

# **COASTAL COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING**

## **STAKEHOLDER EVIDENCE WORKSHOPS**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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#### **APPROACH**

Welsh Government (WG) Marine and Fisheries Division commissioned the Environment and Rural Affairs Strategic Evidence Unit to undertake a series of stakeholder workshops to inform their planning for future support to coastal communities. The ambition for the proposed support is to build capacity to achieve outcomes for sustainable growth and nature recovery (detailed below) in line with Programme for Government commitments. By capacity building we refer to the skills, connections and other underpinning factors that enable people to achieve desired outcomes.

<b>Sustainable growth</b>	<b>Nature recovery</b>
• sustainable aquaculture	• tackling climate and nature emergencies
• local seafood supply-chains	• managing the marine environment
• tourism & recreation	• blue carbon
• delivery of 'Fisheries Objectives'	• public understanding of marine issues

Two workshops were undertaken in September 2022, with a total of 29 marine and coastal stakeholders from organisations across Wales. Workshops were structured to capture participants experiences with existing projects, so we could document key lessons learned. This was both in terms of successes i.e. 'what works well' but also to understand additional needs that may be required in future and any limitations of current/past approaches. The workshops were structured as follows:

1. Mapping Current Delivery
2. Understanding Success
3. Additional Needs?
4. Looking to the Future

## **KEY FINDINGS:**

A shortlist of key approaches and attributes for projects, which successfully achieve capacity building in coastal communities, was drawn together from the learning shared in both workshops. Whilst workshop participants brought forward a range of experiences, there was clear consensus across all those involved in both workshops that the following five points are important determinants of success. We, therefore, suggest that these approaches and attributes are actively sought and supported through government and wider interventions. They are not listed in order of priority.

## **KEY APPROACHES**

- 1. Achieve outcomes by working across boundaries and taking a joined-up approach to problem solving.** This includes working across marine/terrestrial and administrative boundaries and identifying all the connections and actors that are relevant to consider for the issue(s) at hand.
- 2. Ensure a collective sense of involvement, by being inclusive and responding to needs identified in communities.** This requires trust and democratic processes, as well as good communications. Ensuring diverse representation is also key. Working with community leaders is helpful here, but it is equally important to support a wider culture of volunteering and engagement to ensure communities can fully participate.
- 3. Ensure financial sustainability** by enabling skills development and innovation to capitalise on opportunities in emerging markets. Also, by using appropriate project structures (e.g. Community Interest Companies (CIC)) and fostering buy-in to projects through business investment and/or activities that have evident participant benefits.
- 4. Work at the appropriate scale,** which is small enough for communities to be involved, ensuring trust and relevance to them, but achieves essential outcomes in line with Programme for Government commitments. To do this, good facilitation and network structures are needed.
- 5. Maintain continuity between projects** so that trust can be built with stakeholders and learning is shared, scaling-out good practice so that we build on past experiences. This places value on previous successes and not only on innovation.

An extended list of guidelines and advice for prospective projects was also developed through the final exercise of the workshops, which sought to synthesise discussions on what works and why, and what else is needed to ensure success looking to the future. As with the shortlist, there was a strong degree of consensus on the points put forward. These extended guidelines provide insights on how to work most effectively with communities, what characteristics to prioritise in your projects and staff, who needs to be involved, what supports might be required, and how to usefully monitor and evaluate activities. The advice here is not only directed

to future project leaders but can also be read as advice for funders and government on what they should be encouraging and supporting.

## ADVICE FOR CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECTS

### 1. What approaches make projects successful?

**Continuity**, to enable communities to develop trust in organisations, feeling a sense of longer-term commitment, and build relationships with individual people (e.g. project staff). ‘What works’ should be continued, shared and scaled-out rather than projects constantly seeking to ‘innovate’.

**Structures and systems in place so projects aren't 'stop-start' or piecemeal**. For example, management boards that sit above different project steering groups (as with the Marine Protection Area's, and Severn Estuary Partnership) and/or a Community Interest Company, which run more like businesses and continue beyond individual projects (e.g. Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum).

**'Strength in numbers'** – the size of a project can keep it going. For instance, when you have many different activities/partners in place to enable continuation, particularly when these are supported through different income streams. Diverse networks can also support each other, with different organisation types taking on different roles and activities as best suits their capacities. Connecting an ‘ecosystem’ of related projects can equally be helpful. Similarly, if lots of people are involved, projects develop momentum, as people want to be involved due to the social buzz.

**Use self-sustaining project structures**, like Community Interest Companies. With CIC's, projects are run by paid employees protecting their commitment and capacity, and enabling recruitment of replacement(s) if needs. This reduces the reliance of success on one or two individuals, especially if they are volunteers. This supports continuity listed above.

**Self-sustaining activities** are those which have buy-in from participants, either in terms of interest in activities or financial. People keep doing things that they like doing (i.e. are fun, sociable), when they see results, or it benefits them (e.g. citizen science, finding out about their stretch of coast; meeting a core need, like disabled access; leading walks/conservation activities).

**Activities which tap into emerging markets/opportunities for innovation**, however small, can also be the key to being self-sustaining. Joining-up small business interests and/or social enterprises can be useful here. Getting actors with business/development skills involved can help support these types of activities. Simple seed/ capital funding for key infrastructure can similarly enable start-ups/business enhancement.

**Projects having a face in community**. One to one contact can be very valuable for some people and may be more equitable and effective than public meetings which can become more ‘political’. This needs resourcing. Accessible spokespersons embedded within the community can also provide clear (and direct) communications, combating misinformation i.e. assumptions and fears about what a project might involve.

**Facilitators and intermediaries** between communities and other groups/funders/government are important, enabling connections between grassroots interests/opportunities and strategic objectives.

**Celebrate successes publicly** across a range of media/channels. People are interested in what other projects are doing so sharing this information is good.

## 2. Who needs to be involved in projects going forwards?

**It works well to use established structures and processes to involve people**, developing connections and engagement with a project, for example through community associations, youth clubs and volunteering groups.

**Good projects talk to a wide range of people, inclusive of a range of demographics.** It is important to consider the diversity of the community and ensure this is reflected in projects. A democratic process is only ensured by considering all views in project development.

**Bottom-up, community-led approaches are the preferable style** of project development. Top-down approaches can work but project staff need to work with people in a meaningful fashion, not just consulting, but coproducing the project where possible.

**Working at appropriate scales that are meaningful** to the desired outcome, is important, instead of working to administrative boundaries. Working at the scale of community interest is equally important, channelling existing enthusiasm rather than coming in with strategic objectives. Good facilitators can connect to these as needed. This means having flexibility to be reactive to what is needed, not being dictated by a 'fund'. Projects have to mean something to the community & place.

**Community leaders are the key to wider community engagement** and can enable 'self-sustaining' activities. It is important to identify, facilitate and work with these individuals. They are not just those in formal positions of power and don't always have an established track record. New 'leaders' can emerge depending on circumstance. So, projects and funding calls need to be widely networked.

**Volunteering is a commitment and needs to be supported/acknowledged** in order to ensure that community activity can be sustained. Could businesses/employers support this to enhance community volunteering?

**Project officers need to be trusted** and well-known to be successful, which takes time. Ideally they should be seen as separate from vested interests. Stakeholders feel that competing for funding against people who should be collaborators is not helpful and want to aim instead for partnership building.

**Good projects will ensure holistic approaches**, joining-up where it makes sense to the issue at hand e.g. linking terrestrial and marine, or working across administrative/political borders. To be effective, we need to connect everyone who has impact. For example, the

tourist sector need to be more involved as it is not clear they understand their impact on marine ecosystems.

**Consider what skills and attributes a project needs and how to access these.** Get relevant players involved to facilitate this e.g. development trusts/business leaders, renewables companies, or universities for technical input. This can enable projects to become self-sustaining.

### 3. What supports do projects/stakeholders require?

**Long term commitment to funding is important to success.** Projects can otherwise lose momentum, trust and connections within the community. Funding continuity also allows staff career development and incentive to stay, otherwise you can lose experienced people.

**Stakeholders would like to have a cross-Wales future funding plan** outlining a long-term strategy that they can plan their activities to. They would also like to know where investment is needed for projects, for example through an augmented marine spatial development plan that illustrates what we need to make space for in our oceans and what areas need to be protected / restored.

**Funding windows are quite tight.** Stakeholders would benefit from more forward planning /visibility of forthcoming windows (linking to the point above about a long-term strategy). Proportional windows to fund size is equally important i.e. larger funds take more time to prepare a bid for.

**Stakeholders want simple processes enabling them to action ideas** and not get 'bogged-down' in paperwork. For example, appropriate application processes that are simple for smaller / seed-funds.

**More funder involvement during projects** and better availability/access to these representatives – i.e. direct lines of communication, would be welcomed by stakeholders.

**Access to skills, to take advantage of new infrastructure/opportunities, is important** for coastal communities. For example, funding local skills training for the energy sector has been beneficial. Need to enable communities to identify the skills/supports they need (e.g. disabled access).

**There is appetite for a 'Royal Welsh Marine Show'** – to enable awareness raising, sharing insights, connecting people & enhancing ocean literacy.

### 4. How should projects be monitored?

**Softer outputs i.e. qualitative measures** – are now used in many rural development projects, which provide a good example to follow. For instance, recording quality of engagement with projects rather than quantity and focusing on personal stories. Innovative approaches are also useful e.g. photos of before and after an activity, to show impact.

**Some quantitative measures can be helpful** to provide structure to reporting, but they are blunt tools. Not all quantitative measures are comparable, context is critical; e.g. jobs created in remote rural versus urban settings - a small number of jobs in a rural location might be very important and have wide impact.

**Any survey should be optional/voluntary** (especially covering demographics e.g. ethnicity). Make it personal – ‘how would you describe your background?’. Shouldn’t collect diversity info if not using it – i.e. committing to make changes on the basis of insights.

**Post implementation monitoring is needed to capture ongoing impacts.** Currently funding for monitoring finishes when a project finishes.

**Need to enable people to learn from failure.** Key Performance Indicators can lead to risk aversion, with a perception that you can’t fail because of the risk of not getting the next project.

**Enable sharing and learning from good practice.** A spatial log/database of projects/reports would be helpful as a resource for applicants and reviewers/auditors to help people to learn from other projects, share successes and understand what is happening where to connect-up similar projects. Dedicated resource for networking and sharing would be useful as people don’t have time/capacity to share learning/info from projects.

**Continue what works** - there is a frustration that funding prescriptions have favoured 'new and innovative approaches'. Stakeholders know what works. “We just need to do an awful lot more of it.” Could monitoring and bid process be adjusted to reflect this?

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## **STAKEHOLDER EVIDENCE WORKSHOPS**

### **FULL REPORT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Welsh Government (WG) Marine and Fisheries Division commissioned the Environment and Rural Affairs Strategic Evidence Unit to undertake a series of stakeholder workshops to inform their planning for future supports to coastal communities. The ambition for the proposed supports is to build capacity to achieve outcomes for sustainable growth and nature recovery (detailed in Table 1 below) in line with Programme for Government commitments. By capacity building we refer to the skills, connections and other underpinning factors that enable people to achieve desired outcomes.

<b>Sustainable growth</b>	<b>Nature recovery</b>
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**Table 1:** Objectives for Sustainable Growth and Nature Delivery

Two workshops were undertaken in September 2022, with a total of 29 stakeholders from a range of organisations, as shown in table 2. Stakeholders were invited by direct email invitation from WG and identified through participation in, or connection with, current Ministerial Advisory groups and associated networks. Whilst a good spread of interests have been captured, we acknowledge that there are some omissions which would be desirable to gain further representation from including more community-level representation from residents and local leaders, Marine Protected Area officers, fishers and aquaculture.

Participants were informed that their contribution to the workshop would be kept anonymous (no named individuals reported), but organisations would be listed. Workshops lasted 2.5 hrs and were held online via Microsoft Teams, using Mural to facilitate discussions and capture comments and insights from participants. The Mural board used for the workshops is shown in figure 1. Questions and associated activities were arranged at four points around the board, which participants could then zoom in and out to, in order to engage with the conversations and associated note-taking. Mural links were shared prior to the workshops and brief training undertaken on the day.

**Table 2:** Who participated in the workshops.

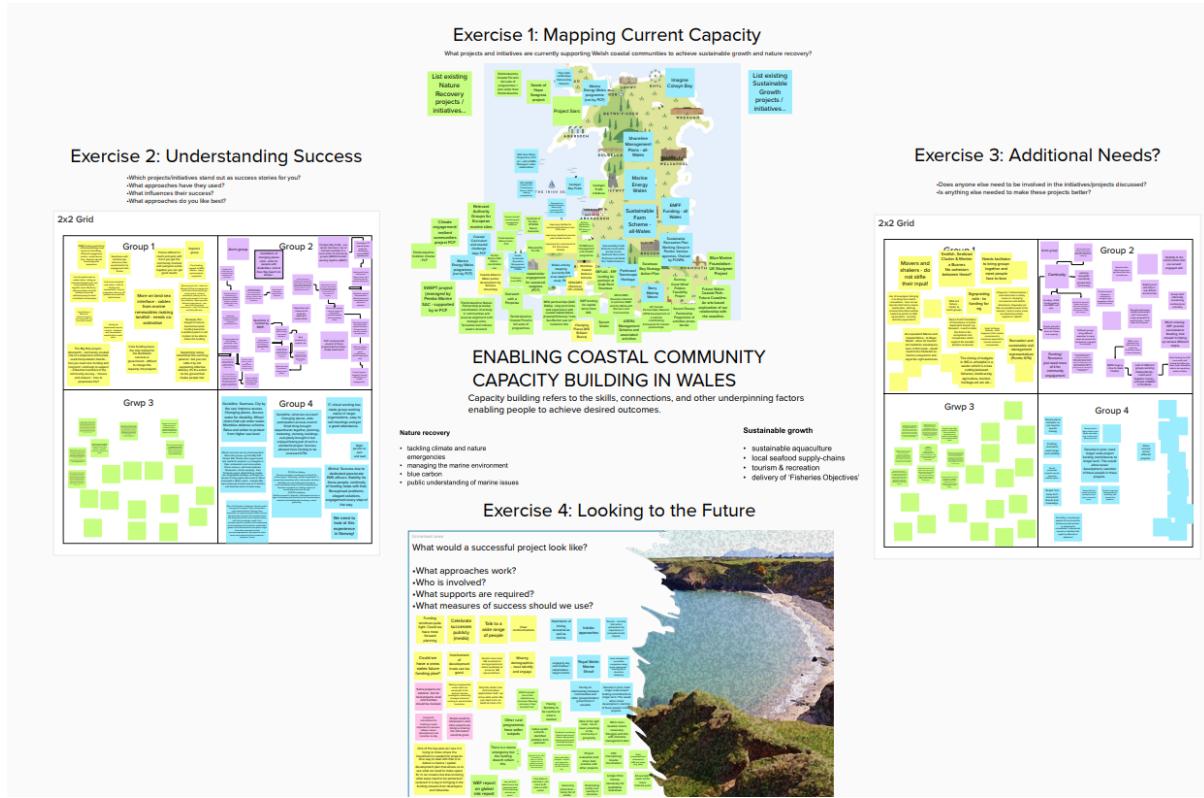
Newport County Council	Severn Estuary Partnership
Pembrokeshire County Council	European Subsea Cables Association
Ceredigion County Council	Chamber of Shipping
Gwynedd County Council	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Denbighshire County Council	National Lottery Fund
Isle of Anglesey County Council	Wildlife Trusts
Cardiff City County Council	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park authority
Swansea City County Council	Syren Shellfish Limited
Abergele Town Council	Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum
The Crown Estate	Cardigan Bay Fisheries Local Action Group
Swansea University	Natural Resources Wales
Freelance educationalist	Local resident

Participants were invited to make notes in the first exercise (detailed below), but otherwise dedicated notetakers from Welsh Government were used to record discussions. Notes taken were visible to participants throughout, and immediately after the workshops, ensuring that details were recorded accurately. Workshops were not recorded and information came from notes only so any data will not be verbatim. A mixture of small-group activities and whole-group plenaries were used through the workshop to ensure active participation by all and allow time for everyone's experiences to be heard and documented.

Workshops were structured to capture participants experiences with existing projects, so we could document key lessons. This was both in terms of successes i.e. 'what works well' but also to understand additional needs that may be required in future and any limitations of current/past approaches. The format of the workshops was as follows:

1. **Mapping Current Delivery** – rapid icebreaker activity where participants annotated a map of Wales to list projects and initiatives currently supporting coastal communities to achieve sustainable growth and nature recovery.
2. **Understanding Success** – extended in-depth discussions with participants in small groups to understand what has worked well in their experience and why.
3. **Additional Needs** – in-depth discussions with small groups to understand additional needs and limitations of past approaches that should be considered for future schemes.
4. **Looking to the Future** – plenary session bringing together insights from all the groups, aiming to synthesize key lessons regarding the format and approach of future schemes. Extended discussion of how schemes should be monitored and reporting were also included here.

**Figure 1:** Screenshot of Mural Board from Workshop 1 (which focused on experiences from South Wales).



## FINDINGS

### EXERCISE 1: MAPPING CURRENT CAPACITY

In this exercise participants annotated post-it notes detailing different projects on a map of Wales to provide an overview of current activity and capacity. We posed the question: 'What projects and initiatives are currently supporting Welsh coastal communities to achieve nature recovery and sustainable growth?' to guide their responses. The whole group was involved, and the activity was used as an 'icebreaker' and chance to familiarise participants with the Mural software.

The workshops were organised to connect to experiences from stakeholders in the north and south of Wales and the spread of activities shown in figures 2 and 3 reflects this. It should be stressed that the maps produced do reflect the experience of those participating in workshops and should not be viewed an exhaustive mapping exercise.

Taken together a good range of activity is evident with good coverage across the Welsh coastline. Projects shown include both those focussed on 'nature recovery' (green post-its) and 'sustainable growth' (blue post-its) but with more activity in the former group. Projects were often connected to certain organisations, including the Wildlife Trusts, Local Authorities, and Coastal Partnerships and common structures (e.g. Marine Protected areas) that involved in multiple projects. There were, however, some examples of unique partnerships and projects in specific locations

(e.g. coastal protection schemes or renewable energy schemes). There is often a similar focus for projects in different areas of Wales e.g. seagrass conservation, and in the case of seagrass there is a national network but it is not always clear how well networked similar projects are. Projects often involve partnerships and a diverse set of players is evident e.g. Universities, charities, business and public sector organisations.

**Figure 2:** Screenshot of exercise 1 mapping for the South Wales Workshop



**Figure 3:** Screenshot of exercise 1 mapping for the North Wales Workshop



## EXERCISES 2 & 3:

In these two exercises, we sought to dig deeper into participants insights of projects listed in Exercise 1, to understand what makes them successful and what else might be needed to achieve desired outcomes. The exercises involved breakout groups, to enable smaller group discussions and time for participants to share their experiences in some depth. A notetaker captured key points on Mural, whilst the facilitator posed questions. Questions were as follows:

- Which projects/initiatives stand out as success stories for you?
- What approaches have they used?
- What influences their success?
- Does anyone else need to be involved in the initiatives/projects discussed?
- Is anything else needed to make these projects better?

Insights from these two exercises are presented here under the following cross-cutting themes, which were identified through thematic analysis of the raw data:

1. Strategic oversight & facilitation
2. Cross boundary / joined-up approaches
3. Appropriate scale
4. Continuity
5. Project structures
6. Trust
7. Inclusive & democratic
8. Community leaders and motivators
9. Seeing results
10. Effective communications
11. Right processes
12. Monitoring
13. Innovation and new markets
14. Access to skills

Each theme is discussed in turn, with examples of the insights presented by participants during workshops to illustrate the points in question. Participant insights are paraphrased, rather than given as direct quotes, given the format of data collection in the workshops (i.e. as notes rather than full recording). All of the raw data is not included here for the sake of brevity. Each of the themes presented was evident across all of the workshop groups, and during both workshops, demonstrating their relevance to all participants. Whilst a range of experiences were presented, there was a strong degree of consensus across participants, regarding what works and what is needed in future. Many points were reiterated almost exactly by different participants, showing clear commonality of experience and indicating ‘saturation’ of themes i.e. we have reached an exhaustive list that wider engagement with similar stakeholders would not extend. Nonetheless, as noted above, some key stakeholders ideally need to be further engaged to ensure that any additional points can be identified. Themes are not presented in an order of priority and should be seen as equally pertinent. Themes often interconnect and some stakeholder comments are relevant to more than one theme, as is highlighted in the findings below.

### **Strategic oversight & facilitation**

Stakeholders identified a need for project staff to act as facilitators, linking grassroots energy and interests from communities to strategic policy ambitions. They explained this in the following manner:

“Communities can be enthusiastic about taking action but don’t necessarily see the bigger strategic picture – which is where officers come in.”

“Lots of projects start as smaller ideas - taking a strategic overview can bring smaller projects together more effectively - officers provide a key link between those and optimising bang for buck.”

“You need a project officer who can span policy and implementation. They need an oversight of both, feeding back to policy what is needed in place, but also ensuring on the ground action meets strategic targets.”

In the early phases of a project it was argued that facilitation is critical to bring communities together to identify interests and develop their ambitions, as well as connect to potential funds which they might not be aware of. It was also noted that communities also need an official legal entity to actually apply for funds, and here intermediary organisations are again key:

“Need facilitator to bring groups together and meet people face to face”

“Signposting role to funding is critical through events and staff who can act as a voice on the ground within communities, working with those who are harder to reach.”

It was also noted that project staff can usefully act as networkers ensuring that communities are connected to similar projects elsewhere in Wales/their region:

“People stay in their own area and need to network better – many are doing similar things but not talking. Similar projects across Wales could be more linked up.”

### Cross boundary / joined-up approaches

Stakeholders noted that good projects link across boundaries, whether these were terrestrial/ marine or administrative (county and national borders). This was both in terms of their approach to funding and the interventions they undertook. The following examples and comments were given:

“We need to work at ecosystem scale, joining-up terrestrial with marine, for example to manage silt pollution from land into shellfish beds and water quality as affected by farming and development.”

“Land and sea are interdependent; we need to work with actors across these different areas & ensure all the relevant communities (e.g. farmers and fishers) are fully engaged at outset.”

“More on land-sea interface is needed, for example cables from marine renewables making landfall needs co-ordination.”

“The siloing of budgets is unhelpful in a sector which is cross cutting between fisheries, biodiversity, agriculture, tourism, heritage etc.”

“Communities that straddle county or country borders might need additional oversight to get actors to work together.”

These points also link to the need to work at the appropriate scale. More broadly, stakeholders identified a need to work holistically so that you join-up with all the relevant actors who affect the issue at hand, and that any inadvertent trade-offs are considered:

“We need to join-up departments across councils - harbours and communities need to talk to each other. They are not currently seeing the need.”

“Need to engage Chambers of Commerce in tourist dependent towns to make better links to the ecosystems that underpin tourism revenues, as there is currently limited apparent consideration of this. For example, stressing of marine wildlife by water users. Similarly, lifeguards / harbourmasters / boat clubs should also be engaged regarding management of recreational craft wildlife disturbance.”

### Appropriate scale

The need to work at an appropriate scale, which was relevant to communities, was a point that was expressed in a number of different forms. Primarily, it was outlined in terms of working at a scale that was meaningful for the community, and which enabled them to act on issues which were important to them in the places they know and care about. Ideally, this would happen because project ideas originated in the community and were developed in a ‘bottom-up’ way. In contrast, it was argued that ideas developed outside of the community would not work as well, linking to points about having an inclusive and democratic process. This would often require good facilitation, as noted above, to ensure that projects could connect to strategic aims and funds, but would be grounded in the needs of people in place.

“Not all successful projects can be moved to another place.”

“The idea worked because it originated in community, involving a diverse set of users with a shared vested interest. It was successful because it responds to clear needs within the community and it can be part of processes they are already engaged with here.”

Of course, some ambitions do need to work at a wider scale, and here the need for an all-Wales vision, or networking between different aligned projects across different locations, was seen as important. Yet, even for national scale ambitions it seen to be imperative that communities could identify with needs and objectives on their own terms.

“Some projects are best joined across Wales and wider, (e.g. invasive species management) but some are local. You need to appreciate the range of scales that projects can appropriately work at.”

Finally, issues of appropriate scale were raised in relation to points about working in a holistic way, across any administrative or political divisions, to ensure that problems were tackled effectively by including all the relevant people/factors. This links to points above about joined-up working.

## **Continuity**

The need for continuity between projects was a very prominent theme discussed by stakeholders. This was highlighted in relation to the desirability of core funding or other structures in place to ensure that key staff could be maintained. Whilst it is unsurprising that stakeholders would seek greater financial security, the objective benefits of project continuity included a wide range of factors including developing trust and demonstrating commitment to communities and ensuring staff skills and networks are retained, as outlined in the following:

“Continuity is key to success, it enables projects and organisations to build momentum, passing key lessons on, and ensuring what works can be repeated across a range of locations – duplicating good practice.”

“Continuity of people needed – those with skills, relationships and experience of what works move on if there is no security. We need to retain staff with the skills and experience to do this work effectively. Longer-scale project funding commitment would also allow career development.”

“Working alongside community groups long-term is key. It takes time and resources to build capacity in communities.”

The need for continuity in these terms, was also connected to arguments around the importance of trust between project staff and communities. As well as being able to design projects that understand community needs:

“Successful projects build on core funding that maintains activity in areas - maintaining community trust through a legacy of engagement.”

“Stability in funding/ core structures enables projects to respond to local needs rather than jumping to fit funders specifications.”

This connects to points about working at the right scale, effective communication and using democratic processes. It was also argued that too much emphasis is placed on innovation and doing something new, when existing projects have often got it right if we could just role that out more widely.

“Funding tends to be given to innovative ideas only – over egging innovation. We know what works, we just need to do more of it.”

## **Project structures**

Following on from the points made about continuity, stakeholders highlighted a number of different approaches to structuring projects in such a way that could address the need for continuity, even if funding was short-term. This included having longer-term structures in place, like management boards which sit above individual

projects, or establishing a Community Interest Company<sup>1</sup> which exists beyond a single project funding cycle. These structures can provide an ongoing point of connection for stakeholders, building good relations with the community:

“It works well when there is a strong structure in place to help smooth the way for projects i.e. a management structure above project boards. It can ensure continuity and builds trust over time, providing a presence in communities. Projects are not then seen as a one off but part of a longer-term commitment.”

Community Interest Companies were seen as particularly useful as they were designed to operate more like businesses. Similarly, when people were able to run initiatives as businesses, including social enterprise and not-for-profits, or when existing enterprises came together to collaborate in new ways, they were often seen as more financially sustainable. This was due to peoples’ motivation in a business context as well as the access granted to different incomes streams.

“They were motivated because the enterprises were their own innovation. If they could run as businesses they were self-sustaining without lots of further grant funding.”

Equally, when projects involved a range of groups with similar goals it was seen to improve resilience, as different types of organisation can have different niches, focusing on what they do best. In this context stakeholders outlined that social enterprises could take pressure off other organisations, by taking the lead on some activities that others may be less well suited to, if they required a more entrepreneurial approach, and ensuring that if needs could be met in a business context, that others were not using their resources to fulfil these needs.

Nonetheless, there was a clear desire for more core funding to address the need for continuity between projects. Stakeholders argued that core funding would unlock a wider range of benefits that were hard to address with isolated project funds. Others contended that the facilitatory role project staff often fill is one that there is no wider market for. It is a public good that government should support.

“The only market for these facilitation services is government – it is difficult to charge this to projects. Having staff undertaking this facilitation work over the longer-term is critical to enable the knowledge base, connections, and trust between stakeholders.”

“Linking funding to specific projects limits other potential positive outcomes organisations could achieve.”

Others also argued that it was not possible for staff members to engage with the community and key partners on the fringe of their main role. It was necessary to have an allocated paid role to tackle this specific challenge.

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<sup>1</sup>A Community Interest Company is a non-charitable limited company, which exists primarily to benefit a community or with a view to pursuing a social purpose, rather than to make a profit for shareholders.

## Trust

Trust was a key quality discussed to ensure a successful project. Projects need to build trust with and between communities, and partners, and this is done primarily by project staff. Staff need to have good interpersonal and communications skills, but it also helps when they have existing social capital i.e. they are already known and embedded within a community. Establishing trust is about knowing people, listening, respecting, and working effectively with people in a reciprocal way, where everyone can gain benefits. Trust building takes time and hence was linked by stakeholders to the priority for continuity, given the need for long-term, ongoing, relations.

“Staff need to have good relationships with other key people/groups, they need to be embedded in local/regional networks. To have a local officer ensures trust building and accessibility.”

“You find stakeholders by being in the communities over the long-term. You need to sit on a lot of groups. It is hard to explain in funding bids, but you need that network and local knowledge. It takes time to build the relationships.”

To gain trust, project staff also need to be seen as a neutral agent, not affiliated with any particular agendas, as much as is possible.

“The facilitating person needs to be seen as unbiased – a person who can look at all viewpoints without an agenda is vital. You need the ability to have conversations where stakeholders feel really listened to.”

Building trust was a key ingredient to ensure that projects could be driven by the community, addressing needs and interests identified by them, rather than struggling to gain traction because they do not fit and feel like an imposition.

“Projects that are dropped on communities struggle to get engagement. You need to do the reverse. To do this, you need to be more present in the community.”

It was equally important that trust, once established, should be maintained as it could easily be lost if respectful and engaged styles of working were not continued:

“There used to be a high degree of mutual respect. That respect has gone. The lesson here is to recognise there are many people in the community who are better qualified and have better knowledge of local conditions than the officers - and that they should seek to use those skills productively not ignore or exclude them.”

## Inclusive & democratic

The need to be as inclusive and democratic as possible in the way that projects operate was stressed unanimously. It is not only ‘good practice’ in stakeholders’ eyes, but also maps on to the goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) providing further impetus to achieve these objectives. To do this, participants outlined that it was important to engage with as wide a range of people as possible and listen, because:

“Communities are best placed to identify and prioritise their own needs.”

Being inclusive meant that there is a need to understand the make-up of the community and ensure that all groups are properly represented. Some groups might be harder to engage with, but efforts are required to provide pathways for different people to be involved.

“We need more diversity, i.e. Black and Asian Minority Ethnic representation, in those getting involved and leading!”

“It is important to give voice to young people who don't have many other outlets to discuss thoughts on their community. Often, they can be less represented and confident in traditional forums, so consider different ways they can participate.”

Decision-making then also needs to be collaborative and democratic. This could be achieved by establishing a steering board with wide membership, and/or ensuring full partnership with decision-making embedded across all organisations/groups. Or having project ideas submitted and selected by community group, not having project decisions being made elsewhere and imposed. The key thing is to make sure people feel they can really determine the direction projects are taking. Working in this way then means you can build trust.

“Success is dependent on the extent to which locals are involved and feel respected, important and heard.”

“You need to give equal weight to each of the partners and have proper discussions drawing on their experience, not dictating what the project will do but codeveloping.”

### Community leaders & motivators

A lot of discussion focused around how to mobilise people within the community and who you needed to work with to make things happen. The role of project staff as key facilitators has already been discussed, along with the range of characteristics that can be usefully associated with those people. Equally important are those leaders and motivators within a community, who are not necessarily paid by the project. Identifying these influential members of the community was seen as key to getting others involved. These people were often described as ‘movers and shakers’ and perceived as someone who would be ‘hard to refuse’:

“You need the right person to own and lead, someone who is highly respected and a motivating person who is hard to refuse!”

Fostering and seeking out such leadership can then lead to wider mobilisation due to positive associations with the activities of that person, and the social buzz that can arise for communities ‘pulling together’. This is particularly important as a means to connect to ‘harder to reach’ groups and individuals who might not otherwise engage.

“If you get the community involved and everyone works together you can get good results”

Critically, these leaders were not necessarily those in traditional leadership roles in a community e.g. political representatives / holding positions of office.

“Leaders can emerge from expected quarters but also unexpected places. For example a mother with children who became engaged and vocal on particular issues and can play a vital role, including securing support from schools councils.”

Nonetheless, there was clear acknowledgement that volunteering capacity needs credible support. Even with the right people driving a project, there needs to be greater recognition of the time commitment a lot of projects demand. To nurture leaders of the future, and to ensure that wider communities can participate there needs to be further thought given to supporting a culture of volunteering:

“Community volunteering needs more promotion to vary the demographic. It tends to be the older generation with less time constraints. We need improvement to our volunteering culture perhaps through workplaces initiatives and funds to allocate people’s time.”

## Seeing Results

‘Seeing results’ was discussed in terms of how we can better support active citizenship. Here it was acknowledged that in order to develop community capacity to volunteer and participate in different initiatives there has to be some clear rewards to keep people motivated. If people didn’t see results, or there are too many barriers, they could quickly be de-motivated.

“You can't buy passion, but you can stifle it by not supporting effective delivery. It's the action on the ground and seeing results that makes people tick.”

“Everyone enjoyed being part of such a wonderful project. Once they could see success, momentum built.”

By and large, the main motivation noted was seeing tangible outcomes and clear benefits arising from their activities. But even outcomes as simple as having fun together and being creative were seen as very important.

“It was good because the whole community participated in doing something fun together and they could see stuff happening.”

“Bringing creativity in is important to mobilising the community, it can be very motivating and engaging.”

Realising the benefits to different project participants was also seen as key to sustaining the activities over a longer term. If people perceived clear rewards, they would continue with the activities in question. Equally, by making outcomes personal and enabling people to connect more deeply, they could take greater ownership of different project activities. For example, with citizen science monitoring of sections of the coast (e.g. for marine wildlife), it was observed that communities would take ownership of their own section of coast and lead surveys:

“Because they feel positively impacted, being able to see how their environment is changing over time through the monitoring, this has led to more commitment and enthusiasm.”

To ensure different people could be involved, stakeholders highlighted the importance of considering a range of benefits that different audiences might connect with. Running projects that have a range of different activities to appeal to those different audiences was therefore critical to successful positive engagement.

### **Effective communications**

Good communications were unanimously seen as critical for a project’s success. This included a range of points. Firstly, communication with the community and key stakeholders was paramount to enabling an inclusive and democratic process and developing the trusting relations that were also seen as fundamental to success. Communication here could take a number of forms, it did not always have to be in person, and online approaches have been successfully utilised in recent years - opening up a different section of society to those who want to attend in person. Ensuring the availability of project officers/co-ordinators to answer questions and engage in dialogue seemed to be the most important factor, whatever format that communication might then take.

“Visibility to the communities that are served or engaged with is what is needed.”

Several points were made about the potential for miscommunication, and misinformation, which can lead to resistance. Staff capacity was emphasised as the main way to tackle this, providing multiple opportunities for people to engage in whatever way best suits them. It was noted, for example, that public meetings do not always give everyone equal opportunity to speak, and it is therefore important to offer different channels of communication.

A second area where difficulties with communication were highlighted, was communication between funders and projects/community groups. Previous experiences with FLAGS for example, led stakeholders to emphasize the need for greater access to government officials who administered the funds previously so they could have better ongoing support to understand what they could/should not be doing within the parameters of the funds.

“We need WG representatives to be more available and keep communication channels open throughout the entirety of the projects. There is a feeling that comms are very one-way i.e. officials can get in touch with us very easily but the reverse is not true.”

“Communication is difficult, we are told that communication has to be done via online portal but access takes a long time to set up and often doesn’t work. Why are there frequently no telephone numbers for WG staff?”

Finally, it was argued that there was a need for wider public communication to celebrate the successes of the projects, enhancing engagement further, and raising the profile of marine and coastal issues more broadly. One particularly notable suggestion was made to raise the profile of Marine and Coastal issues:

"Could we have an equivalent Marine and Coastal Show - to the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show – as a draw for tourism, residents and developers? We have 'Fish Week' but we need to bring in a whole cross section of stakeholders, not just around seafood consumption, but wider marine ecosystems. It would be a great way to raise awareness (ocean literacy) but also to have as a platform for policy and funding communications to communities so everyone understands current priorities and opportunities."

### Right processes

There was a lot of discussion around the processes of funding, administration, and associated monitoring. Stakeholders would like these processes to be as streamlined and simple as possible. Whilst it was acknowledged there would always be some bureaucracy in accessing public funding this should be to a minimum. Examples of when this had worked well were given demonstrating what 'the right processes' might be. These always reflected the core principle of being straightforward and easy to action, enabling a need to be met without unnecessarily complexity and detail. This often meant that small pots and 'start-up' funds were particularly popular as they required less detail and enabled a bounded set of needs to be easily addressed e.g. disabled water access, without requiring a lengthy proposal to be submitted.

It was also noted that timescales to apply for funds could be more realistic, and greater support offered to develop more ambitious projects:

"Grants are being advertised with ridiculous conditions i.e. short timescales for large sums of money such that there is no time to put forward a well thought-out proposal. If you are going to put out grants with short timescales lower the minimum spend. Or, if short timescale grants are to become the norm, then arrange for enabling grants to be available so the groundwork to support short timescale grants can be done."

Alongside the application process, reporting and monitoring were equally raised as key areas to rationalise. Again, whilst there is an acknowledged need to conduct evaluation and deliver reporting on public money, stakeholders felt this need to be more proportionate in terms of the time and resource demands.

"The requirement to account for spending public money is understood but we had to spend £10k paying independent consultants for an evaluation report which didn't tell the group anything they didn't already know - that money might have been better spent elsewhere, the focus has to be on doing the projects."

Many stakeholders also felt that the best use of evaluations was not being made as no one has the capacity to read and learn from this reporting. In response, it was felt

that a more usable data-base of project evaluations could be compiled that would support further shared learning and ensure that new projects were able to draw more fully on past experiences.

“Evaluations and reports are often not read through and are filed away. We need a central portal for individual projects to feed in information to enable sharing and learning.”

## Monitoring

Points on how to effectively monitor projects connect to wider issues raised around having the right administrative processes in place. Participants argued that monitoring has to be proportionate, but it also has to be useful for the project. This is a different mindset from seeing evaluation as something that is exclusively for funders. Instead, stakeholders wanted monitoring to be something they could also gain from, and to support a wider culture of learning in this space.

A critical consideration was not only what to monitor, but how? Levels of engagement, for example, was seen as a key thing that projects try to measure. But project staff explained that they don't want to over-monitor people as it puts them off volunteering and getting involved. Finding different ways to monitor might therefore be more appropriate, to better capture peoples' experience rather than impose a fixed set of reporting criteria. Qualitative and creative approaches were discussed at length in this regard. Others asked:

“Why do we monitor? Do funders trust the projects? The benefits of community projects are already proven. Can we measure what we actually need to measure?”

Monitoring was discussed in more detail in Exercise 4 to draw out more detailed advice on how this could be improved in future.

## Innovation & new markets

Connecting with enterprise and innovation is important for financial sustainability. Not all project ideas have a relevant business outlet, but many of the examples discussed in the workshops did have connections to enterprise. Working through business channels can enable access to a wider array of finance and provide ongoing resource, which might otherwise be limited by funding cycles.

Several good examples of marketable produce and services were discussed, from expanding social access to marine recreation, through to opportunities for green energy and bioeconomy. Working from a more sustainable mindset, for example adopting the principles of circular economy, was also seen to open up new business ideas.

A key distinction for all the innovations and enterprises discussed was their starting point with community needs, with local actors either personally acting on issues that

were affecting their lives, or community members coming together to voice requirements that could work across a cross-section of local people. In this way, having an inclusive approach that is strongly embedded in place is not only good for democracy but can enable people to meet their needs using market innovations where appropriate.

The ongoing commitment from people, once they have committed to business innovations and business partnerships, was the other notable benefit of connecting to entrepreneurial activity. As noted above, this can work particularly well when a variety of organisations come together around a 'hub' or core concept, bringing different strengths and capacities.

### Access to skills

Skills were considered on two fronts: Firstly, what skills are needed to put together successful projects and where can you source those skills from? Secondly, how can projects support skills delivery?

In relation to supporting project development, discussions centred on involving a range of partners. For example, involving the universities and connecting to business (linking to points made above). Overall, it was acknowledged that different groups can bring different expertise and in many cases they all need to be involved for a project to succeed. This connects to points about having an effective democratic process. Another notable point in this regard was the importance of 'softer skills' that have been discussed under other headings, enabling trust building, facilitation, community cohesion, project management and governance. Developing and rewarding these key skills was seen as paramount.

With regards to the impacts of a project, it was argued that when development activity is happening, the workforce needs to be appropriately trained to service these industries. Stakeholders identified several opportunities where this had been done well in the past and highlighted it as a priority for the future. Here the argument was that communities need more than a development fund, to spend on facilities or activities for example. Rather, local people needed to have access to the necessary skills to directly benefit from new initiatives and investment, for example in energy infrastructure and marine renewables.

### EXERCISE 4

In the final exercise, the whole group came back together in a plenary session. Groups were asked to synthesize and present key points arising from their smaller group discussions, in order to provide a summary list of key guidance reflecting a collective sense of agreement from participants regarding their experiences and learning, which they wanted to be taken forward.

The questions addressed here include:

- What approaches make projects successful?

- Who needs to be involved in projects going forwards?
- What supports do projects/stakeholders require?
- How should projects be monitored?

The final list of ‘lessons’ have been drawn together as a summary set of guidelines and advice, as **shown in the executive summary**. The ‘lessons’ listed in the workshop were subsequently crossed-checked against the thematic analysis of exercises 2 &3 (shown above) to ensure that no key issues from those earlier discussions were omitted, nor that undue emphasis was placed on something in the plenary that had not been previously raised. From this, a final list of project guidelines and advice was drawn together, offering insights both for those wishing to take forwards projects in future but also to funders and government officials aiming to support capacity building activities.