



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

***EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITIES@ONE  
PROGRAMME***

***BASELINE REPORT***

***February 2007***

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

This is the first report from an on-going evaluation of the Communities@One Programme which has been commissioned by the Social Justice and Regeneration Department of the Welsh Assembly Government. The aims of the evaluation are:

- i. To set up a clear monitoring and evaluation framework for the initiative, setting out arrangements at the local and national levels that can be used throughout the initiative to provide feedback, and to inform the final assessment of the impact of Communities@One (see iv).*
- ii. To provide a baseline position of the areas to be addressed by the initiative, assessing the ICT facilities already in place, the current levels and characteristics of ICT access and usage, and the levels of ICT awareness and skills.*
- iii. To analyse the relationships between community brokers, the central team, the Assembly Government, the Wales Co-operative Centre, community organisations and partnerships, and any other relevant parties, and to advise on maximising their effectiveness.*
- iv. At the end of the programme, to assess the extent to which Communities@One has been successful in meeting its stated aim.*

While originally envisaged as providing an evaluation framework for the Programme and a baseline for the later stages of the evaluation, the fieldwork was undertaken in the autumn of 2006, almost a year after the start of the Programme: the report therefore contains an element of formative evaluation and includes a range of recommendations for future implementation.

The Communities@One Programme aims to support “digital inclusion” - a process which seeks to ensure greater equality of access to the potential benefits of ICT to those groups which might otherwise be excluded for economic, social, spatial or cultural reasons – to individuals and communities within Communities First areas. It does so by proactively working with voluntary and community organizations (through a number of “Community Brokers”, managed centrally but located throughout Wales) to develop projects and approaches to digital inclusion and by funding such projects through a Grant Fund. It is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and by European Regional Development Fund monies but is managed by the Wales Co-operative Centre. The Programme runs until June 2008 and has an overall budget of £9.565 million.

The evaluation is centred on twelve case-studies, nine examining activity in individual Communities First areas and three based on relatively large-scale projects. Three “control group” areas - communities with relatively high-levels of deprivation but which are not currently eligible for Communities First and thus for Communities@One – are also the subject of case-studies. The work underpinning this first report has involved interviews with over 70 individuals (Brokers, Community First Co-ordinators, local stakeholders and grant applicants) in the case-study areas, as well as desk research related to both the case-study areas and the Programme as a whole, and interviews with 17 “central stakeholders” (Wales Co-operative Centre staff and Welsh Assembly Government and other members of the Programme’s Advisory Group).

## **Findings**

Overall, it is clear that the Programme, which was developed under considerable time-pressure because of the need to make use of available European funding, has made very great progress from a standing start. The original allocation for the Grant Fund has been fully committed and the projects which are coming forward to take up this funding are generally fully in line with the Programme's aims and objectives, including, critically, building on what is already in place rather than "reinventing the wheel" and with a strong emphasis on providing support to individuals with no or little experience of ICT. The Community Brokers are, for the most part, highly regarded by local partners and by grant applicants alike and are clearly playing a critical role in helping to develop and bring forward project ideas. Moreover, in some cases, they are managing to work round what are clearly difficult circumstances in terms of underlying tensions or conflicts surrounding Communities First.

The grant processes ensure that projects are mediated by Brokers and aim to identify and address potential weaknesses before applications are formally assessed, with the explicit intention that few, if any, applications are turned down after they have been fully developed. The processes appear generally to be working smoothly and are viewed positively by the majority of applicants, though a minority of mostly larger projects appear to find them overly intrusive. While the consultancy team have some concerns that, in theory, the very strong involvement of Brokers with project development may weaken the sense of ownership by the applicants, there was little evidence of this on the ground. In the case study areas, it was clear that ideas for similar projects to those being progressed through Communities@One Programme had been considered but not yet realized.

A key underlying reason for the Programme's performance to date has been the engagement of a range of external organisations with expertise and experience of digital inclusion in both the development and (through an Advisory Group) the delivery of the Programme. This appears to be a model of good practice, and those involved were clearly very positive about their engagement with the Programme. Relations between the Welsh Assembly Government and the Wales Co-operative Centre appear to be very sound, and linkages into the wider development of policy are being made.

The research to date thus suggests that there has been a very positive start to the Programme. At the same time, a number of potential areas for concern have been identified.

At a local level, the success in generating project ideas from individual organisations has been achieved by Brokers working with those organisations most willing and able to engage and concentrating on the project development role sometimes to the exclusion of wider objectives (e.g. networking local voluntary and community groups, building wider awareness of digital inclusion issues). Linkages with statutory providers (such as libraries and learning providers) are often not strong, meaning that opportunities for cross-referral and joint working may be being missed. This is mirrored by a lack of strategic engagement by the Department of Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills with the Programme.

More importantly, perhaps, while the importance of disseminating good practice is well recognized, in practice systems need to be put in place to ensure this does actually happen.

Perhaps inevitably, given that many of the projects involve funding new staff to provide informal support and learning, there are issues over longer-term sustainability, while a concern with building up longer-term capacity within the voluntary and community sector to provide technical support on ICT seems to have faded as the Programme has been implemented. Finally, a number of issues around communications between the Central Unit and the staff in the field were apparent.

### **Recommendations**

The report makes 13 recommendations as set out below:

#### *Objectives*

**Recommendation 1:** Consideration should be given to revise the formal Objectives of the Programme to reflect the reduced emphasis on encouraging service providers to innovate in the provision of services.

**Recommendation 2:** The capturing and dissemination of good practice from amongst funded projects needs to be given a high priority. Depending on decisions on the monitoring processes, Brokers should be encouraged to maintain contact with funded projects and to work closely with the Communications Officer to develop the intended case-studies; regional and national networking events need to give a high priority to showcasing projects and sharing experience and these sessions need to be recorded in some form of conference report or record; and the website should be developed as an interactive forum for projects.

**Recommendation 3:** The engagement of the Programme team with its hands-on experience of delivery, in the development of the policy debate both within Wales and beyond is to be welcomed, but it is important that this does not distract from managing the team on the ground.

#### *Policy linkages*

**Recommendation 4:** The way in which the Advisory Panel has been structured and the linkages with relevant organisations which have been made is itself a good practice example which should be widely disseminated within the Welsh Assembly Government.

**Recommendation 5:** The possibility of developing a more strategic relationship with DELLS needs to be examined.

**Recommendation 6:** The Programme team, in conjunction with the evaluators, should investigate whether postcode data on household take-up of internet (and broadband) connections is available and can be analysed. While clearly this is only a proxy measure, securing such data would enable more targeted efforts on areas with particularly low take-up of internet usage, and would also allow for some tracking of trends across time.

### *Delivery*

**Recommendation 7:** While the initial concentration on project development was appropriate, Brokers now need to be encouraged to ensure that they have a clear overview of services which are being provided within their areas. While we recognise that the Programme is about far more than informal mentoring and learning and open access facilities, in order to be manageable, such “mapping” should concentrate on organisations which provide access to, and support in using, ICT for individual users, whether the general public or defined user groups. This mapping should be used to identify unfilled gaps, to ensure links are being made between compatible organisations, and to prepare the way for a possible second phase Programme.

**Recommendation 8:** While we believe it is appropriate that all applications should be mediated by the Brokers, the Programme team may wish to consider if a less “hands on” approach is appropriate with larger organisations, recognising that this may well lead to the Grants Panel turning down inadequately worked up projects.

**Recommendation 9:** The Programme team and Advisory Panel need to decide whether more needs to - and can - be done to ensure the development of a sustainable network of technical support services, for example through the network which the Programme is already developing involving key national organisations such as PAVS, the Scarman Trust and Deudraeth.

**Recommendation 10:** The Programme team needs to consider how, as the Programme develops, greater links can be made with ICT provision made by formal learning providers.

**Recommendation 11:** The situation with regard to the conversion of financial commitments to spend needs to be monitored carefully to identify the extent to which this is a consequence of slippage or of groups not proceeding with plans, leading to a view on the appropriate extent to which the Grant Fund should be over-committed to ensure full spend.

**Recommendation 12:** Given the fact that many – if not a majority – of the projects are focussed on providing or utilising ICT facilities which are accessible to the public or to defined user groups, considerable emphasis needs to be placed in the monitoring system on recording usage of such facilities.

### *Management and Organisation*

**Recommendation 13:** We believe the system of “embedding Brokers” is generally working well and should not be changed (although some individual staff may need to be relocated). However, there is scope to ensure a better flow of information to Brokers: this might involve ensuring that Brokers have and are using up-to-date information about all projects approved and that notes of Broker team meetings, with action points, are made and followed up; sending Brokers by e-mail the papers for Advisory Group and Grant Panel meetings and notifying them of the outcomes (rather than relying on the shared drive); and possibly doing a weekly or two-weekly “e-bulletin” of key developments at the Centre, in order to ensure all Brokers are working on the basis of

shared knowledge. This may become even more important as the end of the Programme looms and decisions about future funding are made.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### *1.1 Purpose of the Report*

Old Bell 3 Ltd. was awarded the contract to undertake a long-term Evaluation of the Communities@One Programme in June 2006, with the Inception meeting being held on 23 August 2006. The evaluation was commissioned early in the life of the Communities@One Programme, with the aim both of informing – and thus improving – the delivery of the Programme and of gauging the impact of what is a new approach to addressing what is also a relatively new issue – “digital inclusion”.

The evaluation has four purposes:

- i. To set up a clear monitoring and evaluation framework for the initiative, setting out arrangements at the local and national levels that can be used throughout the initiative to provide feedback, and to inform the final assessment of the impact of Communities@One (see iv).
- ii. To provide a baseline position of the areas to be addressed by the initiative, assessing the ICT facilities already in place, the current levels and characteristics of ICT access and usage, and the levels of ICT awareness and skills.
- iii. To analyse the relationships between community brokers, the central team, the Assembly Government, the Wales Co-operative Centre, community organisations and partnerships, and any other relevant parties, and to advise on maximising their effectiveness.
- iv. At the end of the programme, to assess the extent to which Communities@One has been successful in meeting its stated aim.

This is the first of a series of reports, and is principally focussed on the first two of these goals. However, in practice, since work on the study only commenced in September 2006 – around nine months after the Programme began in practice to be delivered – the situation as observed during the fieldwork was not that which applied before the start of the implementation of the Programme.

This has both a positive and a negative effect. In positive terms, it enables us already at this stage to take a view of the way in which the Programme is operating and thus contains a strong element of formative evaluation. However, less positively, it means that the “snapshot” of the position, particularly in the case-study areas and projects which will be the focus of much our work, is not truly a “baseline”, since the effects of the Programme’s activity had already begun to be felt in some instances.

### *1.2 Method*

The work underpinning this report has - in line with the Work Programme agreed at the Inception Stage for Stages 2 and 3 of the evaluation<sup>1</sup> – involved the following elements:

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<sup>1</sup> Stage 2 - Developing the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and Stage 3 – Establishing the Baseline

### *Developing the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework*

- Meeting with the Communities@One Central Unit/Wales Co-operative Centre to discuss what data collection systems were already in place, as a result of the requirements of ERDF funding and the Wales Co-operative Centre's own project management processes;
- Review of a selection of Grant Fund applications to understand the nature of the projects and targets set for them;
- Holding a briefing meeting with Central Unit staff and the community brokers to explain the rationale behind the monitoring and evaluation framework and to discuss the key elements which should be within included in it;
- Developing a first draft of the monitoring and evaluation framework and discussing this with the Steering Group;
- Making refinements to the framework to reflect comments made by the Steering Group and by the Communities@One team and preparing a final version (see Section 3 below).

### *Establishing the Baseline*

- Desk-based analysis of the available baseline mapping data (from BT, ELWa, Everyone On-Line and the Community brokers) to build up a picture of overall levels of access to and take-up of ICT in Communities@One areas and Wales as a whole;
- Desk-based analysis of documentation relating to the development of the project and implementation to date, to include the WEFO Programme plan, Communities@One guidance, Grant Fund Guidance and Appraisal Criteria, Advisory Group Agendas and Papers, current list of approved and pipeline projects;
- Limited desk-based research into digital inclusion policy in other parts of the UK;
- Developing a draft questioning framework for the initial phases of fieldwork in the case-study areas/projects, the control group areas and with key stakeholders, sharing this with the Steering Group and refining it in the light of comments received;
- Undertaking fieldwork relating to the 12 case-study areas/projects<sup>2</sup> and drafting case-study reports on these: this involved:
  - Desk-research into the characteristics of the area and grant application documentation;
  - Face-to-face interviews with all eleven Community Brokers and one of the Broker Managers;
  - Face-to-face interviews with a total of 30 local stakeholders (including Communities First Co-ordinators, members of Community First Partnerships, and staff of Communities First lead bodies, CVCs and local authorities) and telephone interviews with an additional three stakeholders;

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<sup>2</sup> The case studies were selected in agreement with the Steering Group to provide a representative mix of experience of the Programme and included at least one area/project from the areas of responsibility of each of the Brokers.

- Face-to-face interviews with a total of 24 managers and staff of projects which are already receiving funding from the Grant Fund and telephone interviews with a further three such individuals;
- Face-to-face interviews with a total of three staff from organisations who have pending applications to the Grant Fund;
- Face-to-face interviews of informal discussions with three individuals already benefiting from Grant Fund projects;
- Synthesising the material into 12 case-study reports.
- In each case, the fieldwork for each of the case-studies was undertaken exclusively by one member of the research team;
- Interviewing five stakeholders across the three control group areas and drawing up case-study reports on these three areas;
- Undertaking 14 semi-structured face-to-face interviews involving 17 individuals with key “central stakeholders”, including Central Unit and Wales Co-operative Centre staff and Welsh Assembly Government and other members of the Programme’s Advisory Group<sup>3</sup> (a list is at Annex 1);
- Presenting to, and observing, a meeting of the Advisory Group.

### *1.3 Structure of the Report*

In the remainder of this report we:

- In Section 2, briefly explain the background for the evaluation, in terms of the Communities@One Programme’s origins, objectives and delivery mechanisms and examine policy elsewhere in the UK;
- In Section 3, present the monitoring and evaluation framework;
- In Section 4, outline our findings from our research to date;
- In Section 5, present Conclusions and Recommendations, at this stage of the research.

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<sup>3</sup> The community brokers were interviewed in the course of the case-studies and were asked a series of questions about the overall functioning of the Programme, relations with the Central Unit etc. which also feeds into the analysis of the overall management effectiveness of the Programme.

## **2.0 Background: The Communities@One Programme**

### *2.1 Digital Inclusion and the Origins of the Programme*

In the last two decades, ICT has transformed life in developed societies: whether it is used for keeping in touch with friends and relatives in other parts of the world, for enabling people to work in more flexible ways (such as home-working and operating “virtual” enterprises), for shopping and for by-passing traditional service providers such as travel agents or insurance brokers, or for accessing information about, and doing business with government, ICT either already has or is in the course of radically reshaping the way in which we live our lives.

But the very fact that ICT has the potential to empower individuals and communities means that differential access to, familiarity with and use of ICT can potentially exacerbate the gap between wealthier and more powerful groups in society – whether defined in social or spatial terms – and those who are less privileged. While “entry costs” to the use of ICT in terms of hardware and internet access costs have become progressively less, they are still not negligible for those on fixed low incomes. Even more importantly, the gap between the “knowledge rich” and the “knowledge poor” can mean that even where there is access to the ICT infrastructure, it is used in a far more constrained way by excluded groups and communities. This has led to the development of the concept of “digital inclusion” – a process which seeks to ensure greater equality of access to the potential benefits of ICT to those groups which might otherwise be excluded for economic, social, spatial or cultural reasons and to go further by using ICT as a way of empowering people to transform their lives.

“Digital inclusion” is the fundamental aim of Communities@One. Launched in January 2006 and funded by the Social Justice and Regeneration (SJR) Department of the Welsh Assembly Government and the European Regional Development Fund (from the Objective 1 and 2 Programmes for West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales respectively), the Programme is targeted at the Communities First areas: 100 wards and 32 sub-wards, identified in 2000 as the focus of a long-term, flagship community development programme to provide holistic support to the most disadvantaged communities in Wales.

The development of the Programme began in the second half of 2004 and, in origin, it was essentially opportunity-led. Funding of some £4.5 million had been informally ring-fenced under Priority 2, Measure 2 (“To Stimulate and Support Demand for ICT”) of the Objective 1 Programme for a project aimed at demonstrating the benefits of ICT for the community as a whole and supporting communities to increase their access to and use of ICT<sup>4</sup>. The then Welsh Development Agency had been developing a project (known as “e-communities”) which was intended to take this forward, but in mid-2004 the Agency’s Objective 1 funding applications were reprioritised and work on the project abandoned. At this point, the Communities Directorate of SJR was asked to take on responsibility for developing an alternative project (and to source match-funding for it) which could promote “digital inclusion” and community access to ICT.

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<sup>4</sup> Objective 1 West Wales and the Valleys Programme Complement November 2002, page 24 - 5

The Programme concept and idea – which early on focussed on targeting the initiative on Communities First areas - were developed by the Communities Directorate, but drawing on widespread informal consultation and the support of an informal (and pre-existing) network of organisations and individuals with an interest in the agenda (see Section 4) during the second half of 2004. Match-funding was secured from within the Welsh Assembly Government's budgets. A formal Objective 1 project application was developed in the first half of 2005 and funding secured, with the first staff appointed in the autumn of 2005.

## 2.2. Communities@One: Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of Communities@One is to “help achieve social inclusion through the use of technology – digital inclusion” and more particularly “to enable communities and individuals to use ICT in ways relevant to them to enhance their quality of life, overcome difficulties and allow them to fulfil their social, economic and cultural potential”<sup>5</sup>.

In this broad context, Communities@One at its outset had four interrelated objectives (as set out in Box 2.1)<sup>6</sup>:

### Box 2.1: Communities@One Objectives

**ICT enabled communities** – to encourage and support community use of ICT to ensure ICT access, skills progression and outreach to the disengaged. It will help engage citizens with community organisations and activities. This objective will include ensuring that suitable ICT support provision is made available throughout the project area, using existing provision where possible but delivered to common quality thresholds.

**National and local information and support structures**– to ensure that the local projects delivering the programme are well guided and have the capacity to deliver results, that resources are channelled as effectively as possible and that a network of support and sharing is established. Good practice will be identified and exemplars will be established as points of references for other community organisations involved in this initiative.

**A community sector enabled by ICT** – will be developed which is well co-ordinated with local regeneration partnerships and is able to make the best strategic use of ICT for efficient operations both within its own organisations and the communities it serves. The project will resource local community brokers to provide support to community organisations to develop a range of projects. This, in turn, will enable local organisations to engage local ICT specialists to support their work, so creating new jobs in high technology in SMEs and social enterprises.

**Better enabled service delivery** - to encourage communities to better engage with key service deliverers, including local authorities, health service providers, the police, employment and careers services and learning centres. The project will encourage service providers to make innovative use of the medium in order to forge better links with communities and fine-tune their services to local need. It will also allow community organisations to build stronger links with the National Assembly in its priority areas.

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<sup>5</sup> Guidance p. 11

<sup>6</sup> Project Plan p. 3-4

In essence, the Programme is intended to:

- use community organisations as a way of providing individuals in those communities with access to ICT infrastructure and opportunities to better understand and exploit ICT in a range of ways including a better interface with public service providers, with a view to promoting economic and social regeneration; and
- strengthen the community sector itself, both by encouraging the most effective use of ICT and building closer collaboration both between diverse community organisations operating in the same areas and increasing co-operation between community organisations and statutory service providers.

The Programme is firmly based on encouraging bottom-up, community-based initiatives, but at the same time seeks to provide “central” expertise, ensure common quality standards and disseminate good practice. The Programme’s underlying principles (see Box 2.2)<sup>7</sup> underline the importance of capitalising on existing provision, including building new linkages between existing ICT provision, rather than creating parallel structures.

*Box 2.2: Communities@One Underlying Principles*

New provision is brought to areas where it does not currently exist;

Existing provision is extended to provide an outreach capacity for the most marginalized groups;

Contact is made between ICT activities that are already in place in order that they no longer stand alone and can benefit from working and learning together and sharing experiences;

Priorities are identified locally by community groups in conjunction with a community broker

*2.3 Communities@One Delivery Mechanisms*

2.3.1 Budget

The overall budget for Communities@One is £9.565 million for the period until June 2008. Just over £5 million of this was originally earmarked for the Grant Fund, with just over £1.5 million allocated for the costs of the Central Team (staff, management costs and overheads of the managing body and marketing). The balance of the funding – some £3 million – was allocated for outreach support costs, with around £1.7 million of this allocated to meet the costs of the Community Brokers (staff and location costs) and the balance available for technical support.

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<sup>7</sup> Guidance, p. 12

### 2.3.2 The Grant Fund

The Grant Fund represents a key element of the Communities@One Programme – although it is important to stress, as should be clear from Section 2.2 above, that the Programme is more than a Grant Scheme.

According to the Communities@One Guidance<sup>8</sup>, the Grant Fund is intended to provide grants of any size to groups which:

- *“are a not-for-profit community or voluntary sector group (including Communities First Partnerships)*
- *would normally be working in, and involving people from, a Communities First area, or if outside the area, the activity must be of direct benefit to the Communities First area;*
- *have a constitution or set of rules, dated and signed as “adopted” by the Chair, or other senior office holder on behalf of the group*
- *have a bank account, in the name of [the] group, which requires at least two signatures*
- *can provide a copy of [the] most recent accounts or statement of income and expenditure and a bank statement.”*

Applications must be submitted with the support of a Community Broker<sup>9</sup> but there are no upper or lower limits on the size of the application.

Larger applications (over £15,000) are assessed by a Grants Panel, which consists of members of the Advisory Panel (see 2.3.4) and which meets at least quarterly. Applications below £5,000 are assessed by a “mini-Grants” panel consisting of senior members of the Central Team (which also screens larger applications before submission to the full Grants Panel). It was originally intended that all applications over £5,000 would be assessed at Grants Panel meetings, but it has subsequently been agreed that applications between £5,000 and £15,000 should be assessed by the mini-Grants panel and then considered by the Grants Panel by written procedure<sup>10</sup>. In all cases, the Assessment Criteria used are the same and are outlined in Box 2.3 (over).

Although the grant criteria originally excluded national voluntary organisations, this was revisited by the Advisory Panel in May 2006, when it was decided that projects promoted by national organisations could be considered where it was the case *“that the Community Broker Managers confirm that the service or project could not otherwise be provided by a local community/voluntary group”*<sup>11</sup>. The same meeting also decided that projects promoted by statutory organisations (but not by for-profit private companies) could also be considered, provided that the Community Broker Managers were convinced that a similar project could not be undertaken from within the voluntary or community sector.

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<sup>8</sup> p. 43

<sup>9</sup> Guidance, p. 45

<sup>10</sup> Minutes of Advisory Group Meeting of 10 May 2006

<sup>11</sup> Advisory Group Meeting, 10 May 2006, Document 3, p.1

*Box 2.3: Grant Fund Assessment Criteria*

<p><b>Community Benefit</b> Is there a clear identified need for the project? Does the application benefit the community, in general, as a whole and is it available to all of the community? Are there any parts of the community which would directly benefit from the project? Is there evidence that the project can achieve the results described in the application?</p> <p><b>Marginalised Groups</b> Does the application help the digital inclusion of e.g.: Minority Ethnic Groups People with Disabilities Older/Younger People Other</p> <p><b>Innovation</b> Is the application innovative in looking at new ways of engaging people with ICT? Will it date quickly?</p> <p><b>Sustainability</b> Is this sustainable in longer term? What is needed to make it so? Does the project have the potential to generate income and move towards self-sustainability?</p> <p><b>Support</b> Has the group identified the skills it needs to make a project work? Does the group have the existing skills to do the project? What support does the group need, is this factored into the bid?</p> <p><b>"Do" ability</b> Is the project do-able - given skills, costs and support? What existing provision is already in the community concerned? Does it or should it link to other projects? Is there scope for partnership working with other local projects? Does the project bring additional benefits if it is an existing project?</p> <p><b>Links with Partnerships/Strategies</b> What evidence is there of links with other strategies at both a local and national level?</p> <p><b>Jobs (for applications in excess of £5,000)</b> How many jobs, if any, are created through the application? How many jobs, if any, are safeguarded through this application? What informal training is provided for Group Members?</p> <p><b>Performance</b> Has the applicant set measurable outcomes?</p> <p><b>Management systems</b> Does the group have the capacity to manage the grant/project?</p> <p><b>Eligibility</b> Does the project meet eligibility requirements of WEFO including measures to promote environmental awareness? (checking what the WEFO requirements are and then this will be a fuller question for the brokers to answer)</p> <p><b>Cost effectiveness</b> Does the project demonstrate value for money?</p>
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Grants are available for a wide range of projects, both capital and revenue, which are seen to help promote digital inclusion. Examples given in the Guidance include not only supporting existing locally-based ICT projects and “*setting up new computer provision*” in communities where this is not readily available, but also projects to support mentoring of individuals in the use of ICT and applications from community projects without a specific ICT focus which “*display an innovative approach to utilising ICT and bridging the “digital divide” within their locality*”<sup>12</sup>. Support is not restricted to groups which provide general public access to equipment and ICT is deliberately defined in a broad fashion:

*‘ICT refers to any technology that is used to communicate, provide or find information. Obvious examples are computers, the Internet, e-mail, telephones, mobile phone and even digital television and radio’*<sup>13</sup>.

### 2.3.3 The Central Team

Although the Programme is “owned” by the Social Justice and Regeneration Department of the Welsh Assembly Government, who were the applicant for the ERDF funding, the management and delivery of the Programme were contracted out through a public procurement process to the Wales Co-operative Centre, a not-for-profit organisation whose main remit is the promotion of social enterprise. The Programme’s Central Team is based in the Centre’s headquarters in Cardiff and consists of:

- The Programme Manager, Alun Burge, who was recruited by open competition but who is a secondee from the Welsh Assembly Government and who was responsible in his previous role as Head of Communities First for developing the Programme;
- Two Community Broker Managers (it was originally intended to recruit only one Manager) who have line management responsibility for the Community Brokers but also undertake a number of other roles within the Programme;
- A Finance Officer (integrated with the Centre’s Financial Team);
- A Marketing Officer (working alongside the Centre’s own Marketing Manager);
- A Technical Support Officer who provides advice not just to Programme staff but direct to Grant Fund applicants and projects;
- An Administrative Officer.

The overall role of the Central Team<sup>14</sup> is to:

- Provide management support to Community Brokers;
- Ensure that Community Brokers are aware of interesting initiatives so that community and interest groups are kept informed of latest developments;
- Manage [the] grant fund that will be used to fund projects and required technical support at a local level;
- Maintain contact with other initiatives and developments across Wales and beyond;
- Provide quarterly reports to WEFO and the Communities Directorate;
- Ensure that the initiative is appropriately marketed.

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<sup>12</sup> Guidance, p. 45- 46

<sup>13</sup> Guidance, p. 21

<sup>14</sup> Guidance, p. 17

The Team is line-managed by Lesley Jones, who is the Deputy Chief-Executive of the Wales Co-operative Centre.

The Central Team is assisted by the Advisory Panel, which was, however, set up at the initiative of the SJR Department, with Members appointed by the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration.

The Terms of Reference of the Group, as agreed at its first formal meeting in November 2005<sup>15</sup> are *“to support the successful delivery of the project by providing informed advice to the Wales Co-operative Centre and the Project Manager”* and more particularly to

- Discuss and advise on the overall strategic direction of the project;
- Receive and consider quarterly reports on project activity including statistics relating to project targets;
- Nominate a number of representatives to sit on the Grant Panel which will assess grant applications from community organisations and make recommendations for grant payments to the Wales Co-operative Centre;
- Advise on procurement and provision of technical support at a local level;
- Undertake any additional activities as may be identified and agreed with the Wales Co-operative Centre.

The Panel is chaired by David Jenkins, who is Chair of the Wales Co-operative Centre and also holds a number of other relevant appointments and meets quarterly.

#### 2.3.4. Community Brokers and “Outreach”

According to the Communities@One guidance, the *“Community Brokers are pivotal to the success of the Communities @One initiative”*<sup>16</sup>. There are currently 11 Brokers in post<sup>17</sup>. Although they are on the payroll of the Wales Co-operative Centre and were recruited centrally, they are based in the field, located with bodies which were perceived to be playing a critical role with regard to digital inclusion and to Communities First (mostly local authorities or County Voluntary Councils [CVCs]). Their formal responsibilities (as envisaged at the outset of the Programme) are set out in Box 2.4<sup>18</sup> (over), although they are also expected to play a key role in *“the identification and dissemination of best practice [which] will be at the heart of this project”*<sup>19</sup>.

In reality, however, the role of the Brokers has evolved considerably since the “model” job description was developed and a new version more reflective of actual practice is being drawn up. Much of the initial effort of the Brokers has been concentrated on

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<sup>15</sup> Draft Terms of Reference and Minutes of the Meeting of 1 November 2005

<sup>16</sup> p. 17

<sup>17</sup> A twelfth post was originally envisaged to cover RCT. However at the outset of the Programme it was agreed with the local authority that there was a degree of overlap with a separate, Local Authority-led Objective 1 project, Shape-IT.org, and that for the first six months Communities@One would not be actively promoted in RCT. After the six months this was reviewed, and while it was agreed that it would be appropriate for Communities@One to be promoted in RCT, by this point, the Grant Fund was already heavily committed, so it was decided not to appoint an additional Broker.

<sup>18</sup> Guidance, p. 18-19 and “Model Brokers job description” at Annex B, p. 69 onwards

<sup>19</sup> Project Plan, p. 14

developing networks and partnerships and more particularly helping to develop, as well as co-ordinate, applications for the Grant Fund.

*Box 2.4: Brokers roles and responsibilities*

Establish links and partnerships with key local agencies (community/voluntary, statutory and private) and develop their role in digital inclusion.

Work alongside local people to help them to overcome barriers to access and facilities.

Review local ICT and Internet resources, facilities and barriers to access.

Assist in drawing together baseline information in order to identify gaps in current provision and access and developing creative and effective ways of meeting needs, e.g. through local content and networks.

Promote and enhance use of local resources and facilities among new and existing users.

Advise new and existing Internet users and groups of rights and responsibilities and any appropriate codes, protocols or standards.

Co-ordinate applications from local groups and present them to the Advisory Group for consideration.

Help local community groups access other prospective funding sources.

Motivate and work with a team of volunteer community champions and activists and community tutors who promote interest in learning locally.

Work in partnerships with local learning providers to create learning progression routes.

Work in partnership with local agencies, to create joined-up approaches to skills development and job seeking.

Promote government services online through appropriate local channels.

Brokers are expected to work closely with the Communities First Partnerships, but are not directly answerable to them. On the contrary, the Guidance makes clear that brokers

*“may, if appropriate, convene and work with a local group to assist in the development of the Communities @One programme at the local level. The Community Broker may also work with any previously existing groups. However, it will be for the Community Broker to determine the most appropriate way forward”<sup>20</sup>.*

Besides the direct assistance of the Brokers, the Programme was conceived as having a key role to play in building up the local availability of technical support, both by increasing the capacity of community organisations themselves and by encouraging the

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<sup>20</sup> p. 18

development of local social entrepreneurs capable of providing such support. Ensuring the provision of adequate and long-term technical support was seen as a crucial way of underpinning the Programme’s sustainability, since prior research had suggested that lack of technical support was often a cause of ICT infrastructure within deprived communities being unused<sup>21</sup>.

The Project Plan refers to “Circuit riders” as one of the key elements of the Programme (alongside the management agency and the central unit, the Advisory Group, the Community Brokers, and the Grant Fund) who would be:

*“local ICT specialists, ... funded for project support through the central fund. Local ICT specialists from the communities themselves will be encouraged to apply for consulting status as a means of creating tangible social enterprises. These Circuit Riders will be available as a resource for the Community Brokers to support bottom up project creation, assistance with any IT related queries/issues and to advise on such matters as required”<sup>22</sup>.*

A Technical Support Fund, with a budget of well over £1 million was created in order to underpin these efforts.

## 2.4 Digital Inclusion Elsewhere in the U.K.

### 2.4.1 Introduction

In this section we consider the broader UK policy context relevant to the area of tackling the “digital divide”. In doing so, it is important to stress at the outset that some of the policy documents labelled “UK” appear in practice to apply only to England. In fact, several UK Government departments have published strategies that deal with digital inclusion to varying degrees, including the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)<sup>23</sup>, the Cabinet Office (E-Envoy’s Office), the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). As such, there does not appear to be a “natural home” for digital inclusion policy, or indeed a Ministerial portfolio with direct and over-arching responsibility for it. We therefore consider a number of policy and strategy documents at a UK level which set out Government thinking on the digital inclusion agenda which are relevant in the context of the Communities @ One Programme. We also consider briefly the London Advice Services Alliance which influenced early thinking about Communities@One and digital inclusion policy in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

### 2.4.2 UK Government Policy

**“Inclusion through Innovation (Tackling Social Exclusion through New Technologies)”** is a report published by the Social Exclusion Unit<sup>24</sup> (SEU) of the former ODPM in November 2005.

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<sup>21</sup> BT: Communities@One audit, p1.

<sup>22</sup> p. 7

<sup>23</sup> Now the Department for Communities and Local Government.

<sup>24</sup> The strategy forms part of the Social Exclusion Unit’s (SEU) wider work programme – *Improving Services, Improving Lives* – which aims to make public services more effective for disadvantaged people, in order to improve their life chances.

The report explores the role of ICT in improving service delivery and outcomes for socially excluded groups and focuses on the key problems faced by them. Its focus is less on overcoming disparities in access to technology than in how technology can be used to address broader social exclusion, recognising that *“much remains to be done...[including]...tackling problems of worklessness, homeless children and health inequalities”*.

The report states that *“ICTs offer considerable potential to support solutions to exclusion problems”* and points to a small number of examples of this already happening (including inter-agency information sharing initiatives, community websites and mobile phone services). However, whilst some fairly limited good practice has already been identified and is referred to in the report, the SEU also recognises that there is *“very little evidence of serious evaluation [or] roll out of successful trials”* and goes on to say that there is a pronounced need *“to explore and understand the generic motivations, aspirations and experiences of socially excluded people in relation to ICT, so that e-services and support can be more appropriately tailored to their needs”*.

*“Inclusion through Innovation”* suggests that there are three main ways in which ICT can help deliver benefits to excluded groups of society:

- Firstly, through *“strategic planning and evaluating services”*. This rather vague and all embracing heading encompasses the need to target public services and develop *“efficient, tailored local plans to improve delivery”*;
- Secondly, by *“joining up services around the needs of the person”*. The report recognises that people can often be *“customers”* of multiple agencies simultaneously and that using ICT to join up government needs to *“go beyond the superficial sharing of personal details”*. The document suggests that an approach based on *“triggers of intervention”* needs to be developed (e.g. early warning systems for youth offenders). It goes on to state that such an approach would demand *“strong and clear partnership working arrangements”* regarding data sharing and co-coordinating actions;
- Thirdly (and perhaps of most interest in the context of C@O) through *“personal development and active inclusion in employment, social groups and community participation [which can] all be helped by technology”*. Examples here include ICTs being used to provide support, advice and information (mainly through websites) and in combating isolation and empowering people in deprived communities.

As will be seen, these are largely focused on service delivery rather than engaging socially excluded groups with ICT. While the report expands on these three themes in a section entitled *“What does ICT do to address Social Exclusion”*?, the issues explored are similarly largely focused on public service delivery (and their improvement) and do not explore pro-active measures to encourage engagement with ICT at grassroots community level.

Finally, the report proposes a series of actions to move forward with the digital inclusion agenda. In summary, these actions include:

- Using ICT as a tool for “*citizen engagement*”. Whilst this is outlined as a priority throughout the document, it is very much focused on citizen participation (particularly excluded groups) in service design and e-government;
- Bringing initiatives together through an “*independent unit*” to be known as the Digital Inclusion Unit for England which “*should be a third sector agency, with local and national representation on the governing body, with the key objectives of identifying and evaluating good practice, providing technical and practical guidance on roll out and implementation of good practice, providing and stimulating leadership on delivery of good practice, and stimulating communities of users and leaders to promote discussion and understanding*”<sup>25</sup>;
- Developing more detailed guidance across Government as to how ICT can be used to support information sharing about excluded groups. The report acknowledges that this will by no means be a straightforward task and outlines that the “*problem is trust and agreeing roles and responsibilities*”.

“**Connecting the UK: The Digital Strategy**” was jointly published by the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit and the Department of Trade and Industry in March 2005. It refers back to the 1998 *Knowledge Economy White Paper* and the subsequent establishment of the office of e-Envoy and Minister for e-Commerce as evidence of the Government’s commitment to the e-agenda in its broadest context.

The document depicts the UK as “*the most extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7*”<sup>26</sup> and refers to the 6,000 or so UK online centres across the UK (ranging from community centres to libraries, colleges and cyber cafes) as evidence of the “*Government having invested heavily in bringing the internet to every community*”.

However, the *Digital Strategy* recognises there is a digital divide and highlights the correlation between socio-economic status and owning a PC with internet access, citing evidence that individuals in the top two socio economic groups (A/B) are three times more likely to have access to the internet than those in the lowest groups (D/E). Moreover, the report points to the fact that (as of the third quarter of 2004), 48% of UK households had chosen not to access the internet from home. According to ONS research in 2004 the main reason for this is that people feel “*no need*”. This is further underscored in the document by a quote from an independent evaluation of the UK online centre network which stated that “*By far the biggest barrier to accessing ICT is interest and motivation, followed by a lack of perceived need*”.<sup>27</sup>

Other barriers which contribute to the digital divide outlined in the report include lack of knowledge and confidence to use the internet (cited by 35% of those interviewed by the ONS), the perceived cost of PCs and internet access, the perceived complexity of PCs

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<sup>25</sup> It is understood that the Digital Inclusion Unit located in the City of London Corporation but staffed by Cabinet Office staff on secondment has been set up with this remit, but we were unable to find much in the way of published information about it at the time of writing.

<sup>26</sup> On the basis of the falling price of broadband and increase in access to it. According to the report 99% of the UK’s population would have had broadband access available to them by the summer of 2005, with a new broadband connection being made in the UK (at the time) every 10 seconds, amounting to around 50,000 broadband connections per week.

<sup>27</sup> Report by Hall Aitken, 2003

(“PCs are not for me”) and a view amongst socially excluded groups that the content of the internet is not relevant to them

The report’s section on the reasons behind the digital divide concludes that *“evaluation, information, support and easy access to ICT are crucial to ensuring that people from low income backgrounds reap the benefits of the digital world”*.

The report provides some interesting evidence to suggest what the benefits of digital inclusion (particularly access to PCs and the internet) can be. Some examples include:

- Improved employment prospects (30% of internet users in the UK having searched for jobs online);
- Financial benefits (GLA research apparently showing an average saving of £368 p.a. after being on line for 4 years);
- Social benefits (the report quotes 66% of over 55 year olds using the internet as saying that ICT has a positive impact on their lives).

The report also states that access to a PC and the internet can also help service providers to *“reach hard to reach groups”* such as homeless people and those outside of the system, although it does not reference any examples or evidence of this.

In considering what can be done to bridge the digital divide, the report first of all affirms the Government’s belief that any intervention should first and foremost be responsive to what it describes as *“market dynamics”* defined in the document as being competition, falling process, increasingly useful ICT based services etc. *“Our objective will be to maintain the momentum of competition in the market”* – which is a clear indication of the Government’s support for regulation which facilitates the continued downward trend in prices. The document then goes on to claim that:

*“There is a clear rationale for Government involvement in tackling the digital divide and minimising social exclusion; ensuring the correct national skills framework, regulating where there is market failure and delivering responsive public services”*.

It outlines a role for the Government in a number of areas such as:

- Ensuring competitive regulation;
- Helping to promote and increase public awareness of ICT;
- Pressing ahead with delivering public services online;
- Developing public infrastructure to ensure universal availability;
- Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to acquire key ICT and basic skills to make best use of ICT.

Finally, the document outlines a series of 8 actions to close the digital divide. Of most relevance to the Communities @ One programme is Action 7 *“Improve accessibility to technology for the digitally excluded and ease of use for the disabled”*. Specific measures under this action include:

- Building on UK online centres<sup>28</sup> and ensuring that every adult enrolling on a basic skills course is given an e-mail account;
- Reforming the “Home Computing Initiative”<sup>29</sup>;
- Improving access to people with disabilities.

Action 8 makes the commitment to review progress on combatting the digital divide in 2008.

**“Enabling a Digitally United Kingdom: A Framework for Action”** was published by the E-Envoy’s Office<sup>30</sup> in 2004. The report is intended to “provide an overview of the current state of digital engagement” looking at demand side (i.e. how individuals are currently benefiting from being digitally engaged) and at the supply side (how industry, the voluntary sector and Government are benefiting from digital engagement).

The report is based on a very thorough analysis of digital inclusion in the UK (and rehearses many of the arguments and baselines subsequently described in *Connecting the UK*). Table 2.1 is an extract from the report and summarises the benefits of digital engagement:

Table 2.1: Benefits of digital engagement.

Individual Consumers	Industry, Gov’t and the Voluntary Sector
<p><b>Financial savings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Price reduction of charged-for service;</li> <li>○ Reduced cost of transmitting information;</li> <li>○ Reduced travel costs.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Improved service delivery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Greater take-up of entitlements</li> <li>○ Improved user satisfaction</li> <li>○ Improved communication</li> <li>○ Improved reputation, increased user trust</li> <li>○ Enhanced customer service</li> </ul>
<p><b>Time savings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reduced user time</li> <li>○ Reduced need for multiple data submissions</li> <li>○ Reduced travel time</li> </ul>	<p><b>Time savings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reduced processing through common standards such as databases</li> <li>○ Employee time savings</li> <li>○ Reduced error rates</li> <li>○ Reduced need for multiple collection of data from same customer</li> <li>○ More flexible working hours</li> </ul>
<p><b>Value-based benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Improved information</li> <li>○ Improved reliability</li> <li>○ Improved choice and convenience</li> <li>○ Improved access to premium services</li> </ul>	<p><b>Resource efficiency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reduced systems redundancy through integrated systems</li> <li>○ More effective use of existing (electronic and non-electronic) infrastructure, reduced wastage of capacity</li> </ul>

<sup>28</sup> The network of open-access ICT facilities in libraries, community centres etc.

<sup>29</sup> HCI is a Government initiative designed to make it easy for employers to offer computers at a very good price to their staff. However, despite this recommendation tax breaks for employers which was at the heart of the Initiative were brought to an end in the 2006 Budget.

<sup>30</sup> Part of the UK Government’s Cabinet Office.

In terms of the role of ICT in promoting social inclusion, the report comments that:

*“Ongoing lack of digital engagement on the part of large numbers in our society will risk exacerbating family, economic and social problems; a more inclusive society, by contrast offers the opportunity to build a stronger, wealthier and more equal United Kingdom. Specifically, lack of digital engagement on the part of individuals and communities as result of age, ethnicity, disability or income means their identities and cultures remain largely invisible. In this regard, the ‘network’ effect of communications technology is important”.*

The report concludes with a series of three headline recommendations which embrace a wide range of different suggestions including:

- Government should provide key stakeholders with ongoing market intelligence on the supply of and demand for ICT. The sharing of this research evidence should be supplemented with cross-sector meetings to encourage collaborative innovation and ongoing progress;
- Government should continue to join up services around the needs of citizens via DirectGov and the enhanced role of the new e-Government Unit, while evaluating services to ensure the realisation of benefits for all, including those who are currently not digitally engaged;
- Government should continue to support the national network of 6,000 UK online centres, because trusted intermediaries that have a deep understanding of their client group are often better equipped than government to deliver services for hard-to-reach groups. UK online centres are also an important community resource, providing the necessary lift to enable often hard-to-reach groups of people to become digitally engaged. Innovation in these areas should continue;
- The Government should look to encourage the establishment of an industry-led body that focuses on encouraging digital take-up through social enterprise, supported with corporate social responsibility initiatives. The organisation should build on the many different projects that exist regionally and locally, and should create new partnerships and joined-up initiatives within existing organisational frameworks<sup>31</sup>;
- Government should encourage Intellect, the trade body, to convene a new cross-industry, fully representative group that focuses on the implications for digital engagement in the UK of the convergence of broadcasting, telecommunications, broadband and the internet, with a particular emphasis on digital content.

#### 2.4.3 London Advice Services Alliance (LASA)

LASA is a charity that provides support to voluntary organisations including information and advice to practitioners as well as influencing policy and stimulating good practice. It has a particular interest in promoting and developing the use of ICT in the voluntary sector and has been involved in developing and delivering a “Circuit Rider” initiative since

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<sup>31</sup> This would appear to be the impetus behind the proposal to establish the Digital Inclusion for England

2002. Circuit riders are “*people who support other organisations to make the best use of technology*” and the term is used to cover a range of professionals working in the voluntary and community sector. LASA’s Circuit Rider project (now in its second phase)<sup>32</sup> provides the following services:

- An initial site visit consisting of an IT Health check, consultation on strategy and project plans;
- Assistance with IT problems;
- Technical support (through a contracted technical support company);
- Development of individual recommendations and action plans;
- Periodic follow up visits, usually around six per organisation;
- Training sessions and seminars;
- Subscription to LASA’s newsletter service;
- Telephone and e-mail help-line, website and private mail discussion list.

The Circuit Riders work in various types of organisations including social enterprises, community groups and infrastructure organisations which operate ICT projects. They provide (depending on the individual’s specialism) a wide range of ICT related support from repairing and fixing hardware through to training and general strategic advice and consultancy.

#### 2.4.4 Digital Inclusion Policy in Scotland and Northern Ireland

In “***Digital Inclusion: Connecting Scotland’s people***” (undated – but believed to be from around 2001/2), the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning outlines the Scottish Executive’s vision for a digitally inclusive Scotland as being one which:

*“will ensure more equal, effective and beneficial access for all people to the digital technologies and Web facilities that benefit them in their day-to-day lives. In a digitally-inclusive Scotland, the public, private, and voluntary sectors will make positive use of digital technologies and the Web to improve quality of life and deliver new opportunities for disadvantaged individuals and communities.”*

In terms of a baseline, the report outlines that at the time it was published (which is undated) almost 25% of Scottish households were online (compared with an estimated 47% in Wales in 2007<sup>33</sup>).

The strategy recognises that “*a significant proportion of society does not have access to any of the new communication tools*” and that the “*the digital divide*” to a large extent affects those which are already most excluded within society. It identifies several reasons why a significant proportion of the population do not, or cannot, make full use of the internet and related ICT. These can be summarised as:

- Perceived or Actual Costs;
- Lack of Access;
- Lack of Skills;
- Cultural/Community Barriers;

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<sup>32</sup> The project is a two year initiative (to April 2007) working with sixteen London based grantee organisations, the Bridge House Trust and Big Lottery Fund.

<sup>33</sup> Wales Consumer Council Research 2007

- Personal Attitudes.

The strategy proposes to take action in the following ways:

- Awareness and Promotion: Ensuring that excluded individuals and groups are aware of the opportunities that ICTs can provide;
- Access: Disadvantaged individuals and communities must have access to ICTs at the time, place, method and price appropriate to their needs and lifestyles;
- Support: Providing reliable, accessible and cost-effective sources of advice and support is crucial;
- Skills: Providing the basic computer and technological skills that will instil individuals with the confidence to use ICTs;
- Content: Ensuring that disadvantaged individuals and communities are provided with, or develop themselves, online content and services that they value and wish to use;
- Community Involvement: Ensuring that the initiatives are sustainable at a local level, and that local communities have a sense of ownership.

It goes on to specify a number of key priorities in the following areas:

- Conducting a major campaign with the UK Government to raise the awareness of the general public of the benefits of getting online;
- Increasing awareness of existing opportunities for public access to the internet by mapping and publishing the locations of all such facilities in Scotland;
- Significantly increasing the number of venues across Scotland which offer public access to the internet;
- Developing two pilot digital communities in disadvantaged areas in Scotland.

The ***“Digital Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland”*** covers the period from May 2003 to December 2005. Whilst this strategy is now clearly out of date, there does not seem to be a more recent replacement for it. The strategy outlines a view that *“all citizens, who so wish, should have access to modern technology and should be able to take advantage of opportunities offered by the internet, email, word processing, database, spreadsheet and other related electronic tools”* and sets as its goal *“to ensure that every Northern Ireland citizen has the opportunity to maximise the use of computing and internet technologies to enhance their quality of life”*.

Research conducted in April 2002 by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) highlighted a number of obstacles which prevent citizens from making greater use of computing and Internet technologies. These included:

- Lack of interest;
- Lack of access to the technology; and
- Lack of relevant computing and Internet skills.

The strategy also makes clear that information on digital inclusion initiatives and opportunities are not widely available. This in turn has led to an under-estimation and lack of knowledge of the range and abundance of computing and internet initiatives already in place. As a result, a key action is to build and maintain an up-to-date knowledge base of relevant activities and initiatives, which should include schemes and

programmes aimed at helping citizens access and make use of computing and internet technologies.

The strategy acknowledges that the best way to ensure that all citizens enjoy the benefits of the “Information Age” is through co-operation amongst all those interested in the topic. The strategy argues that this would need to involve a partnership approach between (but should not be limited to) the 11 central government Departments, their Agencies and sponsored bodies, local government, the private sector and the community and voluntary sector.

In terms of monitoring progress, the strategy outlines as its goal that by 31 December 2005:

- The percentage of NI citizens who will recognise and be prepared to take advantage of the access opportunities available, will be on a par with ‘information elite’ countries; and
- Difficulties experienced by certain groupings in society in accessing modern computing and Internet technology will have been overcome.

It is not clear to what extent these goals have been met by the strategy.

### **3.0 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**

#### *3.1 Introduction*

In this Section we:

- Introduce our proposed evaluation framework
- discuss issues to be taken into account in developing and implementing the framework;
- set out our proposed evaluation framework model;
- describe the measures contained within the framework in a little more detail, set out proposed sources of data, the frequencies at which key measures should be monitored and identify external factors to be considered.

#### *3.2 The Framework Model*

The evaluation framework we propose is based on the Treasury Model and provides a structure of process, output, outcome and impact measures to be reviewed at specific points in time. It is designed to articulate a suite of common measures that provide an insight into the progress made and the results achieved across the wide range of activities supported under the Communities@One Programme. The framework model shown below<sup>34</sup> is followed by a table (Table 3.1) which sets out the sources of data which it is proposed should be used for measurement/assessment, the frequency with which it is proposed indicators should be measured and external factors which should be taken into account when considering individual measures.

In the interest of simplicity, the Model is presented in two halves, the first focused on the work undertaken with community groups prior to the award of grant funding or technical support or which is not related to providing funding (for example, networking by the Brokers which results in groups which have not previously worked together starting to do so) and the second revolving around activities undertaken as a result of groups' receiving grant funding. Since one of the major outcomes of the work of brokers with community groups (the left-hand side) is the development of grant applications, which represent one of the necessary inputs which generates the processes, outputs and outcomes of the grant-funding (the right-hand side) the two sides are not shown in parallel in the Model.

Impact measures are intended to be “long-wave” indicators which show trends over the longer term and should be reviewed roughly on an annual basis in order to allow sufficient time for projects to gather pace and policy effects to become apparent. These measures are unlikely to be wholly attributable to activities supported under the Communities@One Programme and some of the external factors which should be taken into account in reviewing changes over time are set out in the Table.

Outcome measures are intended to highlight the intermediate effects of activities and should relate logically (in theory at least) to the achievement of longer term impacts. The outcome measures proposed represent the point at which the assistance received by community groups begins to affect the “clients” which those groups exist to serve. Although less pronounced than in the case of impact measures, external factors will play

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<sup>34</sup> This page should be printed onto A3 size paper

a significant part in influencing the extent to which apparent outcomes can be attributed to the support provided.

Output measures seek to capture the immediate results of interventions and are far less likely than impact or outcome measures to be subject to the effects of external factors. Generally speaking, these revolve around the capacity of community groups assisted rather than any activities undertaken by the “clients” of such groups.

The purpose of process measures is to assess whether the Programme is being delivered as it was intended and to identify any scope for improvement. They are intended to look at work carried out by a range of actors involved in developing and implementing specific projects as well as the role of the Wales Co-operative Centre in facilitating and managing the Programme. In essence, this element of the evaluation framework is intended to be formative and is most likely to be pertinent when there is an expectation that the Programme is likely to be continued into the future

### *3.3 Issues to be Considered*

In developing the framework, it has been necessary to take a number of issues into consideration and these are discussed below.

#### 3.3.1 Attribution and Externalities

It must be recognised that the Programme is one of a number of “enablers” that together put the conditions in place to facilitate greater digital and wider social inclusion. Success or failure in meeting the Programme’s higher level aspirations may well owe something to the activities funded, but may also be attributable to factors outside the Programme, or “externalities”.

#### 3.3.2 Data needs and availability

The proposed framework has been shaped by consideration of the practicality and cost of accessing new data. In particular, we have been careful to minimise the demands put upon community groups in terms of gathering data and reporting to the Wales Co-operative Centre. Indeed, a significant proportion of the data will be gathered during the fieldwork with case-study areas and projects to be undertaken as part of this evaluation. In order to clarify the different sources of data, within the tables we have shown all those activities which will be undertaken by the external evaluators highlighted in red, all those which are likely to require information from projects funded by the Grant Fund in green, and those which will need information from the Brokers or Central Team in normal format. Obviously this is subject to further discussion with the Programme team. It should be noted that in the case of entries relating to video diaries and similar techniques, these will only be used in the case of community groups within case-study areas/projects and will be subject to their agreement to take part in this activity.

### 3.3.3 Diverse nature of projects

Whilst every effort will be made to avoid over-burdening community groups, the size and strategic importance of some projects supported under the Programme will merit closer scrutiny than others.

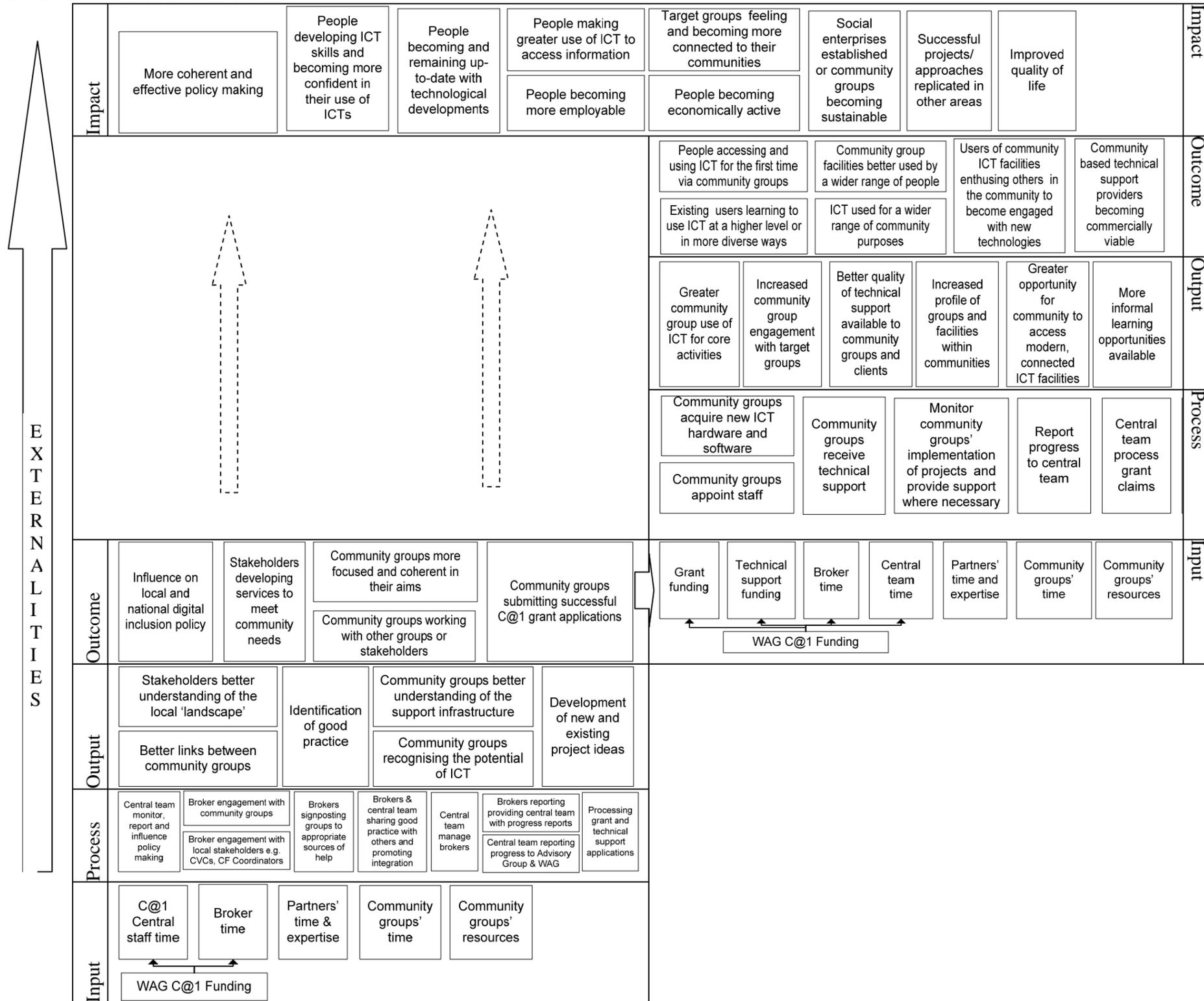
### 3.3.4 The need for the Programme to evolve as it matures

Thus far, the main focus of the Communities@One programme has been upon putting in place the infrastructure to run the Programme, upon developing relationships with community groups and other stakeholders and upon helping community groups develop project proposals. Given the Programme's relatively short planned lifespan, it has been crucial to concentrate on these aspects in order to generate the funding applications needed to ensure full and effective investment of the resources available. The original budget for the Grant Fund is now approaching full commitment and, although additional funds are being vired to provide for projects in the pipeline to come forward, the Programme will, therefore, be moving into another phase in its life. As yet, however, it is not entirely clear how this movement into an "implementation" phase will effect the roles of individuals working within the Communities@One team, and Brokers in particular. In presenting our model, we assume that the same staffing structure will be maintained for the remaining life of the Programme, but make no assumptions in relation to the roles played by different individuals.

### 3.3.5 Efficiency in evaluation

The Framework demonstrates that the Evaluation Team will need to consult a wide range of stakeholders at the local and national levels. To this end, we have assumed that the Community@One Brokers will help to set up arrangements for meetings with key stakeholders within the case-study areas/projects.

COMMUNITIES @ONE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK



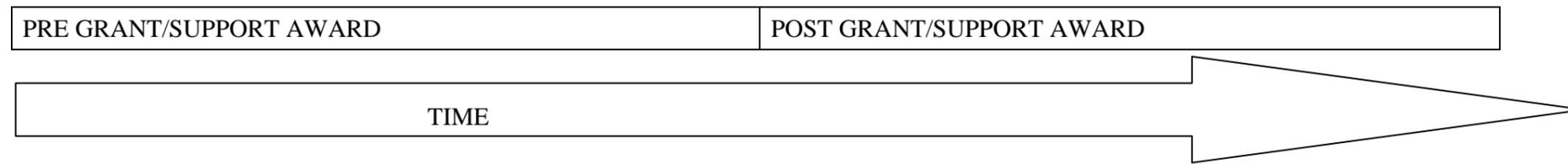


TABLE 3.1

REF	MEASURE	INDICATOR DESCRIPTOR	DATA SOURCES	TIMING/ FREQUENCY	DATA SOURCED BY	EXTERNALITY CONSIDERATIONS
IMPACT MEASURES						
	More coherent and effective policy making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence of influence on WAG and other stakeholders' policy making in Steering Group papers</li> <li>○ Stakeholder's views of degree to which programme is influencing policy making at an all Wales level as well as more locally</li> </ul>	Steering Group papers  Discussion with: Programme Manager WAG staff Other stakeholders	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008  Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Other policy pressures effecting the level of attention given to digital inclusion policy</li> </ul>
	People developing ICT skills and becoming more confident in their use of ICTs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Individuals undertaking informal ICT related activities or training using community group facilities</li> <li>○ Individuals undertaking formal ICT related courses at community group facilities</li> <li>○ Individuals progressing into learning in formal settings</li> <li>○ Individuals feeling more confident in using ICT</li> </ul>	Project progress reports Project progress reports Project progress reports  Discussion with people using community group facilities	Quarterly  Quarterly  Quarterly  Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Community groups  Community groups  Community groups  Evaluation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Continuing innovation making it difficult for marginal users to keep up with changes</li> </ul>
	People becoming and remaining up-to-date with technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Individuals making greater use of a range of new generation ICTs (including mobile</li> </ul>	Video diaries or paper/computer based journals	Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pace of technological developments outstripping people'</li> </ul>

	developments	phones, television etc)	prepared by participants in group activities			capacity to learn
	People making greater use of ICT to access information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level of usage made of community group ICT facilities</li> </ul>	Project progress reports	Quarterly	Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Roll-out of the Broadband network</li> <li>The cost of hardware</li> </ul>
	Target groups feeling and becoming more connected to their communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals engaging with community groups</li> <li>Individuals volunteering for the first time</li> </ul>	Project progress reports Discussion with people using community group facilities	Quarterly  Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Community groups  Evaluation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social problems preventing sustained engagement</li> </ul>
	People becoming more employable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals acquiring new skills required by employers</li> <li>Individuals feeling more motivated to get a job or undertake voluntary activities</li> </ul>	Video diaries or paper/computer based journals prepared by participants in group activities	Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>
	Social enterprises established or community groups becoming sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community groups generating income from sources other than C@1</li> <li>Stand alone social enterprises established as a result of C@1 support</li> </ul>	Project progress reports	Quarterly	Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change in focus of European Structural Fund programmes</li> <li>Pro-activity of CVCs in assisting groups develop their income generation capacity</li> </ul>
	Successful projects/ approaches replicated in other areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>	??	??	??	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>

	People becoming economically active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Individuals moving into employment or voluntary work</li> <li>○ Individuals entering formal learning</li> </ul>	Project progress reports Video diaries or paper/computer based journals prepared by participants in group activities	Quarterly  Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Community groups  Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Wider labour market conditions</li> </ul>
	Improved quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Individuals feeling that accessing ICT has made a positive difference to them</li> </ul>	Video diaries or paper/computer based journals prepared by participants in group activities	Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○</li> </ul>

OUTCOME MEASURES						
	Influence on local and national digital inclusion policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use made of information gleaned to influence policy</li> </ul>	Steering Group papers Discussion with: Programme Manager WAG staff	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Other policy pressures effecting the level of attention given to digital inclusion policy</li> <li>○ Assembly backing of programme giving it more 'clout'</li> </ul>
	Stakeholders developing services to meet community needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Community groups' views of changes to services provided by stakeholders such as learning providers</li> <li>○ C@1 Brokers views of changes to services provided</li> <li>○ Stakeholders' views of changes to services provided</li> </ul>	Discussion with: Community groups Brokers Others e.g. CVCs	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Budgetary pressures upon learning providers</li> </ul>
	Community groups more focused and coherent in their aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Clarity of purpose expressed by community group leaders</li> <li>○ Clarity of purpose in community group plans/documentation</li> </ul>	Discussion with: Community groups Brokers Others e.g. CVCs	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○</li> </ul>

	Community groups working with other groups or stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Community groups' views of the extent and effects of linkages forged with other groups as a result of Broker intervention</li> <li>○ Brokers views of extent and effects of linkages they have facilitated</li> <li>○ Other stakeholders' views of linkages made</li> </ul>	Discussion with: Community groups Brokers Others e.g. CVCs	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Personalities within different organisations promoting or stalling cooperation</li> </ul>
	Community groups submitting successful C@1 grant applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Grant applications submitted</li> <li>○ Grant applications approved</li> </ul>	Central database	Quarterly	Central team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Availability of C@1 funding</li> </ul>
	People accessing and using ICT for the first time via community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Individuals being introduced to ICT by community groups</li> </ul>	Discussion with people using community group facilities	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○</li> </ul>
	Existing users learning to use ICT at a higher level or in more diverse ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Individuals learning to use ICT in new and more advanced ways</li> </ul>	Discussion with people using community group facilities Video diaries or paper/computer based journals prepared by participants in group activities	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team  Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○</li> </ul>

	Community group facilities better used by a wider range of people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Numbers of people using community group ICT and other facilities</li> <li>○ Hours of computer usage</li> </ul>	Project progress reports	Quarterly	Community groups	○
	ICT used for a wider range of community purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Types of use made of ICT and other facilities</li> </ul>	Project progress reports	Quarterly	Community groups	○
	Users of community ICT facilities enthusing others in the community to become engaged with new technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ??</li> </ul>	??	??	??	○
	Community based technical support providers becoming commercially viable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Numbers of technical support organisations or networks created or strengthened by C@1 support generating sufficient income to sustain themselves</li> </ul>	Project progress reports	Quarterly	Community groups	○

OUTPUT MEASURES						
	Stakeholders better understanding of the local 'landscape'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Community groups perceptions of their understanding of other groups operating in their areas</li> <li>○ Community groups' perceptions of their knowledge of the local support infrastructure, including the statutory sector</li> <li>○ Brokers' perceptions of the level of awareness among community groups and stakeholder organisations</li> <li>○ Stakeholders' views of their understanding of community groups and their individual aspirations</li> </ul>	Discussion with: Community groups Brokers Others e.g. CVCs	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	○
	Better links between community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Joint projects supported by community groups</li> <li>○ Synergies achieved as a result of dialogue between community groups or community groups and statutory organisations</li> </ul>	Activity/ reports  Discussion with: Community groups Brokers Others e.g. CVCs	Quarterly  Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Brokers  Evaluation team	○

	Identification of good practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Examples of good practice reported by Brokers to central team</li> </ul>	Minutes of team meeting Discussion with: Central team Brokers	Quarterly  Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Central team  Evaluation team	○
	Community groups better understanding of the support infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Community groups knowing what support is available to them</li> <li>○ Community groups making contact with support agencies</li> </ul>	Discussion with: Community groups Brokers Others e.g. CVCs	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	○
	Community groups recognising the potential of ICT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use made of ICT by community groups to perform administrative and management tasks</li> <li>○ Use made of ICT by community groups as a means of attracting disengaged groups of people</li> </ul>	Discussion with: Community groups Brokers	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	○

	Development of new and existing project ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Number of project ideas which Brokers are involved in developing</li> <li>○ Number of project ideas which are developed into coherent plans</li> <li>○ Number of grant applications developed</li> <li>○ Number of technical assistance applications developed</li> </ul>	Activity reports  Central database	Quarterly	Brokers  Central team	○
	Greater community group use of ICT for core activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use made of ICT by community groups to perform administrative and management tasks</li> </ul>	Discussion with: Community groups Brokers	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	○
	Increased community group engagement with target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ New ‘clients’ engaged by community groups as a result of support received</li> </ul>	Discussion with: Community groups People using community group facilities	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	○

	<p>Better quality of technical support available to community groups and clients</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Level and nature of technical support received by community groups</li> <li>○ Community group assessment of the quality and accessibility of technical support available to them</li> </ul>	<p>Project progress reports Reports from funded technical support providers Discussion with: Community groups</p>	<p>Quarterly  Quarterly  Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008</p>	<p>Community groups  Technical support providers  Evaluation team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○</li> </ul>
	<p>Increased profile of groups and facilities within communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Stakeholders' views of the local profile of specific community groups</li> <li>○ Web-sites established</li> </ul>	<p>Discussion with: Community groups CVCs, CF coordinators Project progress reports</p>	<p>Quarterly</p>	<p>Evaluation team  Community groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○</li> </ul>
	<p>Greater opportunity for community to access modern, connected ICT facilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ICT facilities made available as a result of the project</li> </ul>	<p>Activity reports</p>	<p>Quarterly</p>	<p>Brokers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Roll-out of broadband infrastructure</li> </ul>
	<p>More informal learning opportunities available</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ New informal learning opportunities launched</li> </ul>	<p>Project progress reports</p>	<p>Quarterly</p>	<p>Community Groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Strategies pursued by Local Authorities, for example to open up access</li> </ul>

PROCESS MEASURES						
	Central team monitor, report and influence policy making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Central team keeps steering group abreast of relevant policy developments</li> <li>○ Steering group provide central team with information and advice</li> <li>○ Central team liaise with national and local stakeholders to inform about and influence policy</li> </ul>	Steering group papers Discussion with: Central team Steering group	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	○
	Broker engagement with community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Broker time spent in discussion with community groups</li> </ul>	Activity reports	Monthly	Brokers	○
	Broker engagement with stakeholders e.g. CVCs, CF Coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Broker time spent in discussion with 'partner' organisations e.g. CF Partnerships, CVCs, learning providers, local authorities etc</li> </ul>	Activity reports	Monthly	Brokers	○
	Brokers signposting groups to appropriate sources of help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Number of community groups referred to other appropriate organisations e.g. CF, CVCs etc</li> </ul>	Activity reports	Monthly	Brokers	○

	Brokers & central team sharing good practice with others and promoting integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Good practice ‘case studies’ publicised &amp; distributed to community groups</li> <li>○ Examples of good practice presented at community sector events</li> </ul>	Case studies produced	6 monthly	Central team	○
	Central team manage brokers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Central team view of the effectiveness of management processes</li> <li>○ Brokers’ views of the effectiveness and openness of management processes</li> </ul>	Discussion with: Central team Brokers	Autumn 2006 Spring 2007 Spring 2008	Evaluation team	○
	Brokers reporting providing central team with progress reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Structured activity reports</li> </ul>	Activity reports	Quarterly	Brokers	○
	Central team reporting progress to Advisory Group & WAG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Structured progress reports</li> </ul>	Advisory Group papers Reports to WAG	6 monthly	Central team	○
	Processing grant and technical support applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Number of applications processed</li> <li>○ Number of applications approved</li> <li>○ Reasons for rejecting applications</li> </ul>	Central database	Monthly	Central team	○
	Community groups acquire new ICT hardware and software	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Record of kit and software purchased</li> </ul>	Central database	Monthly	Central team	○

Community groups appoint staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Record of appointments made, including brief description of posts supported</li> </ul>	Central database	Monthly	Central team	○
Community groups receive technical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Record of technical support funded</li> <li>○ Analysis of the nature of technical support required by community groups</li> </ul>	Central database	Monthly	Central team	○
Monitor community groups' implementation of projects and provide support where necessary <sup>35</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Broker time spent in discussion with community groups after grant or technical support applications have been approved</li> <li>○ Nature of hindrances encountered by community groups</li> </ul>	Activity reports	Monthly	Brokers	○
Report progress to central team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Receipt by central team of Broker activity and progress reports</li> </ul>	Activity reports	Monthly	Brokers	○
Central team process grant claims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Report of numbers of claims received</li> <li>○ Report of payments made</li> </ul>	Advisory Group papers	Quarterly	Central team	○
Central team report progress to Advisory Group and WAG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Report on progress against targets</li> <li>○ Discussion of variances of more than 10% from targets</li> </ul>	Advisory Group papers	6 monthly	Central team	○

<sup>35</sup> This is subject to the agreement and implementation of the monitoring system

INPUT MEASURES						
	C@1 Central staff time	○ Time allocated to specific tasks	Central database	Monthly	Central team	○
	Broker time	○ Time allocated to specific tasks	Activity reports	Monthly	Brokers	○
	Partners' time & expertise	○ Input from stakeholder organisations e.g. CVCs, CF Partnerships, Local Authorities etc	Activity reports	Monthly	Brokers	○
	Community groups' time	○ Input from community group representatives	Activity reports	Monthly	Brokers	○
	Community groups' resources	○ Input from community group representatives	Activity reports	Monthly	Brokers	○
	Grant funding	○ Value of funding committed ○ Value of funding paid out	Activity reports	Monthly	Brokers	○
	Technical support funding	○ Value of support committed ○ Value of support funded/given	Activity reports	Monthly	Brokers	○

## **4.0 Findings**

In this Section we report on the findings from our fieldwork to date, drawing both on the case-study reports (for both case-study areas/projects and control group areas) and on discussions with “central stakeholders”. We consider in turn the inputs – focussing particularly on those areas outside the direct control of the Programme (as the inputs from the Programme are described in Section 2), the Programme processes and the way in which they are operating, the immediate effects (or outputs), both of the Programme’s own activity and the projects which have already received funding, the longer-term effects (or outcomes) and the impact of the Programme.

### *4.1 Inputs*

#### 4.1.1 Inputs at the Central Level

Apart from the direct resources which have been made available for the implementation of the Programme, it is clear from our consultation with central stakeholders that there have been a number of other enabling factors which have served to assist Communities@One in its early life.

Perhaps most importantly, the Programme has clearly been able to draw on a degree of pre-existing expertise and enthusiasm from a range of organisations outside the Welsh Assembly Government. Even before Communities@One was conceived, several organisations with a strong Welsh presence had been involved in digital inclusion projects. In particular:

- BT Wales had taken a particular interest in a UK project funded by BT and led by Citizens On-line - “Everybody On-line” - which had undertaken three pilot projects in Wales (in Rhyl, Bettws in Newport and Clydach Vale in RCT). These had placed a project officer in each area to foster a network of local facilities, programmes, partners and volunteers with the aim of working with the local community to understand their needs and to create a co-ordinated local action plan to overcome the barriers to increased ICT and Internet access. Building on this, BT Wales convened a small group of expert organisations which proved a nucleus of the future Advisory Group.
- Citizens On-line and the Scarman Trust had worked together on a UK-wide project funded by Microsoft but supported by the Department for Education and Skills in England, to develop the capacity of voluntary and community organisations to manage and maintain ICT “kit”.
- BBC Wales (working with partners including Cardiff University) had led a large-scale project to develop digital storytelling, motivated largely by the need to develop and experiment with new community-based media but also explicitly aiming to build capacity amongst communities to manage and exploit media technology.

These organisations (together with others such as CAN, Wisekids and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action) were brought into the process of developing thinking about the initiative early on and clearly made a very significant contribution. This was clearly very

much a two-way process, with a number of the interviewees commenting favourably on the way in which the Communities Directorate of SJR had welcomed and built on the advice which they had proffered:

*“The really nice thing about the project was the advisory group – it was a really nice process to be involved with...people said stuff and it got to listened to”*

The members of the Advisory Group have clearly continued to provide a considerable input to the operation of the Programme, often without cost to it: for example, both BBC Wales and Wisekids were said to have provided substantial amounts of technical advice on grant applications in support of the Technical Support Officer.

This support was all the more important because of the almost complete lack of experience and awareness of the Communities Directorate staff when they were first asked to develop the initiative, as they themselves acknowledged – although this may in itself have been helpful in ensuring that outside expertise was drawn in. In terms of the overall capacity of the Welsh Assembly Government to provide support and impetus to the Programme, it was clear that a key issue was the perceived political support for digital inclusion from the highest level:

*“Ministers were as quick as any of us in understanding what it was all about”*

However, at the same time there were more mixed views as to the extent to which Welsh Assembly Government structures were an enabling factor. While almost everyone interviewed felt that relationships between the Communities@One team and the Communities Directorate were excellent, a small number felt that the latter had insufficient resources to drive the initiative forward with one suggesting that the digital inclusion agenda was not widely understood across the whole Department, and another arguing that, as a consequence, the Communities@One team were leading on areas (for example, making linkages to the UK and other Government departments) which were properly ones which should be dealt with “in-house” within the Assembly. This same interviewee felt that the lack of a clear social inclusion strategy for Wales made it difficult to understand how digital inclusion fitted in, and to establish precisely how Communities@One was intended to contribute to it: the lack of a clearly articulated social inclusion policy, and of a clear digital inclusion policy as part of it, was seen as making it difficult, if not impossible, to make sure that the Programme’s activities were in line with wider Welsh Assembly Government policy.

As far as other Welsh Assembly Government Departments were concerned, there were mixed views about the degree of engagement of DEIN<sup>36</sup>, with several interviewees feeling that key parts of the Department had not grasped that the key to digital inclusion was not investment in infrastructure but changing people’s attitudes, while others, particularly those within the Communities@One team feeling that fairly strong support was provided. By contrast, in terms of DELLS<sup>37</sup>, most of those commenting felt that, despite positive contributions from the e-learning branch, there was very little engagement from the Department as a whole:

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<sup>36</sup> The Department of Enterprise Innovation and Networks

<sup>37</sup> The Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

*“the ownership is not really there at a senior level within DELLS”*

For some, this was a serious problem, given that the resources available for learning swamped those available to the Programme. One interviewee argued forcefully that while DELLS was formally committed to “widening participation”, this was seen only in terms of Colleges providing accredited learning in community locations, which might work for 70 or 80% of the population but not for the other 20% who were most excluded.

The existence of the Communities First Programme was clearly another key contextual factor for the development and implementation of the Programme. In general, stakeholders felt that the targeting of the Communities@One Programme had, in practice, either been a positive factor, in that there were established structures for the Programme and more particularly the Brokers to relate to and build on:

*“[it was] a vehicle to piggy back on.....using Communities First allowed things to work”*

- or at worst a necessary evil (*“I’m resigned to it”*), given the limited resources available to the Programme and the short time-scales with which the Programme was developed. It is important to stress that, because of the finite life of the Objective 1 Programme, it was clear from the start of the work to develop the Programme in late 2004 that it could last no longer than June 2008: in these circumstances, targeting on Communities First wards meant, for many interviewees, giving the Programme a quick start:

*“I can’t emphasise too much how much we felt under time pressure – I’ve never been involved in anything like it”*

Even those interviewees who were sceptical about the targeting on Communities First wards had been surprised that (thus far at least) this had caused relatively little problems in terms of complaints and resentment from non-eligible areas.

Experience of Communities First was also an important input to the development of Communities@One in a different way: learning the lessons of what had not worked, or had not worked well. The decision to employ Community Brokers on a single contract by one organisation was said to be an explicit reaction to the disparity between different employment conditions of Communities First Co-ordinators (who are employed by the lead bodies for Community First in each area, although the funding is provided by the Welsh Assembly Government).

The skills and experience of the Wales Co-operative Centre - in particular in project management and, more specifically in managing European-funded projects - were also seen to be another important resource behind the Programme – even though the Centre itself had no specific experience of digital inclusion to draw on.

*“the fact the Coop Centre has systems which means questions can be answered straight away underpins the working relationship [with the Assembly]”.*

Even those interviewees who said they had been sceptical as to the involvement of the Centre at first felt that the organisation had made a major contribution in terms of turning the Programme from a concept into reality, while interviewees (particularly those

in the public sector) were clear that it could never have got off the ground so quickly without the organisational skills of the Centre.

*“a civil servant mentality wouldn’t have worked with this project – it needed to be innovative”.*

For their part, interviewees within the Centre felt that the nature of the arrangement with the Assembly – not a contract for delivery, but a system of devolved management – was a major asset, because responsibility for the success of the Programme was shared:

*“It’s a real partnership – it’s their’s and it’s ours”*

One area of weakness underlying the Programme was, however, highlighted by several interviewees – the lack of any coherent mapping of facilities and capacity across the Communities First areas. Although the Programme was able to draw on a number of studies, undertaken by Citizens On-line, the WCVA (on behalf of the then ELW and concentrating on the voluntary sectors use of e-learning) and BT, those involved with these studies admitted they were *“quick and dirty”*, highlighting some generic lessons (for example, that the key issues were not around the existence of “kit” but around the skills and motivation of people in deprived communities to use it) and the demographic groups who were most likely to be digitally excluded. In practice, the research did not provide anything like comprehensive spatial mapping – a view which was confirmed by our own review of these documents. While Brokers were asked to undertake their own mapping as part of their initial period in post, several interviewees believed this had not happened, and were concerned that lack of good awareness of the baseline position in each area could make it more difficult for Brokers to ensure that they were making the right linkages as well as making it impossible to measure the success or otherwise of their activities:

*“We had no idea what was out there, what we were going to build on...it was a shot in the dark .... We’re still in that position – “we really have no firm evidence to go on”*

#### 4.1.2 Inputs at the Local Level

As might be expected, it was clear from our case-studies that one of the key, if not, the key contextual issues shaping the work of Communities@One in the field is the way in which **Communities First** is working (or not) in the areas where Brokers are working. As one Broker said:

*“most brokers will tell you the same: where CF is working well, Communities@one is a doddle, where it isn’t its tough going”*

In four of the ten “area-based” case-studies<sup>38</sup>, it was clear from a variety of sources that the Communities First process and structures were highly problematic and divisive:

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<sup>38</sup> For the purposes of this analysis we have included PC Care Sandfields, one of the project-focussed case-studies, because it is based almost entirely in an area covered by one Communities First Partnership

- In one case, all those interviewed labelled the current position “*a disaster*”, though a breakdown in relationships between the Partnership and the accountable body was relatively new.
- In a second, where there had been a succession of Community First Co-ordinators, the latest of which had only been in post for three months, no-one, including the Co-ordinator could name a single thing that the partnership had achieved.
- In a third, there had been a breakdown in relationships between the local authority (the accountable body) the CVC and the management committee of the only community centre within the area.
- In the fourth, there had been very widely publicised problems leading to a change in accountable bodies and a voluntary agreement that the local authority would not attempt to undertake any community development work in the area.

Of the remaining six, Communities First appeared to be functioning very well in one and smoothly in two (despite, as one Co-ordinator put it “*the inevitable personality clashes now and again which can cause problems*”). In the three others, there were less serious problems occasioned, in one case, by “*antagonism*” between the Partnership and the only other significant voluntary organisation in the area, in another by what was perceived as the lack of priority given to Communities First by the local authority and in the third by a perceived gap between the broader community and the individuals on the Partnership Board, described by one observer as:

*“reds, the retired and well heeled, the educated and the vocal”*

While the state of Communities First was a very major issue in terms of determining what Brokers could achieve, it is important to stress that it did not appear to be conclusive. In three of the four cases where Communities First was the most difficult, the Brokers appear to have managed to “*work round*” the problems, by a mixture of diplomacy and simply ignoring the formal mechanisms of Communities First (in other words, not attending Partnership Board meetings). Only in one of the four cases (where the community was also geographically isolated from other Communities First areas) did it appear that the local politics of Communities First had decisively undermined the capacity of the Broker to achieve anything, and this was in part as a result of the Broker deciding to concentrate her efforts elsewhere.

By contrast, in the other areas where Communities First appeared to be working well or reasonably, this had not been a guarantee of easy going for the Brokers: the one case where there was a degree of antagonism and tension between the Communities First Partnership and the Communities@one team, was in an area where Communities First partners themselves were reasonably united, though in three cases, it was clear that the Brokers had been able to use Communities First structures as the basis for their activity.

In terms of the project based case-studies, the question of the targeting of Communities@One on Communities First areas was also an important contextual issue. In one case, the fact that one of the four main partners in the project had its services

based outside the Communities First eligible area was not, ultimately, an issue, as it was possible to show that a significant proportion of the beneficiaries of the service would come from Communities First areas. For the other project, however, this was much more problematic, as only a relatively small number of communities were eligible within the County areas in which the project was to operate (and particularly so since a predecessor project had operated throughout one of the Counties). A solution to this was being sought through developing a project which would provide complementary funding through the Big Lottery Fund which would enable the service to be extended more widely.

In terms of the **broader community and voluntary sector “infrastructure”** which Brokers could build on, the position in our case-study areas was, perhaps inevitably, rather different. In four of the areas, there appeared to be a large number of voluntary and community groups, though in one of these, a distinction was drawn by interviewees between the “professionalised” voluntary sector drawing on “outsiders” to the community, and more organic, volunteer-based community groups, while in another there was said to be:

*“lots of groups along the lines of the Orpheus choir and the drama group”*

but few groups serving the community such as tenants associations.

In the other areas, there appeared to be a relatively limited voluntary and community sector, with, in each case, only one or a handful of organisations with paid staff.

In two areas, there were no Community Centres (either statutory or voluntary/community) within the area with paid staff – in one case, because the ongoing fall-out over Communities First had led to the pre-existing Centre which had originally housed the Communities First team ceasing to sustain professional staff to the extent that

*“[it is] no longer a recognisable community facility”*

In the four other areas, there was one or several Community Centres with the presence (at least) of paid staff, in some cases directly associated with Communities First and, in others, independent.

In the majority of the case-study areas, interviewees generally characterised the coherence of the voluntary and community sector locally as average or at quite a low level. In some cases, this was because of positive splits or tensions within the area (for example, between different ethnic communities or between two parts of an area, which though adjacent to each other were perceived to be quite different), but more often it was simply because there was no direct relationship between them and because (as volunteer-led groups) they lacked time and resources for networking, with formal structures bringing together the voluntary sector (e.g. the CVCs) operating at a much higher level.

In two of the areas, however, there were clear pre-existing networks/organisations (besides Communities First) which had helped to open doors for the Brokers, while in a further two, the Communities First accountable body or Co-ordinator had strong relationships with a range of voluntary organisations in the area.

The profile of the three control group areas was also fairly mixed, although in all three, there were only small numbers of active community groups, despite (in one case) the presence within the County of nearly 900 registered groups.

In one of the areas, community “infrastructure” was generally poor, with only campaigns against local Travellers sites having stirred local action over recent years, although relations within the community sector were described as generally reasonably good and relationships with the statutory sector were described as “*poor but improving*”. In this area, there was a Community Hall, where a community development worker, paid for by the local authority, was based. The community development worker organised a regular community newsletter.

In the second, there were tensions between the only two significant voluntary and community organisations active within the area, while the local authority was perceived as fairly passive, partly because of the concentration of resources on Communities First areas. There were a number of Community facilities, and a major change was anticipated with the opening of a new school at Easter 2007 which would also provide accommodation for the local library (with an improved ICT suite), the current Community Centre and a Council run nursery.

In the third of the control group areas, relations with the local authority were very strong, due to the prominent role of a local Councillor, while a local Forum provided a basis for the coherence of the local community. There was also a relatively recently constructed Community Centre, which included a library with ICT access, managed by the Forum as a social enterprise.

In terms of the project-based case-studies, these projects were in both cases building on pre-existing organisational infrastructure which had been funded by Objective 1. In one case the project was built around a formal partnership of community-based organisations which had developed from an Objective 1 project (which finished in 2005) which had built up a network of ICT-based learning centres. In the second, the project developed out of a project which had operated over more than six years, with funding first from Objective 5b and then from Objective 1. In both instances, however, the Communities@One project represented a development of the previous projects, and in the latter case, an extension of its geographical scope.

In terms of **ICT infrastructure**, the picture which local interviewees were able to give us suggested considerable differences between our case-study areas:

- In four areas (the same four as identified as having a fairly large community/voluntary sector), there were a number of reasonably well-equipped ICT facilities, open to the public or to particular sectors of the community (particularly young people) either within the Communities First ward or very close to it: all four of these areas included “Digilabs”<sup>39</sup> (in two cases, with two within a few hundred yards of each other). At the same time, even in these areas there were limitations to the facilities: restricted (and unclear) opening hours were seen to be a problem in the case of some of the Digilabs, for example, while in

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<sup>39</sup> ICT open-access facilities for young people, funded by a major Objective 1 ERDF project

one area, there were frequent queues outside an internet café, charging for internet access, despite the presence of open access facilities within the area.

- In four areas, there were more limited facilities, predating the Communities@One Programme, within the ward which provided some access to community organisations and individuals to ICT and the internet. In one of these, however, despite the fact that nine laptop computers had been purchased for a community centre using the Communities First Trust Fund, these were not functioning because of problems over the connection to the internet, meaning that public access was restricted to the Centre Manager allowing residents to use her office PC to access the internet.
- In the remaining two areas, publicly accessible ICT facilities were only available outside the immediate area prior to Communities@One, although in both cases there were library-based ICT suites available within walking distance.

In terms of broader ICT infrastructure, only one of the communities appeared to have a pre-existing community-focussed website providing a range of information on local activities (though others were featured in more tourism-orientated websites or in websites of specific groups) and even in this case, the website was the product of a local enthusiast who was struggling to get engagement from the voluntary and community organisations. Another area had a website publicising the Communities First Partnership and the community organisation which was the accountable body for the Partnership and which contained some information about community events. In a third area, a local group was in the course of setting up a website focussing on local heritage.

In two areas, there had been local community radio stations, but in one of these the station had ceased broadcasting. In one area, a WAN had been operating, though it was claimed this was no longer functioning. In one area, film equipment was owned by a voluntary group and had been used for making community based films prior to the Programme.

All of the case-study areas appeared to have access to no- or low-cost ICT training from a range of providers within the area or in very close proximity : this was principally Further Education Colleges outreach provision – although in three cases, FE campuses were located in or very near to the area – Local Authority sponsored Adult and Community Learning, and provision from the Workers Educational Association. In many cases, the provision was based on providers using their own laptops rather than equipment available on location. Provision generally included “basic” ICT as well as more formal courses such as CLAIT or ECDL, while in several areas, more targeted courses such as digital photography or desktop publishing were available. In at least four of the areas there also was already, or was about to be (independent of Communities@One) family learning provided at local schools. However, in many cases the provision was seen to be (in the words of one Broker):

*“as fragmented as the provision of facilities”*

Moreover, a point that was made widely and repeatedly, the barriers to taking up the opportunities were not physical or even financial but attitudinal. As one set of interviewees pointed out:

*“There are superb opportunities for the community if they chose to engage with them”*

But the people in the targeted communities were – not least because of poor basic skills and negative experiences of formal education:

*“a million miles away from accredited courses”*

Indeed, in this area, it was said that demand for formal ICT courses was falling which was attributed to the fact that most of the motivated groups had already accessed the training they felt they needed.

Even in the areas which were most fully provided with good pre-existing ICT facilities and training it was said that there was little in the way of *“fun ways”* to get into computers.

Interviewees in all of the control group areas thought that ICT facilities were relatively limited within their areas. In two of them, PCs with internet access were available in libraries within the area (but there were no other publicly accessible facilities). In one of these, opening hours were quite restricted (18 hours per week): in this case, where the library was within a Community Centre, it had originally been possible for local people to use the PCs even outside library opening hours, but this had had to be changed as a result of inappropriate material being found.

In the third area, there were no publicly accessible ICT facilities: there was no library and the local schools did not have any publicly available ICT equipment. The Community Hall had a broadband connection, but this was purely to allow the community development worker access to the local authority’s intranet. The local authority had an ICT Bus which visited areas of the local authority without ICT facilities but the case-study area was no longer on its route.

In one area, a local community partnership maintained a website which publicised events which the partnership itself organised but this was acknowledged to be in need of an overhaul/updating and did not provide wider community information. In the other areas, there were no relevant local websites, although in one, the local authority-employed community development worker was hoping to develop a site as part of the local authority website: funding was being sought from Microsoft for this. Apart from this, no other local ICT resources were identified in any of the areas.

In one of the control group areas, a small number of ICT courses were being run by the local College, using the PCs within the library/community centre, but in the other two areas no local ICT training was available. In one of these, a voluntary sector project which was provided training opportunities within the community had been trying to broker the delivery of ICT training but had been faced by a series of barriers:

*“one course I cannot get up and running is IT – though I’ve got a list of people who want to do it...The College have promised us they’d come in and do it, but then there was a health and safety issue - they wanted us to have proper IT chairs and wanted us to pay for them...we didn’t have the funding for that, so eventually they gave us some ....[second-hand]: then it was computers, we didn’t have the money, so the IT department eventually said they would bring laptops, though they didn’t want to do it and*

*basically that was the end of it. The lady I was liaising with cannot tie anyone down in the department to come and do it”*

In terms of the project case-studies, in both cases these were building on established infrastructure, both in terms of hardware and training provision, in at least part of the area covered by the new project. It was clear that in the areas covered by one of the projects there was “quite a lot of stuff going on” even outside the boundaries of the organisations involved in the project, but it was felt that this mostly consisted of formal training and was reliant on fairly low-level marketing which would be unlikely to overcome the reluctance or lack of interest of those least “switched on” to ICT.

*“This project lets us really try the more informal softly-softly approach. Some of the work won’t lead to formal accreditation – but that’s not the point - there is learning and there is fun - that’s what this project is about”*

In the course of the fieldwork, we were able to gain relatively little hard information from interviewees about the numbers and profile of the **users of pre-existing ICT facilities and ICT training** in the case-study areas. This would appear to relate to a lack of any real “mapping” having been undertaken by the Brokers, although this was intended to be a clear part of their role<sup>40</sup>.

A number of the brokers were explicit that this had not been done. In one case, the Broker said that, at least in relation to the case-study area:

*“it’s been a bit of a token effort ... I need to map what’s going on”*

In another, the Broker was honest in saying that, although a mapping exercise of local provision and use of ICT by the voluntary and community centre was a part of the job description, he had not yet started to undertake this: and having looked at the requirements, he felt it was impractical (since it would potentially involve contacting and asking intrusive questions of every voluntary organisation in the local authority area – several thousand of them). This was related to what was seen as a bigger issue around the lack of consistency between job descriptions and what Brokers were actually doing – which to date had principally been focussed on developing projects (see below).

In the one control group area where there was a community based ICT facility (though run by the local library service), the PCs were said to be used mostly by schoolchildren to do their homework.

In terms of the **use of ICT by local voluntary and community groups**, while the picture was again somewhat mixed, in most areas, Brokers felt that this was limited to the use of PCs for fairly basic administrative tasks (e.g. writing letters and documents, book-keeping) on the part of organisations with paid staff. This also appeared to be the case in

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<sup>40</sup> See page 13 above: the job description for the Brokers includes: “Review local ICT and Internet resources, facilities and barriers to access; Assist in drawing together baseline information in order to identify gaps in current provision and access and developing creative and effective ways of meeting needs, e.g. through local content and networks. Promote and enhance use of local resources and facilities among new and existing users”.

the control group areas. Particularly in the Valleys, it was felt that the majority of community groups were managing with very limited or no use of ICT, illustrated by the Chair of one group receiving funding from the Programme who had started using his home PC to produce Minutes of meeting only to give up because:

*“they [the other Committee members] didn’t know what to do with their bits of paper, so I’ve gone back to reading them out of the minutes book”.*

In another case-study area, according to the Broker:

*“E-mail is still seen as innovative”*

by local community organisations.

In two cases, however, both ones with a large number of community and voluntary organisations in the area, more groups were thought to use PCs for internal administration and in both cases there had been specific support for this in the past. In one, there had been a pre-existing project which had provided both “kit” and training to voluntary and community groups which had clearly left a legacy of a higher level of usage of ICT, although some interviewees were critical of what they saw as a lack of sustainability around this initiative (which had now finished), in particular a lack of ongoing maintenance. In the other case-study area, a Community Agency provided support to local voluntary and community agencies, including access to PCs with associated support to produce newsletters and publicity. Even in these case-study areas, however, few groups were thought to use ICT proactively to engage with or provide services to their clients.

In terms of the **use of ICT by the more general population**, little hard evidence was available from the fieldwork about this. In one area, a local authority household survey in March 2005 had shown that the broader area (five wards) in which the case-study area was located had far lower access to ICT in the home than was true for the Local Authority area as a whole, with 42% of people having a PC at home (59%), 36% an internet connection (50%) and 33% an e-mail address (49%). In this area, however, it was also claimed that a survey of year 11 pupils at the local comprehensive school had suggested that 95% had access to a PC at home, which perhaps ties in to the very general perceptions suggested by Brokers elsewhere that the young were most likely to access ICT, with older people, and middle-aged men least likely to use access and use ICT either at home or in public locations.

Finally, in terms of locally-based inputs it is worth mentioning **the prior experience of the Communities@One Brokers** themselves. It was clear that the Brokers collectively brought a wealth of relevant experience from previous employment to the Programme. This included:

- In two cases, experience of working on the “Everybody Online” programme which had similar broad aims to Communities@One and in two cases, experience of working with the Rhondda Cynon Taf “Shape.IT.org” project;
- In another two cases, having worked as an “e-learning” champion as part of the ELWa funded mapping project;

- In almost all cases, experience of hands-on community development work, including as Community First Co-ordinators. This appeared to be particularly important in equipping Brokers with the skills, and even more the instincts, they needed to cope with the often difficult circumstances in individual areas.

## *4.2 Processes*

### 4.2.1 Communities@One and Wales-wide Stakeholders

As has already been noted under Section 4.1.1, there was a clear view from stakeholders that Communities@One had established and benefited from excellent working relationships with external stakeholders, particularly those on the Advisory Group. It was noted that the Welsh Local Government Association – who had not been fully engaged in the initial development of the Programme – were now fully involved in the Advisory Group.

There was a clear enthusiasm and energy about the Advisory Group members, with many of them commenting that the work with the Group was both stimulating and enjoyable, referring to the “*excellent personal relationships*” underpinning the work.

Several interviewees also emphasised that the Programme team were now moving beyond the Advisory Group to build up a core network of organisations within the voluntary and community sector with an expertise and interest in delivering digital inclusion projects, PAVS, the Scarman Trust (already a member of the Advisory Group) and Deudraeth, who had recently submitted a joint application for funding from the Big Lottery<sup>41</sup>.

Interviewees also felt that the core relationship with the SJR were very well managed, with this partly being attributed to the fact that the project manager himself had previously been a civil servant but was rooted in a community development background:

*“Alun will manage the civil service bias, whereas someone else might just have railed against it”.*

However, the lack of any substantial relationship with DELLS was again seen as a weakness by a small number of interviewees, though this was partly attributed to what was seen as the impenetrability of that Department even to those within the Welsh Assembly Government:

*“even I can’t find my way down into the Department, so it must be impossible for people outside”.*

Several of those interviewed also noted that the Communities@One team was also making wider policy linkages, developing relationships with some of the large ICT suppliers and with other Government departments and devolved administrations.

*“it would have been quite easy for project to be quite insular, and I think [the management team] have now realised its about more than just delivering a project – once that penny dropped – it probably took about 6 months for that penny to drop – they’ve started to engage with the policy side”.*

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<sup>41</sup> See also Advisory Group 8 December 2006, Document 5, p. 1

Overall, then, those interviewed were clear that the “*external facing*” aspects of the Programme were working well.

#### 4.2.2 Broker Engagement with Local Stakeholders and Community Groups

In general terms, it was quite clear that in the case of a clear majority of the Brokers, those who had had dealings with them - whether within community groups or within local stakeholder organisations – were highly complementary about the way in which the Brokers were doing their job. Typical comments were:

*“I’m astounded at the number of organisations he has engaged with in such a short time”.*

*“she has been great..can’t fault her”.*

As has already been noted, in areas where Communities First was divisive, Brokers generally appeared to have avoided being drawn into the conflicts, and in some of these cases, were praised by the warring factions, even as they attacked each other. In one case, where the CVC was in conflict with the local authority as accountable body, CVC staff praised the Broker’s persistence:

*“at first L. [a colleague] and I thought he was from Communities First, so we ignored his phone calls, but he kept on”*

It was clear, however, that different Brokers had adopted different tactics with regard to local stakeholders. Several – two in particular - had used their “embedding” within local bodies as a way of ensuring they were involved with a wide range of partnerships and working groups relating to Communities First, regeneration and lifelong learning. While this was positively regarded by all concerned, there is of course, the downside that this could absorb considerable amounts of the Brokers’ time. A further three Brokers appeared to have far less intense relationships with key agencies, but worked very closely with Communities First teams – in two cases, to such an extent that they were clearly regarded almost as a part of the team. Others, by contrast, seemed to be working fairly independently of the established stakeholders.

In one case, local stakeholders felt that the Broker had not been able to make much of an impact (a view shared by the Broker) but there was only one case-study area where the Programme had run into some serious difficulties in terms of local stakeholders. In this instance, a County-wide project had been approved which cut across specific plans of the Communities First Partnership. There were fundamental concerns about this amongst local stakeholders and in particular very real apprehensions that the proposed work programme extensively duplicated work already underway by the Communities First team with other partners in the area. While this project had been developed during a period of long-term sickness absence by the Broker, the real cause of the problem appeared to be a lack of mapping and making the connections with key stakeholders. However, as noted this was very much the exception, although in the case of one of the project-based case-studies, the sponsor also felt that a potential “rival” project had been approved which cut across the work planned by the project, blaming this on a lack of shared information within the Communities@One team about the activities of funded projects.

No interviewees identified voluntary and community organisations with whom any Broker might have worked who had not been engaged, and there were no suggestions that any Broker had given priority to some groups over others. At the same time, in around half of the cases, the Broker had worked directly with only a relatively small number of organisations (in one case, working almost exclusively with the Communities First Partnership and in another with only one organisation in the area) and in one case, a Communities First Co-ordinator (who was clearly the lynch-pin of local community development) felt that:

*“The most organised and switched on got the money and the smaller organisations are only just getting the message and money has gone”*

It would appear that there was a tendency to concentrate on working fairly intensively with groups who could deliver “*quick wins*” in terms of developing grant applications. One Broker commented:

*“I’ve no time to chase [groups] up”*

While another regretted the fact that, as he saw it, the demands of the Grant Fund (in terms of the need for professional management of resources) meant that in practice his efforts had been more concentrated on those groups with some established infrastructure – above all paid staff – rather than those (the majority) which were wholly reliant on volunteers (e.g. sports and social clubs).

Moreover, in some instances the Brokers appeared to have relatively little contact with some key providers of ICT services, such as libraries, youth centres, family learning centres in schools, Further Education Colleges or the Digilabs, seeing their focus rather as working with individual groups who needed support<sup>42</sup>.

#### 4.2.3 Grant Fund Processes

Almost all of the central stakeholders interviewed were convinced that the Grant Fund processes were not only working well, but represented an exemplar of good practice. In particular, there was very wide support for what was perceived as the very distinctive “Broker” model by which groups were given hands-on support to develop grant applications:

*“spending time and taking the trouble of working with people.. not telling them what to do, but pointing them in certain directions”*

- though several different interviewees claimed to be behind the original idea of a grants process which recognised *“the importance of built-in support from inception to the end”*.

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<sup>42</sup> It is understood that as part of their initial training, Brokers were encouraged, quite understandably, to focus their efforts on engaging with the voluntary and community sector. Moreover, in the case of Digilabs WEFO have advised the project that double funding rules prevents joint working between the two projects. However, it is clearly essential for Brokers to have a good understanding of what provision and support is available from other sources in the areas in which they are working and for them and Grant Fund projects to work with these other bodies to encourage cross-referrals and prevent confusion or duplication of effort.

Given the general recognition that the barriers to digital inclusion were more attitudinal than practical, most interviewees believed that a “traditional” grant application process would have been disastrous, with take-up being low, or with money hoovered up by “the usual suspects”:

*“If we’d had a typical grant, where you just invited everyone to send in a grant application, we’d be absolutely stuffed”*

Almost without exception, central stakeholders were full of praise for the way in which Brokers were working and “delivering the goods”, even if it was recognised that there was some patchiness in performance:

*“[they are] very good, very enthusiastic – they are at the heart of everything and want to make it work”.*

The system was seen as one in which

*“from what I can see applicants are sheltered from a lot of the bureaucracy”*

by the role of the Brokers.

Those involved felt that the Grant Panel worked well, but emphasised that its rigour was reflected not so much in terms of filtering out poor applications (since the proactive involvement of the Brokers and the Central Team meant that applications which were not suitable were identified at a much earlier stage) but in the way in which it looked critically at how the project would achieve its ends and not infrequently suggested increasing the resources allocated to a project:

*The Board is more of a fine tuning process...we have a good look at them not to see if they need to be turned down but to see if they’ve thought through all the issues and in some cases we’ve offered more than they’ve wanted....hopefully we’ve mitigated the inexperience of some of the brokers”*

Staff too, stressed that the whole system was geared to ensuring that once a formal application was submitted, it should be of a quality to succeed:

*“we always say if an application gets to the grants panel and it fails, its we that have failed”*

One of the Central Team also emphasised the team work between brokers and themselves in helping develop robust applications:

*“we work with them in the development of the application rather than the Broker (sic) making an application and then us commenting and criticising it as it comes in”.*

Of course, the downside potentially of the proactive role of the brokers (revealed by the reference above to the **Broker** making the application) is that groups could be deprived of ownership of the projects which have been submitted in their name. While this was acknowledged as a risk by some of the interviewees, they generally believed that the fact the Programme and the staff were rooted in community development principles should ensure that this did not happen – although several were concerned that individual brokers would pursue their own “hobby horses”. It was emphasised that the aim of the

Broker's involvement was not to ensure that the grant application succeeded, but that that the project was successful in the long-term, and that to some extent the Broker involvement was designed to make the applicant face difficult issues about delivery, not just say what was needed to access the funding:

*“trying to get them to think about the whole process, not just focussing on the application and getting the money...we try to invert the usual process”.*

In terms of the findings from the case-studies, it was quite clear that for the smaller groups, in particular, Brokers were very actively involved in developing projects, in advising on the specific way in which the project application should be completed and, in some cases, in actually writing the application on behalf of the applicant Groups. One of the Brokers, for example, explained that as a Broker, the key was to understand what groups wanted to achieve and then to help them structure and present their ideas in such a way that they fitted with the Communities@One criteria. She thought that she was now

*“getting used to asking the right questions of groups and knowing what wording to use”*

on applications. She estimated that she made a significant contribution to writing the application form in around 50% of cases:

*“I get them to write them where I can or I get them to dictate what they want to me”*

Echoing this, another Broker, who was fairly critical of the application form which she saw as:

*“a WEFO form at the end of the day”*

said that she often avoided *“showing them [the applicants] the whole form”*. In helping groups develop applications, the Broker's approach was to *“pick out some key questions for them to think about”* and then *“sit with them to address the silly questions”*. She also sought to get groups to *“give me the fluffy evidence”* rather than the statistics which she can source to help support bids. The Broker felt that her role was to *“take a lot of queries out of the equation”* by acting as an intermediary between groups and the Programme central team.

The applicants generally echoed this view, though perhaps unsurprisingly tended to play down the extent to which they had been happy to let the Broker do much of the work: in one case, where the Broker said he had written the application, the Group said:

*“we did it together...he asked the right questions.. and helped to find the right words...we were together all the way through”.*

Another put it more forthrightly:

*“[the Broker] came and asked us about our plans and ideas, then she put them into the right kind of words for the grant people and said ‘how does this sound?’”*

However, not all the Brokers were perceived as taking on such an active role: in one case (where there was a problematic pending application) a local stakeholder felt the Broker had not been sufficiently “hands-on”, commenting on the fact she had been:

*“marking the application like a teacher in red pen”*

While all the Brokers saw helping applicant groups to develop applications as integral to their role, at least four of them commented that they felt the role had become too narrowly focussed on this aspect of their role. One believed that the process had become far too based around:

*“doing it for them...its very disenfranchising for the groups...the applications are really ones from the Communities@One team”*

Despite this view, a large majority of the Grant applicants who were interviewed (16 out of the 20) were very positive indeed about the application process in general and the role of the Broker’s in particular. Typical comments were:

*“[The Broker] did a lot of really good work to help us and this made the first phase bid pretty straight forward”.*

*“He has been very helpful....he knew the jargon and explained”*

*“He gave me constant help and encouragement...he kept me on track with it”*

The last of these three comments came from an applicant in the statutory sector, who had considerable experience of grant schemes and who was full of praise, not just for the Broker’s individual contribution but for the way in which the Programme was structured to provide this support:

*“Because I work for a local authority, I was quite unused to the friendliness and willingness to help from the funding body...we do need all the help we can get, because we are trying to do groundbreaking work and it was great to have the support of people who wanted to help”.*

She knew from experience that if you were really to generate activity from the grassroots you needed to have a resource who was really going to get stuck in and help with the applications and

*“I was really excited and interested to find Communities@One doing actively that...it’s an extraordinary grant scheme”.*

This sponsor particularly highlighted the importance of personal, rather than technical skills:

*“he doesn’t need to be an expert on ICT, he’s a people person”*

These very favourable comments were often echoed by local stakeholders, for example, a Communities First Co-ordinator:

*“she’s brilliant ... she’s been really helpful from day one and she’s bent over backwards to work with some very green groups ... hugely accommodating”.*

Most groups with experience of different funding regimes believed that the process was relatively pain-free, though some felt that it had been rather lengthy and several noted

that the rules for the scheme seemed to have changed during the time the grant application was in process.

There were, however, a small minority of groups (four in all<sup>43</sup>) who were more heavily critical of the process. Interestingly, three of these were larger projects.

One applicant (who blamed the problems not on the Broker but on the Central Team) said:

*“At times, I felt that the process was too rigid and inflexible and the goal posts in terms of the information they wanted were constantly moving... We ended up having to write over a 30 page application which had to be re-drafted several times... This made it a really disempowering process, although I realised that we had to go through it and that the end product would be very empowering”.*

A second applicant echoed these points:

*“The whole process was a bit stifling and really irritating”. “I feel they showed a real lack of trust in us as partners. The level of detail they were asking of us on quotes for equipment was very restrictive and has not allowed us any flexibility within the project”*

The third project sponsor made a series of criticisms over the extent to which

*“The goal posts just kept on moving and the rules kept on changing”*

and more particularly, the extent to which, in their view the Brokers had taken too much ownership away from them:

*“We were literally led by the horns by the Brokers and we collectively felt as though we were being taught how to suck eggs”*

This was again not seen to be the direct fault of the Brokers:

*“The Brokers were having to dance to the tune of the grants panel”*

This criticism does need to be seen in the context of a rather fraught process of negotiation in which the “mini-Grants panel” had bounced back an early version of the application. As the Broker explained, despite the applicant being experienced:

*“The application was nowhere near ready to go to the grants panel and so we deferred it. It was a simple choice – either that or they would have been turned down flat”*

Few of the applicants had yet got much, if any experience of the claims and monitoring process. Those that had had somewhat mixed views, with some feeling the forms were rather complex and confusing, but others believing they were relatively straightforward. There were some critical comments, principally (but not exclusively) from the same larger projects who had been critical of the application process: one relating to a refusal to allow a project to vire money between staff and equipment, one about the need to itemise expenditure in too great detail, one (from someone with fairly detailed knowledge

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<sup>43</sup> A further group with a pending application was reported to be very unhappy with the process, but was unwilling to be interviewed at this stage in the research.

of the Programme but who had again been critical of the application process) of the lack of clarity about monitoring requirements:

*“The Communities@One central team are far too late in thinking about this. It should have been built in from the start. This means that we’ve had to second guess their monitoring requirements and we’ve been operating in a vacuum”.*

and a third from someone strongly supportive of the Programme’s approach who nevertheless believed the bureaucratic requirements of the record-keeping were too onerous:

*“when I saw the paperwork which was needed for 20 years, I have a worry about the sort of people this is trying to help are going to do that”.*

At the time of the fieldwork, Brokers had not been given clear guidance on their role in aftercare or monitoring of projects, but in a minority of cases, Brokers clearly were already taking on this responsibility. Where this was the case it was very strongly appreciated by grant applicants:

*“[The broker] is great because he’s there to help us since we’ve had the project approved ... it’s become a friendship”*

*“what’s been great is that he hasn’t left us high and dry”*

#### 4.2.4 Capturing Good Practice

The Central Stakeholders were not generally convinced that mechanisms were already in place to capture good practice:

*“I remain to be convinced that they are there”*

although several, along with the staff, referred to the fact that regular team meetings of the Brokers were held. Brokers were also thought to share experience with each other more informally, though this did not necessarily result in any more formal recording of good practice:

*“[it’s] quite organic, not based around rules and procedures”*

Having said this, most (but not all) felt that, after an initial concentration on developing and submitting grant applications, the importance of teasing out and disseminating good practice would grow:

*“We will do this better...- it’s just going to be brilliant”*

Several pointed to the revised Communications Plan, which saw a redistribution of effort away from marketing the Programme to collecting and disseminating good practice case-studies and to the forthcoming networking events which were to take place in the early part of 2007, though it was pointed out that consultation with funded projects had revealed a relatively low interest in networking and exchanging experience compared to receiving training on issues such as new technologies and on-line safety.

However, several interviewees felt that the capturing of good practice needed now to be put centre stage and that it needed to be more than “*a skimming off of information*”, involving self-evaluation not just by the Brokers but also by the projects themselves. It was argued that there was scope for a much more ambitious approach to the Programme website, so that it could become an interactive forum for projects: it is understood that this is being actively pursued by the Central Team.

The case-study fieldwork also suggested that sharing good practice had, at this stage of the Programme, a fairly low profile. Brokers did not identify any formal mechanisms which existed to share good practice (either in project development or in project activity) though recognised that the formal team meetings offered a good opportunity to discuss common problems and issues. One Broker pointed out, however, that discussions did not always lead to the formal recording or adoption of good practice, citing by way of example, discussions about Brokers’ approaches to internet safety which had never translated into any codification of standard practice.

At the same time, it was clear that Brokers informally had developed networks to support each other and to share good practice. Examples cited included Brokers helping each other over work with Housing Associations, issues relating to ownership of laptops that were funded under the Programme and, more generally, less experienced members of the team getting advice on community development approaches. One commented that:

*“I skype with [three other Brokers] about three or four times a week”*

Another Broker put this more cynically, talking of meeting with colleagues to “*bitch about work*”.

In terms of community and voluntary groups who had been assisted, none identified formal advice on good practice from other projects, although in most cases, Brokers had provided input into the development of project ideas which clearly drew on practice elsewhere (see 4.3.2 below) and in some instances, Brokers were also aiding networking between different groups within the same areas (see 4.3.3).

#### 4.2.5 Internal Management Processes

Central Team members were generally very positive about the arrangements which had been put in place for ensuring good liaison and support between the Brokers and the Central Team. While formal meetings bringing together all the Brokers were held around every eight weeks, with each of the two teams meeting with their Broker Manager on an alternate eight weeks cycle, it was emphasised that informal contact (both with Broker Managers and with other team members such as the Finance Officer and the Technical Support Officer) was almost continuous:

*“they are always on the phone, they skype or mail the whole time”.*

*“I think it works pretty well given the distances involved...I worked with a distributed team before, using video conferencing, and we don’t have that here, but the relationships here are almost as good”*

However, it was also clear that Brokers were not routinely copied in on papers relating to the Advisory Group or Grant Panel decisions: these were available on the shared drive, however, and it was argued that e-mailing or circulating material to the Brokers might distract them from their own work.

Central stakeholders in general were also, as we have seen, very positive about the out-location or “embedding” of Brokers and believed that this was key to the success of the Communities@One Programme, since it simultaneously ensured that the Brokers were in the field, that they still (because of common terms and conditions and their status as employed by the Wales Co-operative Centre) felt part of one team and that they had a good rapport with key local agencies. A structured induction process which had drawn on inputs from members of the Advisory Panel was seen to have been important in this regard.

There were however, some concerns: in particular, there have been a number of long-term sickness absences, in which elements of work-related stress appear to have played at least a limited part (which was a new phenomenon for the Wales Co-operative Centre which generally was said to have had very low rates of sickness absence), and some concerns were expressed that this might reflect the relative isolation of the Brokers:

*“When I come into the office, I’m with colleagues and friends, but that isn’t the case for the brokers in every case”*

There were also some concerns that the existence of the two teams and the relatively long gaps between full team meetings might have led to a development of an “us” and “them” mentality within the Brokers (though we found little explicit reflection of this in our interviews with Brokers):

*“although we try to think of them as one team there is quite a distinction between the two teams”*

More practically, there had been continuing issues around the ease of access for Brokers in the field to the Wales Co-operative Centre’s ICT systems, owing, apparently to restrictions on the width of the broadband connection to the Centre, which was also a source of negative comment from the Brokers.

Although all were positive about working relationships with the more junior members of the Central Team who provide direct assistance at the front-line (such as the Technical Support and Finance Officers), Brokers generally had more mixed views of the extent to which internal management processes were working well: four were generally positive, five had more mixed views, highlighting both positive and negative aspects and two were generally critical. All agreed that the Broker Managers had an open door policy and were readily available:

*“The team is not hierarchical and we’ve got a very open relationship”*

*“I just ring [the Broker Manager] when I need her”*

Team meetings were generally thought to be useful, though some felt that they needed a greater degree of formality, for example, in terms of producing notes and action points arising from them.

One Broker with considerable experience of the voluntary sector felt that the systems and management in the Wales Co-operative Centre were of a high standard:

*“Having worked for community organisations in the past, I’m really impressed with the set up at the Co-op Centre”*

This same Broker also praised the induction process.

However, a frequent criticism was that Brokers were not kept well informed about thinking at the Centre. One Broker highlighted her view that Brokers were not kept “*in the loop*” on changes to grant criteria, information requirements from applicants and monitoring activities, which in her view meant that she had been put in some uncomfortable situations and had had to “*bear the brunt*” with groups where she had either had to back-track, ask for further information or change approach with them. The concern about lack of clarity about objectives and procedures was echoed by others:

*“goal posts kept changing”*

*“I don’t think the central team has decided how to set objectives, so we have none ... but we’ve been assured that we’re hitting targets”*

While several admitted that information was available on the shared drive, this was not seen as a substitute for proactive communication – not least because of the problems Brokers had had accessing the Wales Co-operative Centre’s server.

The Brokers who were most critical (and who were both ones who were clearly delivering a very good service to local groups in their “patches”) painted an impression of being unsupported in terms of fairly basic issues (for example, putting pressure on the host organisation to provide the Broker with a desk), with one referring to the “*macho management team*” and “*having to shout for stuff*” and the other claiming that despite the open door policy, he could not rely on getting “*something when I really need it*”.

This latter Broker felt that the problem was that the Programme Manager was concentrating on managing the relationship with the Welsh Assembly Government (a role he felt should be fulfilled by the Wales Co-operative Centre), leaving the Broker Managers to carry too many other tasks rather than concentrating on line-management:

*“I’ve had 4 or 5 meetings with [the Broker Manager], each lasting about 2 hours. In one year. I would have thought they should be spending 1 or 2 days a month with each of us understanding what we are doing....it’s like its all moved down a level and squashed in”.*

In terms of information systems, the systems for logging applications and initial project ideas and for drawing off financial data from this was clearly working effectively and was a subject of positive comment from members of the Advisory Group. The existence of a list of approved projects which also gave a brief description of the project was also something which was mentioned by a number of interviewees.

It was perhaps less clear that Central Team members had robust mechanisms in place to track activities and inputs from Brokers. Although Brokers were expected to keep file notes of all meetings with individual groups, at least one commented that he had long

ceased doing this, since it was clear no-one ever read them and each one would take valuable time which could be used in direct working with groups and individuals. While this is true, the lack of any formal records could pose problems in the even of unforeseen staff changes or absences. Brokers do complete an activity log, however, which allows management to track, for example, the proportion of their time spent in direct contact with voluntary and community groups.

A small number of central stakeholders did express concerns about what they saw as a clear variation in effectiveness between different individual Brokers, although most were very positive about the effectiveness of the Co-operative Centre in managing the operation of the Programme.

In terms of the Advisory Group, as already noted, members were generally very positive about the work of both this and the Grants Panel and, from the observed meeting of the Advisory Group, it was clear that there was a positive atmosphere with most of those present making an active contribution. The only subject of any adverse comment from any of the central stakeholders was what was perceived as the delay in dealing with the issue of the Communities of interest which was flagged up in the Project Plan as an issue to be addressed and which was discussed (inconclusively) at the first formal meeting of the Advisory Group in November 2005. It was not until October 2006 that a decision was made by the Welsh Assembly Government to extend the Programme to Communities First communities of interest, and even this decision did not meet with complete approval, since some interviewees felt that there was a need for a broader approach to defining communities of interest.

#### *4.3 Immediate Effects (Outputs)*

##### 4.3.1 Development of Grant Fund Projects: Overview

One of the most striking facts about the Communities@One Programme to date – and one which was commented on almost without exception by the central stakeholders – was the speed with which the Grant Fund had been taken up, which had exceeded all expectations, a fact which was seen to be linked to the proactive approach of the Brokers:

*“[we’ve been] inundated with applications”*

Indeed, the speed with which funds had been allocated was the reason why the Programme was seen to be a success – perhaps not unreasonably given that with the tight timescales of the Programme, a failure to generate early interest and take-up of the Scheme would have been fatal.

In terms of the current position, Table 4.1 (page 57) shows the Grant Funds Allocated (in other words, formally offered to and accepted by projects) and within the Forward Plan (projects under development but not yet formally appraised), as well as actual Spend, allocated according to the different funding streams which support the Programme. This is indeed a picture of success, although there is clearly, as yet, quite a low rate of conversion of commitments to spend (particularly given that projects receive funding in advance) which will need to be closely monitored. The variations between the different Objective areas probably reflects the fact that ERDF from the different

Programmes has been allocated more according to what was available than to the levels of potential coverage: the Objective 2 core allocation, for example covers only seven wards and one –sub-ward eligible for the Programme, and thus represents a significantly higher allocation per community than is true of Objective 1. It is likely also that the Objective 2 core area will be disproportionately affected by the decision to include Communities First Communities of interest as eligible, since these wards are in Cardiff and Newport, which is a major focus of the BME Community of interest.

Table 4.2 shows a spatial breakdown of financial commitments (though it should be noted that there are no formal allocations to different local authority areas and that “Cities” refers to Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and the Vale of Glamorgan). This shows that the only region where funding has not been fully taken up is the Valleys – and again this may well simply reflect the large budgetary resource available (and the high concentration of Communities First areas) rather than any particular problems with regard to interest or delivery. The high allocation to South West Wales reflects the existence of several large projects in the region, despite the fact that it has relatively small numbers of eligible areas.

At a local authority level, more detailed analysis suggests particularly high up-take relative to nominal allocations in Denbighshire, Swansea, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire and the lowest relative levels of take-up in Torfaen, Bridgend, Monmouthshire, Newport and Caerphilly.

Finally, Table 4.3 shows the size of Grant Fund projects by value. This shows that the high level of financial commitments has not simply been achieved by funding large, national projects: even though the 12 projects over £100,000 which have either been funded or which are in the pipeline together represent some 43% by value of all projects, just over half of the projects (by number) are less than £15,000. Although not shown, it is worth noting that almost all the funding allocated is revenue rather than capital (though most ICT equipment is counted as revenue for these purposes because of its very rapid depreciation).

In terms of the potential for over-commitment, proposals were made and agreed at the Advisory Group to vire more than £1 million into the Grant Fund from Technical Support and Central Services (marketing). Despite the initial budget allocation of well over £1 million for technical support, very little of this funding has been required to date, a fact attributed by Programme managers partly to the recruitment of the Technical Support Officer (who has been able to offer advice and support direct to Grant Fund applicants and projects), partly to the way in which organisations represented on the Advisory Group have given additional more specialist support free of charge, and partly due to the fact that Grant Fund projects have generally factored in technical support (provided by local suppliers) to their applications, rather than seen this as a stand-alone issue. While the virement should provide headroom to finance a number of projects which are on a “waiting list” and will also ensure some resource is available for projects serving the Communities of interest, it may have some implications for the degree of effort which is able to be made to develop new sources of local technical support (see 4.4.4 below).

Table 4.1: Funds Allocated as of 15 December 2006: By Objective area

Objective Area Allocated to Date	Non Obj	Obj 1	Obj 2 Core	Obj 2 Rural	Obj 2 Trans	Grand Total
<b>Budget</b>	£367,570.00	£4,153,616.00	£431,037.00	£57,338.00	£43,039.00	<b>£5,052,600.00</b>
<b>Total Allocated</b>	£193,959.61	£2,304,570.89	£124,866.49	£56,029.02	£25,755.73	<b>£2,705,181.74</b>
<b>Forward Plan</b>	£167,542.95	£2,080,286.17	£173,178.38	£0.00	£9,296.00	<b>£2,430,303.50</b>
<b>Remaining</b>	£6,067.44	-£231,241.06	£132,992.13	£1,308.98	£7,987.27	<b>-£82,885.24</b>
<b>% Remaining</b>	1.65%	<b>-5.57%</b>	30.85%	<b>2.28%</b>	18.56%	<b>-1.64%</b>
	<b>Non Obj</b>	<b>Obj 1</b>	<b>Obj 2 Core</b>	<b>Obj 2 Rural</b>	<b>Obj 2 Trans</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
<b>Budget</b>	£367,570.00	£4,153,616.00	£431,037.00	£57,338.00	£43,039.00	<b>£5,052,600.00</b>
<b>Spend to date</b>	£70,352.71	£607,750.49	£66,278.70	£16,488.93	£14,732.17	<b>£775,603.00</b>
<b>Remaining</b>	£297,217.29	£3,545,865.51	£364,758.30	£40,849.07	£28,306.83	<b>£4,276,997.00</b>

Table 4.2: Funds Allocated as of 15 December 2006: By Region area

Allocated to Date	Cities	NE Wales	NW Wales	Other (Powys & Mon)	South (Valleys)	SW Wales	Grand Total
<b>Budget Total</b>	771,895.25	371,693.68	543,463.78	65,945.80	2,989,050.76	310,550.73	<b>5,052,600.00</b>
<b>Allocated Forward Plan</b>	377,210.88	390,201.78	252,225.81	57,377.63	1,294,233.39	333,932.25	<b>2,705,181.74</b>
<b>Remaining</b>	658,039.95	170,606.40	346,045.50	5,000.00	976,172.29	274,439.36	<b>2,430,303.50</b>
<b>% Remaining</b>	<b>-263,355.58</b>	<b>-189,114.50</b>	<b>-54,807.53</b>	3,568.17	718,645.08	<b>-297,820.88</b>	<b>-82,885.24</b>
<b>% Remaining</b>	<b>-34.12%</b>	<b>-50.88%</b>	<b>-10.08%</b>	5.41%	24.04%	<b>-95.90%</b>	<b>-1.64%</b>

Table 4.3: Project Size by Value as at 15 December 2006.

Value	Awarded / Submitted		Forward Plan		Total	
	Total	Number	Total	Number	Total	Number
Less £5,000	£48,199.16	20	£34,199.02	15	£82,398.18	35
£5,000 - £14,999	£243,274.85	25	£236,469.23	32	£479,744.08	57
£15,000 - £49,999	£349,016.52	13	£589,075.99	27	£938,092.51	40
£50,000 - £99,999	£642,800.90	10	£936,179.33	14	£1,578,980.23	24
£100,000 +	£1,703,656.41	8	£634,379.93	4	£2,338,036.34	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>£2,986,947.84</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>£2,430,303.50</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>£5,417,251.34</b>	<b>168</b>

Despite the unanimously positive view of interviewees about the speed of take-up of the Grant Fund grant and a general view that many of the Grant Fund projects were exceptional in terms of their value for money, several were worried about the quality of some of the projects and the (lack of) variety of approaches which had come forward – with the latter, perhaps, being somewhat disquieting given the concern that the proactivity of the Brokers might in some instances lead to them being rather directive in the way in which projects are shaped.

A particular issue was what was perceived as the high number of digital storytelling projects: while some felt this was exciting and positive, several interviewees were sceptical as to whether these projects would succeed in engaging people with technology, as opposed to delivering other broader social benefits.

*“how can it improve anything apart from Curry’s profits?”*

Underlying this, was a sense of some unease on the part of some of the interviewees about the clarity around the ultimate aims of the Grant Fund and the Programme in general. One argued that, in contrast to, for example, Opportunity Wales<sup>44</sup> where there was a clear developmental model of how SMEs could and should progress up a “ladder” of increasingly sophisticated use of ICT, this did not exist for Communities@one (although it should be noted that the Guidance does in fact contain a typology of use by ICTs by community groups)<sup>45</sup>. Another suggested that it was not clear to them whether the ultimate aim was really about inspiring individuals to make use of ICT (*“people have been focussing more on encouraging use of the internet”*) or whether the original intention was not to stimulate and support the use of technologies in ways which provided community benefit, citing a hypothetical example of a mobile CCTV scheme to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in a community. Some interviewees worried about the lack of specific targets and outputs and argued there needed to be a clearer focus on progression routes for individuals:

*“what is the end game?.....a lot of the outputs are pretty vague, a lot of it quite nebulous and I ask myself how do we measure if we’ve succeeded”*

A further specific concern expressed by a small number of interviewees was the approach to Rhondda Cynon Taff<sup>46</sup>:

*“I’ve visited the project and even I don’t understand it fully but it’s really based around constructing a community portal and I don’t see how that overlaps with Communities@One...we are doing RCT a disservice by not trying to play a role there”*

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<sup>44</sup> An Objective 1 project supporting the adoption and use of ICT by Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs)

<sup>45</sup> p.32 – 33. The six stages are Initial Uses; Information In; Information Out; Interaction; Creation; and Community Management of IT.

<sup>46</sup> See footnote 18, page 12 for an explanation of the context. Despite the decision not to appoint a full time Broker with sole responsibility for RCT, funding and Broker time have been earmarked for RCT Grant Fund applications.

### 4.3.2 Development of Grant Application Projects: Findings from Case-Studies

In all, our case-studies involved 21 projects which had been developed and had successfully applied for funding from the Grant Fund and a further four<sup>47</sup> which were in the pipeline. However, in three cases the same organisation was responsible for two related projects. Apart from the project-based case-studies, three projects which have been included in the fieldwork are County or region-wide, but have been included in order to ensure that the effects of such projects on local Communities First areas are not ignored. In a small number of cases, projects which were based in neighbouring Communities First areas but which were intended also to serve the case-study area in question were also included.

All except two of the 10 area-based case-study areas had seen at least one successful project developed. Both these areas were isolated from other Communities First areas. One was one of those where Community First structures were in poor shape, while in another there were more limited problems occasioned by what was perceived as a lack of engagement from the local authority in Communities First. In one of these areas, a number of project ideas had been discussed at a preliminary stage but only one had been worked up to application stage: this was currently on the reserve list. In the other, only one potential project had been identified and this was still being developed.

The three case-study areas where there was most activity (three projects in each case, with one area having also two projects in the pipeline) were those which were relatively large settlements and ones where there was a relatively large local community and voluntary sector (though in two of these cases, Communities First was not working well).

Table 4.4 shows the breakdown of “our” projects by grant size:

Table 4.4: Breakdown of case-study projects by grant size

Value	No. of projects
Less than £5,000	5
£5,000 - £14,999	5
£15,000 - £49,999	5
£50,000 - £99,999	4
£100,000 +	6
TOTAL	25

The projects were quite varied in terms of what they were setting out to do. Overall, it can be said that:

- Nineteen projects involved paying for staff, either on an employed basis (the majority) or on a sessional basis: in the majority of projects, staffing was the largest element of the budget;
- Nineteen projects involved purchasing ICT equipment, though only in a minority of cases was this the largest element of the budget. Six projects consisted of equipment on a stand-alone basis;

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<sup>47</sup> One additional project in development was identified but the sponsor was unwilling to speak to us at this stage in the research and it has been excluded from Table 4.4. and the analysis which follows.

- Thirteen projects provided resources for mentoring or training of individual residents or users (though in all but one cases, it was intended that such support would be entirely informal, on a drop-in bases, rather than more formal);
- Twelve projects were projects focussed on providing “drop-in” facilities with access to ICT equipment in a permanent physical location;
- Eight projects were providing extra staffing resources to enable better use of existing ICT resources (including two which were focussed on Digilabs which were unable to open for sufficient hours because of lack of paid staff);
- Around seven projects either involved existing, or were seen to have potential to help establish, social enterprises which might aspire to be self-sustaining;
- Five projects involved an element of digital storytelling as a way of engaging individuals and/or community groups with ICT (though in some cases this was regarded as a secondary goal, compared to the primary aim of engaging with excluded individuals);
- Five projects involved providing community groups with assistance in website development;
- Four projects involved providing an external technical support resource to voluntary and community groups (generally with the intention also to develop the capacity of organisations to meet their own technical needs in the longer term); most other projects made some provision for technical support to ensure the functioning of equipment during the lifetime of the project;
- Three projects (all of them large projects) might in some senses be regarded as “cascading out” the function of Communities@One itself, in that they involved working with community groups to raise their awareness and use of ICT (albeit that one of them also involved digital outreach to individuals within the targeted communities);
- Two (large) projects involved elements of providing technical support and servicing to individuals with problems with ICT equipment and training volunteers; though one of these was principally focussed on providing technical support for a network of pre-existing learning and access centres;
- Two projects involved recycling computer equipment and providing them at low cost to members of the community;
- Two projects (both very small) were basically concerned with meeting the internal needs of individual community groups: in one case, providing an internet enabled PC to allow a charity shop to sell items electronically and in the other, providing laptops to enable a Credit Union to train volunteers, access relevant websites and make presentations;

- One project (not yet approved) involved the purchasing of recording equipment for a music project.

None of our 25 case-study projects were supporting broadcasting, though two community radio projects had been discussed, with one having been signposted elsewhere and one which might yet emerge as a project. Also, interestingly, despite the emphasis in the Guidance<sup>48</sup> on the broad definition of ICT (for example, multi-media applications) most of the projects were focussed on fairly conventional uses of PCs and Macs, and of the internet – with the partial exception of those projects involving “digital storytelling” – while content projects were generally restricted to the development of websites.

It was clear from the fieldwork that in the majority of cases (and in line with the generally positive findings with regard to grant processes), the Brokers had done more than simply act as conduit for groups to access funding for these projects. Rather they had played a significant role in developing the project ideas and in injecting elements which the project sponsor had not always thought of. In particular, it was clear that Brokers had often been responsible for flagging up the need to address issues around training or mentoring, rather than focussing on equipment – something which is clearly in line both with the philosophy of the Programme and the findings of prior research which informed it. In a number of cases, the Brokers had made very positive suggestions for how to enhance the project under discussion drawing on wider experience, for example:

- Suggesting that a project which intended to “spin out” local digital storytelling projects, which would access their own funding should purchase extra “kit” which could be lent to the groups to ensure enthusiasm was not dissipated while funding was sought;
- Encouraging the inclusion of new elements in a project which built on a pre-existing initiative, such as using volunteers to refurbish computers, showcasing of practical applications of ICT such as on-line shopping and e-mail, making links to existing training provision and encouraging a greater emphasis on PCs rather than Macs:

*“Macs are more for techies ... which is what the Project Leader is”*

Though both of these examples are from larger projects, it was generally the case with the largest projects that the ideas of the sponsor were more clear-cut and the Brokers input correspondingly more related to points of detail:

*“The contact from Communities @ One did help us – mainly by focusing our attention on the outputs we needed to show. Apart from that nothing much changed from our original work on it”.*

In terms of the counter-factual, it is possible to separate the projects into a number of broad categories, though it is important to recognise that these can not be regarded as definitive:

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<sup>48</sup> P. 26 on

- Around five of the projects were essentially project ideas which were already relatively well-developed and which used Communities@One as a funding source to implement them. This included all four of the projects related to the project-based case-studies and a smaller digital storytelling project which had already been worked up for an application to the Social Risk Capital Fund. While this last, small scale-project would almost certainly have been funded without the Programme, it is more difficult to be sure whether this is true of the other projects. In essence, this would largely have depended on the scope to access European funding from the new Convergence Programmes or possibly from Lottery funding. In both of these case-studies it seemed clear that the scope of the potential projects had been increased by the existence of Communities@One: in one instance it had been the catalyst for a broader regional roll out of the project, while in the other it had enabled the addition of new elements (the employment of Digital Outreach).
- In the largest number of cases – around ten of the projects – the project itself was mobilised by the existence of the Communities@One Programme, but built on nascent ideas of things which the applicant group wished to achieve. These can be regarded as “opportunity-led” projects and included projects which gave extra resources to extend use of existing facilities or the range of services provided. In most cases, these organisations were used to accessing external funding. Some of these projects may well have been developed in response to other external funding opportunities (related to the Lottery or European funding for example) and the groups would generally have been capable of undertaking the grant application process without the input of the Brokers (in other words, in the absence of the Brokers, the projects might have materialised, though without the Grant Fund they would not have). In these cases, however, most applicants felt that the Broker had played a key role in making the process easier, and in some cases making sure a nascent project became an actual one. This included one of the larger projects, where the sponsor was adamant that without the Programme the delivery of an outreach service to the case-study area would simply not have happened. Similarly, another interviewee felt that without the personal engagement of the Broker, even had the funding opportunity been presented, she might not have found the time to develop the project and the application: in the end she completed it over a weekend at home, because

*“almost I didn’t want to let him [the Broker] down”.*

- A third category involves projects which would not have been developed without the direct contribution of the Broker. There were around four of these (mostly small), generally submitted by organisations without paid staff who simply did not have the time or resources to develop a funding bid. In these cases, it is improbable that the projects would have happened in the absence of the Programme.
- The final category consisted of around four projects which could almost be categorised as “Broker-driven”, where the original idea had been formulated very much as a result of the interaction of the Broker with the group concerned. In these cases, clearly the (mostly small) projects would be very unlikely to have materialised in the absence of the Programme.

Generally, there were few examples of missed opportunities which were evident during the fieldwork. However, in one case, a Community Centre which had nine relatively new laptops which were not being used because of a faulty internet connection was not being assisted (because the Broker felt that this was not something the Programme could deal with) even though another facility on the same housing estate was applying for funding to set up a drop-in centre from the Programme. In another case, there had not been any focussed discussion between the Broker and a Community Centre which had drop-in facilities but which was operating only fairly limited opening hours (with no evening opening, for example).

#### 4.3.3 Effect upon Local External Stakeholders and the Community/Voluntary Sector

At this stage it was generally quite difficult to identify effects on local stakeholders and the local and community sectors in our case-study areas, over and above the development of the Grant Fund projects.

While it was clear that most Brokers had been very active at general raising of awareness about the “digital inclusion” agenda and in a number of cases, stakeholders referred to specific events at which the Broker had made an effective input, there was relatively little evidence that this, as yet, had made any great difference to the thinking of local stakeholders and partners. Perhaps because of the lack of much in the way of “mapping” of local provision and facilities, there was no evidence of Brokers having so far helped stakeholders to develop a better understanding of the “landscape” or what was available locally.

There were cases in which Brokers had made linkages between different community groups who were receiving funding from the Programme. For example:

- A small group who had successfully applied for funding to develop a website with a digital storytelling element were put in touch with a project which could provide assistance with developing the website;
- Two supported groups were in discussion (thanks to the Broker) about sharing technical support;
- A Community Centre and a project serving minority ethnic women both of whom had drop-in facilities had been introduced to one another due to the Brokers efforts: although they were within a few hundred yards of each other, the project leaders had never met;
- A Broker had facilitated contacts between a County-wide digital storytelling project and groups which might be able to host storytelling circles;
- A Broker was trying to encourage two separate groups within the same community who were interested in establishing a community radio station to work together.

In general though, these were rather isolated examples, and were related to specific groups receiving funding under the Programme. There was, as yet, little evidence of

Brokers establishing better links between community groups as other than a spin-off from the grant development activity.

In terms of encouraging a better understanding by community groups of the potential of ICT, we have already seen that, in the context of the Grant Fund, Brokers were often able to inject new elements into applicants' thinking – often in terms of the “softer” elements of the importance of mentoring or support for new users of ICT but also in terms of specific technologies or applications such as skype or internet trading.

One very good example of the Broker “raising the sights” of a group was a very small project where the organisation (a charity helping cancer sufferers which ran a high street shop to raise funds) wanted to start trading on e-Bay in order to increase the revenue-generating capacity of the shop. While helping the group to achieve these internal, organisational aims, the Broker also raised the group's awareness that its (mostly retired, female volunteer workers) probably had little experience of using ICT and could benefit from being helped to use the equipment provided by the grant. This had led to the group encouraging each of the volunteers to learn how to use the equipment, recording the time spent by each in doing so. The project sponsor commented

*“I don't think I would probably have given it the emphasis without the grant...I needed the computer equipment ...I probably wouldn't have involved myself so much in making sure the volunteers understood it...I don't think I would have given it as much of a priority as I do now...I don't think I would have attempted to get everyone to turn it on...its given me that insight into helping the volunteers to use the equipment”.*

#### 4.3.4 Effects upon Facilities/Services Available Locally

Although in the majority of cases, the projects in our case-study are concerned with making new, or more often, existing ICT facilities and equipment available to the public or to defined user groups, almost all of the projects were not yet fully operational at the time of the fieldwork. However,

- Programme funding by providing technical support to provide maintenance had safeguarded the operation of ICT suites in five existing community suites, enabling the continuation of both “drop-in” and more formal ICT training;
- An existing ICT suite, which had been grossly underused, was opening longer hours as a result of the recruitment of a mentor;
- A Community Centre had been able to set up an internet-enabled PC for use on a drop-in basis on a large estate which had no other publicly accessible ICT facilities.

At least a further four new facilities and eight existing facilities with higher levels of staffing/equipment were expected to come on stream in the next few months.

#### 4.4 Intermediate Effects (Outcomes)

##### 4.4.1 Policy Effects

Perhaps unsurprisingly at this stage of the Programme, central stakeholders were unable to point to **specific** ways in which the Programme was already driving the digital inclusion agenda in Wales or elsewhere. However, a number of stakeholders, including those with knowledge and experience of the digital inclusion agenda elsewhere in the UK were convinced that the Programme was already demonstrating that applying a community development approach to digital inclusion was a viable and potentially far more successful way of tackling the issue than a physical centre-based approach which was seen to have been favoured elsewhere. It was reported that there had been considerable interest in the Programme at a recent Seminar held by the Alliance for Digital Inclusion in London.

It is also important to note that digital inclusion is now firmly on the policy map as far as the Welsh Assembly Government's ICT policy is concerned. "*Towards E-Wales: A Consultation on Exploiting the Power of ICT in Wales*" published in July 2006 provides clear and consistent evidence of the extent to which digital inclusion is seen as a critical element of harnessing ICT to produce economic and social change. Indeed the first of the list of aims (before even enhancing economic performance) which the Consultation document says it is trying to achieve is to:

*"ensure all citizens can exploit the opportunities offered by ICT"*<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, the fact that "*there remains a proportion of the population who are not*" confident and familiar with accessing online information and that our understanding of reasons why this is "*not complete*" is the first in a list of specific challenges relating to ICT said to be facing Wales<sup>50</sup>.

While it is far from clear that this emphasis can be attributed to Communities@One Programme (since, for example, it is evident clear from the document that EU thinking on digital inclusion is also a key factor underpinning this<sup>51</sup>), it is at least consistent with the high profile which the Programme is beginning to command in Wales.

Apart from digital inclusion policy, several interviewees stressed that the delivery model of Communities@one (with "embedded" but centrally managed Brokers taking a very proactive approach to project development) should and indeed, to some extent, was already informing thinking about other Programmes such as Communities First and broader policy agendas such as "Beyond Boundaries"<sup>52</sup>:

*"what is clear is that we've got a strong, really powerful tool which we want to develop and transmogrify".*

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<sup>49</sup> p.8

<sup>50</sup> p.31

<sup>51</sup> p. 16

<sup>52</sup> The Welsh Assembly Government's Response to the Beecham Review, looking at ways of improving integrated working across the public sector in Wales.

#### 4.4.2 The Use Made of ICTs in Communities

As might be expected, it is simply too early to make any judgement of the results of the projects within case-study areas on the usage of ICT, since the majority of the projects are only now starting. Some very slight indications of future effects can be gleaned however:

- In the Centre where the mentor had just been appointed, the baseline position was that in one year, during 18 hours a week availability, 671 uses have been made or 200 hours of active computer use, although there were 10 workstations. Most of this was by schoolchildren (in particular a home work club). This illustrates the extent of under-use and will provide a useful baseline against which to measure increased use.
- In the project-based case-study supporting pre-existing ICT centres, the project had so far had contact with 239 individuals, 38 of whom had agreed to participate in the project, mostly in the form of taking part in digital storytelling. In addition, the PC clinics which had been set up as part of the project had already helped 70 individuals and were training 16 active volunteers.
- Sixteen individuals had already participated in a digital storytelling project in one of the case-study areas, leading to 12 digital stories being made.
- At least eleven volunteers in a charity shop with little or no prior experience of ICT, had learnt how to use a digital camera and how to market goods on e-Bay and had also been using the PC in the shop for personal uses such as booking holidays: one of these was hoping to purchase a PC for her home.
- In a Community Centre which has not previously had an internet-enabled PC for public use, there has been limited use of the facility by local schoolchildren for homework and research, by a mother and toddlers group and by individuals booking holidays. However, use here has been limited due to the lack of any qualified support on site.

#### 4.4.3 Effects on Community Infrastructure

It is too early to comment on any effects on the coherence and effectiveness of community organisations in the case-study areas.

#### 4.4.4 Sustainability of Facilities/Services

In terms of the case-study projects, while it will be possible to explore issues around sustainability in greater detail once projects are up and running, there must be some questions about the potential of some of the projects for sustainability beyond the lifetime of the Programme. As has been seen, many of the projects are providing resources for staffing existing or (in a few cases) new ICT facilities and the extent to which these posts can become self-funding must be questionable: indeed, one of the larger projects argued explicitly that projects of this nature would inevitably have to continue relying on public funds.

At the same time, it might be argued that such interventions should of their nature be only short-to-medium term, given that it might be expected, once the benefit of ICT has been proved to otherwise sceptical or disinterested groups and individuals, most might be expected to acquire home-based resources. Despite this, a number of local stakeholders did flag up concerns about the limited resources available to the Programme and the relatively short-term nature of the funding: one local authority interviewee argued that what was needed was long-term revenue support for staff to engage with and build up the confidence of excluded groups.

A small number of projects – particularly those involving technical support - were already focussed on developing the capacity of volunteers, as a key way of providing longer-term sustainability. One or two of the smaller projects also seemed likely to be sustainable, because the use of ICT was being mainstreamed into the core business of the organisation.

Despite the fact that a number of projects are focussed on technical support services, it is important to note the lower than anticipated profile of technical support services in the Communities@One Programme as a whole and in particular the virtual disappearance of the original ideas of developing a network of “*circuit riders*”, individuals based within the community and voluntary sector and capable of providing ongoing support to ICT facilities within the sector. A small number of central stakeholders drew attention to this, with one feeling that there had been a tendency from the start to downplay this, possibly because the idea had come from outside Wales “*not invented here*”. This individual stressed that the Programme should be:

*“growing local expertise rather than giving money to companies that provide ICT support”*

With the virement of funds away from Technical Support, it may be that the opportunity to develop such resources may be limited.

Equally, though, it might be argued that the original idea of providing financial support to individuals or social enterprises to provide technical support services in place of pre-existing market mechanisms might be anti-competitive and/or risk undermining local businesses and that the real key to ensuring that “*kit*” is maintained and supported is ensuring that the users understand its benefits and therefore prioritise keeping it in working order.

Even so, while at the level of the individual grant application, the question of the adequacy of technical support during the lifetime of the Programme has been addressed, it is not clear that the Programme is of itself now helping to put any new mechanisms in place which will ensure longer-term support being available. But the adequacy of technical support is critical for many community organisations with small budgets:

*“If you give someone a PC without proper support then within 6 months it will be useless – riddled with viruses, full of unsuitable (and I don’t mean pornographic – just unnecessary) software and just won’t work”*

#### *4.5 Impacts*

In terms of impact, the central and local stakeholders, inevitably, felt it was too soon to judge. While, for most, the Programme had already proved itself an outstanding success in process terms, no-one felt confident of predicting the longer-term impact in terms of individual skills and outcomes or in terms of the effectiveness and cohesion of the voluntary and community sector:

*“the jury is still out, even in my head”*

## 5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Overview

In this report, we have both considered the baseline position in our case-study areas and also provided some early findings about the way in which the Programme is working. It is clear that, from a standing start, the Programme has made very great progress and is on track to achieve a full commitment of its Grant Fund. While our findings are inevitably preliminary, in the rest of this section, we highlight what we regard as the strengths of the Programme to date (Section 5.2) and a number of areas where there may be scope for improvement, or where the ambitions of the Programme may need to be reviewed (Section 5.3) before proposing a number of Recommendations.

### 5.2 Strengths

#### 5.2.1 Objectives

- The development of the Programme to date appears to reflect the Objectives set for it, in particular the first three of these<sup>53</sup>. The support structure which has been established for community organisations who become involved with the Programme is generally very strong and there is a strong focus on ensuring “*ICT access, skills progression and outreach to the disengaged*”
- The Programme is generally working well to build on existing infrastructure and is harnessing existing facilities which are under-used rather than starting from scratch. This is clearly in line with the overall objectives of the Programme and represents a good use of resources.

#### 5.2.2 Policy Linkages

- The Programme team have made the right connections with key organisations, and these are very actively contributing to the Programme through the Advisory Panel. This is working well and those involved with the Programme at this level clearly find their involvement worthwhile and are contributing to the success of the Programme.
- Relations between the Wales Co-operative Centre and the Social Justice and Regeneration Department are clearly excellent which enables the Programme to be developed on a “no surprises” basis.
- There appear to be generally good links with DEIN and the concept of digital inclusion is strongly referenced in recent strategy documents dealing with the “e” agenda.
- The Programme team has early on made linkages into the wider policy debate about digital inclusion. Thinking about policy elsewhere in the UK seems more concerned with improving service delivery and in particular increasing access to

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<sup>53</sup> ICT enabled communities; National and local information and support structures; A community sector enabled by ICT; Better enabled service delivery.

government services than with proactive measures to increase the use of ICT by socially excluded groups. This serves to underline the fact that Communities@One represents a relatively novel initiative both in its approach and scale.

### 5.2.3 Delivery

- The Programme team has succeeded with a remarkably short lead-time in bringing forward a large number of varied projects, spread widely across the eligible communities. This is a major success which everyone connected with the Programme is rightly proud of.
- The vast majority of projects have been brought forward by voluntary and more particularly community organisations, despite the relaxation in the rules originally intended. Where statutory bodies have been project promoters, there appear to be good reasons for this, and the overall priority of using a “bottom-up”, community development approach has been respected.
- The use of Brokers to “mediate” the development of projects and Grant applications is generally working very well indeed, particularly in the case of smaller groups and projects. In some cases, it is clear that good projects would not have come forward without the Brokers inputs, even had the funding opportunity (the Grant Fund) been in existence. It has potential to be used as a model for other Programmes of community engagement.
- While we believe there may be a risk of Brokers occasionally being so enthusiastic that they take more ownership of projects than the applicant, there seemed to be few examples of this in practice in the case-study areas.
- The grant application and appraisal system appears to be working well and is generally strongly supported by applicants.
- There is a strong focus on enabling access to ICT equipment and more particularly support. The overall balance of funding appears to be focussed on staff, and we believe this is appropriate, even if it raises issues over longer-term sustainability.

### 5.2.4 Management and Organisation

- The system of embedding Brokers is also generally working well, though there are some legitimate concerns about the difficulties of providing adequate support to dispersed individuals.
- The structure of the Central Team appears right and the inputs from the Communications Officer, the Technical Support Officer and the Finance Officer are appreciated and valued by the Brokers.
- Financial and information gathering systems are sound and provide up-to-the minute information.

- The Programme has built effectively on Communities First structures where they are functioning well, but Brokers have generally avoided being drawn into conflicts within Communities First Partnerships. This is a major achievement!

### *5.3 Areas for possible improvement*

#### 5.3.1 Objectives

- There has been relatively little emphasis to date on the fourth of the original Objectives<sup>54</sup>. If (as is understood) this has become a lower priority as the Programme has developed, then it would be sensible to formally revise the Objectives to reflect this. Certainly, it may make sense to downgrade the expectation that the Programme should make a major contribution to the way in which service deliverers deliver services using ICT, since this might more properly be funded from elsewhere (for example, through the “Making the Connections” Agenda). It would, however, be unfortunate if the emphasis on enabling individuals in deprived communities to make more use of public services (for example in learning) were lost.
- Thus far, there has been relatively little emphasis on formally capturing good practice and ensuring it is disseminated. While the importance of this is recognised by the Programme team, systems need to be put in place in the short term. There seems also to be a fairly widespread recognition in other parts of the UK that very little knowledge in terms of best practice exists, which partly reflects the limited roll-out of specific initiatives designed to bridge the digital divide.

#### 5.3.2 Policy linkages

- There is relatively little strategic engagement from DELLS in the Programme
- Although the baseline materials prepared before the start of the Programme were useful in accurately identifying the nature of the issues to be addressed (in particular the need for a much greater emphasis on developing awareness of why ICT might be useful to individuals who have no contact with it, building confidence and providing informal support), as far as we are aware no detailed data has been made available which provides a baseline of individual household’s access to ICT at a very local level, though it is believed such data exists.

#### 5.3.3 Delivery

- Brokers have so far concentrated almost exclusively on developing project applications for the Grant Fund. While this is at the core of the Programme’s achievements to date, it has led to some frustration on the part of some Brokers and meant that some areas of their formal role (e.g. networking local voluntary and community groups, building wider awareness of digital inclusion issues) have not yet been given prominence.

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<sup>54</sup> Better Enabled Service Delivery

- There is perhaps rather less variety in the projects which have come forward than might have been expected.
- While Brokers have worked very well indeed with individual organisations, they have done so in something of a vacuum, because of the lack of consistent mapping of services (including those by statutory providers) available in each area. A problem here may be the (over-)ambitious scope of the mapping which it is understood was developed during the induction training, which potentially involved analysing the use of ICT by every voluntary and community organisation.
- While the Brokers contribution has generally been appreciated for most projects, larger projects appear sometimes to find the extent to which the Programme insists on “hands-on” involvement with project development intrusive.
- While there is no evidence of Brokers having in any way favoured some groups over others, there is a lack of clarity about the extent to which the priorities of individual groups are widely shared within each community. In reality, projects have come forward on a “first come, first served” basis, without any overall view being taken about the priorities within a particular community. In practice, however, it would have probably been impossible to find a way of setting shared priorities across individual communities: an attempt to do so would undoubtedly have been incompatible with the short timescale the Programme has to deliver and would have run the risk of becoming bogged down in local conflicts, as many of the Community First Partnerships have done.
- Although some Brokers have undoubtedly delivered good links with local learning providers, in general there seems little awareness of, and few contacts with, more formal learning provision at the basic level offered within the targeted areas. While it is recognised that many of the individuals supported by the Programme will neither want nor be able to progress, more needs to be done if the Brokers task of *“Work[ing] in partnerships with local learning providers to create learning progression routes”* is to be realized.
- While the decision to vire money away from a specific Technical Support budget was understandable and probably correct, the issue of building up a longer-term sustainable network of technical support appears to have a fairly low profile, although some individual larger projects are addressing this.
- While a large gap between the aggregate financial commitments in the Programme and the actual spend is to be expected, this does need to be seen in the context of the fact monies are paid in advance (quarterly in the case of revenue expenditure) and in this light, the “conversion rate” is perhaps lower than we might have expected.

#### 5.3.4 Management and Organisation

- There seem to be some concerns on the part of the Brokers about the extent to which the Central Team ensure that they are kept fully informed about the “big

picture”. While part of this is undoubtedly an inevitable result of the dispersed nature of the team, these concerns do need to be taken seriously.

#### *5.4 Recommendations*

##### 5.4.1 Objectives

**Recommendation 1:** Consideration should be given to revise the formal Objectives of the Programme to reflect the reduced emphasis on encouraging service providers to innovate in the provision of services.

**Recommendation 2:** The capturing and dissemination of good practice from amongst funded projects needs to be given a high priority. Depending on decisions on the monitoring processes, Brokers should be encouraged to maintain contact with funded projects and to work closely with the Communications Officer to develop the intended case-studies; regional and national networking events need to give a high priority to showcasing projects and sharing experience and these sessions need to be recorded in some form of conference report or record; and the website should be developed as an interactive forum for projects.

**Recommendation 3:** The engagement of the Programme team with its hands-on experience of delivery, in the development of the policy debate both within Wales and beyond is to be welcomed, but it is important that this does not distract from managing the team on the ground.

##### 5.4.2 Policy linkages

**Recommendation 4:** The way in which the Advisory Panel has been structured and the linkages with relevant organisations which have been made is itself a good practice example which should be widely disseminated within the Welsh Assembly Government.

**Recommendation 5:** The possibility of developing a more strategic relationship with DELLS needs to be examined.

**Recommendation 6:** The Programme team, in conjunction with the evaluators, should investigate whether postcode data on household take-up of internet (and broadband) connections is available and can be analysed. While clearly this is only a proxy measure, securing such data would enable more targeted efforts on areas with particularly low take-up of internet usage, and would also allow for some tracking of trends across time.

##### 5.4.3 Delivery

**Recommendation 7:** While the initial concentration on project development was appropriate, Brokers now need to be encouraged to ensure that they have a clear overview of services which are being provided within their areas. While we recognise that the Programme is about far more than informal mentoring and learning and open access facilities, in order to be manageable, such “mapping” should concentrate on organisations which provide access to, and support in using, ICT for individual users, whether the general public or defined user groups. This mapping should be used to

identify unfilled gaps, to ensure links are being made between compatible organisations, and to prepare the way for a possible second phase Programme.

**Recommendation 8:** While we believe it is appropriate that all applications should be mediated by the Brokers, the Programme team may wish to consider if a less “hands on” approach is appropriate with larger organisations, recognising that this may well lead to the Grants Panel turning down inadequately worked up projects.

**Recommendation 9:** The Programme team and Advisory Panel need to decide whether more needs to - and can - be done to ensure the development of a sustainable network of technical support services, for example through the network which the Programme is already developing involving key national organisations such as PAVS, the Scarman Trust and Deudraeth.

**Recommendation 10:** The Programme team needs to consider how, as the Programme develops, greater links can be made with ICT provision made by formal learning providers.

**Recommendation 11:** The situation with regard to the conversion of financial commitments to spend needs to be monitored carefully to identify the extent to which this is a consequence of slippage or of groups not proceeding with plans, leading to a view on the appropriate extent to which the Grant Fund should be over-committed to ensure full spend.

**Recommendation 12:** Given the fact that many – if not a majority – of the projects are focussed on providing or utilising ICT facilities which are accessible to the public or to defined user groups, considerable emphasis needs to be placed in the monitoring system on recording usage of such facilities.

#### 5.4.4 Management and Organisation

**Recommendation 13:** We believe the system of “embedding Brokers” is generally working well and should not be changed (although some individual staff may need to be relocated). However, there is scope to ensure a better flow of information to Brokers: this might involve ensuring that Brokers have and are using up-to-date information about all projects approved and that notes of Broker team meetings, with action points, are made and followed up; sending Brokers by e-mail the papers for Advisory Group and Grant Panel meetings and notifying them of the outcomes (rather than relying on the shared drive); and possibly doing a weekly or two-weekly “e-bulletin” of key developments at the Centre, in order to ensure all Brokers are working on the basis of shared knowledge. This may become even more important as the end of the Programme looms and decisions about future funding are made.

### Annex 1: Interviews With Central Stakeholders

Name	Organisation	Reason for Inclusion
Alun Burge	Communities@One	Project manager
Claudia Davies and Kay Chichester	Communities@One	Members of Central unit Staff (Community Broker Managers)
Elizabeth Hudson and Richard James	Communities@One	Members of Central unit Staff (Communications Officer and Technical Support Officer)
Joe Draper	Communities@One	Member of Central unit Staff (Finance and Grants Officer)
Lesley Jones	Wales Coop Centre	Line Manager for Communities@one unit
Simon Harris	Wales Coop Centre	Chief Executive
David Jenkins		Chair, Advisory Group
Karen Lewis	BBC	Member, Advisory Group and Grants Panel
Terry Price	Scarman Trust	Member, Advisory Group and Grants Panel; part of emerging national network
Anne Stephenson and Chris Gittins	Communities Directorate, WAG	Sponsor Division for Communities@One (Director and Head of Branch: CG also Member Advisory Group and Observer, Grants Panel)
Janine Pepworth	E-Wales, WAG	Member, Advisory Group and Grants Panel
Owen Evans	BT	Member, Advisory Group and Grants Panel
Christine Major	DELLS, WAG	Member Advisory Group and Observer, Grants Panel
Gail Bradbrook (by telephone)	Citizens Online	Member Advisory Group and instrumental in Programme development
Sian Irons	WEFO, WAG	Responsible for project within WEFO

