireland's culture, heritage and society, including marking the centenary, exploring the Shared History Fund project, supporting linguistic heritages, and promoting learning in Schools.

However, this public support for heritage is also set against a backdrop of a decade of cuts to local authority cultural and heritage services budgets. In England, [Local Authority spend]() on cultural and related services fell by 45% from 2009/10 to 2018/19, and staff expenditure by 41%, which has had a real impact on how heritage assets are protected and used. For Scotland, from 2010/11 to 2020/21, Local Authority budgets for culture and leisure fell by [27%]() and for Welsh Local Authorities, from 2009/10 to 2017/18, cuts of [36.3%.]()

National Lottery Heritage Fund Strategic Funding Framework 2019-2024

The Fund is the largest dedicated funder of heritage in the UK, and from its creation in 1994, it has distributed £7.7 billion of National Lottery money to [42,000 heritage projects]() across the UK, across a broad spectrum of heritage domains. In 2019, The Fund outlined their vision for the following five years in their Strategic Funding Framework. This document sets out the principles and objectives for investment from 2019 to 2024. Development of the Framework and vision came in the backdrop of a [Tailored Review]() of the Heritage Lottery Fund, policy directions from [DCMS](), research to guide [future planning](), a report into public perceptions of heritage, commissioned by [The Fund]() and consultation with [stakeholders](). From this research and other evaluations, The Fund received a steer and support to take a leadership position in heritage strategic priorities across the UK, address barriers to certain groups engaging in heritage, leverage the wider economic and social benefits of heritage, preserve the natural environment and contribute to place-making.

The Fund, in their vision-setting, reaffirmed the importance of their funding in conserving, protecting and passing on heritage of all kinds, [which is at risk of loss, damage or neglect](). The

framework also outlined the desire of The Fund to demonstrate and champion the wider benefit of heritage to the economy, wellbeing, the environment and place-making, and The Fund sought to imbed inclusion in all investments that they make, particularly focusing on underrepresented groups. Six strategic objectives for investment were identified, such that The Fund would:

- continue to bring heritage into better condition;

- inspire people to value heritage more;

- ensure that heritage is inclusive (it is a required outcome for all projects to engage a wider range of people in heritage);

- support the organisations we fund to be more robust, enterprising and forward looking;

- demonstrate how heritage helps people and places to thrive; and

- grow the contribution that heritage makes to the UK economy.

As part of The Fund's commitment to inclusion and demonstrating the role that heritage can have for people and places to thrive, The Fund identified 13 areas where The Fund's investment had previously been limited, that had scored highly on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (indicating high levels of deprivation) and had associated lower levels of heritage and cultural opportunity. Over the course of the Strategic Funding Framework, these Areas of Focus will receive priority investment and tailored support.

Covid-19 and Refocused Priorities

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on heritage provision in the UK, with organisations and sites suffering from a significant drop in visitors and revenue. For local authorities, who are key heritage stakeholders, often responsible for valuable heritage sites and functions, Covid-19 has added significant financial pressures, adding risk of budget cuts to heritage and cultural services already experiencing significant budgetary challenges following a decade of cuts. Local Authority heritage and cultural staff capacity has also been impacted by the pandemic with many reassigned to other local authority functions, furloughed or made redundant. The pandemic has also deeply influenced people's lives across the spectrum, providing challenge to health and wellbeing, financial security, and increased isolation and social exclusion.

The pandemic has also engendered positive shifts with regard to heritage: natural heritage sites seeing an increase in demand for recreation; digital capabilities of heritage providers have accelerated as they move to enable digital engagement; and home working patterns have led to a shift to localism, with local heritage seen as more significant, as people spend increased time in their local areas. Indeed, Local Authorities are now understanding more the role that heritage can play in achieving wider policy objectives.

It is in this context that The Fund opted to refocus their Strategic Funding Framework to respond to the challenges emerging as a result of the pandemic. As the country looks to recovery, it is the objective of The Fund to demonstrate and employ heritage to drive wider economic, wellbeing, environmental and place-making benefits. Whilst the existing strategic objectives and outcomes for heritage remain, The Fund, in this period of recovery will prioritise heritage outcomes that go beyond 'heritage for heritage's sake' but drive wider economic and social recovery, building back local economies, places and communities. Hence, investment will focus on inclusion, the local

economy and job creation, wellbeing, the local area, skills and organisational resilience. Further, the expectation on all projects is that they reflect a commitment to environmental sustainability and drive green recovery. In line with the Strategic Funding Framework, the outcome of ensuring that a wider range of people will be involved in heritage is still mandatory within these refocused priorities.

Alignment with the Wider Policy Agenda

As a result of the pandemic, heritage has become more prominent in the policy agenda, with an increased understanding of the role that heritage can play in economic and social renewal. The following section details key areas in which The Fund's priorities align with other policy areas and agendas.

Heritage and Placemaking

Placemaking is not a new endeavour for The Fund; in their 2019 strategic funding framework, creating places that thrive was an important outcome of heritage investments, Prior to that, The Fund demonstrated the link between placemaking and heritage, delivering the 2016 Culture White Paper's Great Place Scheme; place was also built into government policy impetus to The Fund, to invest in ways and in projects that strengthen local communities, and indeed The Fund worked with the RSA to understand the role of heritage to places, publishing the Networked Heritage Report, with findings highlighting the importance of heritage to how people identify with place, and the significance to devolution for the unique heritage of places to be embedded in wider thinking and actions. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on communities and local economies in places across the UK and as such, ensuring that heritage investments contribute to improving places, making them a better place to live, work and visit is a core re-focused priority of The Fund in the light of the pandemic.

'Place' to The Fund is broadly conceptualised, referring to, for example, a local community, a natural landscape, or a city or town; it is heritage, whether built, natural, intangible, that can connect people and communities to a place. A place-based project will hence identify challenges and opportunities in the heritage of a place and develop partnerships to make improvements in that place. A place-based approach will also embed place in the project formulation and delivery, prioritising local collaboration, alignment with local policy agendas and improving places beyond the delivery timeframe.

The role of heritage in placemaking is a policy priority across UK jurisdictions. The Fund's specific focus on place-making in the wake of Covid-19 offers significant synergies with current UK and devolved government policy agenda. Commitments to building back better and levelling up centre on the role of places for economic prosperity and seek to ensure that all across the UK have the opportunity to reach their potential. A key mission for the UK government, outlined in the Levelling Up White Paper is to drive a pride in place, increasing people's satisfaction with their town centres and engagement in local culture and community. To achieve this, amongst other policies, 20 towns and cities (across England) will receive funding for regeneration to transform derelict urban sites into beautiful communities, as well as a commitment for significant cultural spending outside of London.

Heritage and the Economy

The shock of the pandemic led to steep drops in the UK's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment rate and productivity, with many individuals, businesses and communities struggling as a result. Economic recovery is a key policy objective at all levels of government and given the

pervasive challenges that this economic shock caused, The Fund has chosen economic prosperity and job creation and skills development as key heritage outcomes to support and drive recovery. The Fund details ways in which projects may drive economic benefits, through attracting visitors, supporting businesses, utilising local supply chains and services, rejuvenating premises for business to use, and creating local jobs.

Recent research from RSA and Historic England highlight how heritage plays a significant role, not just in driving economic prosperity, but holistic, sustainable and inclusive growth. Within The Fund's strategic framework, boosting the economy is held in tandem with boosting wellbeing, skills and jobs, as well as a desire for environmental sustainability and inclusivity for those marginalised. It is this economic growth that captures the UK Government desire to build back better and greener from the pandemic. This desire for economic recovery that includes a greater focus on wellbeing and nature connections is also reflected across the devolved nations. Within local governments, there is increasing recognition for the co-benefits of heritage for inclusive growth and economic prosperity; although previously siloed in local authorities, heritage has an important role to play in building back more inclusive local economies and communities. As The Fund focuses on boosting the economy as a key objective for heritage investment, it aligns with UK government objectives and is driving change in local authorities.

Heritage and the Environment

At a UK and devolved government level, there is a commitment to achieving Net Zero emissions by 2050 (2045 for Scotland). As well as responding to the climate emergency, a policy agenda across governments is the protection and restoration of natural assets, as well as ensuring the natural environment can benefit health and wellbeing and be sustainably utilised for economic activities. The Build Back Better plan for growth strategy seeks to prioritise the natural environment and leave it in a better condition that it was found, with policies including the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (England only) and Nature for Climate Fund (England only) outlined as key to achieving this goal. At a local government level, over 300 local authorities have declared a climate emergency and within local authorities, there is increasing recognition of the role that heritage can play in addressing climate change.

The Fund is a key partner in delivering on the UK Government's ambitions to maintain and restore the natural environment, create green jobs and connect people to nature, particularly as the delivery partner for the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (on behalf of DEFRA), supporting conservation, climate adaption and natural projects. The Fund also delivered on behalf of the Welsh Government, the £1 million Green Recovery Capacity Building Programme and the £9.8 million Nature Networks Fund. In Northern Ireland, The Fund has distributed the £5.5 million Heritage Recovery Fund. The Fund has throughout its Strategic Funding Framework, prioritised natural heritage and landscapes, ensuring that projects maintain the beauty and quality of natural environments, reduce biodiversity loss and connect people to nature. In the context of biodiversity loss and rising emissions as well as increasing public engagement in natural heritage and parks as a result of the pandemic the updated priorities for The Fund strengthen The Fund's commitment to benefiting and protecting the environment, moving from *encouraging* projects to adopt environmentally responsible measures, to *expecting* for all projects that they consider steps to reduce negative impacts and implement positive impacts for the environment. Historic England have explored the various interdependencies between heritage and the environment, considering land use, built environment, habitats and biodiversity, green spaces, natural resources, highlighting how protecting, preserving and enhancing heritage can positively impact environmental outcomes. With The Fund building environmental outcomes into projects, and focusing on projects that benefit

natural heritage, it is evident how The Fund aligns with key policy priorities at multiple levels of government.

4. PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Introduction

This section of the report analyses The Fund's investment within the 13 AoF, covering the period from Financial Year FY2018-19 (the baseline year) to FY2021-22 (up to 3rd February 2022). It incorporates a review of the programme's funding activity (enquiries, applications, awards, and investments), in comparison with national level metrics, and the programme outputs (for which data is available).

Data Limitations

It is recognised that in some cases, accurate and comprehensive data collection has been a challenge for The Fund, due to resource and capacity issues, and the need to manually input data. As such, it is stressed that, whilst the following is reflective of the data received, there are a number of limitations including:

- not all engagement activities are fully captured by existing processes / data requirements;

- there is potential for human error in inputting responses;

- data recording approaches / processes vary across different AoFs, thereby making comparisons challenging; and

- different time lags in AoF reporting means that not all data may be reflective of February 2022.

The issue of data availability is a key one, reflected by the limitations above. The lack, in some cases, of defined and standardised data capture and reporting processes is something to be addressed for ahead of future evaluation reports.

Funding Activity

Enquiries

All projects seeking funding of greater than £10,000 are encouraged by The Fund to submit an enquiry form prior to commencing work on an application, in order to gain feedback from The Fund on their proposed project. Figure 4.1 shows a marginal in annual enquires received from the 13 AoF from FY2019-20 to FY2021-22. Enquiries data encompasses Project Enquiry Forms and Expressions of Interest.

The FY2019-20 figure is lower than would be expected, given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Fund's open funding calls closed, with a temporary shift in focus to delivering emergency Covid Recovery Funding. Organisational priorities also shifted to specific pandemic related activities (e.g., delivering foodbanks). There has been a resurgence in the following year as restrictions lifted and funding calls reopened.

Figure 4.1: Number of enquiries per financial year (aggregate AoF)
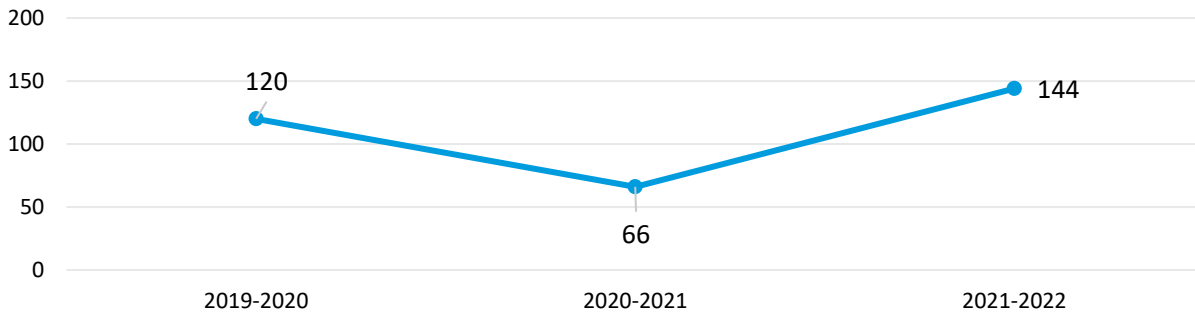
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Of the 330 enquires made to engagement teams in the 13 AoF since the beginning of the programme (April 2019), 17% have led to applications for funding, and 11% led to funding awards. Figure 44.2 details the outcome of enquiries by financial year. From FY2019-20 to FY2020-21, there is an increase in the proportion of successful applications (despite a decrease in the total number of applications) indicating that conversations at the initial stage have been more successful at targeting appropriate and investable projects. It is too early at this stage to assess the outcomes of enquiries submitted in FY2021-22 to determine the proportion that will submit a funding application due to the lag between enquiries and applications being submitted.

Figure 4.2: Application and award outcomes per enquiry
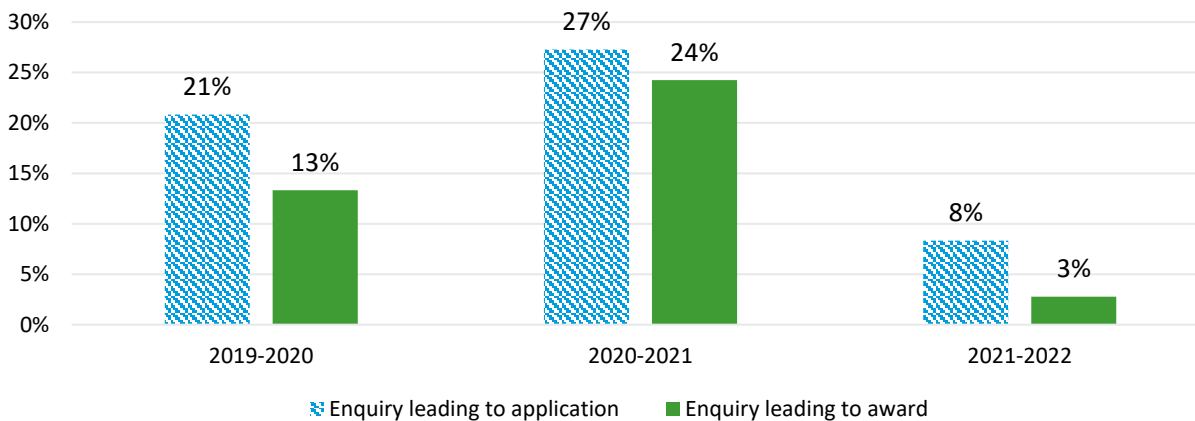
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Part of the enquiry process allows for engagement teams to discuss projects and give advice to potential bidders on how to best shape an application. Figure 4.3 shows the status of projects who made an initial enquiry. 55% of enquiries in FY2021-22 have been given advice to help shape an application and 26% of enquiries were discouraged from progressing. A high proportion of projects were discouraged in FY2020-21 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the programmes closing for new applications.

Figure 4.3: All outcomes per enquiry
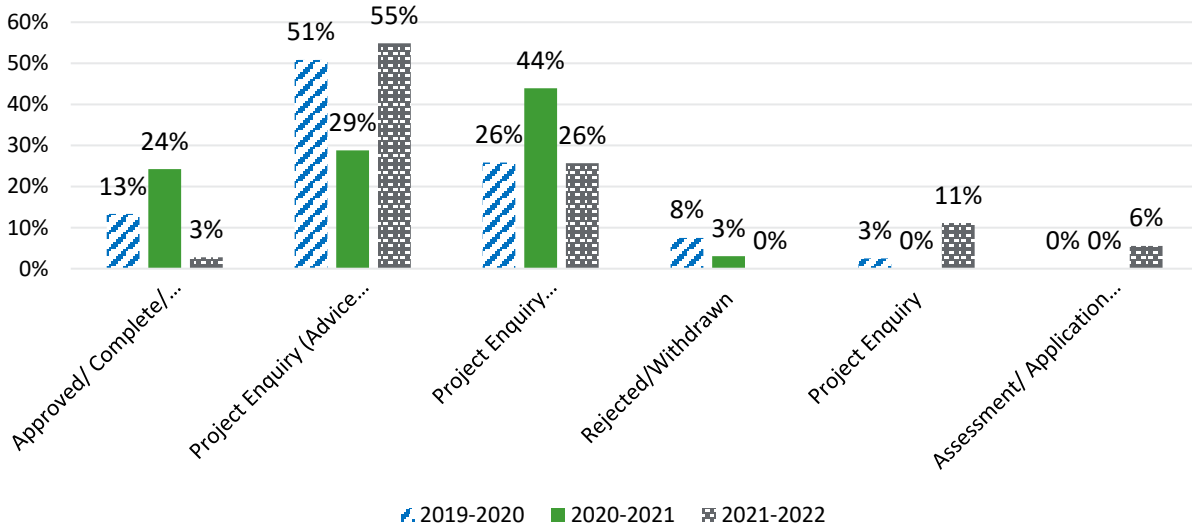
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Applications and Awards

A core outcome for the AoF programme is to see an increase in the number of applications received from the 13 AoF. Figure 4.4 details the percentage change in applications per year, compared with the baseline year (FY2018-19). As shown, whilst there are some instances of a significant increase in the number of applications, the majority of areas show a more mixed picture in change from the baseline year, reflecting the challenge of the local context, as well the impact of Covid-19. For a number of areas, this is also skewed by an abnormally strong baseline year. On average across the 13 areas, there was a 52% increase in applications from baseline in FY2019-20 and a 47% increase in applications (from baseline) in FY2020-21. However, FY2021-22 reports a 26% decrease in applications from the baseline, which may reflect the fact that not all figures for this financial year are captured.

Figure 4.4: Trends in applications, (% change from baseline year FY2018-19)
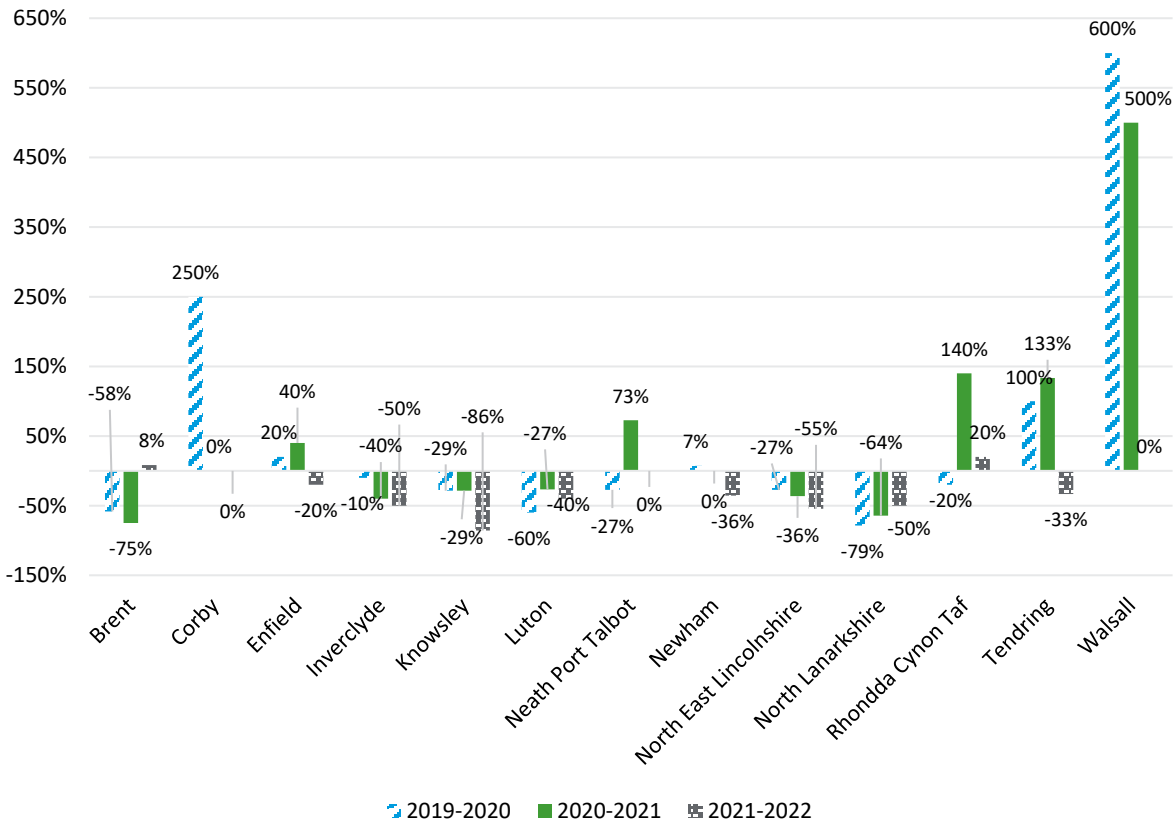
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

As a measure of the change in the quality and appropriateness of the applications received, Figure 4.5 details the change in the proportion of applications received that have led to a fundable project (average of the three years since the AoF programme began), compared against the baseline year of FY2018-19. Across the majority of AoF (n=7 out of 13), there has been a positive change in application success, with an overall average increase from 63% successful applications in FY2018-19 to 74% over the course of the AoF programme to date, with a likelihood that this number will increase as FY2021-22 decisions are confirmed.

Figure 4.5: Proportion of applications leading to awards
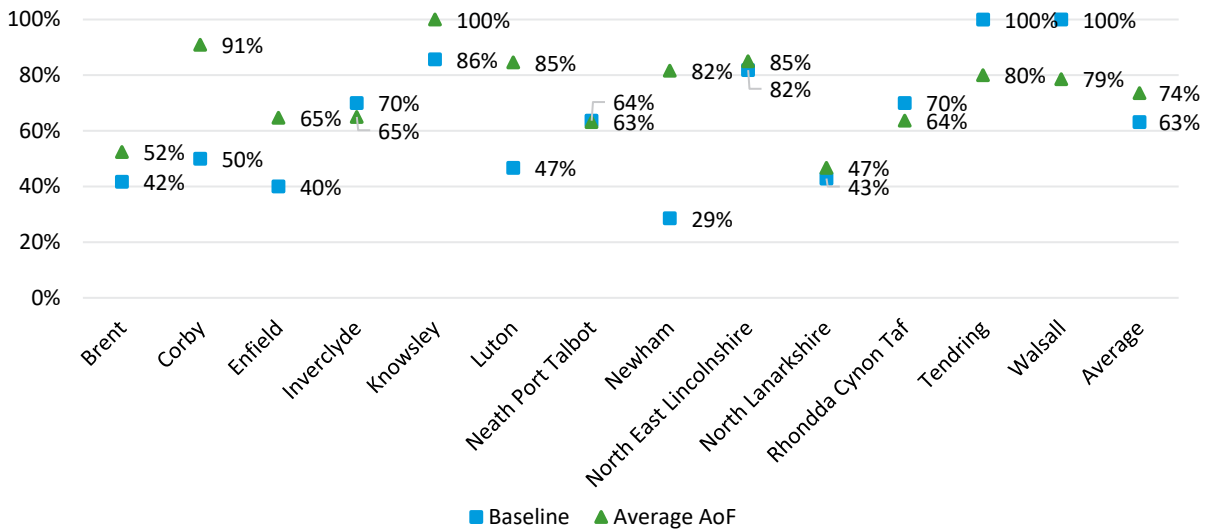
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Figure 4.6 shows the proportion of applications that came from first-time and returning applicants. This was broadly evenly split in FY2019-20, with a spike in first-time applicants in the following year, and an increase in repeat applications in FY2021-22. The increase in the proportion of returning applicants in FY2021-22 could be indicative of relationship-building within AoFs, as engagement teams identify support organisations to develop ideas for fundable projects, as well as better ensuring that projects meet The Fund's objectives. Initial applicants are often encouraged by engagement to tweak and develop their project, if in its current state it is not a fundable project. In FY2020-21, of the first-time applicants, 81% of these applicants were successful in securing funding. Campaigns, including the solicited bid, the digital campaign and Covid-19 funding all played a key role in enabling new applicants to receive funding, within the context of the pandemic.

Figure 4.6: First time applicants
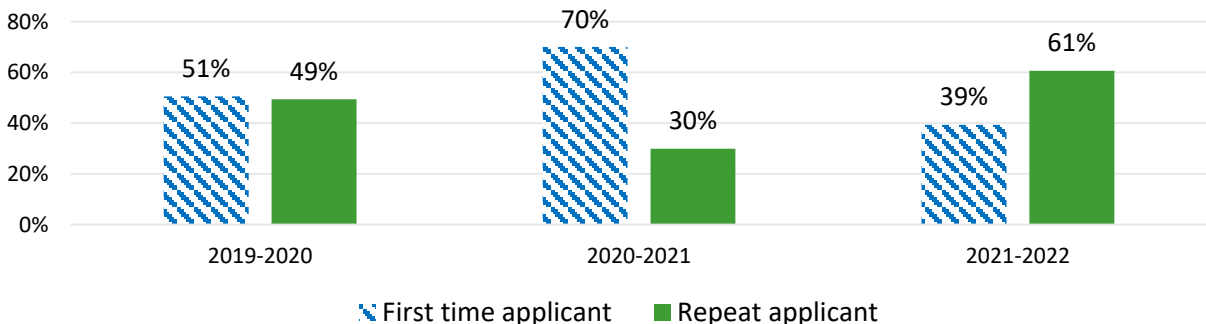
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Registered charities have, over the three years of the programme, accounted for between 45% and 52% of applications in the AoF . Increasing in prominence over this time has been registered companies / community interest companies. Faith based groups and community and voluntary groups have both seen a drop in prominence, likely a consequence of Covid-19, as the pandemic impacted the capacity and priorities of these sorts of organisations. Local authorities in FY2020-21 were the second most likely applicant type, due in large part to the solicitation of bids, but they have not remained as at this level in FY2021-22. This is summarised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Types of Organisations Applying

Types of Organisations Applying	2019 -2020 Percentage (%)	2020 – 2021 Percentage (%)	2021 – 2022 Percentage (%)
Registered Charity	52%	45%	48%
Registered Company or CIC	13%	18%	26%
Private owner of heritage	0%	1%	2%
Other public sector organisation	1%	1%	4%
Faith based or church organisation	9%	5%	4%
Local Authority	10%	18%	11%
Community or Voluntary group	14%	5%	4%
Other	1%	5%	1%
Total	**100%**	**98%**	**100%**

Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Funding Awarded

In the selection of the thirteen Areas of Focus, one of the key criteria was low Fund spend per capita. As evidenced in Figure 4.7, with the exception of North Lanarkshire and Inverclyde, the baseline spend per capita in the 13 areas is below the national average, and an outcome of the programme is to increase spend per capita. Green markers in Figure 4.7 represent spend per capita in the given area, averaged over the three years of the AoF programme. In the majority of cases (n=11 out of 13), there has been an increase compared to baseline values, and for a number of areas spend per capita is in line with, or exceeds, the national average.

Figure 4.7: AoF spend compared to average spend per capita
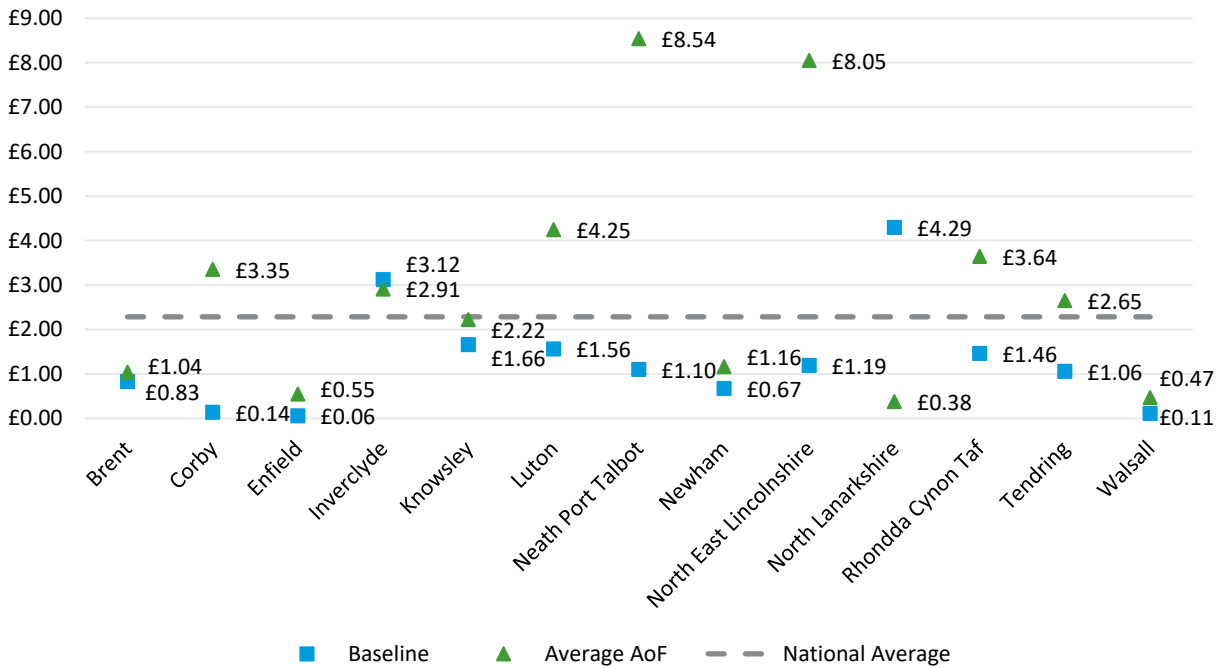
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

To further understand change in investment in heritage from the baseline, Figure 4.8 shows the percentage change in spend from FY2018-19. Across the majority of areas (n=11 out of 13), investment in heritage projects has increased, with the largest percentage change in Corby, Enfield and Neath Port Talbot. For some, spend has decreased from the baseline, but in a number of these cases, this may be attributed to uncharacteristically strong baseline years.

Figure 4.8: Percentage change in spend from baseline (average over three financial years
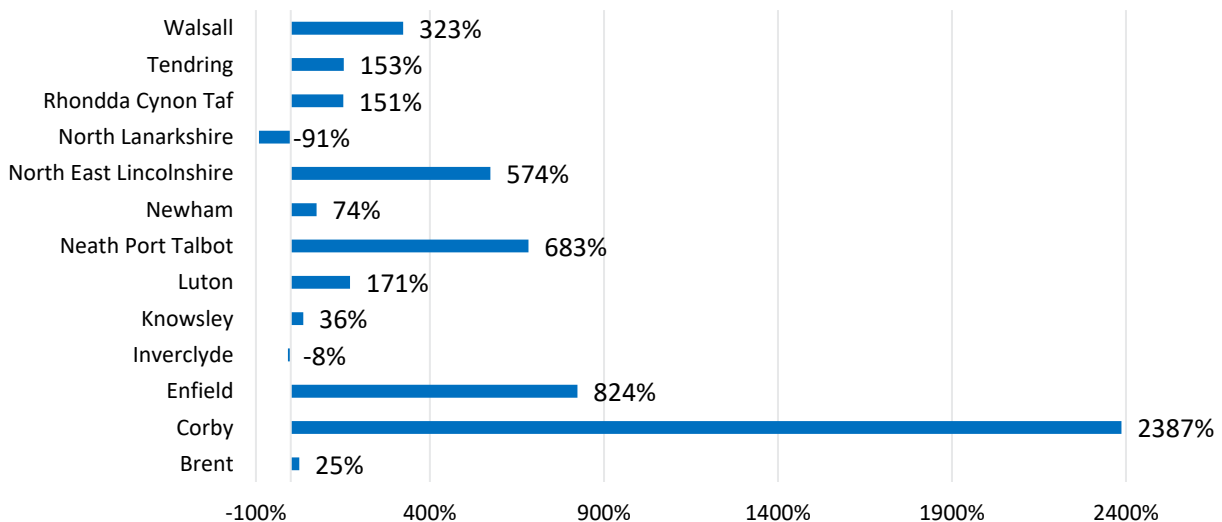
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Programme Outputs

As highlighted in the programme ToC, the following outputs have been identified for the AoF:

- number of events sharing knowledge about AoF agenda between VCSE, The Fund and local government;

- funding advice sessions raising awareness on funding opportunities;

- volunteers supported;

- new strategic partnerships; and

- increased number of quality and relevant heritage proposals.

The section below profiles the programme's performance in relation to those outputs. However, data is currently limited in relation to the number of knowledge sharing events and funding advice sessions to only three AoFs, as this data had to be specifically requested and collated by individual AoFs, and this request was limited to the five case study areas (only three have been able to provide data on this).

Volunteers Supported

Figure 4.9 shows the number of volunteers supported across projects in the thirteen AoF. In total, 4,247 volunteers have been supported in projects across the three years of the programme. Enfield, Newham and Tendring are all outliers in the dataset, with significantly more volunteers supported than the other areas. To support readability, this data has been presented on a logarithmic scale.

Figure 4.9: Volunteer numbers (logarithmic scale)
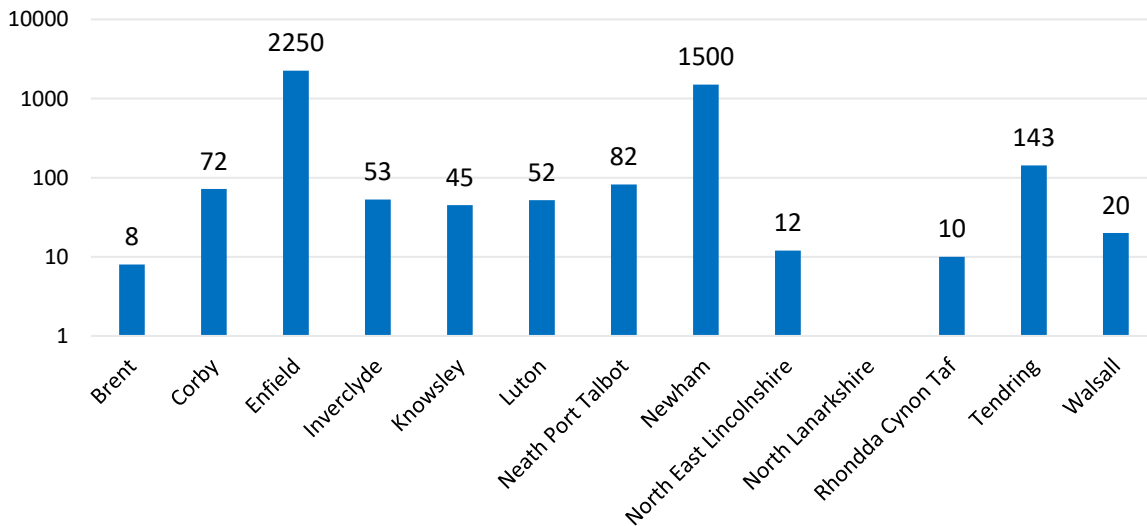
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

## Increased Quality and Relevance of Heritage Proposals

As highlighted previously, across the 13 AoF, seven have experienced an increase in application success, with the overall average increasing from 63% successful in FY2018-19 to 68% over the course of the AoF programme to date. An increase in the proportion of applications that are successful suggests that both the quality and relevance of applications being received is improving. Furthermore, it is likely that this will increase further as FY2021-22 decisions are confirmed. This output is aided by clearer prioritisation of AoF projects internally at The Fund, with

growing internal openness to trust applications from AoFs that scores medium, given the priority status of AoFs and the distance travelled from the baseline.

New Strategic Partnerships

The proportion of projects delivered in partnership is shown in Figure 4.10. Partnership delivery has increased slightly from FY2019-20 (14%) to FY2020-21 (16%). The proportion of projects delivered in partnership dropped in FY2020-21, to 6%, likely as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on National Lottery Heritage funding and organisation priorities. However, it should be noted that there is a time lag between partnerships being developed and projects being delivered, therefore, it is expected that the proportion of projects being delivered in partnership will increase over the programme period to reflect that relationships / partnerships that have been developed to date through the programme. The wider context also is relevant to limited formal partnerships; first time applicants, local authorities delivering discrete solicited activity and the nature of emergency grants all contribute to less progress in this output.

Figure 4.10: Projects delivered in partnership
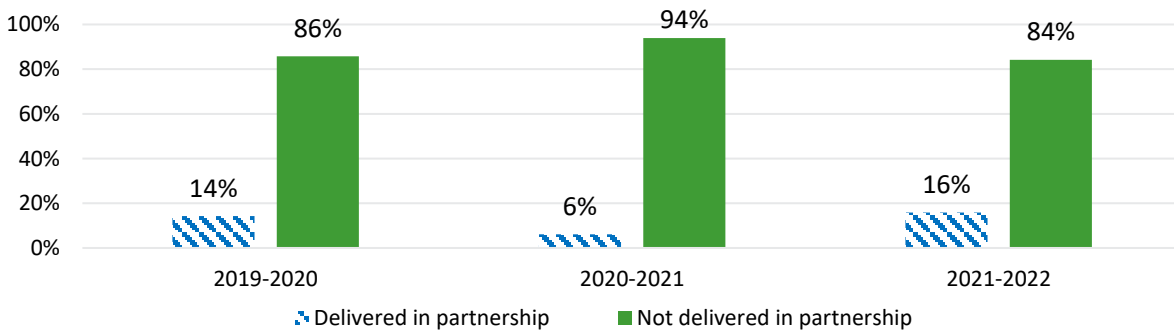
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Events and Funding Advice Sessions

With regard to the number of events undertaken in AoF, and the number of funding advice sessions, data limitations means that this information is only available where it has been specifically requested from case studies. As such, for this evaluation, we have received data on events and advice sessions for three AoF (Enfield, North East Lincolnshire and Walsall).

Capacity and resourcing challenges in Wales and Scotland teams have meant that this sort of support event is more difficult to deliver given high delivery pressures, and the need to manually record data poses a challenge to already capacity-stretched teams. Figure 4.11 profiles the data available to present total values from FY2019-20 to FY2021-22. In total, 143 events and advice sessions have been delivered across the 3 AoF. The 'other' category most often refers to ad hoc meetings with strategic partners (e.g., local authority officials, strategic partner organisation, CVS organisations) and informal conversations with prospective bidders. As is evident, this 'other' meeting category is the most prominent, but 37 formal Advice Surgeries have been recorded across the three areas from FY2019-20 to date.

Figure 4.11: AoF Events and Advice Surgeries
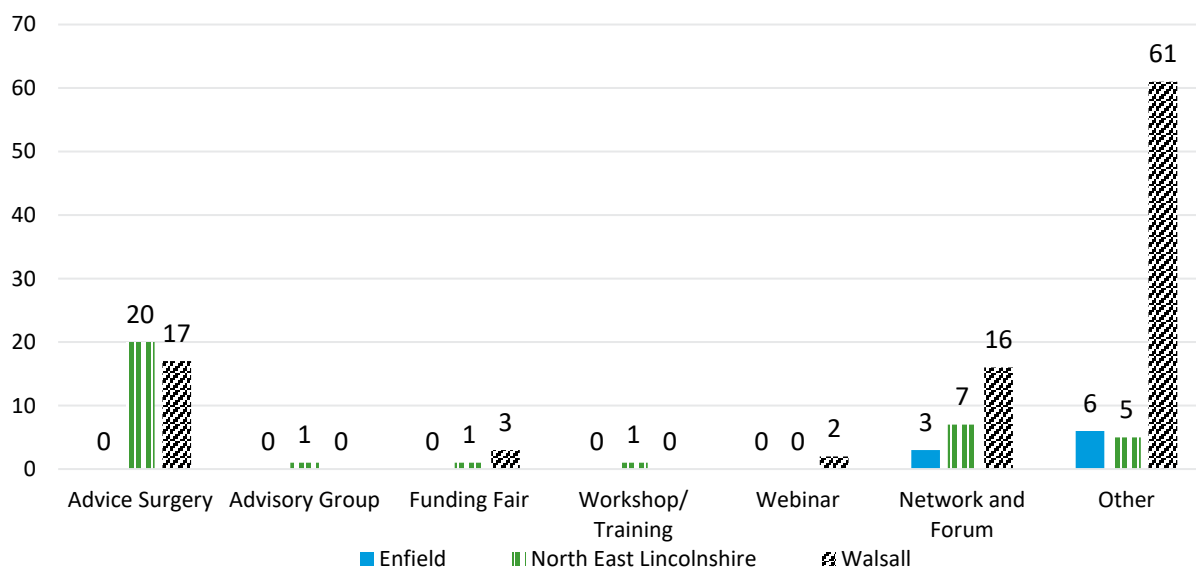
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Key Findings

This chapter has analysed National Lottery Heritage Fund activity and outputs across the 13 AoF and has compared trends to national averages where appropriate. As such, the following key points have emerged from this review:

- there has been a positive trend in the number of enquiries, rising from 120 in FY2019-20 to 144 in FY2021-22, despite a drop in FY2020-21 (as a result of the pandemic impacts on open funding). Significantly, there is a trend emerging that shows an increased proportion of enquiries will progress to the award stage, indicating appropriate engagement activities and messaging;

- a review of the number of applications received from the various AoF against a FY2018/19 baseline identifies a mixed picture. The majority of AoF have seen a negative change from the baseline, but there has been an average increase of 8% across the AoFs of successful applications (i.e., applications receiving funding), indicating that the support received by projects developing an application is improved. There is also evidence to suggest that the quality and relevance of applications is improving, reflected by an increase in the proportion of successful applications;

- spend per capita data shows that the AoF programme is closing the gap with the national average, with a number of areas at or exceeding the national average spend per capita. Although some areas have seen a percentage decrease in the level of investment from baseline, overall, the picture is encouraging;

- for only one AoF was the spend per capita lower than the baseline year, with the vast majority showing strong and positive spend per capita figures. FY2020-21 is significantly above average spend per capita, given the lower total national spend, combined with activities such as the solicited bid;

- there is good progress in relation to volunteers supported through the programme, with Enfield, Newham and Tendring reporting particularly strong performance; and

- whilst the increase in projects being delivered in partnerships is relatively modest at this stage, this may continue to improve over the lifetime of the programme to reflect the partnership building that has occurred in the early part of the programme resulting in successful funding awards in later years.

5. CASE STUDIES

Introduction

This section presents an in-depth review of five of the 13 AoF, specifically:

- Enfield;

- North East Lincolnshire;

- North Lanarkshire;

- Rhondda Cynon Taf; and

- Walsall.

For each case study we present a summary of the AoF context; the rationale for intervention; the engagement activities undertaken; information of the area's solicited bid / project; and a review of key issues and lessons learned. This evidence is derived from desk-based research activities, data analysis of performance monitoring information and consultation with key internal and external stakeholders.

Case Study 1: Enfield

Area Context

The RSA, in collaboration with The Fund, have developed the RSA Heritage Index which collates a large range of data sources to provide a broad overview of heritage in different local authority areas across the UK, producing a heritage ranking and allowing for relative comparison of heritage assets and activities across local authority areas. The Heritage Index was last updated in October 2020. Figure 5.1 provides an overview of the key indicators for the London Borough (LB) of Enfield, showing the previous (2016) ranking, the most recent (2020) ranking, and the relative position of LB Enfield against the highest and lowest ranked areas. Green dashes signify a top performing area, and red lines, the bottom performing area in relation to the ranking.

Figure 5.1: Enfield RSA Heritage Rank key indicators
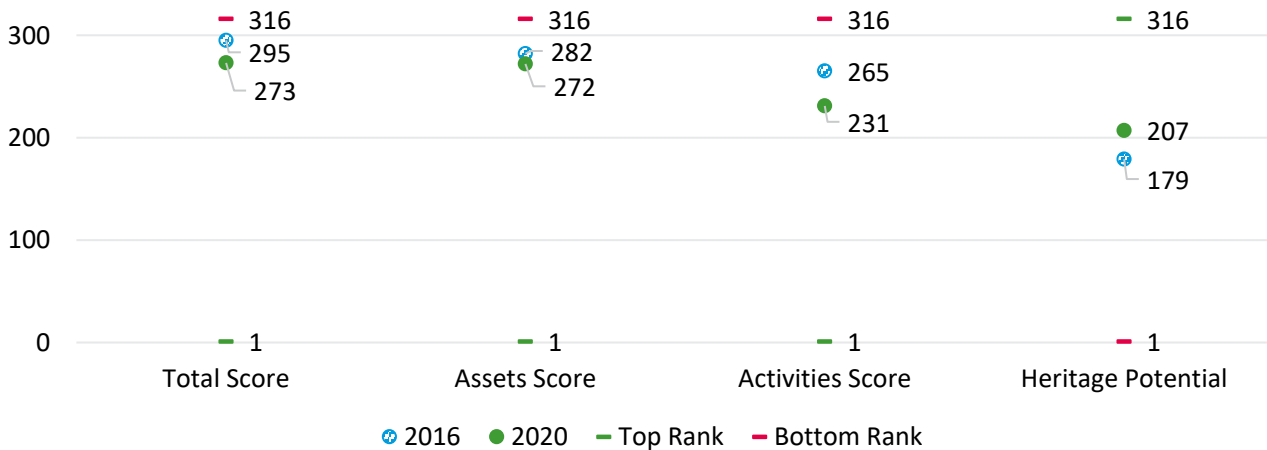
Source: RSA Heritage Index (2020)

Note: Figure 5.1 reflects the RSA approach to ranking – for total score, asset score and activities score, the ranks range from 1 (highest scoring LA) to 316 (lowest scoring LA). The measure of heritage potential identifies areas where their heritage assets ranking outpaces their activities ranking. That is, that there is a gap between the assets and activities. It is these areas where they might be greater potential to engage with local assets, and by looking to areas that have a high heritage potential ranking we can understand where there might be scope for greater heritage activity.

Although all indicators show positive performance compared to 2016, Enfield ranks towards the poorest performing areas in overall rank, asset score and activities score, signifying comparably poor local heritage assets, as well as limited engagement (i.e., funding, visiting, volunteering) in local heritage. Heritage potential represents the difference in heritage asset ranking and activities, highlighting the level of opportunities for areas to better utilise their heritage assets. As is shown, Enfield's heritage potential performs more strongly than its other indicators, suggesting that there is underutilised heritage resource within Enfield, to be unlocked.

The AoF programme seeks to specifically target areas of deprivation. Figure 5.2 shows LB Enfield's performance across the indices of multiple deprivation (IMD). It is in the bottom 25% of local authority areas and performs particularly poorly in relation to income deprivation and living environment. Some indicators do tell a more positive story, with education deprivation sitting just under UK average and an above average performance in terms of health deprivation.

Figure 5.2: Enfield IMD indicators
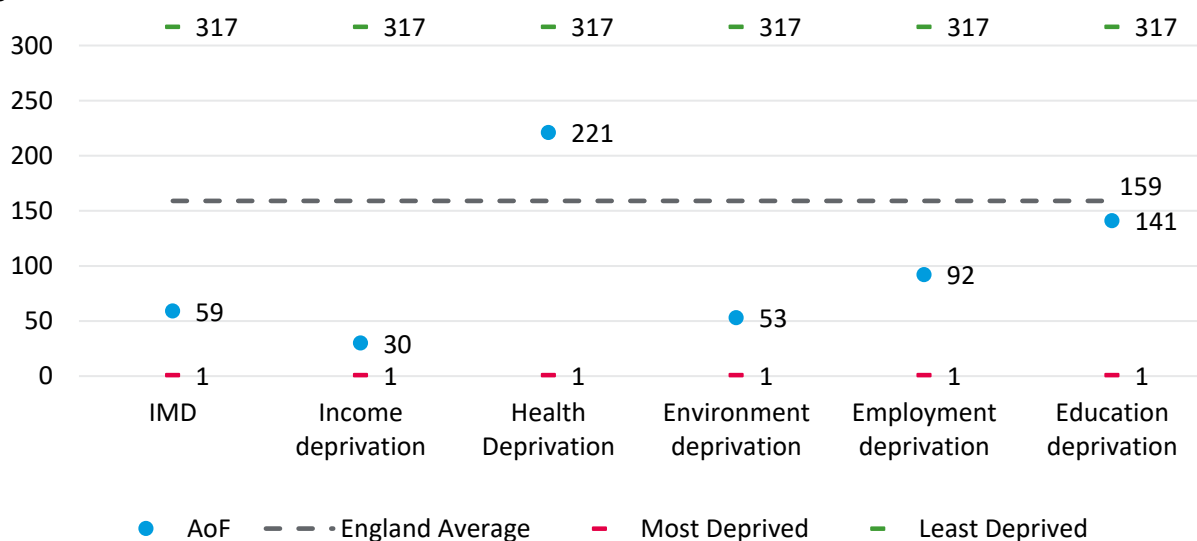
Source: English indices of deprivation (2019)

It should be noted that IMD figures at a local authority level do not tell the full story in Enfield, with significant spatial inequality across the borough when IMD rank is analysed at a Lower Super Output Area (LSOA). Anecdotal evidence from consultations suggests that much of the existing capacity within the community to support heritage projects was located in, and representative of, only the more affluent parts of the borough, a challenge for the AoF programme to address.

Another core metric for the inclusion of Enfield as an AoF was their below average investment per capita. Figure 5.3 details the investment per capita of Enfield and the national average from FY2018-19 until FY2021-22. The sharpest difference in investment per capita was in the baseline

year, where Enfield investment per capita was 1.2% of the average national figure. As is shown, this has narrowed each year of the programme, with FY2020-21 representing an outlier as the Covid-19 pandemic and closing of open funding calls meant the total national investment was lower, whilst specific campaign activity in AoF (e.g., Solicited Bids, Digital Campaign) meant investment remained high in comparison to national trends. FY2021-22 shows an improved picture from baseline, although investment per capita is still 59% below the national figure.

Figure 5.3: Enfield Fund annual investment per capita
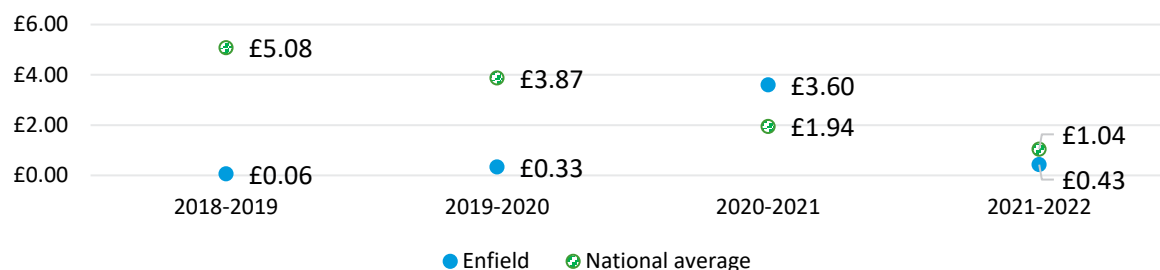
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Despite this challenging picture of heritage score, deprivation levels and investment, there are a number of other insights that set the baseline position of heritage in Enfield that have significantly contributed to the positive outcomes seen as a result of the programme. This context includes:

- the previous focus of the Museum of Enfield in attempting to engage communities (with AoF investment re-catalysing this priority);

- the 2019 Local Authority Heritage Strategy, with a regeneration focus as well as desire for community engagement, highlighting the value that heritage possessed politically prior to the intervention;

- a number of engaged culture and heritage groups already in the borough, with understanding / appreciation of heritage;

- the work of Local Authority and other owned / managed heritage sites and greenspaces; and

- a Local Authority commitment to culture through growing the department. The AoF programme has enabled heritage delivery opportunities under the banner of "culture".

Rationale for Intervention

As is evident from Enfield's area context, a clear rationale for intervention through the AoF programme is Enfield's performance across the two key indicators determining AoF selection; per capita spending from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and indices of multiple deprivation. Fund representatives highlighted that *"Enfield had small success in the past with grants"* and previously lacked the tools and prominence as a funder to address this.

Heritage provision was not completely lacking in Enfield prior to the intervention, with the local historical society an active funder and advocate for heritage. This organisation *"have done a great job in protecting heritage"* in Enfield but understand heritage only as it relates to the built environment. This homogenous conceptualisation of heritage is too narrow, not including provision for *"engagement in intangible people or community heritage"* and this focus on the built heritage, according to fund representatives *"is not what the [Fund] committee are interested in".* Local

Authority representatives suggested that the focus on built environment only was due to a limited understanding of *"what intangible heritage meant"*, highlighting how the area requires advocacy intervention to communicate the breadth of heritage. Beyond this, the Local Authority's 2019 Heritage Strategy emphasises their regeneration focus, which included community engagement as a key strategic priority. Therefore, heritage has value and is of importance within the political sphere of Enfield.

While there was not a formal mechanism to support people to deliver a broad range of heritage ideas in Enfield before The Fund was introduced in 2019, the infrastructure was partially there for success; evident through the Museum of Enfield which committed to working to engage with communities prior to 2019. The local willingness to engage with heritage including through the Local Authority's engagement work around the Heritage Strategy and its cultural programmes existed but the benefits could not be maximised without the advocacy from The Fund.

The prevailing focus of heritage, prior to this intervention, was not representative across Enfield spatially or socially, with voices only of those "*over sixty, middle class, white professionals from one area*" heard within the heritage space. The local context, according to und representatives, also lacked the *"community platform to have a strong heritage focus"*. The local authority reflected that it was not used to supporting and funding smaller community groups and groups themselves are *"completely new to this [delivering heritage projects]"*. Feedback suggests there is a good demand for heritage in Enfield Local Authority area, but the lack of capability for local community groups to succeed in applications for funding was an issue. This is the area the engagement teams will seek to rectify through supporting and collaborating with local community organisations.

Engagement Activities

Stakeholders identified engagement activities that they undertook at both an operational and strategic level. The engagement seeks to be efficient and strategic in how they meet the specific needs of heritage in Enfield. The team describes their approach as identifying *"where are the gaps in the area?"* and then seeking to fill these gaps. This requires a good level of on-the-ground understanding of the area and the key partners. Delivery partner consultees highlight that the engagement teams are *"out in the community… and they know about players we [local authority]* can talk to.

To get out in the community, the Enfield engagement team have undertaken and attended a number of engagement events over the course of the programme. The breakdown and reach of these events is detailed in the Figure 5.4. These events have spanned networking opportunities, forum presentation and conversations, follow-up meetings with potential beneficiaries, regular meetings with the local VCSE organisations and Local Authority-run funding / heritage-focused events.

Figure 5.4: Enfield Engagement Events
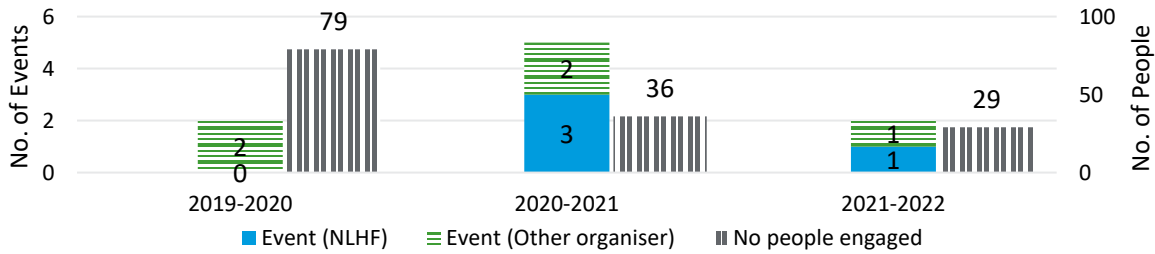
Source: Enfield AoF Team

As is shown in Figure 5.5, Enfield is building capacity within its heritage team, increasing on a yearly basis. As capacity increases, there is greater opportunities for networking and relationship building, as well as activities to grow the pipeline of potential fundable projects in the borough.

Figure 5.5: Staff Resource (hours) for Engagement Activities
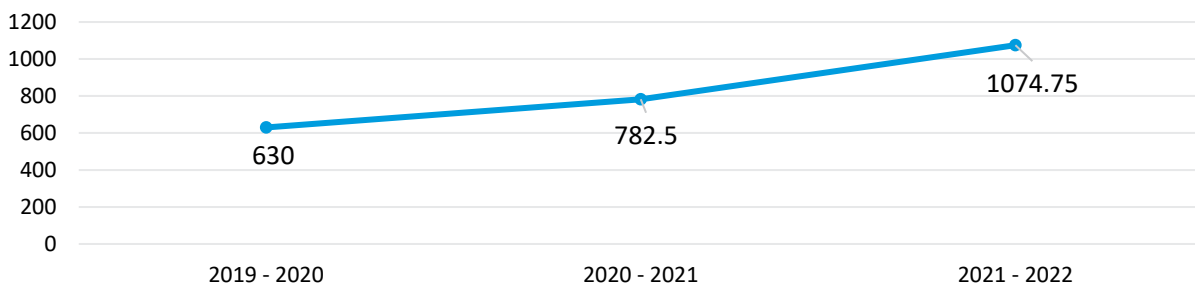
Source: Enfield AoF Team

The team engages with projects on a one-to-one basis, with the level of engagement from the stakeholders was dependant on the support needs that the community organisation had identified. Key in providing support to potential applicants is ensuring *"[the organisations] define a heritage focus in their application"*. The Fund have also used consultants to help support applicants. The Fund also engages in wider community-level outreach and does so in partnership with stakeholders who are already are embedded in the community, with one example of a *"joint roadshow with the Community Fund and [Community and Voluntary Sector] organisations [to reach] pockets of communities [the team] haven't contacted."*

As well as engaging on a community level, The Fund seeks to influence on a more strategic level. Within the Local Authority, they have developed key contacts, at officer and cabinet level, meeting regularly with heritage officers, as they describe, are *"to share ideas and any challenges"* and *"compare strategic overviews for the borough, and any differences we [both organisations] could make".* These positive relationships within the Local Authority are as a result of the *"visibility"* and *"accessibility"* of the heritage team, and the support that the team has given the Local Authority in networking, training and attending meetings, with one delivery partner reflecting "*I don't think they could be any better".* The success in relations with The Fund and the Local Authority is due to the commitment and effort demonstrated by Enfield Local Authority, with the AoF lead reflecting *'it's as much about Enfield Council being committed to the AoF opportunity, to heritage including through resourcing, and dialogue with us, as it is about our efforts'.* Beyond the Local Authority, The Fund

seek to influence other strategic partners, such as the Enfield Society, to broaden their approach and understanding of heritage.

Solicited Project

The solicited bid project from the Enfield is to be delivered from September 2020 to August 2022. The project seeks to build capacity within community groups to define and develop heritage project and will assist in achieving the outcomes such as: more engagement through Applications; more investment through smaller grants; role of heritage improves through strategic activities funded; more volunteers. The project will do so by providing staff resource within the local authority, deliver a training programme to organisations and provide a community grant pot to support community heritage project ideas.

The project will have four main outcomes:

- organisations across Enfield will have greater capacity to design and deliver community heritage projects;

- Enfield Local Authority will have a strong model for supporting heritage activity;

- more people will have taken part in heritage; and

- heritage projects will take place which bring Enfield's heritage to life for a wide range of borough residents.

The solicited project has made strong progress against its objectives. Thirteen community projects have been selected to tell 'Stories of Enfield', sharing in £100,000 of Lottery funding. These projects explore aspects of Enfield's heritage including the histories of different cultural groups, buildings, parks and rivers, and provide opportunities to engage local residents.

Initially, around 130 groups expressed some level of interest in the Stories of Enfield programme, with some discouraged based on The Fund's criteria. The Heritage Lottery funded Cultural Heritage Development officer (employed as part of the solicited project) met with 50 interested organisations and all of these interested groups were invited to attend an information session on the community heritage programme, after which the application process was opened for a period of two months. The steering committee allocated funding to 13 projects, all of which are now underway.

In addition to this, 32 community organisations have received training as part of the bid. This has upskilled these organisations such that they have the confidence and skills to now apply for grants, and it is already seeing impact, with a number of organisations go on to apply for grants, and some of the supported organisations have partner with one another.

A further £10,000 of solicited project funding has gone to funding a specialist design team to plan for a revamp of a local museum and cultural centre. This investment has leveraged an additional £1.5 million from the Local Authority to complete the project. The Local Authority have also *"reinvigorated"* a quarterly forum focused on built heritage, with more than 40 people attending, and sustainability has become an important focus of these conversations.

The Local Authority highlighted challenges that they have faced in delivering the project, including inexperience in grant giving of this nature, groups who are *"new to this"* and require more intensive support to deliver their project, and stretched staff capacity across 13 active projects. However, as

is evident from the range of activities supported through the bid *"the [Fund's investment] has gone a long way"* and delivery partners were hugely appreciative of the high level of support they had received to get the project to this point.

Issues Encountered and Lessons Learned

Engagement in heritage over the last 12 months has been hindered due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Stakeholders commented:

- the first lockdown in March 2020 coincided with the beginning of workshops and engagement meetings, therefore there was time lost as transitions to online interaction had to be made. *"There was an awkward pause just as we were identifying projects and training needs, and some groups suffered because of this";*

- reflecting on the solicited bid process, the Local Authority were hugely complimentary of the process, and consultees from The Fund expressed a desire to continue with this approach where opportunities arose. They did reflect that the success of the current solicited project was due to good timing between themselves and the Local Authority, with similar visions for the project and a good network to engage with;

- from the Covid-19 pandemic, contingency arrangements were put in place for each new project application; stating how the project would continue if there were to be another lockdown; and

- the understanding on intangible and community heritage has greatly increased in the Enfield area due to The Fund as the community outreach has been successful in impacting many organisations, educating them on not only the heritage of Enfield but also how their potential projects can relate to heritage and therefore be more successful in receiving funding.

Case Study 2: North East Lincolnshire

Area Context

Despite being an Area of Focus, North East Lincolnshire (NEL) scores relatively well with regard to the RSA heritage rank, sitting just below the mid-point of English local authorities. In particular, strong rankings for Culture and Memories, Landscape and Natural Heritage and Industrial Heritage. This is detailed in Figure 5.6.
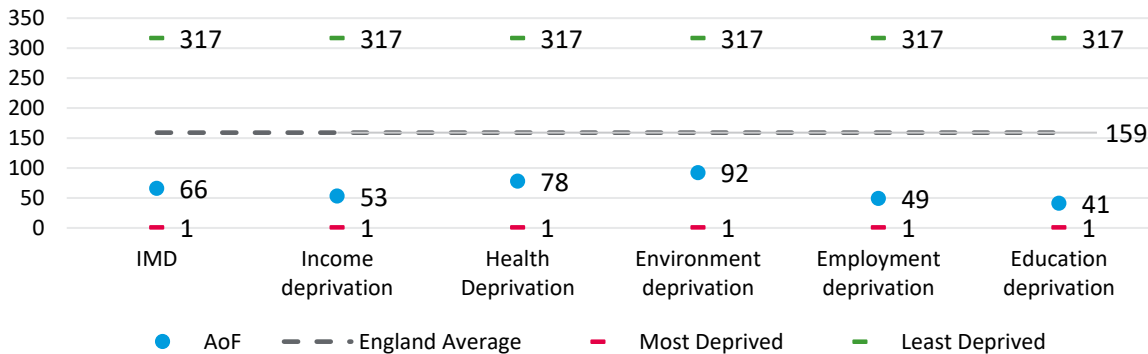
Figure 5.6: North East Lincolnshire RSA Heritage Rank key indicators
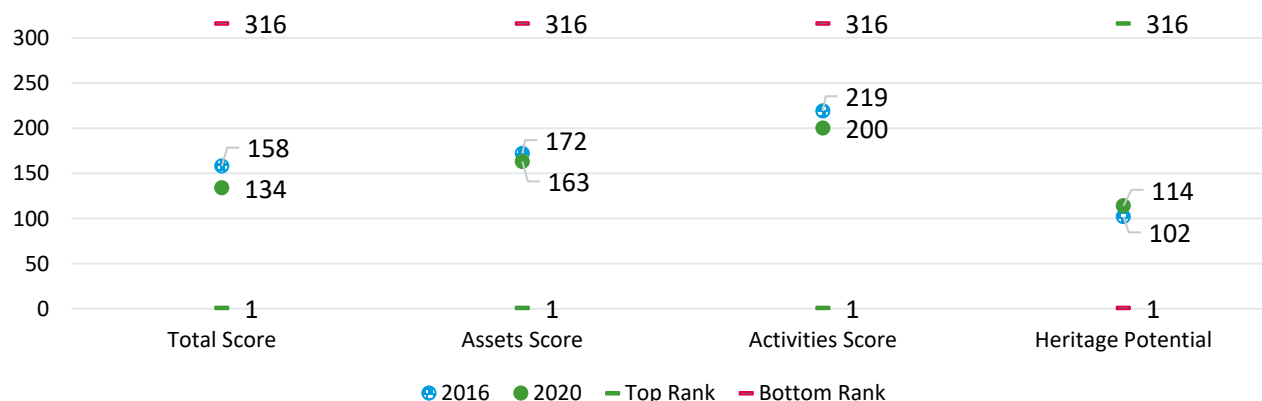
Source: RSA Heritage Index (2020)

All indicators of deprivation score poorly for North East Lincolnshire, sitting below the England average rank. This is detailed in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7: North East Lincolnshire IMD indicators

Source: English indices of deprivation (2019)

This deprivation is focused primarily in the more urban Grimsby area of North East Lincolnshire, with other non-rural areas e.g., Cleethorpes and Immingham also highlighted as experiencing greater deprivation.

The investment per capita in North East Lincolnshire has been in FY2018-19, 2019-20 and 2021-22, significantly less than the national level of investment (23%, 24% and 16% respectively), however in FY2020-21, North East Lincolnshire significantly outperformed the national average.

Figure 5.8: North East Lincolnshire Enfield National Lottery Heritage Fund annual investment per capita
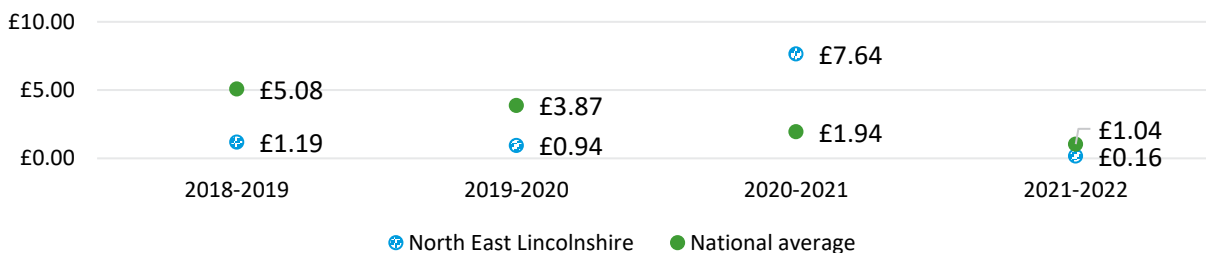
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Rationale for Intervention

Across all stakeholder groups in North East Lincolnshire there was a clear message that deprivation and limited opportunities for young people engendered the need for investment by The Fund. The Engagement team lead comments that *"North East Lincolnshire was identified as an AoF as it has real pockets of deprivation and limited higher education."*

Both The Fund and project delivery partner identified community capacity as an issue in taking forward heritage-based projects. One consultee commented that "*you need people to go and find the relevant communities and people who may be interested; but that is difficult when the capacity doesn't exist to do so"* suggesting that the Local Authority was coming from a *"standing start"* without existing networks embedding them in the community.

The area's Engagement Lead also commented on the lack of bid writing experience and resources of the organisations who came forward as a lot of the grant applicants wanted the Local Authority (solicited bid) to do the application bid for them which doesn't lead to sustainable economic and social growth if the local organisations don't gain the experience of writing and submitting the application themselves. The solicited bid reported some organisations had struggled to "*specify outcomes in their project and how it relates to impacting heritage in the area*".

Consultees suggested that at present, investment particularly in natural heritage in the area is lacking and is a potential opportunity for future funding. The example of sand dunes was proposed as a future action point, particularly as a project that could partner natural heritage and engagement with young people – another important outcome for The Fund.

Engagement Activities

As is shown in Figure 5.9, North East Lincolnshire has engaged with partners and delivered its own events to drive engagement with The Fund. Primarily, it is representatives of the voluntary and community sector that the Engagement teams have met with, however, 12 strategic level meetings with the Local Authority have been recorded. The team kept up engagement even with restrictions due to the pandemic, attending regular online virtual funding fairs.

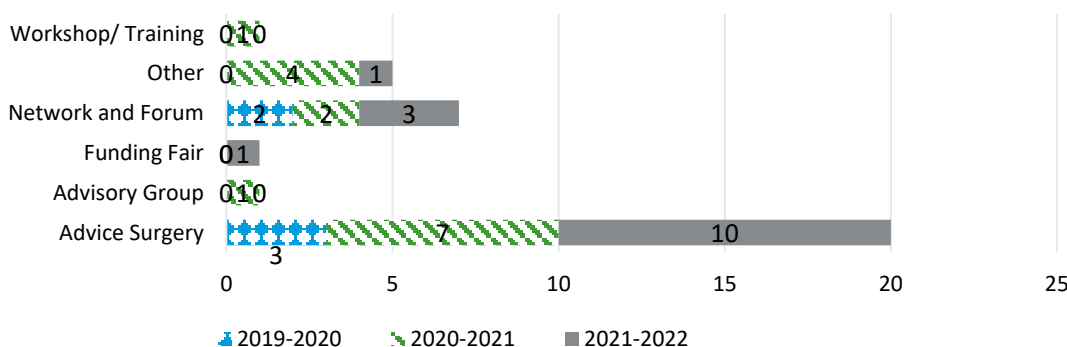Figure 5.9: North East Lincolnshire Engagement Events
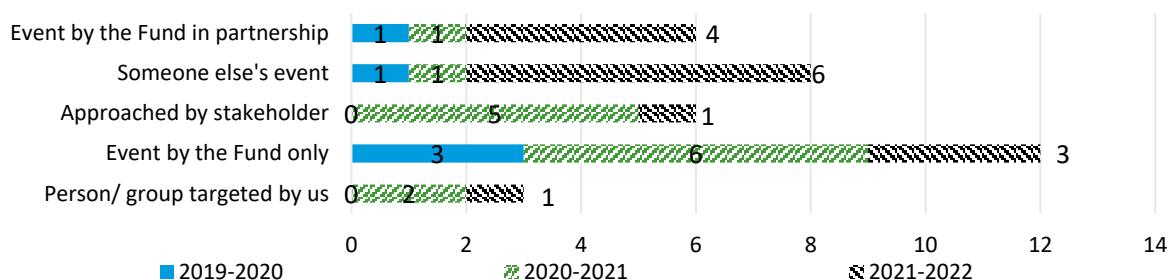
Source: North East Lincolnshire AoF Team

Funding advisory surgeries tend to be the most common meeting type, with the Area reporting 20 across all years. Network events are the next most prominent activity of The Fund. This is detailed in Figure 5.10.

Figure 5.10: North East Lincolnshire type of event

Source: North East Lincolnshire AoF Team

Stakeholders identified engagement activities that they undertook at both an operational and strategic level. The level of engagement from the stakeholders was dependant on the support needs that the community organisation had identified.

- the Heritage Network which Heritage Lincolnshire run is a network run monthly with 90 members ranging from individuals to organisations to businesses outside the heritage sector. This network has been used to support queries and questions around funding and assess potential applications; and

- there has been regular attendance in online Heritage Forums – up to 30 people. These show potential organisations what the Local Authority mean by heritage and offer support in how to apply for that is needed to be successful.

The success of the network is apparent as the North-East Start-Up fund has been exhausted in three months since its opening which funded up to £10,000 for organisations wishing to start a project and there have been 16 applications successfully assessed from the panel. There is still one year left on the Heritage Network, so the next step is to support potential organisations looking at the initial stage to receive Heritage Lottery funding.

Heritage Lincolnshire are looking to develop a training programme to improve local organisations confidence in applying for grants and to improve their application form processing as this was an area identified to be lacking in North East Lincolnshire.

Solicited Project

The Fund's solicited bid from the North East Lincolnshire Local Authority was for a project to be delivered between September 2020 and March 2023. Its overall purpose is to increase the strategic importance of heritage in Local Authority activity, increasing the number of projects and the understanding of the value-added of heritage. The funding will support:

- staff resource in the Local Authority (0.4 Full Time Equivalents [FTEs]) to provide administrative support for the programme;

- freelance support to work with community organisations to develop their projects;

- a small grants scheme to support projects developed;

- building new network of organisations interested in heritage in North East Lincolnshire;

- organisations in NEL participating in national networks, including with other AoF; and

- work to build the case for heritage investment highlighting its wider social, economic and community benefits.

The project aims to:

- maintain momentum and improve the management of Heritage in North East Lincolnshire;

- develop North East Lincolnshire's reputation for the positive and proactive management of heritage assets;

- encourage and support local authority investment in the management and maintenance of its heritage assets;

- raise the profile of North East Lincolnshire's Heritage and realise opportunities for economic and social benefit;

- strengthen local partnership working; and

- build local capacity, skills and experience to manage and deliver heritage-led programmes within the Local Authority and local heritage organisations.

From the award in Summer 2020, the Local Authority has begun delivering against a number of its objective areas. The Local Authority have set up a small community grant programme, awarding grants of up to £10k to heritage focused projects. This grant programme is administered by a heritage officer. The programme has already begun to make awards, with The Fund's engagement lead commenting that these *"have been a real engagement tool and tactic to reach new volumes of people 'stealthily'."* These funded projects range from shorter two- or three-month projects, to those lasting twelve months. In total, of twenty applications, North East Lincolnshire Local Authority have awarded 13 projects to date with £125k given out, and the programme has now been closed. There has been a *"good variety"* of projects funded, focusing mainly on North-East Lincolnshire's industrial heritage, focusing on the docks and shipping and even back to its Viking heritage. The Local Authority recognise that natural heritage remains a gap in terms of what they have funded, and so have provided one organisation £1,000 to develop their ideas and bid when the time is ready. Projects have been funded in some of the most deprived areas of North East Lincolnshire, e.g., East Marsh, West Marsh, with the former looking at a project to do with street names, and the history behind that and the later focusing on looking at the artefacts and archives within that area leading to the creation of a history group. These are both focusing on primary schools and youth organisations but also appealing to the memories of the older generation.

The other aspect of the award is a heritage network, coordinated by Heritage Lincolnshire, which occurs on a monthly basis, and is a key space for breeding collaboration across organisations. There are circa 90 members across North East Lincolnshire, of which 20-30 regularly attend the network forums. From Covid-19, these have been online, which the consultee reflected may have enhanced engagement. The network seeks to *"build an understanding of heritage within the [VCSE] sector and support people to apply for initial starting funding from The Fund."*

Issues Encountered and Lessons Learned

Issues encountered from wider stakeholders included:

- the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact as it limited face to face interaction and the visiting of potential communities who do not have clear ideas of heritage; but with visits Heritage Lincolnshire could educate and give advice to the communities on how they could receive funding. This limited the engagement with new organisations and communities as all interaction was shifted online;

- the natural heritage is seen as a gap in North-East Lincolnshire with opportunities for tourism development through the fishing sector and ports;

- there is certainly a role heritage development can play in the socio-economic development of North-East Lincolnshire, but it will take time to materialise. Through investment in the centre of Grimsby down to the ports, there is the opportunity to improve people's perception of their hometown and place a greater emphasis on heritage; and

- reflecting on the solicited bid approach, aspects such as the third-party grants have been highlighted as a key success, gaining *"access to areas [The Fund] cannot reach",* but there is little appetite for more fast-track bids as it means The Fund cannot monitor the investment, if the funding is given out all at once. The solicited approach was felt to be most useful for acquisitions.

Case Study 3: North Lanarkshire

Area Context

In 2020, of 32 Local Authority Areas in Scotland, North Lanarkshire ranks the second lowest in terms of its overall heritage context and ranks the lowest with regard to heritage activities. It is parks and open space that North Lanarkshire sees its highest heritage ranking (10/32) and evidence from qualitative research highlights North Lanarkshire strong industrial tradition, and the potential underutilised industrial heritage in North Lanarkshire.

Figure 5.11: North Lanarkshire RSA Heritage Rank key indicators
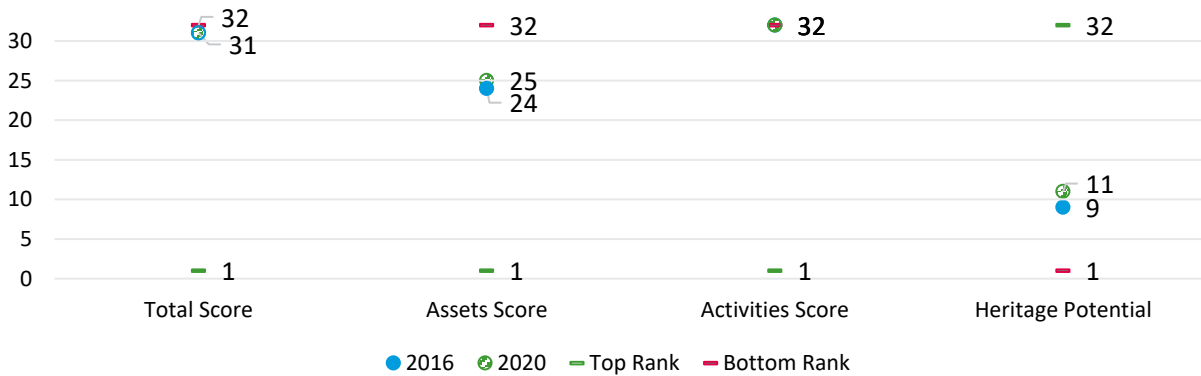
Source: RSA Heritage Index (2020)

As with all other case studies, North Lanarkshire ranks poorly relative to its national context in terms of deprivation, as shown in Figure 5.12.

Figure 5.12: North Lanarkshire Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) indicators
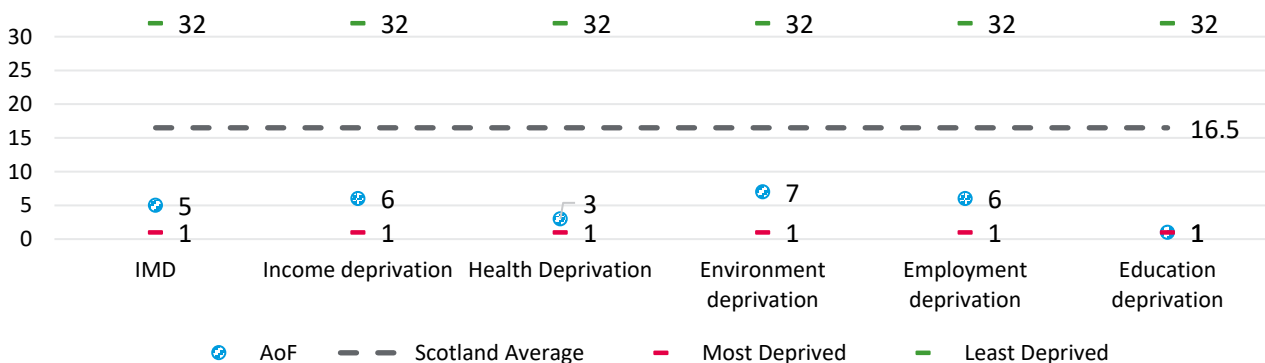
Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2020)

Although deprivation is not evenly distributed, there is no clearly identifiable pattern of deprivation, with pockets of more deprived areas across the Borough.

North Lanarkshire's baseline investment per capita performance was strong; however, this is likely skewed by one significant grant that was received in the first round of 2016, therefore the results of FY2018-19 are skewed and unrepresentative of just the 12-month timeframe. FY2019-20 presents a much worse picture, with investment in this year less than 1% of average investment per capita nationally. This gap has been closing in successive years to FY2021-22. This is detailed in Figure 5.13.

Figure 5.13: North Lanarkshire National Lottery Heritage Fund annual investment per capita

Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Rationale for Intervention
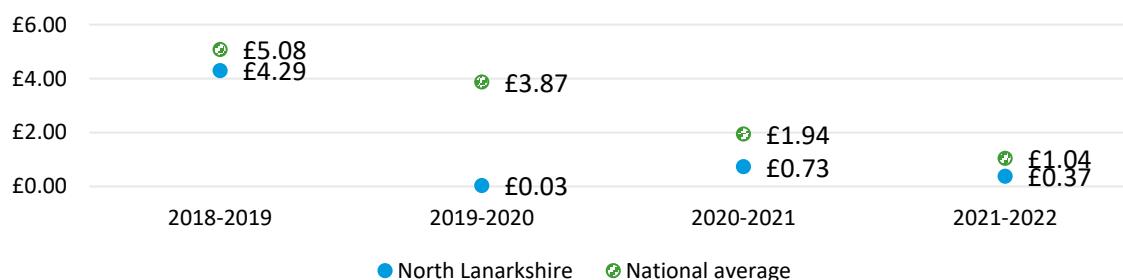
The Engagement team mentioned there is a recurring theme that the people of North Lanarkshire envisage themselves as 'Glaswegian' and there is no identity with their area. The Fund representative commented that "*the people of North Lanarkshire see the museums and parks in Glasgow as their own*" therefore, it has been difficult to try and support a pickup of local heritage activity.

It was widely acknowledged that North Lanarkshire has a real issue of social exclusion, poverty and inequality and that this is contributing to a lack of bids coming forward as "*people do not see heritage activity improving their standard of life.*" One stakeholder did articulate that they believe that although heritage focused projects may not directly influence the challenges of deprivation, "*it might help people feel stronger identity and meaning which can be psychologically important.*"

Across all stakeholder groups in North Lanarkshire (Engagement teams, solicited bid delivery partners, wider Third sector interface (TSI) organisations) there is a recurring theme in North Lanarkshire that local communities do not have a clear understanding of what heritage is and how it relates to them, as a stakeholder commented "*most people think of heritage as a static museum or something belonging in the distant past*".

It was felt that organisations that did show an interest in heritage lacked the capacity to develop an application as they did not have "*professional grant writing skills*" which held many potential projects back from progressing. It was felt that it was important to have professional partners that the community groups can work with to allow more chance of applications passing.

One stakeholder working to promote culture and heritage within North Lanarkshire, when asked about the key partners for heritage projects in the area, responded:

"It's hard when there are no professional bodies set up between the council and the community groups to focus on heritage applications. it's difficult to get a strong alignment between the community and what they want for their project and getting it on an application."

This challenge that this stakeholder faces, represents the gap for The Fund to intervene in, acting as a go-between to engage with and support heritage projects, and represent community heritage interests within local authorities.

Engagement Activities

Without a dedicated officer *"on the ground"* in North Lanarkshire, engagement opportunities, particularly post-pandemic have been limited. Resourcing is a particular challenge for The Fund's Engagement Team in order to build a pipeline of investable projects and drive heritage engagement in North Lanarkshire.

Engagement across the third sector interface in North Lanarkshire has reportedly dropped since the Covid-19 pandemic and the methods of engagement were forced to shift online. The engagement lead explained *"there wasn't a strong local online presence for us to join or collaborate with"*. This has resulted in a slowdown of engagement with new local organisations as there isn't a viable platform to network and engage with them.

There have been some attempts at political influencing. The Engagement lead reported that they *"reached out to our MSP, and he is now the Minister for Culture. We've used him as a springboard to get out to his networks. He didn't know much of what heritage was, but that's caused a few things to happen."*

The engagement lead also highlighted their role in soft-influencing, gently nudging and encouraging projects to apply. One project, to create a network of organisations, has not progressed (as a result of the pandemic). Given the value of this project for The Fund in reaching new applicants, the engagement team is attempted to build relationships to ensure conversations around progressing this project remain at the forefront of the potential partners priorities.

Solicited Project

The representative from the Rural Development Trust (solicited project delivery partner) did not respond to four requests to participate in this evaluation. Requests were made to two separate contacts, provided by the Scotland Engagement Team.

Issues Encountered and Lessons Learned

Partners have highlighted a lack of capacity and resources to bring about significant change that aligns with The Fund's aims. In other AoFs, CVS organisations have been key partners, but in North Lanarkshire, capacity issues have meant that despite a willingness to engage, the relationship with the TSI has been less fruitful. The representative, discussing a potential application to The Fund reported:

"We are still dealing with lots of extra work around Covid support and lots of other programmes that meant we couldn't progress [an application for network development and third-party grants scheme"

Covid-19 has been an issue identified by all stakeholders and delivery partners spoken to. The unfortunate timing of the pandemic meant talks with The Fund and community groups slowed down for 2 years, with online engagement inadequately replacing in person interactions. This has hampered engagement and disrupted relationships, with an engagement team member seeing a *"lack of capacity in organisations [The Fund was] engaging pre-Covid."* Not all responses to Covid

were negative, with one delivery partner envisaging Covid-19 as a potential heritage project in the future "*as there was a sense of community and solidarity from the public which can be remembered and can be a positive way to remember such a negative time.*"

The scope of heritage and how it aligns with creativity and the arts was highlighted as a possible solution for bringing more engagement in the area. A delivery partnered believes "*strengthening creative engagement of communities around heritage and community arts in tandem would overcome the difficulties*". Funding focused on the historical pride in the areas and linking it to heritage could result in more community groups coming forward with ideas and projects, and one stakeholder felt that this would also lead to wider economic benefits such as tourism.

The Local Authority representative for the North Lanarkshire area held in-person engagement activities such as weed-digging of heritage sites as "*there was the biggest pickup in engagement in activities where we have the most hands on heritage engagement*". This allowed for new engagement with more communities they haven't been exposed to and had a positive effect on the understanding of heritage and could provide opportunities for The Fund engagement teams to interact with the community in this way, building their profile at a grassroots level.

Reflecting on the solicited bid approach, a consultee from the engagement team was keen to see more solicited bids, but also wanted to see more innovative approach to reach non-traditional partners and communities. A challenge of the solicited bid was the level of funding given means that the partner organisations have to spend and then claim back funding, which limits the pool of organisations with resource to do this, which may limit the potential for future solicited bids in the future.

Case Study 4: Rhondda Cynon Taf

Area Context

As evidenced in Figure 5.14, Rhondda Cynon Taf has a combined overall rank of second last in Welsh local authorities.

Figure 5.14: Rhondda Cynon Taf RSA Heritage Rank key indicators
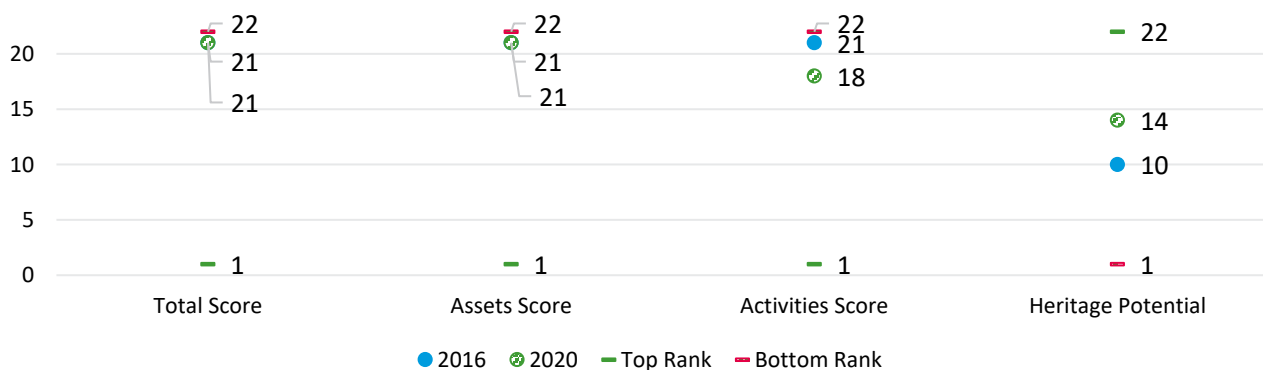
Source: RSA Heritage Index (2020)

Across deprivation indicators, the Borough is ranked amongst the bottom of Welsh local authorities, despite some pockets of affluence, particularly in the South of the Borough.

Figure 5.15: Rhondda Cynon Taf WIMD indicators

	IMD	Income deprivation	Health Deprivation	Environment deprivation	Employment deprivation	Education deprivation
Least Deprived	22	22	22	22	22	22
Wales Average						11.5
AoF	4	4	3	5	4	4
Most Deprived	1	1	1	1	1	1

● AoF   — — Wales Average   — Most Deprived   — Least Deprived
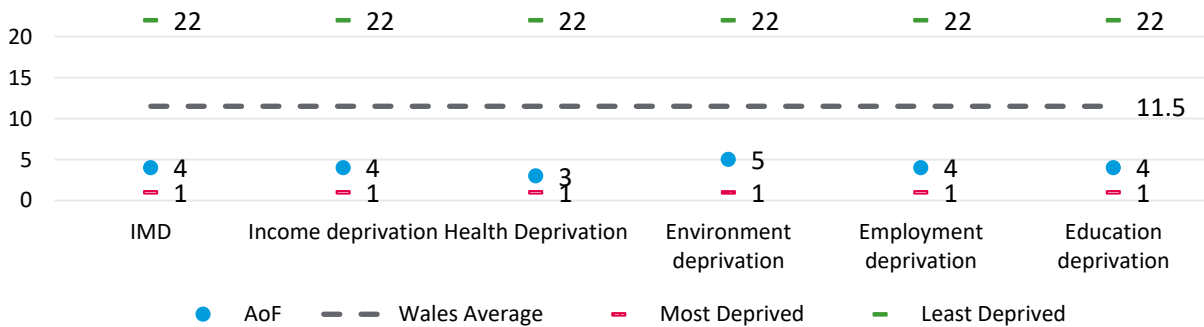
Source: Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019)

The baseline level of The Fund's investment per capita (FY2018-19) shows that Rhondda Cynon Taf was significantly below the national average, however, trends show this gap closing over time, overtaking the national average by FY2021-22.

Figure 5.16: Rhondda Cynon Taf National Lottery Heritage Fund annual investment per capita

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
National average	£5.08	£3.87	£1.94	£1.04
Rhondda Cynon Taf	£1.46	£0.92	£1.85	£1.13

● Rhondda Cynon Taf   ◌ National average

Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Rationale for Intervention

Within this context, struggles in capacity and ambition are highlighted as the key barriers to achieving the *"huge amount of potential"* in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Local Authority recognises the wider value of heritage and has an *"ambitious and dynamic"* team working across the heritage space; however, it struggles with capacity, limited budgets and significant resource demands, posing a barrier to heritage activities in the Local Authority area.

According to one local stakeholder, demographic changes in the area has meant that voluntary and community groups have fewer individual volunteers with experience in designing and delivering projects. Local Authority and Fund stakeholders concur that there is *"no shortage of project ideas"* at a grassroots level, but there are a limited number of groups *"capable of putting up a project."* Groups lack either the dedicated staff or experience in developing applications for funding. Stakeholder consultation identified that a lack of ambition was also limiting heritage

projects, as third sector organisations who receive funding from the Local Authority do not have ambition to look for further funding to deliver bigger projects and are not outward looking when it comes to developing new project ideas.

Engagement Activities

The Fund's Engagement team have been seeking to build relationships and increase the profile of The Fund within Rhondda Cynon Taf through in-person visits to local groups, attendance at funding events and fairs and hosting one-to-one drop-in sessions. It was reported by stakeholders that face-to-face contact is particularly important for relationship-building in Rhondda Cynon Taf, and as such, the pandemic and associated restrictions has limited the effective engagement that can be delivered. In other AoFs, local third sector bodies have proved effective partners, but in this context, stakeholders have highlighted that the Community and Voluntary Council is overstretched and focused on pandemic recovery. Forums have proved a good opportunity for networking with projects not familiar to The Fund.

Given the capacity constraints, the engagement team is seeking to be more intentional and strategic, picking appropriate opportunities for engaging with key partners and understanding the challenges of working in Rhondda Cynon Taf. There is a recognition that more work could be done at the strategic and pollical level.

Project partners have reported that the engagement team have sought to understand the specific barriers that the partner organisation faces, in order to support them to access funding. For example, The Fund is reported to have been proactive in understanding and mitigating the barriers that those with disabilities have faced in accessing grant funding and were commended by partners for proactively welcoming and supporting projects developed by those with disabilities. Another partner highlighted that The Fund was supportive in ensuring that projects met the needs of both The Fund and the supported organisation and appreciated that The Fund had a wholistic view of heritage, particularly in its support of Welsh-language projects.

Solicited Project

The Rhondda Cynon Taf solicited bid project is delivering a programme of community engagement to look at the theme of 'altered images' – considering how views of the past change over time and how understanding the past can challenge assumptions about where we come from and how our communities developed. The project aims to focus on two areas:

- memorials / statues; and stories, myths and legends: mapping and recording these and encouraging discussion and debate with community volunteers and groups; and

- collection of stories and reminiscences of local people.

A variety of activities will be developed to engage and involve the community and opportunities will be created to share work and experiences through a variety of media.

The project also seeks to support heritage work within the Local Authority and will help shape and drive a dedicated heritage strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf. The strategy will aim to be a flexible framework for co-operation and collaboration between the Local Authority and all those active in supporting local heritage. The strategy will proactively work towards the preservation of cultural heritage in Rhondda Cynon Taf, putting heritage and culture at the heart of the future vision for the area. The funding will also support the employment of a project co-ordinator to deliver the solicited project work and advocate for heritage within the Local Authority.

The project has encountered significant delays in getting started - although the initial application was in the Summer of 2020, the project did not receive 'Permission to Start' until the following August (2021). Stakeholders have cited a number of key issues in getting the project up and running:

- staff to deliver the project: limited staff capacity to deliver heritage projects within the Local Authority, combined with challenges in recruiting a project lead (as a consequence of a buoyant labour market) caused a delay in recruiting staff to deliver the project. This delay has meant that the project has seen a *"drop in momentum".* The limited capacity within the Local Authority to deliver the project was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic meant that there was a number of other priorities areas for the Local Authority, with funding linked to Covid recovery to be distributed;

- limited project planning prior to the submission of the application: given the short turnaround time from being invited to submit a bid to submitting the final application, the project plan was *"high level"*, with some key considerations within the plan left blank. The Local Authority lacked support / time to develop a budget for their project, and issues including lack of contingency budget and limited resource set aside for evaluation emerged as a result. The Approved Purposes at the point of application were also quite generic, and had to be refined and re-written at the project start up meeting stage; and

- Support from The Fund outside normal fund processes: the fact that the process was expedited meant that there was no assigned case officer from The Fund to work with the project and as such, the project was managed by the Wales Head of Engagement. Given a lack of dedicated case officer for the project, there were challenges in the ongoing relationship and point of contact at The Fund. The limited capacity of the Engagement team in Wales, with only three staff members, means that capacity to provide specific support to individual projects is limited.

The project has progressed, appointing a project coordinator, and is now in its mobilisation phase. The project coordinator is consulting with neighbourhood networks, community groups and other stakeholders to shape the project and is drawing together ideas for how to best deliver against the project aims. The team are also developing their approach to commission a firm to deliver a heritage strategy. Stakeholders reflect that, although the project is now up and running despite the delays, there is a significant amount of time lost and the project is still *"playing catch"* up to its project plan.

Issues Encountered and Lessons Learned

One stakeholder felt that there needed to be greater recognition of the limitations of the Rhondda Cynon Taf context. This individual suggested that, as their proposed projects were being compared on a Wales-wide basis to projects in Welsh culture, heritage and tourism hotspots, there is no possibility to compete on metrics such as expected visitors. Further context to this challenge is the budget limitations within the Wales Heritage Fund team, as a small pool of resources is shared across Wales, and as such, those reviewing projects need to take a Wales-wide view to ensure that funding is used to support the best projects.

A significant number of stakeholders also reflected that development funding was something that would enable projects to be delivered more easily and effectively in Rhondda Cynon Taf. For projects below £250,000, the fact that groups have to find the project development funding themselves limits the level of funding and type of group that can apply. Individual volunteers *"bear the brunt"* of costs associated with developing projects this can impact organisations' sustainability

in the long-term. This can perpetuate a trap in which groups that cannot develop bids due to lack of development funding are viewed as *"high risk",* which in turn means it is harder to get funding in the future.

The limitations of the size of the engagement team in Wales was also highlighted as a significant constraint in terms of the engagement activities that can be delivered. The limited capacity can mean that specific support for projects within AoFs is a challenge, and projects may not receive the same in-depth support that those in other Areas of Focus might.

The Solicited Bid process: Stakeholders suggested a number of learning points from the solicited bid process, given the challenges that the project has faced in getting up and running. It was felt that, although the intention was for the application approach to be made more *"light touch and not cumbersome"* the result of not giving the proper time and support in the pre-application stage, with limited project planning and precise budgeting, has made the project delivery more cumbersome and challenging. It was also suggested that providing a funding cap, rather than costing out the desired project, added to challenges in delivering the project, as the focus is on spending the money up until a certain point, rather than delivering a project that meets current Local Authority needs and is achievable within the existing infrastructure.

Case Study 5: Walsall

Area Context

RSA Heritage indicators for Walsall show that, in 2020, Walsall was the lowest overall ranked Local Authority of the three English Case Studies and is in the bottom 6% of local authorities in England, but, as is shown in Figure 5.17, the Heritage Assets rank is much higher than the activities, suggesting strong potential to utilise the assets of the area, with improved focus and activities.
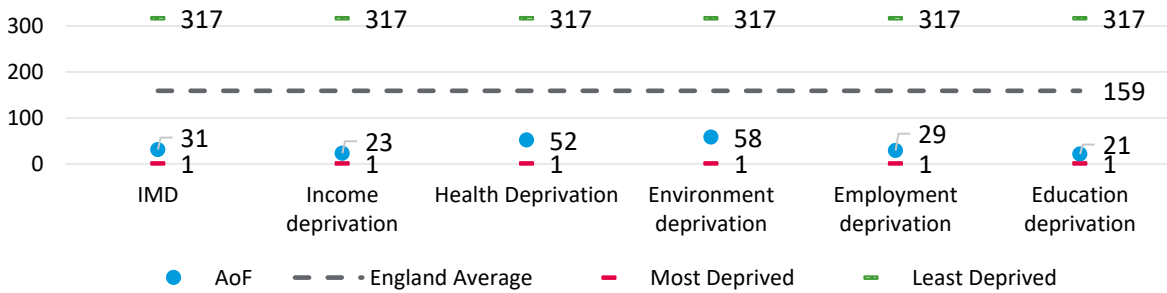
Figure 5.17: Walsall RSA Heritage Rank key indicators
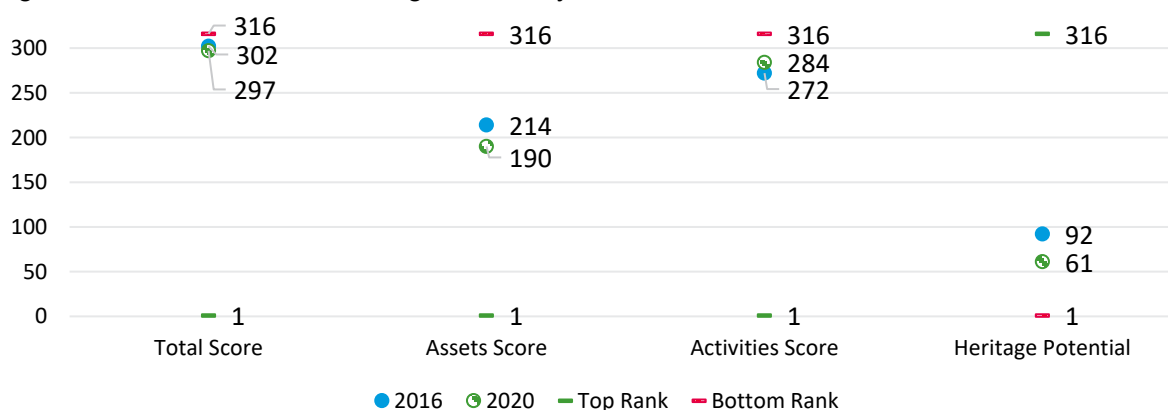
Source: RSA Heritage Index (2020)

As highlighted in Figure 5.18, Walsall is one of the most deprived areas in AoF, with all indicators significantly below the English average, and in the realms of some of the most deprived local authorities.

Figure 5.18: Walsall IMD indicators

Source: English indices of deprivation (2019)

However, as has observed in previous case studies, this deprivation is not evenly experienced across Walsall, with the West of the Walsall significantly more deprived than the East.

Of the case study Areas of Focus, only Enfield had a lower investment per capita figure in the baseline (FY2018-19) year. The following year, the first of the AoF programme, showed little positive change, but by FY2020-21 the gap had narrowed significantly. FY2021-22, however, has seen Walsall slip down to just over 20% of the national average.

Figure 5.19: Walsall National Lottery Heritage Fund annual investment per capita
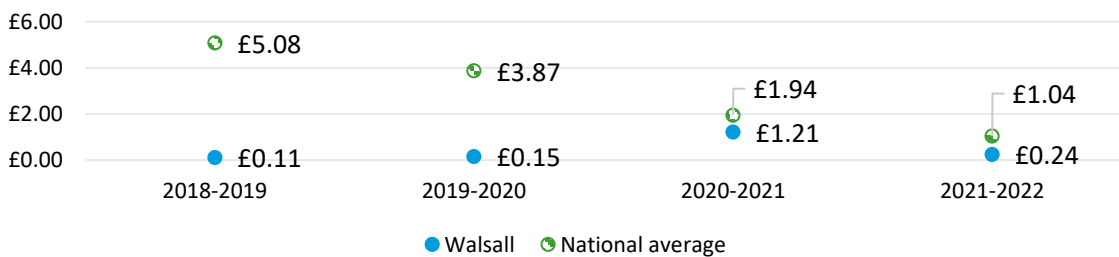
Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Rationale for Intervention

Across all stakeholder groups in Walsall (Engagement teams, solicited bid delivery partners, wider VCSE organisations) there is clear messaging that individuals and organisations in Walsall do not recognise and understand what heritage refers to. Both The Fund and a wider stakeholder involved in funding arts and cultural projects suggested that a key barrier to receiving applications for funding was a lack of appreciation of what heritage means and its significance. One Local Authority representative highlighted that there is a significant amount of work to be done in low-income areas for "*these communities to see the relevance in their culture, and how it relates to heritage".* This was illustrated by another consultee who suggested that local families would "*rather go to a cinema than a museum".*

Although The Fund's engagement team were positive regarding the steps taken to address the limited understanding of heritage in Walsall (e.g., regular messaging on what we mean by heritage, creation of the film, providing examples), there is recognition that the low level of understanding of heritage is a barrier to engagement, and to one wider consultee, heritage was not in the "*immediate consciousness*" of the local population. The lack of obvious assets and sites to act as focal points of heritage in the Borough meant, according to this individual, people couldn't identify

what attractions or organisations were out there in terms of heritage, nor how to access them. To one another stakeholder, not *"hearing examples of what funded projects have done"* was terminal for heritage in Walsall. A sparsity of projects that people "*relate"* to has meant that heritage has slipped down the list of priorities with both organisations and the local authority.

It was widely acknowledged by stakeholders that deprivation and lack of resources has been a key factor in a lack of bids forthcoming. However, it was also suggested that organisations in general lacked ambition and *"don't feel the need to move onwards".* The same stakeholder suggested that the institutional landscape in Walsall was in part responsible, with the Local Authority funding organisations to do *"what they were already doing"* leading to stagnation in the sector. This may be linked to the political context, with the local authority a marginal seat, flipping between labour and conservative majorities, engendering a "*focus on short-termism"* rather than developing the sector in the longer term.

For those groups that did progress to the enquiry stage, it was felt that many of the particularly smaller organisations struggled to meet The Fund's criteria and lacked follow through when given advice to shape the project that might fit. It was suggested that this was a result of the funder context, where organisations were used to receiving funding based on their own priorities and lacked the "*confidence to think out of the box to make ideas meet eligibility criteria".*

Engagement Activities

Walsall has been one the most active case study areas in delivering and attending events in order to drive engagement with The Fund. The Fund has developed close links with the local VCSE organisation, One Walsall, which has a remit of supporting community and voluntary organisations in setting up groups, planning and accessing funding. The Fund describes their relationship with this organisation as "*a bridge"* with community organisations, as well as a valuable source of intelligence and support. Through this relationship, The Fund has attended forums and networking events with One Walsall, where they have been able to deliver presentations and generate enquires. They deliver regular advice surgeries, where they provide one-to-one advice (in person / online) to organisations on potential projects, although The Fund have reported that attendance of these sort of events has *"dropped off"* recently, with the same organisations returning. Beyond these activities, The Fund also regularly produce content for publications, videos and media posts for One Walsall, to be circulated around their channels. The Fund has maintained close ties with One Walsall, through monthly meetings to talk through projects from the *"early idea to more formal"* stage.
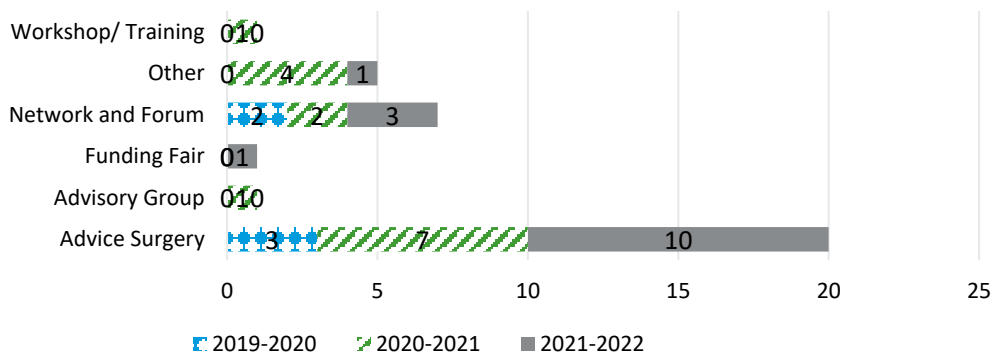
Beyond events delivered alongside One Walsall, other organisations have hosted networking events, funding forums and opportunities to meet community groups. A breakdown of the type of event as well as how it came about is shown in Figure 5.20 and Figure 5.21.

Figure 5.20: Walsall Engagement Events
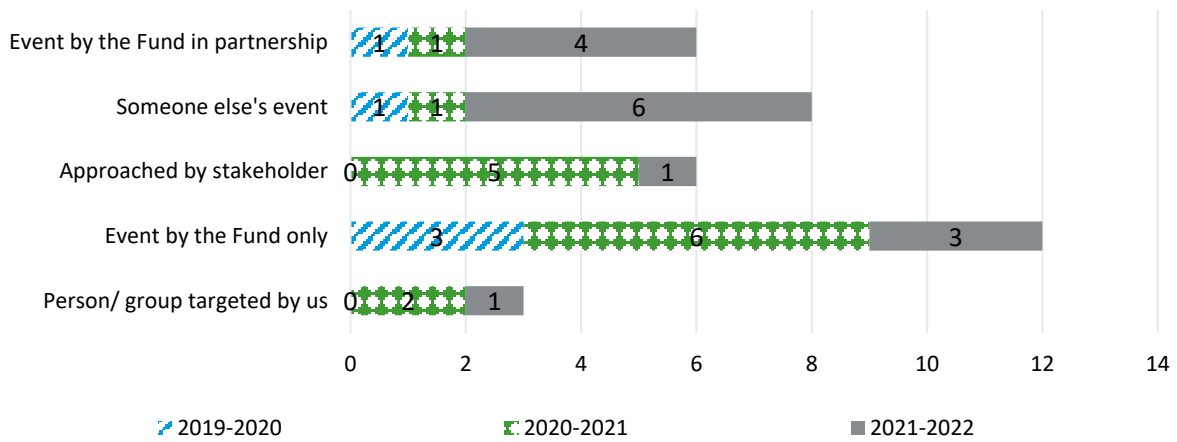
Source: Walsall AoF Team

Figure 5.21: Walsall Type of Event

Source: Walsall AoF Team

With the pandemic limiting the potential for face-to-face engagement, The Fund has been increasing their digital engagement activities, through more social media activity, virtual forums and a Question and Answer (Q&A) film to explain the objectives of The Fund and what they will be able to fund. As restrictions ease, the Engagement team is now in the process of *"rebuilding"* relations with stakeholders, however challenges exist with "*large staff turnover"* amongst key partners.

In terms of engagement on a strategic level, one wider stakeholder described the engagement lead in Walsall as *"very integrated"* in a number of local strategic networks for promoting cultural activities, attending / setting meetings and passing on information. Delivering the Solicited Bid with Walsall Local Authority and funding a heritage officer has also increased The Fund's ability to network and influence more widely and developing new relationships.

Solicited Project

The Walsall solicited bid project is a project that seeks to rebuild the heritage capacity within Walsall Local Authority and the borough and utilise heritage to tackle wider issues / opportunities i.e., inequality, health and wellbeing, environment and economic development. The project will

receive grant funding of £249,900 and deliver from October 2020 to October 2023. The project's objectives are to:

- commission a new heritage action plan to guide discussions, set direction and identify needs over the next five years and beyond, with three cross-cutting themes: equality, environment, and digital transformation;

- create 1 FTE heritage officer and contribute 0.25 FTE towards a full-time conservation officer, with responsibilities to represent sector needs, oversee planning, instigate projects, pilot a community grants fund, establish a heritage forum and create new partnerships; and

- ensure that heritage is better managed and integrated into Walsall's overall vision.

As was outlined in the previous evaluation report, the context of this project was a Local Authority with limited capacity to deliver heritage projects, and a low standing of heritage within the Local Authority's overall strategic priorities. Progress has been made in both of these areas as a result of the solicited project. Both a Heritage Programme Officer (100% funded through the project) and a Conservation Officer (25% funded through the project) are now in post. Poor Local Authority capacity for heritage projects has meant that the pipeline of fundable projects with a heritage focus is limited, which to the Heritage Programme Officer is because *"heritage networks aren't there",* and to address this, the solicited project has led to the creation of a heritage forum, set up to build those relationships with the Local Authority and the local heritage sector.

The solicited project includes resourcing for a small community grants programme, enabling smaller community projects to set up initiatives. According to the Engagement Team, this aspect of the project has *"helped heritage infrastructure"* in Walsall. The scheme has led to a *"couple of successful grants"* in its first round, and it is hoped that this initial success will be *"amplified over the next few years".* In addition to this grant scheme, the local authority has partnered with Spacehive, a crowdfunding platform focused on local impact, giving new routes for projects to be funded and affording the potential for leveraged funding. Applicants to this fund have to raise a set proportion of their target themselves in order to receive funding from the Local Authority. This is a useful resource, delivered primarily by the heritage programme officer, giving access to more groups who are not aware of The Fund or are unwilling to engage. This resource is something that the solicited bid project has been able to utilise, and further demonstrates the growing prominence of heritage within the local authority. An extract from Spacehive's Walsall website (Crowdfund Walsall) is shown in Figure 5.22.

Figure 5.22: Spacehive Website

Source: https://www.spacehive.com/movement/crowdfund-walsall

A significant emerging outcome of the project is the increased potential for strategic influencing and networking within the Local Authority, to ensure that the heritage is included amongst the Local Authority's internal priorities. Representatives from The Fund commented the *"[heritage programme] officer was a really key contact and he made sure that heritage was brought up at meetings",* and they suggest that the individual can provide *"extra backup"* for strategic influencing.

Finally, the project has delivered a Heritage Strategy for Walsall Local Authority, which has now moved into its delivery phase. The Heritage Programme Officer highlights that key to the success of the strategy is partnership, ensuring that it is grassroots and *"embedded in the community".* Representatives from The Fund have found that the strategy has made a *"big difference"* however, one wider stakeholder has felt that, as a result of not seeing *"examples of what funded projects have done"* in Walsall, the strategy has *"lost focus".* Key to ensuring that the strategy remains relevant and active is ensuring community involvement, and continually pushing strategic stakeholders for buy in.

Issues Encountered and Lessons Learned

A number of key issues have emerged from research in this case study area, of which learnings can be derived. This includes:

- a lack of projects already funded, with clear and obvious results for the local community to identify and engage with has meant that heritage has slipped down the Local Authority's priorities, despite investment in the solicited project, and is not in the local consciousness;

- key relationships with strategic stakeholders are frequently lost to high staff turnover, stalling moment for project development and engagement with The Fund;

- there is sometimes a mismatch in level of input required from The Fund to outputs from projects. Small organisations require a lot of handholding, due to limited experience and capacity, but equally, due to their size, they often must prioritise only one focus point of their activities, and from the pandemic, heritage has not been a priority;

- the local context has meant that community organisations can often lack confidence in developing new approaches to projects and in going after larger pots of money. This confidence is often dependent on the capacity, experience and existing skills of local organisations, which can be lacking in smaller community groups which are reliant on a small number of voluntary members. It should also be noted that in some cases, smaller groups who have innovative and ambitious projects that are quite costly are usually advised to scale back due to cashflow risks and perceived lack of experience; and

- reflecting on the solicited bid approach, a consultee from The Fund found it to be a useful tool but only for use in the right situations and shouldn't duplicate the normal route of open grant schemes. Soliciting bids was identified as being useful in meeting priorities for funding and allowed for further partnership development with organisations that delivered the projects.

Key Findings

This chapter has focused on understanding how engagement has worked, and not worked, in five selected AoF: Enfield, North East Lincolnshire, North Lanarkshire, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Walsall. Each project has its own local context and priorities, but across case studies, a number of

cross-cutting issues, approaches and themes can be identified, to inform general learnings on the AoF programme delivery.

With regard to engagement activities being undertaken, it is evident from findings that areas with strong local partners, who have significant capacity and existing networks is key for engagement to be successful. This is reflected in some Engagement Teams tapping into networks and messaging of existing CVS organisations, as well as engaged local authorities driving the heritage agenda in partnership with The Fund. It is evident that the solicited bid approach, when delivered in conjunction with Local Authorities, particularly when directly supporting staff resource, begets good relationships and increased potential for strategic influence. Covid-19 has clearly had a significant impact on Engagement Teams' potential to build relationships with organisations and communicate their objectives. Some individuals spoke positively on virtual delivery methods, but for most, the lack of face-to-face contact has meant a slowdown in the pipeline of potential projects. It is also found that, in order to ensure heritage is in the consciousness of organisations, better messaging / visibility is required for existing heritage projects, to envision potential partners.

With regard to the solicited projects, a number of projects are delivering small community grant programmes. These have seen high levels of engagement from organisations, and as well as delivering heritage projects where applications have been successful, additional groups have gained skills and experience in bid writing, as well as been promoted to engage in developing heritage projects, increasing the sector's capacity across the area. There were mixed feelings as to whether this should be a more prominent tool used in AoFs. Some have had hugely positive experiences but have acknowledged that this may be down to good timing and good relationships and trust with the organisations delivering. One individual felt that, while the approach was useful, they wanted to see more innovative ways of reaching non-traditional partners. Those who saw more challenges with the approach commented that it was not ideal to give out all the funding at once, as The Fund cannot monitor the investment. Another felt that the requirement for organisations to spend and reclaim funding meant that it limited the number of organisations who had this level of resource to deliver a solicited project and another stakeholder felt that the *"rushed"* nature of the application meant that solicited projects encountered delays in the delivery phase, which could have been avoided with the more formal application process developed.

Across areas, there is a need for greater advocacy to ensure there is a broad understanding of what heritage can refer to, with this cited as a common challenge for new organisations. Engagement teams report working one-to-one with groups to address this, but it remains an issue that stakeholders frequently report. Deprivation in areas of focus continues to mean that community organisations lack confidence in applying for bids, and ambition in what they develop.

6. EMERGING OUTCOMES

Introduction

This chapter identifies the emerging findings against the short-term outcomes identified in the programme's ToC. The evidence provided below is based on the data provided by the AoF and key learnings derived from stakeholder consultation undertaken to date.

Short Term Outcomes (Years 0-3)

This section presents the emerging evidence to data in relation to the Years 0-3 short term outcomes. Alongside the outcomes observed, this section will report on 'what works' and 'what needs improved' as part of the process of identifying the lessons for The Fund from this evaluation.

The Fund/ Engagement Teams reporting increased capacity to engage Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise groups

This outcome is focused on the improvement of The Fund's engagement with local communities.

The level of increased capacity to engage in VCSE varies across the five case studies. Delivery teams are structured and resourced differently across the 13 AoFs and this variability impacts on levels of investment and output achieved. Engagement Team Leads also recognise the need to not only prioritise the AoF, but also the surrounding boroughs and areas that receive little or no investment to prioritise heritage. This presents challenges when budgets are constrained.

The level of engagement and interaction between The Fund and local organisations has continued to be impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Repeated patterns of lockdown and pandemic restrictions has meant that for a significant portion of the last three years, face-to-face engagement was put on pause and was substituted with online alternatives.

The success of online engagement activities differed across the five case studies, with some solicited bid workers believing they were able to attract more and new people to online workshops given their ease of access. Conversely, other areas had reported a decline in interest and long-term engagement due to the continuation of online engagement activities.

However, stakeholders did highlight that in the final few months of 2021, as Covid-19 restrictions eased, face-to-face engagement activities were reintroduced, and their success has helped with reaching new community organisations / potential projects. Key partnerships have been built with a number of voluntary sector organisations, and these have acted as key gateways for grassroots engagement, attracting a critical mass of groups to engage with and providing visibility for The Fund.

One significant tool that has enabled The Fund to reach a significant mass of voluntary and community groups are the community grant schemes, administered generally by local authorities, with potential for local community and voluntary sector interface organisations to deliver such funding mechanisms.

Commenting on the community grant scheme, enabled by the solicited application, one Local Authority representative spoke of the benefits of this tool for funding at a grassroots level:

"We also have pockets of money within the project for community grants to enable smaller community projects and to set up various initiatives such as the heritage forum."

What Works:

Leveraging existing networks within CVS organisations and the local authorities' profile through community grant schemes are both identified as ways in which engagement teams can most effectively use their capacity for connection and engagement with community groups.

What Needs Improved:

Although digital engagement activities have been well adopted with generally smooth and innovative transition online, it is felt that fatigue with digital methods of engagement and an inability to build effective relationship online has hindered The Fund's ability to generate effective engagement. Resourcing challenges are also identified within some AoFs (particularly in the devolved nations) as limiting capacity to deliver intensive engagement activities in AoF, which has an impact on outcomes.

VCSE report increased capability to apply for funding

Consultees highlighted that the support offered and required varied depending on the organisation applying. Some AoFs offered one-to-one support to these groups on how they can adjust their applications to emphasis the impact of heritage that their project will bring to the area. Evidence suggests that a greater range of groups are applying for funding, and the amount of money bid for is increasing:

"We have seen such diverse groups ask for funding which has been great to see"

"We are already seeing people coming forward with bigger projects"

The data received from the AoF has shown varying levels of engagement from first time applicants and repeated applicants. From 2020/21 to 2021/22, first time applicants engaging with The Fund fell from 70% to 39% while repeated applicants increased from 30% to 61% over the same time period. While the numbers of new applicants have fallen, it is a positive sign that a significant amount of those who collaborated with The Fund in 2020/21 continued their engagement with The Fund the following year.

Although some stakeholders referenced challenges for some organisations in meeting The Fund's criteria for investment (e.g., due to lack of confidence to adapt projects) there was evidence that organisations were beginning to think more broadly about heritage and submit applications that were more closely aligned with The Fund's priorities. Stakeholders provided anecdotal evidence of increasing numbers of projects that are *"pushing the boundaries"* of what heritage can encompass, capturing natural heritage, language, climate change etc. For those stakeholders who reported difficulties in meeting The Fund's criteria, there was a suggestion to provide further illustration of the criteria through project examples and case studies that might be considered best practice in matching The Fund's priorities.

Some stakeholders commented that some groups expected The Fund to write the application themselves, a view that needs to be challenged to ensure that The Fund is upskilling and building capacity within groups. Community grant schemes have acted as good starting points for first time applicants and inexperienced bid writers and have been key in attracting new organisations to bid for funding for Heritage projects. This is particularly beneficial in the context of the closure of open programmes as a result of the pandemic, which has had an impact on the potential for VCSE groups to develop their skills in applications, limiting opportunities and increasing capacity challenges to develop bids even as open programmes resumed.

What Works:

One-to-one support (e.g., bid writing workshops and one-to-ones) is useful in shaping projects to align with The Fund's priorities, and advocacy work has equally enabled prospective applicants to better understand how their projects could be shaped in this regard. The community grants delivered have acted to upskill community groups in bid writing, without the same level of competition. These are an effective gateway into funding applications for inexperienced VCSE organisations.

What Needs to be Improved:

The pandemic-induced closure of open funding programmes has meant that new applicants have had limited opportunity to develop an application and gain crucial skills in bid writing. In some cases, there may also be a need for engagement teams to better articulate their support role to organisations, to ensure they are not viewed as surrogate bid writers for organisations.

Greater visibility of The Fund on partnerships

The Fund has been most effective in increasing its prominence and influence over strategic individuals through large projects solicited from Local Authorities. By supporting staff capacity for cultural and heritage activities, The Fund is able to push for those regular *"internal strategic meetings"* and ensure a consistent touchpoint to promote The Fund to. One heritage officer supported by solicited project funding has within their Local Authority setting *"made sure that heritage is brought up at meetings"* providing *"extra back up"* for The Fund in their influencing agenda. Without this voice, it is likely that the visibility of heritage as a priority, and The Fund as a key heritage stakeholder would suffer from less exposure in Local Authority conversations.

What Works:

The high-level, early investment in local authority heritage capacity (through solicited bids) has had a significant positive impact on The Fund's ability to influence within Local Authorities and be included in strategic discussions. The funding has given leverage within cultural teams for regular engagement, which has in turn increased visibility across other Local Authority officers.

What Needs to be Improved:

In some cases, the large scale solicited projects have encountered challenges, including a lack of infrastructure prior to investment and rushed project applications, meaning that the strategic influencing aspect of the programme is not immediately realised, due to challenges in getting projects up and running. Although a significant tool for influencing, it should be ensured that partners have the capacity and planning to receive such significant levels of investment.

Better focus on deliverable projects

This outcome focuses on The Fund's ability to prioritise projects most likely to be delivered. Data received from the AoF has shown there has been an increase in application success, from 63% in the baseline year of 2018/19 to 74% in 2021/22.

Through consultations Fund representatives have commented on the success of their £250k grants with some areas maximising and closing out the grant. Areas of Focus have accepted between 10-13 projects of up to £10k and while these projects' direct benefits have not been realised, the indirect benefits of increased confidence in applying for grants for local communities, increased writing application skills and knowledge of heritage can pave the way for future successful projects.

The Fund are taking a proactive approach in ensuring that the projects that meet The Fund's criteria and objectives submit successful applications, providing support and training through that process, summarised by one project partner:

"It feels as if [The Fund] want to give you the money and they want to help your application succeed. We have had lots of meetings with them and visits for training days, all helping to hone our application to ensure we are successful."

One challenge for this outcome has been limit budgets, particularly in the Scotland and Wales AoFs, meaning that projects that are potentially fundable applying in an AoF, face greater competition from other areas, to ensure that budgets are stretched to fund the highest scoring projects. This means that some deliverable projects do not go ahead, and relationships with applicants are damaged. This is captured in the comments from one consultee:

"there's a very limited capacity to what we can commit to and deliver… sometimes the budget per month for all of [the region] doesn't stretch…we need to be relevant across [the region]."

What Works:

The community grant scheme has ensured a pipeline of deliverable projects within AoFs and has also upskilled organisations to develop additional applications and deliver projects in the future, by providing experience, confidence and bid writing skills. Tailored one-to-one support has also ensured that potentially investable projects have made it through the application process to be delivered within AoFs.

What Needs to be Improved:

In cases where teams (particularly in the devolved nations) are budget constrained and must spread limited resources across local authorities, projects that are fundable and medium scoring in AoFs may be rejected in favour of better applications outside of AoFs, to ensure the money is used to fund the best projects within the wider region. This has meant that projects which could be delivered have not come to fruition, and there is danger of long-term damage in relationships with partner organisations in AoFs who have had investable projects rejected.

Increased prioritisation of heritage

There have been challenges in delivering against this outcome, given the additional pressures on local authorities and community groups to deliver a Covid-19 response and support for recovery. However, particularly within local authorities, there is strong evidence that heritage has risen in prominence amongst decision makers.

With networking and engagement over a number of years, one AoF engagement lead reported that their attempts to influence the Local Authority was no longer *"banging on a door that [the council] weren't willing to answer"* and another commented that the council cabinet have been *"really engaged"* in heritage. For example, In Walsall, the Local Authority has recently completed a new heritage strategy were previously no strategy existed, meaning that there is now a strategic approach and plan of action to support heritage projects.

Linkages with the Local Authority, developed through engagement and interaction as a result of solicitation are key for increasing prioritisation. A significant piece of evidence is the wider impact of The Fund's relationship with one Local Authority heritage manager, who then in turn is influencing across the local authority.

"[The Fund Engagement Team] are out in the community as well and they know about players we can talk to. I have very useful check-ins every month where we compare strategic overviews of the borough, and any differences we could make. That is then reflected in an internal strategic meeting with those working in parks, strategic property, the natural heritage project workers."

At a grassroots level, however, there remains a challenge to emphasise the value of heritage. Wider stakeholders have reflected that this is often because the benefits of heritage are not fully appreciated, and organisations who might have the capacity to deliver a heritage project, focus their efforts on other areas.

"I would say heritage is down the list of priorities… You don't hear examples of what funded projects have done. A sparsity of those sort of projects that people relate to doesn't help incentivise more heritage projects to come forward."

As referenced earlier, Covid-19 has meant that heritage has slipped down the priority list of some organisations, including this organisation who were previously developing a project, prior to Covid.

"We have had capacity problems because we have had so much other work to do [during Covid-19]. The grant application process was paused for about a year and when it reopened [The Fund] got back in touch but we were still dealing with lots of extra work around Covid support and lots of other programmes that meant we couldn't progress our application."

Face-to-face and "on the ground" engagement is crucial to promoting heritage as a priority for local organisations. Local nature parks, litter picking and even a community dig were highlighted as face-to-face engagement activities that were successful in demonstrating the importance of heritage and in helping communities gain a broader understanding of heritage.

What Works:

Despite Covid-19 related challenges in engaging with local authorities, so far relationship building activities with local authorities has generated positive outcomes in terms of heritage's position within cultural teams and local authorities more broadly. The Fund have been able to leverage solicited bid funding for capacity to promote heritage, influence strategically, and in the development of heritage and cultural strategies that meet the priorities of The Fund. Relationships with heritage officers are often deemed mutually beneficial, and as The Fund provides intelligence and opportunities to the Local Authority, they will be able to continue to leverage their influence into other areas of the Local Authority.

What Needs to be Improved:

Activities from engagement teams to influence and increase the prioritisation of heritage have tended not to focus on influencing at the highest-level decision makers (e.g., councillors, MPs, MSPs, MSs) but rather focusing on Local Authority officers. Further work to increase the prioritisation of heritage amongst wider Voluntary and Community Groups (beyond those traditionally involved in heritage) is also required, as many of these organisations have moved away from developing heritage projects as a result of a re-focus on the pandemic recovery.

Increased understanding of heritage

There is emerging evidence of The Fund boosting the understanding of heritage and how broad it can be conceptualised. One Local Authority representative reported that they felt the *"breadth and scale of what heritage is has its own challenges"* and articulated that supporting communities to understand the significance of their own community/intangible heritage was a significant challenge. The value of this is that key personal within the Local Authority's cultural services have become aligned with the broad-based definition of heritage adopted and encouraged by The Fund, rather than persisting with a singular understanding of heritage as built heritage. This individual is now advocating for this with the local community. This was not an isolated finding; in another Local Authority area, heritage staff reported that as their approach to heritage captured so much more than a homogenous white, middle-class heritage, and a focus on the built environment, that local people have found it *"refreshing that the council feels different [to other heritage stakeholders]."*

In one area were mining / industrial heritage is most prominent, The Fund has seen a slow emergence of other heritage within the applications they have received. One project, focusing on nature, wellbeing and green prescribing is being delivered by an organisation that would never have considered *"coming into The Fund"* until they saw another heritage project focusing on natural heritage. In the three years of this strategic funding framework, key stakeholders (e.g., Local Authorities and CVS organisations) have grown to understand the breadth of what heritage more fully can be and are advocating for that within their networks. The visibility of some of these 'other' heritages is in turn envisioning other organisations to consider how their own objectives may be aligned to heritage.

What Works:

As The Fund influences organisations to understand heritage more broadly, a wider range of organisations can see themselves as potential applicants and go on to develop projects. Stories of projects which have been delivered across the breadth of heritage, in order to capture imaginations of what heritage can entail, are felt to be important and these should be developed and circulated by engagement teams. Advocacy work to support understandings of heritage has also meant that local authorities have an expanded view of heritage and understand how heritage can align with wider objectives.

What Needs to be Improved:

Stakeholders in areas with an existing strong heritage identity find it hard to accommodate other understandings of heritage. The breadth of heritage has also made it difficult for local authorities and engagement teams to effectively communicate to communities what they can value in their heritage, when this is intangible or community-focused, rather than more traditional heritage.

Improved sign posting between funders

From consultations across case study areas, there was limited discussion of targeted engagement with other major funders. There is some evidence of increased partnership working across funders (for instance the Community Fund) with one Engagement Team taking part in a *"joint roadshow"* event and another about coordination of networks and opportunities with other funders. Engagement teams have tended to focus their efforts in improving signposting at a more grassroots level, engaging with funding distributors such as local CVS organisations. Amongst some of the more engaged CVS organisations, the awareness of The Fund and their requirements has greatly increased. One consultee stated that their organisation *"are a lot more aware of what they [The Fund] do now. I think, if the [CVS organisation team] saw opportunities for funding within*

organisations that we meet, we would highlight them for heritage funding". More work is required to ensure that across Funders, the requirements and objectives of The Fund are understood, as there is limited evidence of significant impact in this outcome.

What Works:

There have been significant positive and symbiotic relationships built with CVS organisations in AoF as engagement team have focused their work to improve signposting at this level. Where CVS organisations have capacity, they are able to advocate for The Fund in their own networks and allow engagement teams to benefit from their communications channels. As these organisations have gained a better appreciation of The Fund's objectives in AoFs and criteria for funding, they have become more effective sign-posters to VCSE organisations.

What Needs to be Improved:

Not all AoFs have been able to build these relationships, often despite interest from CVS organisations, but as a result of limited organisational capacity. In these cases, engagement teams should look to identify new networks / forum opportunities to engage with. It is evidence that limited effort is directed at engaging with other large funding bodies. More relationship building work should occur in order to identify areas of mutually beneficial opportunities, to utilise networks and to maximise benefits and efficiencies by pooling resources for relevant projects.

Volunteering skills contribute to local employment and economic recovery

Many of the groups consulted with were still in the set-up phase of their project delivery, and as such, evidence of change to local employment and economic recovery, as a result of voluntary skills developed is limited. However, indicative of the potential economic and employment benefits as a result of more funded projects are the inputs pledged by projects themselves in order to enable delivery. Data collected by The Fund reveals that significant investment has been made in training for volunteers and organisation staff, as well as in professional fees for local support. These are shown in Table 6.1. This investment, particularly in upskilling individuals associated with projects shows a positive direction of travel for employment and economic recovery outcomes.

Table 6.1: Project investment in training, skills and professional support

Area of Focus	Travel for Volunteers	Travel and expenses for Volunteers	Training for Volunteers	Training for staff	Professional Fees	Expenses for Volunteers
Brent	£10,250	£0	£10,300	£5,975	£76,060	£9,500
Corby	£3,613	£0	£14,433	£6,251	£72,119	£900
Enfield	£900	£1,800	£1,850	£25,675	£139,182	£285
Inverclyde	£6,416	£0	£37,040	£5,900	£43,100	£2,620
Knowsley	£10,790	£0	£9,479	£3,000	£65,975	£10,590
Luton	£4,185	£0	£7,850	£9,317	£55,750	£1,740
Neath Port Talbot	£1,550	£41,780	£43,238	£27,925	£453,667	£2,263
Newham	£17,088	£7,520	£22,110	£10,427	£108,457	£13,262
North East Lincolnshire	£3,200	£0	£3,200	£5,000	£128,745	£4,800
North Lanarkshire	£1,250	£0	£6,300	£1,050	£18,356	£2,880
Rhondda Cynon Taf	£2,100	£0	£25,833	£8,625	£155,783	£6,911
Tendring	£1,440	£650	£3,000	£6,080	£170,352	£1,350
Walsall	£1,000	£0	£1,425	£4,950	£76,914	£5,868

Source: The National Lottery Heritage Fund

What Works:

Many funded projects are at the community and voluntary level, and hence are reliant on local voluntary capacity. This is ensuring that benefits of upskilling and economic impacts can be felt locally. This is reflective of The Fund's commitment to boosting inclusivity and heritage at the local level.

What Needs to be Improved:

Future data collection and analysis should focus on quantifying the employment and economic benefits of volunteer upskilling through delivering heritage projects with The Fund. With it estimated that projects currently funded will generate over 4,000 volunteering opportunities, approaches to capture the benefits of this should be better developed.

Strategic Added Value

This section reflects stakeholder feedback on the strategic added value of The Fund's work in AoFs, in terms of influence, leverage and coordinated working.

Strategic Influence

Having had time to build key relationships, and through increased heritage capacity within Local Authorities as a result of solicited bid projects, Engagement Teams have seen advocacy for heritage at increasingly strategic levels and the delivery of heritage strategies has further pushed heritage into the consciousness of decision makers. One Local Authority representative said they had previously worked on a Local Authority regeneration strategy, and heritage was not part of the conversation, however now, as the Local Authority develops town centre action plans, heritage has increased in prominence, particularly given the strong focus on place-based action plans. However, one wider stakeholder, commenting on the stagnation of the local heritage strategy, suggested that the wider ability of The Fund to influence decision making was incumbent on their big examples of projects and benefits to capture the imaginations of partners and decision makers, and without these, recognition of the wider benefits of heritage would be lost.

Leverage

There is little evidence to suggest that The Fund has leveraged additional private sector investment in heritage in AoFs. One representative of The Fund explained that the focus of their activities was *"community oriented"* as opposed to developing commercial partnerships. There are, however, broad examples of the activities of The Fund leading to local authorities assigning funding for heritage projects to meet wider goals, as a consequence of a better understanding of the potential benefits of a heritage project. One stakeholder commented that future regeneration of town centres could achieve its place-based vision by *"rooting future development on heritage"* and expects heritage to have a prominent position in eight town centre action plans. Another stakeholder commented that their Local Authority is *"trying to use heritage as one of many approaches to improving the lives of our residents"* in areas of high deprivation, citing potential skills and economic development as potential knock-on impacts. There was also evidence of an increased awareness of heritage for natural and wellbeing benefits, with social prescribing a potential co-benefit of investment in heritage.

Coordinated Working

In a number of cases, The Fund has actively built and utilised partnerships with other funders active in the heritage space to maximise the benefits realised. In one AoF, Historic England and the Arts Council have both prior investments and there is ongoing dialogue as to where opportunities are and how they can be best realised. In another AoF, joint events to reach new groups and prospective beneficiaries have been done in partnership with funders. The Fund has utilised existing networks of other funders (e.g., Historic England) to reach new audiences and prospective grantees.

However, the most significant instance of coordinated working is the community grants approach, where The Fund has utilised local authority partners as intermediaries and distributors of small grant funding.

"Community grants have been a real engagement tool or tactic to reach new volumes of people stealthily"

"The community grant scheme has helped heritage infrastructure [in the area]"

This coordination has helped Local Authorities to gain credibility and prominence as a heritage funder amongst the community, giving it long term sustainability, and has enabled a grassroots distribution of Heritage Lottery funding.

Key Findings

There is strong evidence that many of the anticipated short-term outcomes are being realised as a result of The Fund's intervention, with limitations on outcomes as a result of the pandemic and budgetary / capacity challenges in a number of AoF. Benefits realised in the short term include the increased potential for The Fund to influence and engage at a strategic level with local decision makers, and the development of heritage strategies alongside additional resourcing in a number of local authorities as a result of solicited bid funding has increased the prominence of heritage, both as a valuable endeavour, as well as something delivering significant co-benefits for other Local Authority priorities. However, there is less evidence that The Fund has boosted prioritisation of heritage at a community and voluntary organisation level. A number of stakeholders have identified new groups applying for The Fund who have never previously considered themselves relevant in the heritage space, but for many, responding to the pandemic has become the priority for many organisations, with heritage slipping down the list. The Pandemic has also meant that opportunities to influence and engage have been more limited with voluntary and community groups, due to lack of face-to-face events, forums and one-to-ones.

A key finding from this evaluation has been the positive outcomes as a result of community grants scheme, delivered by partners (i.e., local authorities) providing small grants to grassroots community groups. These have been delivered through a number of solicited bid projects, and have seen significant uptake, with one local authority receiving 40 applications and grant 13 organisations funding. This builds the capacity and relationship of heritage grant giving within local authorities, utilising the wide networks and channels available.

AoFs in which engagement teams have developed close partnerships with CVS sector organisations / third sector interfaces have shown evidence of better access points to community organisations, aiding the signposting to perspective project partners. Advocacy work to improve these organisations' understanding of heritage has also been identified as a significant positive outcome.

In general, there is evidence that The Fund has increased and improved its capacity to engage and attract new applications and develop new projects. There are a new range of tools and networks developed in AoF to build the pipeline of projects.

7.   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter draws together the research findings from this evaluation report, distilling key messages and outcomes and identifying learnings in terms of what works and what requires improvement. The chapter will conclude identifying implications for The Fund and the delivery of the AoF programme.

Year Three Outcomes

For nearly all AoFs, there has been an increase from baseline (2018) spend per capita during this Strategic Funding Framework. When averaged across the three years in which the programme has been active (to allow for abnormally weak or strong years), ten of thirteen areas increased in spend per capita, and seven areas have now received investment per capita above the national average (all of whose baselines were below the national average). Despite the impacts of the pandemic, all but one area has managed to either increase from or maintain the baseline investment levels. On applications, it was found that application rates have, in a number of cases, decreased, but on the contracts, successful applications have increased. This must be understood in the pandemic context of closed funding, limited face-to-face engagement, reduced VCSE capacity and prioritisation of Covid-19 response, and also signifies that applications received better align with Fund priorities and hence successful advocacy on understandings of heritage.

Key outcomes in the short term refer to engagement at the strategic level. Engagement teams have been able to make inroads into local authorities, build relationships and in many cases, provide capacity support through funding heritage officer positions through the solicited bid process. The Fund has hence increased its access points to the higher levels within the Local Authority, with those in post advocating for heritage within council meetings across relevant departments and sectors. The Fund has also been able to develop heritage strategies, through solicited projects, and build local authority heritage team experience in administering grant funding. These local authority-led grant funding programmes where heritage officers within the Local Authority become responsible for delivering heritage small grants to community organisations, has had the dual benefit of ensuring investment is distributed to those at a grassroots level, and also gives experience and credibility to the council in providing grants for heritage.

The Fund has been active in establishing new networks and access points to community organisations, engaging virtually over the pandemic, and beginning to reconnect and re-establish face-to-face links as restrictions lift. A number of VCSE representative organisations have reported that they better understand heritage and The Fund's priorities and are in a better place to signpost organisations to The Fund with a relevant project proposition. Engagement team members have embedded themselves in other local networks across the cultural sector, further increasing the visibility of The Fund. Stakeholders have a greater understanding of what heritage can entail, leading to applications from non-traditional partners and in non-traditional spaces.

What Works?

Findings from this evaluation report suggest that across the majority of the anticipated short-term outcomes, The Fund has positively contributed, although the extent to which varies across specific

areas. Key enablers in meeting these short-term objectives and crucial in achieving medium term outcomes and impacts are listed below:

- face-to-face contact: despite effective movement to digital means of engagement activities, including webinars, videos and social media content, findings from primary research show that face-to-face engagement with prospective applicants is much more valuable for The Fund in achieving its ambitions. This includes delivery of its own events and offering one-to-one advice, attendance at local funding fairs and forums, and a presence at cultural and community events (e.g., a community litter pick). Re-establishing face-to-face contact points is key for effective engagement;

- tailored pre-application support: one-to-one sessions with the Engagement Teams, support from consultants and workshops on bid-writing are important in ensuring that projects develop and submit the best application for funding. This support is beneficial when it is tailored to meet the support needs of the potential applicant. Specifically, groups value support in moulding their project to meet The Fund's criteria, and for larger projects, pre-application project planning support is beneficial in ensuring effective delivery;

- use of project examples: ensuring that potential partners and applicants have access to examples of successful and best practice projects is an enabler of larger and more relevant applications. Examples allow for groups to imagine their own potential for such a project, enable a better understanding of criteria in practice and means that heritage remains in the consciousness of local organisations and decision makers, and they can understand the benefits of such projects;

- partnership building: The Fund's significant investment in Local Authority heritage capacity through the solicited bid process has enhanced The Fund's profile within local authorities, increased capacity in culture and heritage teams to deliver heritage projects and advocate for heritage, and provided support in ensuring that heritage is on the Local Authority's agenda and is incorporated in wider strategy and policy development;

- advocacy work: activities from The Fund to influence how heritage is perceived by key partners (e.g., CVS organisations, local authorities, other funders) has been successful in improving how partners understand the breadth of heritage, and recognise a wider range of projects that The Fund would seek to invest in, improving signposting and enabling access to organisations who wouldn't normally engage;

- community grants: grants that have been awarded through community grant schemes have been successful in providing access to new applicants, utilising the existing networks of delivery partners. These grants have also had wider benefits, improving the capacity and confidence of delivery partners in administering grants for heritage and building reputation amongst community groups as a heritage funder. Community groups receive experience in bid writing in a less competitive context, building capacity for future applications and gain an understanding of how to tailor projects to meet heritage requirements; and

- accessing locally embedded networks: where Engagement teams have built close relationships with local CVS organisations, they have gained an access point to a large number of perspective partner organisations. The channels of communication of local CVS organisations provide increased visibility, and as these organisations play a role in signposting groups to funding, such relationships act as a pathway for new prospective applicants. Engagement

teams should remain committed to local forums and networks, building The Funds profile and presence.

What needs Improvement?

To be most effective and impactful in AoFs, a number of points have been highlighted where engagement teams can either alter their approach or do more to improve outcomes. These are highlighted below:

- digital engagement: stakeholders and Fund representatives have been unanimous that, whilst digital engagement has provided good reach and acted as an appropriate alternative during the pandemic, it is not a substitute for face-to-face engagement activities, and these should be returned to and scaled up where resources allow;

- budget / capacity constraints: particularly in Scotland and Wales, constraints on budget and capacity have limited the impact within AoFs as there is a greater resource pressure and need to spread resources across these regions. This means that projects in AoF have increased scrutiny and competition to ensure that resources are best managed. Rejecting a potentially fundable project can erode trust with local organisations, and limited staff capacity will impact on the time available for engagement teams to support applications and building the pipeline;

- spotlighting successes: a number of stakeholders felt that more could be done to highlight best practice projects, in order to ensure that heritage remained in the local consciousness and to help potential applicants understand how The Fund's criteria for projects plays out in real life examples;

- engagement with other funders: despite being a short-term outcome, there is limited evidence that The Fund is partnering with other funders. The focus thus far has tended to be on CVS organisations and their networks, with only a small number of examples of The Fund engaging with other providers e.g., Historic England, and Arts Council England;

- engagement with decision makers: strategic influencing has been mainly focused on a mid-level within local authorities, and in examples where engagement teams have sought to influence MPs and MSPs, this has often involved politicians focusing on their own priorities. Shifting political landscapes within local authorities has also been cited as a challenge of political influencing. Where possible, engagement teams should seek to engage with and establish relationships with key decision-making stakeholders. It is felt that local councillors may offer a more valuable local relationship than those slightly more detached;

- profile of heritage amongst VCSE groups: following the pandemic, it remains a challenge to engage VCSE groups in heritage, given their focus on pandemic response and recovery. Increased advocacy and messaging on the co-benefits of heritage for wider priorities should be focused on VCSE organisations, as well as at a more strategic level; and

- solicitation: the benefits of the solicited bid approach are significant (e.g., for influencing, acquisition), but a number of challenges in the approach were identified and should be resolved for this tool to be most impactful. Stakeholders have highlighted concerns that expediting the application process may mean that projects are not fully thought through and effectively planned. Comments emerged that giving a funding cap, rather than encouraging applicants to cost their project, meant that applicants were designing projects to meet the funding cap, rather

than designing an appropriate project for the context. Others commented that retrospective claims meant that solicitation is only a viable option for organisations of significant resourcing.

Recommendations

Despite the persisting challenges of pandemic recovery, coupled with budgetary / capacity challenges within some AoF, this evaluation finds that the AoF programme is broadly on track in achieving the short-term outcomes expected at this stage of the programme, whilst identifying a number of areas of concern to be addressed to ensure that medium-term outcomes and impacts can be realised. Some key implications from this report are profiled below:

- engagement tools: community grants have been found to be a hugely successful tool for engaging new grassroots organisations and upskilling both delivery partners and recipients. Solicitation was highlighted as having a significant impact on strategic influencing, but a number of challenges and concerns with the process have been highlighted. Opportunities to utilise these tools should be identified where appropriate. It is found that digital methods of engagement, whilst effective in the pandemic context, are not a substitute for face-to-face relationship building, and this should be a priority;

- spotlighting successes: feedback has highlighted a gap in The Fund spotlighting successful projects. Understanding of The Fund's criteria and an increased prioritisation of heritage are key benefits of sharing stories of projects. This may also influence those in more traditional heritage backgrounds to understand the value of other types of heritage;

- partnerships and relationships: engagement teams have built successful relationships with CVS organisations that are generating new opportunities by raising the profile of The Fund and increasing signposting. This is something that should be prioritised, and new networks identified. However, there has been less activities to build relationships with other funding bodies. Opportunities for strategic partnerships should be explored;

- advocacy and influencing: developing heritage strategies and supporting heritage staff with local authorities has improved the reach of The Fund into new strategic spaces. Efforts should continue on this level of influencing, but direct relationships should also be made with decision makers. There is also work to be done to advocate for the co-benefits of heritage projects at a community level, to help groups understand how they can utilise heritage as part of their work to challenge deprivation and boost wellbeing. Advocacy activities have been successful and effective in boosting the understanding of heritage amongst community groups and partners;

- solicitation: retrospective claims were identified as a challenge / barrier for some organisations, limiting the potential to utilise solicited bids as a tool for expediting projects. The Fund have noted that this requirement is not common to all AoF, therefore, consideration should be given to a standardised approach that provides a percentage of funding to successful applicants at the project outset;

- capacity and expectations: throughout this evaluation, it is evident that resource constraints within Scotland and Wales to deliver funding and projects for their AoF (North Lanarkshire, Inverclyde, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Neath Port Talbot) has been a challenge. Limited engagement team capacity to generate opportunities and relationships, combined with budgetary constraints, has meant that these AoF are unlikely to see the same level of impact as other areas. As such, consideration should be given to the funding and resources available to the regions; and

- future evaluation reports: given the significant successes of community grant programmes, as well as the potential displacement impact of small VCSE organisations receiving grant funding through partners rather than direct application to open programmes, it would be beneficial for future evaluations to capture data on applications, awards and investment via community

grants. This data is currently not available through The Fund's data procedures. In addition, to assess value for money, the evaluation should capture all financial inputs beyond direct project funding awards (including Fund staff costs, RoSS inputs, etc.). The associated employment and economic benefits of upskilling volunteers should be quantified in future evaluations.