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Independent Evaluation of WCVA's Making the Connections Project

Summative Evaluation

Independent Evaluation of WCVA's 'Making the Connections' Project

SUMMATIVE EVALUATION

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

| | |
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| AGM | Annual General Meeting |
| CVC | County Voluntary Council |
| ESF | European Social Fund |
| FTE | Full-time Equivalent |
| GAVO | Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations |
| LHB | Local Health Board |
| LSB | Local Service Board |
| MtC | Making the Connections |
| RBA | Results Based Accountability |
| SIP | Single Integrated Plan |
| SLA | Service Level Agreement |
| WCVA | Wales Council for Voluntary Action |
| WEFO | Welsh European Funding Office |
| WG | Welsh Government |
| WLGA | Welsh Local Government Association |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Old Bell 3 Ltd. was commissioned by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) in conjunction with the Welsh Government to undertake an independent evaluation of WCVA's 'Making the Connections' (MtC) project¹.

Established in June 2012 and fully operational by March 2013, the MtC project provided funding for additional post(s) within each County Voluntary Council (CVC) in the Convergence area to stimulate and harness the contribution of the third sector to the public service reform work being driven forward by Local Service Boards (LSBs).

The MtC project aimed to build the long-term capacity of the third sector to contribute to the process of public service reform and in particular to the implementation of the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) developed for each local authority area. In particular, MtC's objectives were:

- to enhance the readiness of third sector organisations to deliver public services, including co-produced services;
- to increase the number of third sector organisations prepared to deliver public services through consortia or collaborations;
- to ensure that the third sector is better informed about the LSB and progress of public sector reform in its area and more generally;
- to increase the capacity of the third sector to engage meaningfully with service users; and
- to increase the capacity of the third sector to influence decisions affecting design and delivery of public services.

Project activity under the project ended on 31 December 2014, though an extension of a further three months until March 2015 was agreed to enable the project to fully capture data on outputs and results and to enable a smooth handover of ongoing work.

The aims of the evaluation were to:

¹ Part funded by the European Social Fund through the Welsh Government as part of the wider the Local Service Board Development and Priority Delivery Project - funded under Priority 4 Theme 1 of the Convergence ESF Operational Programme for West Wales and the Valleys

1. Assess how MtC has impacted on the involvement of the third sector in public service delivery, development and redesign;
2. Assess how MtC has affected the design, planning and development of local public services and whether this has brought about improvement.

This final evaluation report is the culmination of the evaluation and builds on a baseline and initial process evaluation published in early 2014² and a formative evaluation published in October 2014³

Work Programme

The report is based on a work programme undertaken between October 2013 and March 2015. It involved:

- an inception phase, leading to a final Work Programme agreed by the Steering Group⁴;
- undertaking a literature and data review covering key policy documents, data related to the third sector in Wales and documentation specifically related to the MtC project and updating the policy review for both the formative and this final evaluation;
- developing a project logic model and agreeing this with the Steering Group;
- receiving and reviewing monitoring data from the MtC project, as well as SIPs and MtC Officers' individual action plans and progress reports;
- undertaking a short survey at the baseline stage of key LSB stakeholders in both the Convergence area and in East Wales;
- undertaking an intensive package of fieldwork relating to five case-study areas which in total involved individual interviews with 54 stakeholders, in some case up to three times;

² See <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/independent-evaluation-wales-council-voluntary-actions-making-connections-project/?lang=en>

³ See: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/independent-evaluation-wales-council-voluntary-actions-making-connections-project/?lang=en>

⁴ The Steering Group consisted of WCVA project management and evaluation staff; representatives of the MtC Officers and Welsh Government research and operational staff. It met on four occasions to agree the work programme and consider the three main reports. Its Terms of Reference are presented in the Technical Appendix.

- undertaking a small number of face-to-face interviews with ‘national’ stakeholders and groups with MtC officers at the baseline and final evaluation stages;
- offering the opportunity at the final evaluation to CVC Chief Officers to submit written responses to a brief questionnaire circulated to them about the project: in all, six Chief Officers responded (one of whom was from a case-study area).

Findings

We found little evidence from our case-study research that the role of the third sector in delivering local services as an agent of public sector organisations is growing: indeed, public sector cuts at least in the short term seem more generally to be resulting in the withdrawal of funding through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and grants to the third sector, while opportunities for most third sector organisations to secure paid contracts through commissioning have not grown: indeed, in some cases, pressure to protect public sector jobs is leading to a tendency to ‘in-source’ posts which were formerly out-sourced to the third sector.

There is, however, a dichotomy between a relatively small number of larger third sector organisations, who in many cases do not see themselves as represented by CVCs and who are in a relatively strong position to compete for public tenders – and the vast majority of the sector.

Opportunities – or perhaps more accurately challenges – for the third sector to step in to deliver services such as libraries - where the public sector is withdrawing because they can no longer sustain the levels of funding - are probably growing, but there is widespread frustration within the sector at the assumption that it is able to deliver services more cheaply. At the same time, there have undoubtedly been some positive examples of MtC working with local communities to respond to these challenges.

There is little evidence that changes in respect of public service design and delivery are contributing to increasing the sustainability of the third sector, though some stakeholders believe that the changes in the funding

environment are leading some organisations to examine the balance between paid and volunteer staff and to step back from the 'professionalisation' of the sector which was seen to be a feature of the last 20 years or so.

While MtC officers have certainly in some areas contributed and increased CVCs training activity (though this appears to have been less than expected, because of the availability of other resources and staff focused on organisational development within some CVCs), the value of some of this training which has focused on building capacity to tender for services has been undermined because of the lack of opportunities to tender for work from the public sector, or the nature of commissioning practice, particularly on the part of local authorities.

While significant effort has been devoted by MtC officers to building up relationships between the CVC and the wider third sector on the one hand and the LSB and public sector organisations on the other, the sustainability of the relationship and network-building and other activities of MtC officers beyond the lifetime of the project must be questionable. LSB structures and personnel have been (and continue to be) in flux, and where good relationships have been established it is doubtful whether they will be sustained in the medium term. Indeed, in one of the case-study areas where the MtC officer had left early, and where at the time of our formative evaluation MtC seemed most successful, it was clear that the systems and relationships which had been established had already frayed after less than six months.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that in some cases, at least, MtC officers have succeeded in generating awareness and altering perceptions of counterparts in local authorities, and other public sector organisations, of the capacity of the third sector to contribute creatively to the design and delivery of public services.

As with the delivery of public services, there is relatively little evidence that the design and planning of public services (particularly around Single Integrated Plan [SIP] priorities) has been improved through better integration of the third sector, though the problem here has been not so much with any shortcomings

of the MtC officers, but rather with the apparent lack of progress in many areas in LSBs and SIPs getting to grips with detailed issues of service design and planning. Again, while there would appear to be examples of MtC officers achieving small but significant wins in terms of a more collaborative approach to the development of specific initiatives and projects, there is very little evidence of systemic change.

Finally, in terms of citizen engagement in the establishment of LSB and SIP priorities and the design and delivery of services, it is clear that in many cases, MtC officers have played a key role in pushing forward the engagement work of LSBs. More generally, while not all CVCs have been comfortable with seeing themselves as a natural champion of the citizen voice, many MtC officers have played a useful part in facilitating training and organisational development for third sector organisations in terms of engaging with service users, while in one or two cases, work to empower local communities has been central to the achievements of the project.

Overall, we take the view that while MtC officers in most cases added much needed extra capacity to CVCs and found constructive ways of supporting local third sector organisations – by improving the information flow about strategic developments, facilitating connections with public sector organisations, developing their capacity to respond to (the relatively few) opportunities to deliver public services and by engaging in practical projects to demonstrate the capacity of the third sector to make a difference – and while output targets have mostly been met, the project as a whole has not really realised the outcomes which it hoped to achieve.

In large part this is as a result of the context in which the project has operated in particular:

- The often slow progress in terms of moving the work of the LSB from the analysis of needs and identification of issues to the consideration of design and delivery of services, and the sense of disconnect between these high level strategic discussions and commissioning decisions;
- The tendency of public bodies (perhaps particularly local authorities) to turn inwards in response to the pressures brought about by the cuts in

public funding, to seek to minimise job losses by taking services in house, and to be less willing to consider innovative and more personalised approaches to public services in the face of such pressures;

- The decreasing capacity of many third sector organisations to engage with more strategic agendas because of the effect of cuts in their own funding (and in some cases, increased demand for services);
- What appears to be confusion and inconsistency in the approach to procurement, with relatively limited opportunities for local third sector organisations to tender, and fewer for them to tender successfully, to provide services;
- A mismatch between the expectations of public sector commissioners that using the third sector might represent a cheap option, and the view of third sector organisations that the added value the sector can bring is through quality and expertise, not lower costs;
- The ‘planning blight’ resulting from the discussion about restructuring local government and the tension between the local focus of most LSBs and the growing importance of the regional agenda.

But while external factors may account for many of the difficulties faced by the MtC project, we also believe the design of the project was flawed:

- There was a mismatch between the scale of the ambition set out in the Business Plan and the resources and timescales of the project. Even in much more favourable circumstances, it is unlikely ever to have been realistic to expect one relatively junior officer in a CVC to be able to deliver the range of activities (and even more outcomes) envisaged;
- The focus on recruiting new staff to fill the MtC Officer post in most areas, while understandable from the viewpoint of demonstrating the ‘additionality’ of the project, did not necessarily recognise fully the extent to which issues around public service design and delivery were, even when the project started, a key part of the work of CVCs and many of their staff. This has meant that, even where MtC has worked well, it is impossible to disentangle the effects of the project from the wider effects of CVC promotion of this agenda. Where it has worked

less well, MtC officers have struggled to define their role and in some cases, seem to have become marginalised within their own organisation;

- While the CVCs are recognised by the Welsh Government as having an unique role in terms of representing the sector at a local level, their position is by no means uncontested. Ironically, perhaps, those organisations operating on a larger scale, who may already be quite strongly engaged with influencing the thinking of commissioners on service design and who are already relatively well-equipped to secure contracts for the delivery of public services which are tendered openly, tend not to see the CVCs as representing them, and may indeed, see them as competitors;
- The focus of the project on a top-down model of increasing the engagement of the third sector in service design and delivery, is open to question, particularly given the view (which would appear to be expressed in the recent Local Government White Paper) that local authorities in particular are, at the most senior level, resistant to the sort of cultural change needed to transform public services. Arguably, a more collaborative way of working needs to be developed from the bottom up;
- In terms of process, the Results Based Accountability (RBA) approach adopted appears to have been unwieldy and to have absorbed a disproportionate amount of effort.

In all, we make eight recommendations. In summary these are that:

- the Welsh Government should continue to support CVCs to prioritise their work on the design and delivery of public services by ensuring that resources are clearly available within the Infrastructure Grant to support this work and by ensuring that CVCs do in practice give appropriate priority to this role;
- the Welsh Government should recognise the views within the sector of the limited progress made in terms of this agenda and consider what further measures can be taken to incentivise local authorities and other public bodies to engage more actively, particularly given the context of budgetary pressures. This may require a more fundamental discussion

on the balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches to increasing the engagement of the third sector in public service design and delivery;

- CVCs should review, where possible, their existing staff roles and responsibilities to identify obvious gaps (post-MtC) in terms of ensuring adequate coverage of key LSB sub-groups and other fora and should consider how far representation from the wider sector (i.e. non CVC staff) can be mobilised to ensure full coverage;
- CVCs should wherever possible make use of the opportunities presented as a result of the work on developing a standard database template for CVCs to improve the knowledge and awareness of the third sector within their areas;
- CVCs should continue to offer training and capacity building relating to tendering to member organisations as part of their core training offer, pooling resources wherever possible, and with a continued strong focus on brokering collaborations;
- the Welsh Government and WCVA should consider whether and, if so, how, there can be stronger engagement with larger third sector organisations to harness their input into thinking on service design and to ensure consistency of messages from the wider sector to public sector commissioners. In this context, the WCVA may wish to explore the idea of a Code of Practice for sub-contracting within the sector;
- the Welsh Government needs to ensure that all public bodies both have and take into account clear guidance on good procurement practice, including with regard to the perception that potential conflicts of interest render third sector input into service design inappropriate. Public sector organisations, wherever possible, should be encouraged to publish annual commissioning plans, highlighting tendering opportunities which are likely to be forthcoming;
- the Welsh Government should consider what further steps can be taken to ensure greater compliance on the part of all public bodies with the Code of Practice for Funding the Third Sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Old Bell 3 Ltd. was commissioned by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) in conjunction with the Welsh Government to undertake an independent evaluation of WCVA's 'Making the Connections' (MtC) project⁵.

Established in June 2012 and fully operational by March 2013, the MtC project provided funding for additional post(s) within each County Voluntary Council (CVC) in the Convergence area to stimulate and harness the contribution of the third sector to the public service reform work being driven forward by Local Service Boards (LSBs)⁶.

Originating as a distinct project proposal to WEFO from WCVA and CVCs, the project was awarded funding of some £2.7 million from the European Social Fund (ESF)⁷ as part of a wider (and previously approved) Welsh Government project – the Local Service Board Development and Priority Delivery Project - funded under Priority 4 Theme 1 of the Convergence ESF Operational Programme for West Wales and the Valleys⁸.

The MtC project aimed to complement the wider project by building the long-term capacity of the third sector to contribute to the process of public service reform and in particular to the implementation of the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) developed for each local authority area. In particular, MtC's objectives were:

- to enhance the readiness of third sector organisations to deliver public services, including co-produced services;

⁵ Part funded by the European Social Fund through the Welsh Government

⁶ The project provides funding for one project development officer in each of 13 CVCs and two in the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO), which covers both Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, as well as a central project management resource (1.9 FTE) in WCVA itself.

⁷ The total funding for the project consists of £2.7 million of ESF, £453,352 of match funding from CVCs and £45,788 of match funding from WCVA.

⁸ Throughout this report we use 'the project' to refer to the WCVA element of the wider project, and 'the wider project' to refer to the overall LSB Development and Priority Projects Delivery Project.

- to increase the number of third sector organisations prepared to deliver public services through consortia or collaborations;
- to ensure that the third sector was better informed about the LSB and progress of public sector reform in its area and more generally;
- to increase the capacity of the third sector to engage meaningfully with service users; and
- to increase the capacity of the third sector to influence decisions affecting design and delivery of public services⁹.

Activity under the project ended on 31 December 2014, though an extension of a further three months until March 2015 was agreed to enable the project to fully capture data on outputs and results and to enable a smooth handover of ongoing work.

The project evaluation was intended to support decision makers in determining whether and how the project was meeting its stated objectives, as well as providing on-going feedback and learning that would allow continuing improvements to be made to the project.

1.2 Aim of the Evaluation and of this Report

The aims of the evaluation were to:

1. Assess how MtC has impacted on the involvement of the third sector in public service delivery, development and redesign;
2. Assess how MtC has affected the design, planning and development of local public services and whether this has brought about improvement.

The detailed objectives for the evaluation were to:

- examine how the role of the third sector in delivering local services was changing (e.g. whether the scope and volume of the third sector's delivery is changing);

⁹ From the Project Summary as submitted to WEFO. See also Section 2.

- explore how supply and demand for third sector services had changed and how this would affect its sustainability;
- assess impacts of these changes on workforce planning and skills in the third sector;
- explore whether the relationship and network-building and other activities of MtC officers would be sustainable beyond the lifetime of the Project;
- examine if and how the third sector's influence on key partnerships, and the activities they pursue, had improved through the implementation of MtC;
- assess whether the design and planning of public services (particularly around Single Integrated Plan [SIP] priorities) was improved through better integration of the third sector;
- examine how citizen engagement featured in the establishment of LSB and SIP priorities and the design and delivery of services;
- assess whether MtC had brought about improvements in this respect.

This report is the final of three reports arising from the evaluation: a baseline and initial process evaluation was published in early 2014¹⁰ and a formative evaluation was published in October 2014¹¹. As a summative evaluation, this report aims to provide an overview of the outputs and results of the project, the way in which it operated and the barriers it confronted, drawing together the work undertaken in earlier stages. Much of the detailed evidence from the five case-study areas which underpins the findings was reported in the formative report and we do not repeat that here.

1.3 Method

The work programme underpinning the evaluation was undertaken between October 2013 and February 2015 and involved:

¹⁰ See <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/independent-evaluation-wales-council-voluntary-actions-making-connections-project/?lang=en>

¹¹ See: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/independent-evaluation-wales-council-voluntary-actions-making-connections-project/?lang=en>

For the baseline report:

- an inception phase, leading to a final Work Programme agreed by the Steering Group¹² and including a meeting with the team undertaking the long-term evaluation of the wider LSB ESF project¹³ to share views and fieldwork approaches;
- receiving and reviewing monitoring data from the MtC project, as well as SIPs and MtC Officers' individual action plans;
- developing and deploying a short survey addressed to key LSB stakeholders in both the Convergence area and in East Wales;
- undertaking four face-to-face interviews with 'national' stakeholders and two focus groups with MtC officers not working within the case-study areas;
- undertaking a package of fieldwork relating to five case-study areas involving desk research and face-to-face or telephone interviews with key local stakeholders;
- undertaking a literature and data review covering key policy documents, data related to the third sector in Wales and documentation specifically related to the MtC project;

For the formative report:

- agreeing a revised approach to the fieldwork, taking into account the difficulty of undertaking a meaningful quantitative stakeholder survey within the case-study areas, given problems over securing suitable contact data;
- undertaking fieldwork in the five case-study areas. This involved individual interviews¹⁴ with 54 stakeholders¹⁵, as well as studying a wide range of relevant documentation and in one case, observing a meeting of a relevant forum bringing together third sector organisations. In all, these stakeholders comprised:

¹² The Steering Group consisted of WCVA project management and evaluation staff; representatives of the MtC Officers and Welsh Government research and operational staff. It met on four occasions to agree the work programme and consider the three main reports. Its Terms of Reference are presented in the Technical Appendix.

¹³ Cardiff University, Shared Intelligence and IFF Research Ltd.

¹⁴ Of these, 45 were undertaken face to face and nine by telephone

¹⁵ Including four who were only interviewed in the first stage fieldwork.

- the five MtC officers;
- the Chief Officers (or equivalent) of all five CVCs and a further nine CVC staff;
- 17 representatives of third sector organisations, either involved in delivering services or directly involved with the work of the MtC officers¹⁶;
- 14 Local Authority officers¹⁷, three representatives of Local Health Board (LHBs) and one representative of a Police Force.
- updating the literature review to consider key policy material published since the baseline report;
- reviewing the Interim Report of the Evaluation of the Local Service Board Development and Priority Delivery Project (May 2014);

For this summative report

- contributing to the national meeting of MtC officers in September 2014 and undertaking three focus groups with the officers in the course of the day: three officers who left post prior to this meeting submitted responses to similar questions to those discussed at the focus groups in writing in advance of leaving;
- updating the literature review;
- receiving and analysing the project's quarterly return for the period October – December 2014 to the Welsh Government and underpinning monitoring data from each of the MtC officers;
- undertaking limited further fieldwork in the case-study areas, involving telephone interviews with MtC officers (where still in post), CVC Chief Officers and the main contact within the LSB support structure in each local authority: in all, 11 interviews were undertaken;
- undertaking interviews with three key stakeholders in the Welsh Government and the WCVA;

¹⁶ These were from 15 organisations, five of which we would characterise as small, three as medium-sized and seven as large, which operated in a range of policy areas: four were involved with health and social care in general, two with older people, three with children and young people, two with housing and one each with citizens' advice, domestic violence, time-banking and area regeneration.

¹⁷ The majority of these worked in the Chief Executive's Department or equivalent, but two were from Regeneration/Environmental Services, two from Older People's Services and one from Health and Social Care more generally.

- offering the opportunity to CVC Chief Officers to submit written responses to a brief questionnaire circulated to them about the project: in all, six Chief Officers responded (one of whom was from a case-study area).

1.4 Structure of this Report

In the remainder of this report, we firstly set out the background to the project and the context in which it operated (**Section 2**) before presenting our findings from the fieldwork (**Section 3**) and providing a brief set of conclusions and recommendations (**Section 4**).

2. CONTEXT

2.1 Policy Context¹⁸

We described in our baseline report how the Welsh Government has for more than a decade developed a distinctive and consistent approach to public service delivery based around the idea of ‘voice, rather than choice’ and collaboration between public service providers rather than competition.

The creation of Local Service Boards (LSBs), with mandatory involvement of the CVC, and more recently, the introduction of Single Integrated Plans (SIPs) which were intended to allow a significant streamlining of partnership working, has been a critical part of this agenda, while citizen engagement is also seen as a key to improved public services. The third sector has been recognised as having an important part to play in ensuring that the voice of the service user is heard, as well as bringing its own experience to bear on the design of public services.

Increasingly, the Welsh Government has also stressed the importance of the public sector making greater use of the third sector in delivering innovative public services, with a strong focus on prevention and early intervention, as part of a ‘mixed economy’¹⁹. In parallel with this, the Welsh Government has also urged the third sector, in the context of public expenditure cuts, to move away from a culture of grant dependency and embrace social enterprise: this is seen as requiring greater collaboration within the sector, with WCVA and CVCs having an important support role in this regard.

The new Third Sector Scheme, published in January 2014, re-affirms that input into public service design and delivery is one of the core functions of

¹⁸ The Baseline and Formative Evaluation Reports contain a fuller analysis of the policy context prior to July 2014.

¹⁹ For example, the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act, which received the Royal Assent in May 2014 requires local authorities to promote the development of social enterprises to provide care and support and preventative services within their areas; the involvement of service users in the design and operation of care services; and the availability of care services provided by third sector organisations.

CVCs which Welsh Government funding is intended to support. It also pledges continued support for the WCVA as the national infrastructure body, with responsibilities including managing the Infrastructure Grant (which funds CVCs) and reiterates the Welsh Government's commitment to 'maintain, use and promote the existing Code of Practice for Funding the Third Sector'²⁰.

While the LSB agenda has been to date focused at the level of individual local authorities (albeit that in some areas, there is experimentation with LSBs and/or SIPs covering two neighbouring local authority areas), the Welsh Government has also been increasingly concerned to encourage regional collaboration. Research into partnership working suggests that financial pressures in the wake of the economic crisis are pushing local authorities increasingly towards instrumental partnerships, designed to cut costs (often involving working with other local authorities across boundaries) rather than on partnerships where the focus is on citizen engagement and the personalisation of services.

Over the last two years, as the MtC project has been implemented, there has continued to be significant development of the Welsh Government's agenda in this regard, principally stemming from the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery, chaired by Sir Paul Williams, which was established in April 2013 and which reported in January 2014.

The Commission's report endorsed the direction of travel of the Welsh Government in terms of partnership working and greater engagement of the third sector in the design and delivery of public services, but strongly suggested that relatively little progress had been made and that much remained to be done. The Commission suggested that while the consolidation of partnership working at the local level through LSBs was welcome in principle, 'there is clear evidence that progress so far has been no more than limited and sporadic', with little evidence of collaboration having had any impact on service standards or the attainment of outcomes.

²⁰ The Third Sector Scheme, Welsh Government, January 2014 p. 5

The Commission called for a ‘step change in public service governance and delivery’²¹, including local government reorganisation and significant changes in the culture of, and approach to public service delivery in Wales.

This included an insistence on a much clearer focus on citizen-centred services, and on new delivery models focused on early intervention to ease demand pressures and based on ‘meaningful collaboration across sectors, organisations and boundaries, with co-production being a key feature in the service delivery toolbox’²².

In response to the Commission’s report, the Welsh Government published two papers in July 2014²³, broadly accepting the Commission’s overall findings. The first - entitled *Devolution, Democracy and Delivery: Improving Public Services for People in Wales* – sets out a reform agenda for public services in order ‘to improve the well-being of people across Wales now and in the future’²⁴.

The paper sets out a vision for public services in Wales which – in line with earlier Welsh Government policy – stresses that ‘public services must increasingly be delivered not **to** people but **with** people...involving people in the design and delivery of services, recognising people’s own strengths and tailoring services accordingly’²⁵.

In this context, the paper pledges to ‘continue to work with partners in the third sector and more broadly to this end’²⁶.

The second paper, *Devolution, Democracy and Delivery: White Paper – Reforming Local Government* was a consultation document which focused more narrowly on Welsh Local Government with a deadline for responses of 1 October 2014. In endorsing the Commission’s call for local government

²¹ The Report of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery: Summary Report, p. 2

²² Ibid., p.12

²³ Alongside a third paper dealing with increased powers for the devolved Welsh Government.

²⁴ *Devolution, Democracy and Delivery: Improving Public Services for People in Wales*, Welsh Government, July 2014, p. 7

²⁵ Ibid., p.11

²⁶ Ibid.

reorganisation, it made clear the Welsh Government's view that there was a need to restructure Welsh local government but argued that there was insufficient time to pass legislation before the next National Assembly elections in May 2016 while promising to publish a draft Bill for consultation in autumn 2015²⁷.

Further to this, a Local Government (Wales) Bill was introduced in the National Assembly on 26 January 2015. The Bill sets out the overall mechanisms by which local government reorganisation through mergers of existing local authorities will be achieved, and more specifically provides for voluntary mergers between local authorities on the basis of proposals made by November 2014, where the Welsh Government considers this appropriate²⁸. The Bill also announces the intention to bring forward further draft legislation in autumn 2015 outlining the Welsh Government's proposals on involuntary mergers, though with the proviso that the legislation would only be considered after the May 2016 National Assembly elections²⁹.

The elements of the current Bill permitting voluntary mergers has, however, been rendered largely irrelevant by the announcement by the Minister for Public Services, Leighton Andrews, that he was not persuaded of the merits of any of the three cases for such voluntary mergers which were made in autumn 2014 (Conwy and Denbighshire; Bridgend and the Vale of Glamorgan; and Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen)³⁰

More recently still, in February 2015, the Welsh Government published a further White Paper on local government reform: *Devolution, Democracy and Delivery: White Paper: Reforming Local Government: Power to the People*.

²⁷ Ibid., pp.24 - 25

²⁸ Local Government (Wales) Bill, Explanatory Memorandum (Welsh Government, 2014), pp. 8-9

²⁹ Ibid., p. 9

³⁰ See Written Statement by the Welsh Government: Voluntary Mergers: Update on Expressions of Interest Received, 27 January 2015:

<http://www.assembly.wales/ministerial%20statements%20documents/voluntary%20mergers%20update%20on%20expressions%20of%20interest%20received/dat20150127-s.pdf>

The White Paper lays out a very ambitious programme of reform, focusing largely on the culture change which it wishes to see in local government, rather than the narrower issue of mergers.

From the Ministerial Foreword – with its emphasis on ‘co-operative principles’³¹ – on, the White Paper contains much of very direct relevance to the goals which Making the Connections aimed to achieve.

It argues that a key part of the democratic challenge for LAs is to ‘see building social capital, in terms of community empowerment and resilience, as their core purpose’ and claims that ‘the purpose of our proposed reforms is to move decisions closer to the people of Wales in their local communities, to empower local people to secure better services, and to strengthen community engagement in decision-taking’³².

It champions the importance of involving the third sector in service planning, built around the needs of individuals and communities:

‘Over recent years, there has been increasing recognition that if we are to tailor services around individuals, public service providers need to work together and with providers from other services and the third sector, breaking down unnecessary barriers, and breaking out of traditional silos’³³.

It clearly commits the Welsh Government to the broad principles of citizen engagement:

‘Activist Councils must be agents of change in communities, supporting and enabling communities to do more for themselves... There is growing consensus that the future of public services lies in the quality of the relationship between service providers and local people and we agree with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action that we should be *“putting people at the centre”*, treating people and communities as

³¹ p. vi

³² Ibid., p. 5

³³ Ibid., p. 13

equals in design and delivery...we can and should be involving services users, the people who support them and front-line staff at every stage: prioritising, commissioning, designing, delivering and assessing services. This is not about consultation.³⁴

As well as engaging service users and community organisations in the design and delivery of services, the White Paper also advocates closer involvement of these actors in the scrutiny functions within local authorities and LSBs which it believes should be significantly strengthened³⁵.

The White Paper proposes that community organisations – defined as ‘voluntary sector organisations, co-operatives, mutuals, social enterprises and Community Councils... [which] meet certain standards with regards their organisation and membership, including having well-defined aims and purposes which relate to improving the economic, social or environmental well-being of the community’³⁶ – should have a right not just to instigate the transfer of unused community assets to themselves but also to initiate engagement in a service:

‘Where a community body... believes it could help improve a service, it will be able to make a request to the Authority setting out how it considers it could help improve that service. The Local Authority would be required to respond promptly and engage actively with the community body to take the work forward, unless there were valid reasons for not doing so.... This will provide a formal route for communities to work with Local Authorities, combining the experience and insight of service users and communities alongside professional expertise’³⁷.

Such a right could also embrace proposals for taking over a service:

‘A community body could, subject to their having the necessary capacity and capability, propose that they take on the delivery of the

³⁴ Ibid., p.43

³⁵ Ibid., p. 79

³⁶ Ibid., p. 59

³⁷ Ibid., p.57

service themselves. If the Local Authority agreed, in most circumstances this would then trigger an appropriate procurement process³⁸.

While the White Paper contains much that is very positive from the point of view of the Making the Connections agenda – albeit at a point which is too late to provide leverage for the project itself – there are some suggestions which may be less welcome. These include a proposal to relax some of the contracting out regulations in order to provide local authorities with greater freedom on how to deliver services, including ‘in-sourcing’ i.e. taking back in-house provision formerly delivered externally³⁹.

Also perhaps controversial is a proposal that the National Assembly should put in place a legislative framework compelling local authorities to establish area committees ‘led by Elected Members, [as] a model of community governance which can and should be adopted by all Local Authorities in Wales’. While in these committees, ‘Elected Members must share power with their communities.... because we do not believe that representative democracy and participative democracy are mutually exclusive’⁴⁰, this might be thought to contain a threat as well as a promise, for example to well-developed community development trusts:

‘The Welsh Government considers there are significant further opportunities for rationalising partnership working at the local level and bringing it under the control of Elected Members. This is an agenda which should be taken forward vigorously by Local Authorities’⁴¹

In parallel with the emergence of legislative proposals relating to local government reform, the Welsh Government has also been pressing ahead with its proposals to put local partnership working on a statutory basis, through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill, which was

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 22 and p.55

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 49

⁴¹ Ibid., p.50

introduced into the National Assembly in July 2014 and is currently passing through the legislative process.

While the proposed legislation is wide-ranging, including crucially laying out provisions for all parts of the public sector in Wales to set and monitor performance against well-being objectives, Part 4 of the Bill specifically relates to putting the partnership arrangements currently embodied in the LSBs on a statutory footing. In particular, the Bill requires:

- The establishment of a Public Services Board for each local authority area in Wales, consisting of a core membership of the local authority, the relevant LHB, the relevant Fire and Rescue authority, and Natural Resources Wales, but with a requirement for the Board also to invite the Welsh Ministers, the Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner of the relevant Police Force, a representative of the relevant provider of Probation Services, and a body representing voluntary organisations in the area⁴²;
- Public Services Boards to be subject to scrutiny from the relevant local authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee(s)⁴³;
- The aim of each Board to be to 'improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of its area in accordance with the sustainable development principle'⁴⁴;
- Each Board to produce an assessment of the state of economic, social and environmental well-being within its area, on the basis of wide consultation (including with 'any relevant voluntary organisations as the board considers appropriate' and 'representatives of persons resident in its area'), and to produce a local Well-being Plan (effectively a successor to the SIP), also on the basis of wide consultation, setting out objectives for meeting the overall aim and specifying steps to be taken to fulfil these objectives⁴⁵;

⁴² The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill, National Assembly for Wales, 2014, Part 4, Chapter 1

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Part 4, Chapter 2

⁴⁵ Ibid.

- Each Board, in setting objectives, to apply the sustainable development principle, by balancing ‘short term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to meet long term needs’ and by taking an integrated approach, including considering how its actions may impact on its own and other public bodies’ well-being objectives⁴⁶;
- Each Board, in developing its Well-being Plan to seek and incorporate the advice of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, established under Part 3 of the Bill⁴⁷;
- Each Board to publish an Annual Report on progress against the objectives set in its Well-being Plan⁴⁸.

The Bill also provides for two Public Services Boards to merge on a voluntary basis, provided that they both involve the same LHB (and do not involve more than one LHB) or to collaborate in any way they choose, as well as providing for the Welsh Government to direct Boards to collaborate⁴⁹.

2.2 The WCVA Making the Connections Project⁵⁰

The MtC project had its origins as a proposal to WEFO from WCVA and CVCs for a five year project from 2010 – 2015 which aimed to ‘provide a wide range of support to the activities of the third (voluntary and community) sector in delivering the priority activities of their relevant Local Service Boards (LSBs) and related public service planning groups, and enable WCVA to provide strategic support and advice to complement the work of the CVCs’⁵¹.

At the behest of WEFO, however, MtC was incorporated as a distinct element within the wider LSB Development and Priority Delivery Project: an amended Business Plan providing for a £3.2 million project running until March 2015 was approved by WEFO in December 2011.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Please see the Baseline Report for a fuller account

⁵¹ WCVA draft Business Plan v.3 (2010), .p.3

The main aim of the project was to ‘strengthen the capacity of third sector involvement/participation through the county voluntary councils (CVCs) in LSBs and other public service planning groups’ while also contributing to the three other aims of the wider project⁵².

In particular MtC’s objectives were:

- to enhance the readiness of third sector organisations to deliver public services, including co-produced services;
- to increase the number of third sector organisations prepared to deliver public services through consortia or collaborations;
- to ensure that the third sector is better informed about the LSB and progress of public sector reform in its area and more generally;
- to increase the capacity of the third sector to engage meaningfully with service users; and
- to increase the capacity of the third sector to influence decisions affecting design and delivery of public services⁵³.

It sought to do this by funding one project development officer in each of 13 CVCs and two in the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO), which covers both Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, as well as a central project management resource (1.9 FTE) in WCVA itself.

The model job description for the MtC Officers specified the following duties:

- to create opportunities for dialogue between networks and local groups, and service planners and managers through presentations at network meetings;
- to develop the role of relevant groups involving service users;

⁵² Ibid, Para. 1.2: these broader aims are ‘to further develop LSBs into a sustainable support and delivery infrastructure; ‘to co-ordinate generic or common LSB themes to reduce duplication and encourage shared learning’; and ‘to accelerate the implementation of collaborative change projects – in individual counties across LSB boundaries on a regional or sub-regional basis or as pilots on common themes’

⁵³ From the Project Summary as submitted to WEFO.

- to provide information (e-briefings, website information, newsletter articles, briefing papers) about public service developments, and opportunities to engage;
- to organise consultation events and activities to enable local citizens to engage in public service planning;
- to ensure that the views of marginalised and equality groups are included in the work of the project;
- to support third sector organisations to develop effective mechanisms for service user involvement;
- to work with public sector partners to raise awareness and encourage the use of participatory planning methods;
- to assist third sector networks and forums to contribute to public service planning;
- to support and train third sector representatives to enable them to engage effectively with public service planning groups;
- to represent the third sector on public service joint planning teams;
- to provide advice and help to potential third sector service providers;
- to assist third sector service providers to adopt or improve equal opportunities and environmental policies;
- to assist third sector service providers to establish collaborative ventures or services.

The officers were to be line-managed within each CVC but would also work with WCVA to ensure the delivery of the project⁵⁴. However, WCVA was the joint project sponsor, responsible under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Welsh Government for managing the project.

The management approach was based on the Results Based Accountability (RBA) model, with each Officer having developed an Individual Action Plan based around the five key outcomes for the project:

- third sector organisations are more ready to deliver public services, including co-produced services;

⁵⁴ Ibid., Para 8.1

- an increase in the number of third sector organisations which are more ready to deliver public services through consortia or collaborations;
- the third sector is better informed;
- an increase in the capacity of the third sector to engage meaningfully with service users;
- an increase in the capacity of third sector to influence decisions affecting design and delivery of public services.

The formal targets for the WCVA element of the project as agreed by WEFO are set out in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1: Targets agreed with WEFO

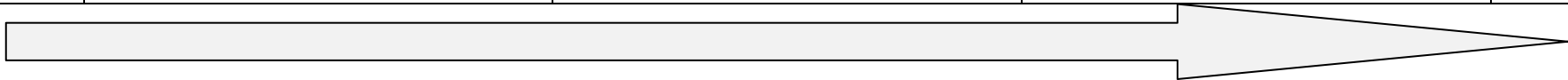
| Output | Number |
|---|--------|
| Dissemination initiatives | 15 |
| Initiatives to support LSB development | 1 |
| Collaborative agreements between CVCs and LSBs | 13 |
| Secondment places | 12 |
| Collaborative agreements within the third sector or between the third sector and public and private sectors | 30 |
| Organisations adopting or improving environmental systems | 15 |
| Organisations adopting or improving equality monitoring systems | 15 |

The budget for the project was set at £3,260,746, of which £1,930,036 (59%) is the ESF contribution with £831,000 match funding provided by the Welsh Government and a further £499,000 provided by WCVA and CVCs.

2.3 Project logic model

Drawing on the above, and on information derived from the initial fieldwork, it was possible to construct an outline model of the logic underpinning the project. This is shown in Figure 2.2 over.

| Inputs/ Resources | Activities | Outputs | Results | Impact | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|--|
| Representation and information | | | | | | |
| <div data-bbox="96 580 302 639" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">15 MtC officers in CVCs</div> <div data-bbox="96 671 302 794" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Line-management from CVCs</div> <div data-bbox="96 826 302 911" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">1.9 FTE project management staff in WCVA</div> <div data-bbox="96 943 302 1050" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Project management support from WG</div> | Ensure representation of sector at LSB and key groups | Dissemination initiatives and products | The third sector is better informed | <div data-bbox="1921 576 2141 743" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">A shift towards early interventions reducing the need for acute services</div> <div data-bbox="1921 775 2141 911" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Citizen-centred public services better designed and delivered more effectively</div> <div data-bbox="1921 943 2141 1027" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">A more sustainable third sector</div> | | |
| | Provide information on public service developments to third sector orgs | Initiatives to support LSB development | | | | |
| | Input into service planning | | | | | |
| | Facilitate input from third sector into public service planning (through brokering links) | Collaborative agreements between public sector/third sector | An increase in the capacity of third sector to influence decisions affecting design and delivery of public services | | | |
| | Training to enable third sector orgs to engage in service planning effectively | Secondments between third sector/ public sector | | | | |
| | | Organisations trained in service planning | | | | |
| | Input into service delivery | | | | | |
| | Provide advice and help to potential third sector providers | Organisations trained/ supported to meet procurement standards | Third sector organisations are more ready to deliver public services, including co-produced services | | | |
| | Training/support to ensure third sector orgs able to tender (equal opps., environmental policies etc.) | Collaborative agreements within third sector | | | An increase in the number of third sector organisations which are more ready to deliver public services through consortia or collaborations | |
| | Support/brokering collaborative ventures between third sector organisations | | | | | |
| | Citizen voice | | | | | |
| | Organise events/activities to enable citizens to engage in public service planning | Consultation events organised/attended | An increase in the capacity of the third sector to engage meaningfully with service users | | | |
| Support service user groups to input into public service planning | Organisations (third sector/public sector) trained in service user engagement/participatory planning | | | | | |
| Support third sector orgs to engage effectively with service users | | | | | | |
| Work with public sector partners to encourage participatory planning methods | | | | | | |



3. FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

In this Section, we report on our findings from the fieldwork undertaken throughout the evaluation, as well as a desk review of other materials, notably the monitoring returns from the project. We do not repeat more detailed evidence cited in the earlier reports, particularly the formative evaluation⁵⁵, but focus on summing up the messages from those reports in the context of developments in the last six months of the projects delivery phase.

We have structured this Section around the project logic model which we have developed for the project (see Section 2.2 above). We thus report in turn on the four thematic areas on which the project was expected to focus viz: representation and information (Section 3.2); input into service planning (Section 3.3); input into service delivery (Section 3.4); and citizen voice (Section 3.5). In each of these sections we consider the relevant activities, outputs and results. After these sub-sections, we go on to consider evidence on impact (Section 3.6), to draw out elements of good practice which enabled the project to achieve (Section 3.7) and barriers which were encountered (Section 3.8). Finally, (in Section 3.9) we consider project management structures and processes before (in Section 3.10) reporting on stakeholder views on future needs and arrangements.

3.2 Representation and Information

KEY FINDINGS

Representation and information was a key element of most MtC officers' work. Officers often represented the CVC on working groups related to the LSB and sometimes played a key role in terms of other partnership and fora. They were also often instrumental in establishing consultative arrangements within

⁵⁵ See: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/independent-evaluation-wales-council-voluntary-actions-making-connections-project/?lang=en>

the sector. However they worked with, and around, other colleagues within the CVC and rarely covered the whole range of partnership working. MtC officers' ability to represent the entire third sector was often questioned because of a view (within statutory organisations and some larger third sector organisations) that CVCs themselves did not speak for all third sector organisations.

MtC officers used a variety of means to raise awareness of, and provide information about, the work of the LSB in their areas and the project's target for dissemination initiatives and products was vastly exceeded. However, this did not always result in high levels of awareness of the work of the LSB and of the SIP. This was due to a range of factors, principally the perception that LSBs were operating at a level and in a way which had little direct relevance to the day-to-day activities of most third sector organisations.

3.2.1. Activities

Representation and information activities were a major focus of MtC, although the focus on this element perhaps diminished somewhat in the latter phases of the project, as officers and their line-managers became more convinced that practical interventions at a community or grass-roots level were more likely to yield visible results.

In terms of *ensuring the representation of the sector at LSB and key groups*, while in all areas, it was the Chief Officer from the CVC who attended the LSB, in almost all CVCs, the MtC officer was closely involved with the work of sub-groups or working groups reporting to the LSB. This was true in four of our case-study areas, for example, and the officers were generally seen within CVCs as adding crucial capacity to ensure that the wide range of sub-groups and thematic partnerships (which generally have continued to meet under LSBs, despite the Welsh Government's intention that they would be subsumed) were routinely covered by a third sector representative.

This was also the case, for example, in one of the non-case-study areas, where a Chief Officer noted that while other CVC staff were available to cover some thematic groups (for example, a sub-group on Health, Social Care and Well Being), the MtC officer enabled a vital third sector presence in other important thematic areas, notably economic regeneration and the environment. The officer had also been able to develop third sector fora to support their work, ensuring that their inputs were more broadly representative of the third sector locally, not just the CVC.

As in this area, in most of the case-study areas, the MtC officer was essentially used to 'plug the gaps' which had emerged within CVC staffing structures or supporting the work of colleagues within the CVC, perhaps most notably Health, Social Care and Well Being Co-ordinators⁵⁶, who in most areas have continued as full-time posts within the CVC funded by LHBs.

In some other areas, however, according to focus group participants, the MtC officer had become the outward face of the CVC, and the 'go-to' person for general enquiries about how to tap into third sector knowledge and expertise, while one national stakeholder believed that MtC officers had generally developed a broad-based understanding of issues across the CVC and public sector partners, which was matched only by the CVC Chief Officer.

However, it was only only in one of our five case-study areas that the MtC officer was really deployed across the whole range of partnership working. In this area, the officer put in place more coherent arrangements to ensure that sector representatives at LSB and sub-group meetings were able really to represent the sector and report back on developments. Interestingly in this case-study area, where considerable effort had gone into establishing a coherent web-based system to do this, the MtC officer had left post early and the CVC was struggling to maintain the system without this dedicated resource, casting doubt on its sustainability.

⁵⁶ These have different titles in different areas

Fieldwork in the final stage of the research highlighted the work done in some CVCs in developing better knowledge of the third sector locally, and creating databases of organisations and their interests and engagement in public service delivery. While this had certainly not taken place in every area (despite the attempt to get MtC officers to establish a clear baseline in their area), two models had proved particularly successful (GAVO Connections in Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent and Info Engine – originally developed in Powys - in West Wales). The project was funding a small consultancy project to develop a database based on these two systems which could be offered to all CVCs and stakeholders saw this as an important part of the project's legacy.

Despite the strengthening of representation of, and of the range of representatives from, the third sector at LSB and partnership meetings, our fieldwork in all five case-study areas uncovered some scepticism on the part of public-sector partners and, indeed, of some larger third sector organisations about the extent to which CVCs could speak for the whole third sector, a concern which was echoed by MtC Officers in the focus groups.

Providing information on public service developments to third sector organisations also emerged as a very major focus of the work of MtC officers in the case-study areas and elsewhere, with the report cards from MtC officers highlighting the range of dissemination activities undertaken.

However, these efforts were widely thought to be undermined by what was seen – principally but by no means exclusively within the CVCs – as the lack of progress in developing meaningful partnership working in LSBs and a disconnect between their work and the actual commissioning and delivery of public services.

These concerns were fully evident in the final stage fieldwork: in two of the case-study areas, partnership structures were being overhauled (in one as a result of the recognition, according to a local authority interviewee that the LSB 'had lost its way'), while in a third, CVC interviewees reported that key

meetings had been repeatedly cancelled because of lack of availability of senior figures from the local authority – although ironically, perhaps, in a fourth where views of the LSB at earlier stages of the fieldwork had been most negative, interviewees reported that some progress had at last been made.

3.2.2 Outputs

In terms of *dissemination initiatives and products*, monitoring by WCVA confirms that this is the area where the project has had most success in respect of its formal targets, with some 347 dissemination initiatives recorded compared to a target of 15 across the entire project, with 161 recorded in the five case-study areas alone. The case-study fieldwork substantiated these claims, with a wide range of different tools and techniques being used, including attendance at events, website and social media postings, targeted e-mails, inserts in regular CVC newsletters and in some cases, newsletters from the LSB or other partners, meetings of third sector fora and specialist third sector networks, items on CVCs' AGM agendas and the MtC e-newsletter.

In terms of *initiatives to support LSB development*, it was agreed that the project itself would be counted as the output, since it would 'provide a single Convergence-area wide initiative to support LSB development in order to maximise the involvement of the third sector in the work of each LSB'⁵⁷. At a local level, in some cases, MtC officers were seen as having contributed to the development of the LSB, particularly through work on engagement strategies and sub-groups.

3.2.3 Results

Despite the efforts which MtC officers made in terms of representation and information, it is not clear that this resulted in *the third sector being better informed* about the LSB agenda, although national stakeholders believed that they had generally had considerable success in providing good quality information about LSB Developments to the sector, with engagement sub-

⁵⁷ Making the Connections Project: Outputs and Results Report Guidance, WCVA

groups also in many areas succeeding in gaining the attention of the sector about the strategic agenda.

In most of the case-study areas, we found that most third sector organisations we spoke to were not well informed about developments within the LSB and had relatively little knowledge of the SIP: this was not thought to have changed significantly at the time of the final stage fieldwork. The reasons for this were mostly to be found in contextual factors outside the control of MtC, notably the apparent disconnect between the work of LSBs and the concerns of hard-pressed third sector organisations, particularly at a time of downward pressure on funding and often increased demand for services, although in some cases, the low profile of the MtC officer themselves, limited engagement between the CVCs and larger third sector organisations, and insufficiently focused communication appeared to have played a contributory role.

3.3 Input into Service Planning

KEY FINDINGS

Input into Service Planning at the strategic level was generally not a significant feature of MtC activity, generally because most LSBs were not seen to be involved with detailed issues of service planning and commissioning.

In three case-study areas, however, some progress had been made in brokering links to facilitate third sector inputs into service planning and building the capacity of the sector to feed into such planning, although in one of these, the early departure of the MtC officer and significant changes in the LSB were seen to be challenging some of the gains made.

Targets for collaborative agreements and for secondments were generally met, although only just over half of LSBs signed a formal collaboration

agreement with the CVC, perhaps suggesting a lack of priority accorded to the project by public sector partners.

In many cases MtC officers sought increasingly in the latter stages of the project to work at a more local or specialised level - bypassing the LSB and partnership structures - to develop a greater understanding of collaborative working and to bring to bear the sector's expertise in shaping services. Many contributors to the research saw these more modest examples of MtC officers building the capacity of third sector organisations to engage with and contribute to public sector thinking about service delivery as the most important outcomes of the project.

More generally, there was a strong view from within the sector that the potential for the MtC officers and the sector more generally to influence service planning was highly constrained by a lack of willingness on the part of local authorities to engage in meaningful discussions with the sector about the shape of services.

3.3.1 Activities

In terms of *facilitating input into service planning through brokering links*, at least at the level of the LSB or its support structures, this appears to have been less of a feature of MtC officers work, largely once again due to the fact that in many cases LSBs were not engaged in detailed issues of service planning.

It was, nevertheless, a reasonably important part of the work of several case-study MtC officers, notably in one case where the officer had been directly involved with leading a number of key initiatives linked to the SIP (and which would lay the groundwork for third sector organisations' expertise to be more effectively harnessed to key priorities of the LSB), while in other areas MtC officers had ensured that there was expert third sector input into discussions at LSB or sub-group level of key themes such as domestic violence. But in

general terms, the role of the MtC officer in this regard was often seen as less well-developed than other, more long-established CVC staff, in particular the Health, Social Care and Well-Being co-ordinators, particularly in respect of relations with LHBs, who in most of our case-study areas were seen as much more welcoming of CVC involvement than local authorities⁵⁸.

The final stage fieldwork in the case-study areas reinforced the view that LSBs were still not generally working at a level where they were grappling with detailed issues of service design, and highlighted again the view that local authorities in particular were wary of allowing the sector any significant degree of influence over service design.

However, the final stage fieldwork also highlighted the fact that in many cases MtC officers had sought increasingly to work at a more local or specialised level - bypassing the LSB and partnership structures - to develop a greater understanding of collaborative working and to bring to bear the sector's expertise in shaping services. Thus, in one case-study area, the MtC officer had devoted considerable time to two initiatives, both health-related: one of these was a project led by the LHB focused on improving outcomes in one part of the local authority area and the other was a collaborative agreement between the LHB and an individual organisation to use the third sector more effectively in hospital discharges. In this same area, the officer had facilitated a number of workshops bringing together procurement staff from the local authority and the LHB with third sector organisations, in order to try to influence the way in which procurement was carried out and (with the support of the WCVA) had formed a Third Sector Reference Group to pool experience of dealing with procurement processes and procedures.

In another area, the MtC officer reported that over the last twelve months or so, she had taken a far more 'bottom up' approach, engaging directly with partner organisations rather than looking to the LSB for leadership. This had

⁵⁸ See for example, the formative evaluation pp. 43 -4

included working with colleagues elsewhere in the region and the Police and Crime Commissioner to stage a consultation/engagement event.

More generally, the focus groups highlighted that many MtC officers had had to 'take opportunities as they arise'; and regarded 'small steps' which they had helped bring about as of equal or more significance than work with the LSB or its sub-groups. Thus in one group, examples such as helping a disability forum work with a local authority's public transport officer on the design of bus shelters and facilitating an income maximisation group which local authority officers attended and which focused their minds on the role being played by the third sector in combatting poverty were highlighted. In another, participants emphasised the importance of being a connecting force on a small scale, supporting small community groups who had never before engaged with the public sector to talk to the local authority.

These views were echoed in the report cards, which contain examples of specific activity only tangentially related to the LSB or indeed key public sector bodies but which delivered results, for example, facilitating a partnership between a housing association and an arts-based third sector organisation to access continuation funding from Arts Council Wales to enable greater community engagement..

In terms of more formal training to enable third sector organisations to engage in service planning effectively, this was a feature of some MtC officers' work, notably in two case-study areas but less evident elsewhere, although in one of these two areas, training delivery had more or less ceased as the result of the MtC officer leaving early and the funding for other posts coming to an end. In some other areas, the lack of involvement of the MtC officer was not because such training was not available, but rather because in these areas training was a separate strand of activity within the CVC and the MtC officers had not been required (and had been sometimes positively discouraged) from becoming involved⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ See formative evaluation pp. 47-8

3.3.2 Outputs

Collaborative agreements between the public and third sectors was originally a target for the project but this has subsequently been split into two: firstly, collaborative agreements between CVCs and LSBs (with a target of 13, with each CVC naturally limited to one) and collaborative agreements within the third sector or between the third and public sectors, with a target of 30. The WCVA guidance makes clear that in the latter case, outputs can include agreements such as those related to joint staff training, mergers between organisations and events jointly organised between the third and public sectors.

In terms of the first of these, monitoring data at the end of the project reported that eight formal collaborative agreements were in place between CVCs and LSBs. The fact that such agreements had not been concluded in just under half of the local authority areas perhaps reflects the lack of priority accorded to the project (and arguably to the CVC more generally) by some LSBs.

In terms of the second, the target of 30 had been exceeded, with a total of 41 collaborative agreements recorded and with all of the CVCs reporting at least one agreement having been put in place. While a rigid categorisation is not possible from the information available, around a third of these related to events which had been held jointly by the CVC and a public sector organisation, and a further third related to agreements between third sector organisations and public sector organisations (including Police and Crime Commissioners, LHBs, the Fire and Rescue Service).

A second formal output target for the project related to secondments between the third and public sectors. As at 31 March 2015, the target of 12 had been exceeded, with 22 secondments recorded, though these were less evenly distributed, with three local authority areas recording no secondments, and two CVCs between them accounting for nine of the 22.

The WCVA Guidance makes clear that the definition of a secondment is quite broad and might include 'short term attachments, between a few days to a few

months.... [or] shadowing – accompanying a counterpart in another organisation in their daily activity or for a particular event⁶⁰.

Monitoring data and our fieldwork with case-study areas (which accounted for more than half of all secondments) suggests that relatively few of these involved secondments into the third sector from the public sector, with around a third being accounted for by HEI students or staff being hosted by the CVC and similar numbers involving CVC staff being seconded to the public sector. In three of the case-study areas (accounting for eight or nearly half of all secondments), it appeared that these secondments were only indirectly connected to the work of the MtC officer, with the CVC Chief Officer playing the critical role in negotiating the secondments and in one of them, it was clear that some of these represented the continuation of a previous pattern whereby the CVC was able to recruit staff for short-term contracts to fulfil roles within public sector organisations which it would be impractical to fill through the latter's normal recruitment processes.

This perhaps suggests that in this regard at least the outputs targets were not particularly meaningful and in general terms, MtC officers and other local stakeholders did not see these formal outputs as a particularly effective way of capturing the value of their work. This was also recognised by national stakeholders who generally saw the collection of output data as important in compliance terms but not a true reflection of the value of the project:

‘They don't really capture the good work that's been going on’.

In terms of *organisations trained in service planning*, as already noted, case-study MtC officers were for the most part not formally engaged in providing or facilitating such training and while report cards provide data on the number of organisations attending training sessions, it would be very difficult to separate out data relating to this specific form of training.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

3.3.3 Results

Our final stage fieldwork in the case-study areas broadly confirmed the findings from earlier stages of the research that in two case-study areas where this strand had been a significant focus of the MtC officers activities, the role played by MtC seemed likely to have led to an increase in the *capacity of the sector to influence decisions affecting the design and delivery of public services*, at least during the lifetime of the project: in one of these areas, the departure of the original MtC officer, combined with a wholesale restructure of the LSB and a review of all third sector funding by the local authority, was seen to be challenging at least some of the gains which had been made in terms of this influence. In this area, the local authority's offer to the CVC to jointly manage the funding review had been turned down because it was felt to be a 'poisoned chalice' given that the expressed aim was to cut back on the overall funding to the sector.

In a third case-study area, by contrast, where relations between the CVC and the local authority had been poor, there were some more positive signs of progress: work with procurement officers was thought (by the CVC) to have brought about a change in attitude, although it was still thought that significant barriers remained to changing procurement practice (not least because of what was said to be a risk averse approach from the Council's legal services).

In a fourth area, where in general terms interviewees still felt that MtC had been able to make little headway, but where the officer had decided to 'bypass' the LSB, the MtC officer had made some modest inroad into the social services department, including arranging a series of placements/visits from a senior member of staff to a relevant third sector organisation, which it was felt might in time lead to greater understanding on the part of commissioners of the potential role which the sector could play.

More generally, national stakeholders, Chief Officers responding to the questionnaire and the focus groups tended to emphasise that while the project had not resulted in any fundamental shifts in thinking about service design at the LSB or strategic level, there had been many more modest

examples of MtC officers building the capacity of third sector organisations to engage with and contribute to public sector thinking about service delivery.

Thus one Chief Officer highlighted how the MtC officer had been instrumental in driving forward work on basic skills, in the face of initial apathy from the LSB (which had seen the issue as too intractable), which had led to much closer relations between the FE sector and third sector organisations working with hard-to-reach groups, and a much stronger interest from the LSB.

Another highlighted work done with libraries under threat of closure, while a third believed the main success of the project in her area had been enabling 'a greater involvement with statutory service providers, including Police, PCC and the Fire and Rescue service', leading to a number of joint projects.

We understand that the WCVA are producing case-studies which contain further examples of where MtC officers are seen as having made a practical difference.

In the same vein, a national stakeholder argued that the contribution of MtC officers in enabling the success of LSB ESF funded projects was often underestimated (though it has to be said that in our case-study areas, this involvement was generally slight). Another national stakeholder also argued that MtC had worked best where there were practical projects – sometimes funded by the wider LSB ESF project – to work with, but admitted that in many areas MtC officers had had to spend 'a lot of time just trying to convince people [in the public sector] of the merits of engaging'.

This comment reinforces the point made in the formative evaluation that while, in terms of the third sector's input into service design, the logic model focuses on capacity, a clear message from the fieldwork in the case-study areas was that there were real barriers on the *demand* side in respect of the influence of the sector on commissioning decisions. This was not seen to have changed in the final months of the project.

In at least three of the case-study areas interviewees within the CVCs and the third sector more generally were highly sceptical of the interest of public sector partners (especially local authorities) in listening to the views of the sector and in all of these areas, interviewees within the CVCs (and in one case, also within the local authority) at the final stage reiterated their view that a huge culture change within local authorities would be needed before the sector could be expected to exert any serious influence over key commissioning decisions. The local authority interviewee talked of the strongly 'municipalist' views of senior officers and members, who simply did not believe it was necessary to consult about the shape of services, while a CVC Chief Officer pointed to clear statements by Council leaders that their main aim was to protect public sector jobs (rather than services) as showing how internally-focused local authorities remained. As a result, these interviewees clearly felt that building the capacity of the sector to input into service planning was at best of limited value and in some cases, a waste of time.

While perhaps less gloomy than stakeholders within case-study areas, national stakeholders also tended to emphasise that the interest of local authorities in listening and responding to third sector views was patchy at best. Thus one argued that:

'The MtC officer might be working really closely with, say, housing, but find that when they try to engage with children's services, they hit a brick wall'

and noted that officers themselves were not really senior enough to find their way round such blockages. Other stakeholders argued that it had always been unrealistic to expect a single MtC officer in each CVC to bring about a fundamental shift in attitudes within local authorities:

'It would be naïve to expect one officer to change the world'

Overall, these stakeholders thought there had been little visible change at a strategic level in the outlook of local authorities towards engaging with the

third sector, arguing that other factors (such as the pressure of budget cuts) had as yet made local authorities more, rather than less, inward-looking.

While generally LHBs and in some cases the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) were seen as more receptive to input from the third sector, in overall terms feedback from the case-study areas (particularly from third sector organisations themselves) was that the engagement of the sector with and its capacity to shape service design remained fairly limited. Where progress had been made with LHBs, this was mostly the result of the inputs of Health, Social and Well-Being Co-ordinators who had long-established relationships with key LHB staff, based on these posts having been in existence for more than ten years.

3.4 Input into Service Delivery

KEY FINDINGS

The extent to which MtC officers were engaged in providing training and advice to third sector organisations to increase their capacity to deliver public services varied significantly, depending on the priorities and other resources available to CVCs. Moreover, given the relatively few opportunities in most areas for third sector organisations to tender for public sector contracts, some contributors felt that efforts to build such capacity had been wasted.

In some cases, MtC officers did develop new third sector fora and networks which improved the capacity of the sector to work collaboratively but some contributors to the research felt that according CVCs a role in brokering or leading collaborative partnerships to tender for public sector contracts could result in CVCs competing with larger third sector organisations.

Feedback from the case-study areas in particular again suggested that the context had been unfavourable to this aspect of MtC, given what was widely seen as a lack of transparent procurement practice and a tendency of local authorities in particular to prioritise the protection of public sector jobs over

public services. Where the third sector was used, it was felt this was too often driven by a misconceived view on the part of public sector organisations that it was a cheap option.

At the same time, some contributors to the research argued that procurement was not the way to increase the role of the third sector in public service delivery, arguing that what was needed was a far stronger emphasis on empowering and enabling more flexible local collaboration between front-line workers and the third sector to meet local needs.

3.4.1 Activities

In terms of *providing advice and help to potential third sector providers*, our case-studies suggested that one-to-one meetings between the MtC officer and individual third sector organisations were a significant feature of the work of some of the MtC officers. While in some instances these were specifically related to procurement opportunities, in others, the work was difficult to distinguish from more generic advice on ‘traditional’ CVC issues such as governance and structure and in others again, it would appear that meetings had not necessarily gone much beyond a first exchange of information.

The final stage fieldwork suggested this had continued to some extent in the final six months of project delivery, with one MtC officer for example, spending a significant part of her time working with one third sector organisation over their relations with the LHB and another saying that one part of her recent workload had been responding to a range of enquiries from third sector organisations to do with funding applications, developing policies and constitutions.

Similarly, our case-studies suggested that *brokering collaborative ventures between third sector organisations* had been an element in the work of some, though not all of the MtC officers in the case-study areas. In the final stage fieldwork, the mapping and database work done by several CVCs was seen

as an important and necessary pre-condition for this, while in one case-study area, an important part of the MtC work had been to establish a network and information portal bringing together third sector services for young people and linking this to the local authority's Family Information Service: a similar information signposting service had also been developed for third sector support for vulnerable, elderly people.

Reflecting on the findings of the formative evaluation that some larger third sector organisations regarded CVCs' attempts to broker, or indeed, lead collaborative arrangements to tender for contracts as 'competition', national stakeholders tended to agree that CVCs had to tread carefully in terms of this role, with one wondering whether this did not take the CVC outside its traditional role as an intermediary between the public and third sectors into a more active role, which could risk bringing it in conflict with larger and more established providers.

In terms of *training/support to ensure third sector organisations are able to tender*, the involvement of MtC officers varied considerably across our case-study areas, with two playing a major role in this and in two this being a much less important part of their role, because training was dealt with elsewhere within the CVC, and because other European funded projects were specifically charged with delivering similar activity⁶¹.

The final stage fieldwork suggested there had been some changes: in one case-study area, where facilitating training had been a major element of the MtC officers work, as already noted, almost all training activity had been put on hold, because of the departure of a number of key officers (including the MtC officer) and because the CVC was restructuring around a much smaller core team. Perhaps depressingly, the main training initiative underway was a training programme for third sector organisations run by a partnership of public sector bodies and the CVC on managing change and building organisational resilience in the context of likely sharp cuts in funding.

⁶¹ Such as Enterprising Communities, Community Voice and Collaborative Communities.

In another, the MtC officer had increased her involvement with training, though some of this e.g. a course on community journalism and photography was arguably more relevant to citizen engagement than to procurement unlike other elements, such as training on environmental management systems and equalities policies and practices.

Another MtC officer, who had in the first 18 months of her work spent a lot of time developing and facilitating training sessions, felt in hindsight this had been fairly tangential to her core role:

‘my time was wasted waiting for the SIP to be agreed, even though I was doing things such as workshops on how to tender and stuff like that ... but even that was done without targeting organisations that could move things forward’.

3.4.2 Outputs

There was no specific output agreed with WEFO for *organisations trained/supported to meet procurement standards* and although report cards give details of the number of groups attending various events and training sessions, it is difficult to isolate from these ones specifically related to the goal of meeting procurement standards. For the reasons cited above, in many cases MtC officers would appear not to have been directly involved with such training.

In terms of *collaborative agreements within the third sector*, as noted in Section 3.3.2, the output target was amended to include collaborative agreements within the third sector or between the third and public sectors, with a target of 30, which had been exceeded by 31 March 2015, with a total of 41 collaborative agreements recorded and with all of the CVCs reporting at least one agreement having been put in place. Around 13 of these appear to relate to collaborative agreements within the sector.

WEFO targets were also agreed in respect of organisations adopting or improving environmental systems and organisation adopting or improving equality monitoring systems – targets which relate both to the work to make

organisations more ready to tender for work with the public sector and which reflect the cross-cutting themes of the ESF programme. Monitoring data as of 31 March 2015 showed that a total of 12 organisations had been supported with regard to environmental systems, by ten CVCs, while eight organisations had been supported with equality monitoring systems by seven CVCs. Outturns were thus below the target of 15 in each case.

Interestingly three of our five case-study CVCs had delivered this sort of support to only one organisation each (with, in one case, the same third sector organisation being the beneficiary of support both with equalities and environmental management), while another had not recorded any outputs against this target. This perhaps suggests why the cross-cutting themes were not prominent in our discussion with case-study stakeholders. In at least one area, however, the lack of involvement of MtC with these issues was the result of a decision to prioritise the achievement of more ambitious targets for the same activity of the Enterprising Communities project⁶², while one of the non-case study Chief Officers stressed the need to:

‘move away from ticking boxes such as the environmental and equality health check frameworks – after all we do them as part of our day job along with many other governance issues’.

3.4.3 Results

The research in the case-study areas pointed to a number of positive intermediate results, in terms of encouraging *third sector organisations [that] are more ready to deliver public services, including co-produced services and an increase in the number of third sector organisations which are more ready to deliver public services through consortia or collaboration*. This was particularly true in terms of stronger networks of third sector organisations working on specific themes being developed: in addition to those in two case-study areas cited in the formative evaluation, the final six months of active delivery had seen one MtC officer consolidate a Third Sector Strategic

⁶² An ERDF project delivering throughout West Wales and the Valleys and delivered by CVCs to provide support to organisations and individuals interested in establishing social enterprises. See <http://wefo.wales.gov.uk/news/latest/120206enterprisingcommunities/?lang=en>

Reference Group to take forward the dialogue with the local authority and LHB which was thought to have sufficient momentum to sustain itself beyond the life of the MtC project. A legacy in this area was expected to be a 'How to Do Business' guide for third sector organisations, incorporating 'top tips' on dealing with procurement.

Nevertheless, in general across the case-study areas, there was little evidence during the lifetime of the MtC project of any increase in the extent to which services were actually being delivered by the third sector, with the success of MtC (and indeed CVCs more generally) in terms of increasing the role of the sector in the delivery of public services being highly contingent on the wider context, in particular the 'demand side' i.e. the view of statutory bodies themselves as to the appropriateness and desirability of the third sector playing such a role.

In reality, the case-study research provided little grounds for optimism that public sector commissioning practices were becoming more 'user-friendly' to the third sector. Indeed, in at least three of the case-study areas, the final stage research highlighted that CVCs continued to be very frustrated by the lack of any coherent and transparent approach to the planning of commissioning. In one area, the MtC officer said that efforts to build more collaborative approaches towards tendering were undermined by the short timescales of individual procurement exercises, and that, despite better relationships between the CVC and procurement professionals, the latter were insistent that it was not possible to publish a timetable of upcoming tenders and still refused to involve CVC staff in specific commissioning exercises because of a view they would have a conflict of interest if any third sector organisation were to bid.

In another, where generally MtC was seen to have been broadly successful, the CVC Chief Officer noted that in practice, despite her lobbying for a clear commitment to a transparent commissioning strategy/timetable from the local authority since at least 2008, no progress had been made on this and in reality there were still few in the way of commissioning opportunities. In this

area, also, there was now a comprehensive review of all contracts with and funding of the third sector by the local authority, which it was feared would lead to a sharp weakening of the sector locally and a reduction in the involvement of the sector in providing services, as it had in at least two of the other case-study areas.

The lack of procurement opportunities led this and most other case-study CVCs to argue that capacity building through MtC and other projects had actually run far ahead of the opportunities which had been or were currently available, meaning that some of this effort had been wasted: third sector organisations had had their capacity built and training delivered on how to tender but they had not had the opportunity to use these skills and now, because of staff turnover, the organisations would probably need to be trained all over again.

Focus group participants tended to echo this, with participants in one group suggesting that the project had been too short and expectations too high. While the project had achieved genuine benefits linked to specific activities/interventions the MtC Officers had pursued, it had 'all been a bit bitty' with little in the way of fundamental change in the mind-set of the LSB partners in respect of third sector engagement in design and delivery.

Some focus group participants and a number of national stakeholders argued, however, that there had been a more fundamental misconception in the project's focus on procurement as the route for third sector organisations to increase their involvement in the delivery of public services. One stakeholder argued that the pendulum within the sector had now swung away from a view that the way forward was to 'professionalise' third sector organisations and another argued that only a tiny minority of those supported by CVCs would ever be in a position to compete for public tenders. What was needed – but which had not yet happened - was a far stronger emphasis from public bodies on empowering and enabling more flexible local collaboration between front-line workers and the third sector to meet local needs. In this regard, the fact that MtC officers had in some cases increasingly concentrated their efforts on

the local and the specific, rather than the 'strategic' agenda was seen as sensible, while the direction of travel flagged up in the Local Government White Paper in terms of a stronger focus on neighbourhood working was welcomed.

The final stage fieldwork in case-study areas perhaps suggested an increasing interest in this sort of working, with at least two referring to new experimentation with neighbourhood working. But it also suggested that local authorities remained strongly focused on retaining (or even taking back) services in-house to protect public sector jobs and that where local authorities in particular were thinking about greater use of the sector in plugging gaps left as public sector cuts bit deeper, this was based on the (in the view of CVC interviewees') misconception that this was because the third sector had lower cost-bases and could use volunteers to replace paid staff.

One CVC interviewee said that she thought that at the top, third sector delivery was still seen as a way of cutting costs: she had recently been to a meeting with the Council Leader and had had repeatedly to tell him that you could not just replace paid staff in the statutory sector with volunteers from the voluntary sector doing exactly the same job. Another said that the public sector did not seem to grasp that the third sector did not 'have the resources' to take over responsibility for service delivery wholesale without some on-going assistance and perceived that public sector staff needed to do more to 'talk to' third sector organisations, to better understand how 'outsourcing' might help to protect or improve public services that hitherto the public sector has regarded as its domain.

3.5 Citizen Voice

KEY FINDINGS

MtC officers generally played only a modest role in case-study areas in terms of developing the role of third sector in channelling the citizen voice, in part reflecting doubts (within statutory partners but also to some extent within the

sector itself) as to whether CVCS were well placed to fulfil this role. However, in many areas, MtC officers made a significant contribution to the engagement strategies of the LSB and this experience has also helped inform thinking at a national level on good practice for the future.

MtC also enabled generally well-received training in Participation Cymru's 10 Principles to be provided to the sector and thus increased the capacity of the sector to engage meaningfully with service users.

3.5.1 Activities

In terms of *organising events/activities to enable citizens to engage in public service planning, supporting service user groups to input into public service planning and working with public sector partners to encourage participatory planning methods*, MtC officers in several of the case-study areas had played an important role in the engagement work of the LSB, often driving forward the work of engagement sub-groups.

Nevertheless, overall, the case-study research suggested that the citizen voice strand of MtC had been relatively modest. In part this reflected the view that public sector partners were 'looking inwards' rather than outwards in terms of their reshaping of public services, in part it reflected the work being undertaken elsewhere within the CVC to promote the citizen voice (e.g. through the Community Voice programme⁶³ or by the Health, Social Care and Well-Being Co-ordinators) while, in some areas, at least, it also reflected a doubt (on the part of some CVC interviewees as well as public sector contributors) as to whether CVCs, as organisations representing third sector organisations, were best placed to do this.

The final stage fieldwork confirmed that in one case-study area, at least, the MtC officer was actively engaged with facilitating work involving both third sector organisations and service users and citizens in taking forward an

⁶³ A Programme funded by the BIG Lottery Fund and providing resources to certain CVCs to fund a portfolio of projects which aim to increase the input of service users into service design.

initiative with the LHB aimed at addressing very low life expectancy in one part of the area, a project seen by national stakeholders as a particularly positive example of piloting a new way of working. In others, however, there had been less or no active involvement with this part of the MtC agenda since the formative evaluation. In this same area, however, the citizen engagement panel which had been a sub-group of the LSB, and which had been led by the CVC had been discontinued as part of a thorough overhaul of LSB structures.

Other elements of the final stage fieldwork underlined that the extent of the involvement with these issues had been highly variable. For some focus group participants, as for some of the case-study interviewees, there was a tension between the role of the CVC as a third sector representative organisation and the aspiration to represent the service user. Some CVCs had definitely decided that strengthening the citizen voice was a long-term aspiration rather than something that could be addressed in the short life-span of the project. But for others, work on citizen voice, the overall approach to service design and persuading the LSB to sign up to involving citizens in service design had been the main focus of their work. This was also emphasised by one of the Chief Officers responding to the questionnaire, who stressed that in his CVC, unlike in others, the role had

‘focussed on citizens and communities, so we had less problems than others in terms of the role duplicating other CVC staff and I believe, better outcomes’

In terms of *supporting third sector organisations to engage effectively with service users*, all MtC Officers were required to assist with arranging training for the sector by Participation Cymru in the 10 Principles and methods for engaging with service users. In general terms, feedback from the case-study areas suggests that this training had been reasonably well attended and received and in the final stage fieldwork, one case-study officer reported that, in response to demand generated by this training, she had developed and delivered a further training course on engagement approaches and techniques to 11 organisations.

3.5.2 Outputs

There were no formal targets agreed for the project with WEFO which relate to this strand of activity. However, as noted above, MtC as a project generated outputs in terms of organisations (third/public sector) trained in service user engagement/participatory planning, with a focus primarily on third sector organisations, while in most case-study areas MtC played a contributory part in a number of consultation events organised/attended. In one of the case-study areas in the final stage evaluation, this included a high profile engagement event organised jointly by CVCs and the Police and Crime Commissioner, for example.

3.5.3 Results

In general terms, not least through the Participation Cymru training, it is likely that MtC made a modest contribution to *an increase in the capacity of the third sector to engage meaningfully with services users*. However, for those case-study areas with Community Voice projects (three of our five) this latter programme seemed to be the main focus in terms of the CVCs' engagement with this agenda.

National stakeholders, however, felt that this was an area where a great deal had been achieved. In their view, the work with Participation Cymru had undoubtedly raised greater awareness and generated good practice in public engagement on the part of third sector organisations, while MtC officers as noted had often played an important role in LSB engagement strategies which involved citizen as well as stakeholder engagement. Another important legacy of the project was the involvement of WCVA and MtC officers in work being taken forward by the Welsh Government on the needs assessment for future Well Being Strategies, where WCVA had prepared proposals for a Code of Practice on Citizen Engagement which was likely to be taken forward as part of the guidance for these strategies, while the Chief Officer of the CVC in the area where the MtC officer had focused almost entirely on citizen engagement stressed that this work had left a legacy of:

‘skills, tools and methods are now being used to develop our organisation and to support the Sector – however, we have also lost the person best able to take this forward’.

3.6 Impacts

KEY FINDINGS

Identifying impact is challenging, given the long-term and wide-ranging nature of the change sought by MtC and the lack of a counterfactual.

While in some cases, MtC officers played some role in supporting a shift towards early interventions, the contribution of the project as a whole is likely to have been modest.

This is also the case in respect of the aim of bringing about more citizen-centred services, where MtC appears to have operated in an unfavourable context, but nevertheless in some cases achieved incremental or highly localised changes.

Finally, in terms of a more sustainable third sector, the research found little evidence that MtC was sufficient to make a positive difference in the face of strong counter-vailing pressures as a direct or indirect result of cuts in public expenditure.

Turning to the expected impacts of the project, it is important to first make a number of *caveats*.

The first is that MtC was a short-term project but with ambitions to bring about long-term change. As such, impacts might only manifest themselves after the project is over.

The second is that the changes sought were far-reaching but subtle and were themselves likely to be influenced and affected by a wide range of external factors. The project was also modest in terms of scale: for even the smallest of the case-study CVCs, the MtC resource represented less than 5% of its overall resources.

Thirdly, it is impossible to model in any real way the counter-factual, in other words what would have happened in the absence of the project, which is an essential step in any assessment of impact. It is important therefore to be aware that even where the desired changes did not come about – or where things actually moved in the opposite direction – it is at least possible that matters would have been worse in the absence of the project.

Turning first to whether the project has aided *a shift towards early interventions reducing the need for acute services*, there were some positive examples from within the case-studies where MtC interventions might help to achieve this. Certainly the work in two case-study areas to enable better signposting to third sector support services for older people and (in one area) young people might be expected to contribute to this over time, while the project piloting a collaborative approach to increasing life expectancy in a third area might also lead to similar outcomes. However, benefits from these have not yet started to emerge and, taken as a whole, the contribution of MtC is likely to have been a modest one.

This is likely to be true also with regard to the contribution towards ensuring *citizen-centred public services better designed and delivered more effectively*, where the evidence from the case-studies suggests that, despite the best efforts of MtC officers in some areas, there has been relatively little change in terms of commissioning practice, although again the increased access of third sector groups to decision makers which MtC has enabled may, if sustained, lead in the longer term to positive change. The final stage research confirmed the view that changes which had been achieved were largely incremental (steps on the way to longer-term cultural changes) and/or largely localised (though very specific work undertaken with, for example, a school) though one

Chief Officer, from the area where the MtC officer had concentrated on citizen engagement, believed that

‘the work has been transformational in [name of local authority area] but reliant upon supportive relationships and coordination with the [local authority] ... it has led to a change in approach toward the meaningful engagement of citizens in public service development, design and delivery’

Finally, in terms of *a more sustainable third sector*, there is little evidence that MtC has been sufficient to make a positive difference in the face of strong counter-vailing pressures as a direct or indirect result of cuts in public expenditure.

3.7 Good Practice

KEY FINDINGS

MtC appears to have been more successful where it focused down on a relatively narrow range of elements within the overall MtC officer role, which reflected the individual skills and expertise of the post-holder; and where the work of the MtC officer was integrated effectively with other resources within the CVC. Success was also dependent on pre-existing good relationships between the CVC and the local authority.

Experience in one case-study area suggests it might be difficult to sustain some of the gains achieved, given the extent of the change underway in LSBs.

As noted in our formative evaluation, MtC appears to have been more successful in two of the five case-study areas and this appeared to be attributable to:

- focusing down on a relatively narrow range of elements within the overall MtC officer role;

- integrating the work of the MtC officer effectively with other resources available to the CVC and ensuring excellent communications with other colleagues within the CVC;
- utilising the individual skills and expertise of the officer effectively and ‘playing to their strengths’;
- taking advantage of pre-existing good relationships between the CVC and the local authority.

However, during the final stage fieldwork, the officer had left post early in one of these areas, and this, combined with other major contextual changes in the CVC (other projects coming to an end, leading to a sharp contraction of the overall staffing) and the local authority (restructuring of partnership working and a review of all third sector funding) was already leading to some unravelling of what had been achieved.

Focus group participants and national stakeholders also tended to emphasise that the original project (reflected in MtC officers’ job descriptions) was far too ambitious, and that officers had succeeded best where they had worked on a narrower canvas, had focused down on specific elements of the job description which were most appropriate locally and had had their jobs structured to fit best with colleagues already in post:

‘We concentrated from the beginning not on the third sector – as we have other resources to do that – but on involvement and coproduction’
(Non case-study CVC)

Reflecting the view that CVCs had generally succeeded – at least in the latter part of the project – to tailoring the work to fit with local needs, one national stakeholder commented that:

‘most CVCs have got as much out of it as they possibly could – even if in ways that were not always the same as those in the WEFO business case’.

3.8 Barriers

KEY FINDINGS

A wide range of factors acted as barriers to the MtC project fully realising its potential. These included issues around the over-ambitious design of the project; poor relationships in some cases between the CVC and statutory organisations; the lack of progress in developing SIPs and LSBs to the point where they start to influence the commissioning of services; and the direct and indirect effects of public expenditure cuts.

Throughout the evaluation, we identified a number of contextual factors which, in our view, adversely affected the capacity of MtC to achieve its full potential. All of these still appeared relevant during our final stage fieldwork.

In summary these were:

- difficult pre-existing relationships between the CVC and the local authority (with local authorities generally seen as in effect controlling the LSB, whatever the theory);
- the resources available to the CVC and the extent to which key aspects of the standard MtC job description were – by the time the project came on stream - already being fulfilled by other staff funded by other projects and funding streams (albeit that in some cases, this meant that MtC objectives were being achieved by other means);
- a strong feeling from most of those contributing to the research that the role as originally conceived was over-ambitious, particularly given the short life-span of the project;
- the progress (or lack of it) in terms of developing the SIP, and the sense that the SIP (and the work of the LSB more generally) was detached from practical decisions about the shape of public service planning and commissioning (thus reducing the incentive for third sector organisations to become engaged);
- the impact of financial cuts on local authorities and other public sector organisations, which, linked to the strong concern within local

authorities in particular to avoid large-scale redundancies was seen to be limiting the willingness to think imaginatively about ways in which third sector delivery could enhance services;

- the high turnover of staff in the public sector as a side-effect of the financial pressures on the public sector and the difficulties this caused for *sustaining* the connections;
- the impact of cuts and the difficult economic situation on third sector organisations themselves, reducing their capacity to engage with strategic agendas;
- the lack of clarity in terms of the public sector approach to commissioning public services from the third sector;
- ‘planning blight’ in terms of decisions on commissioning services as a result of the uncertainty over the future of local government structures and regional working.

These barriers continued to be cited by contributors to the final stage research, with one of the non-case study Chief Officers identifying the following:

- ‘when the project started, the economic climate was much different, more positive and with greater resource and flexibility
- the ‘momentum’ from some partners has changed as their focus and priorities have changed, having to manage severe budget cuts and staff losses, making some aspects of the role difficult to achieve
- relationships have changed as key personnel in own and partner organisations have left their jobs
- sometimes the commitment from senior-level executives has not been matched by operational managers further along the line, or filtered across departmental working principles
- the time frame associated with the post has been too short; this is the kind of role that requires longevity in order to realise key outcomes

- in some cases, the distinction between the role of the MtC Officer and other development officers with specific portfolios, has been blurred’.

3.9 Project Management and Delivery

KEY FINDINGS

Initial tensions between the WCVA and CVCs over the implementation of the project, arising from the dual lines of accountability of the MtC officers both to line managers in CVCs and to the WCVA, were largely dissipated as a result of a more flexible approach from the new project manager appointed by WCVA half-way through the project.

However, concerns about the fitness for purpose of the RBA approach adopted remained even at the end of the project while in at least two of the five case-study areas, MtC officers did not feel well-supported by their CVCs.

There was general agreement that conceiving of the MtC as a discrete project, separate from the broader work of the CVC had been a mistake.

In the baseline report, we noted that:

- in the first year or so of the project tensions had emerged over the model whereby MtC officers were employed and line-managed within each CVC but had a reporting responsibility to the WCVA project manager (and through this post to the Welsh Government project management team of the wider project). Officers (in many cases often new to the sector) were in some cases struggling with two separate command structures, with different concerns and priorities, partly reflecting wider tensions between some CVCs and WCVA and partly reflecting more structural issues of a project management team which was very focused on the RBA model developed for the project and CVCs which wanted to deploy an additional resource flexibly;

- many officers and their CVC line managers also felt that the process of developing Individual Action Plans and a system of RBA-compliant report cards had absorbed disproportionate effort, and suggested that Action Plans were not being used to guide actual activity because of the insistence that they should cover all five key outcomes, when in practice CVCs wanted to tailor the role to fit their needs;
- these problems were in large part attributed to the long delay between the project initially being conceived and finally approved: in the interim, many CVCs had already put in place arrangements to support third sector input into the various workstreams of LSBs and a number of other projects which overlapped with the original MtC concept had received funding⁶⁴;
- staff turnover (both in WCVA and in individual MtC officers) was also perceived as a problem, although not particularly surprising given the short-term, fixed-term nature of most contracts, while the regular meetings of the MtC officers group were generally seen as useful.

By the time of the final-stage fieldwork some of these concerns had abated, though contributors still highlighted what they felt had been the initial problems. All six of the Chief Officers commenting in response to the questionnaire, for example, referred to the lack of sufficient flexibility in determining the role of the MtC officer and in the RBA framework agreed.

‘I think the [RBA] process was flawed. When establishing the project there was no clear vision, shared outcomes, meaningful collaboration and no real involvement of the people the project aimed to influence (the public sector) or participation of citizens / the third sector)’ [non case-study Chief Officer].

‘my first six months or more here were wasted faffing around with meetings to do with RBA targets that should already have been in

⁶⁴ Such as Enterprising Communities, Community Voice and Collaborative Communities - An ERDF project in south-west Wales promoted by the CVCs and local authorities to provide organisational development support to third sector organisations to become more financially sustainable. See <http://www.collaborativecommunities.org.uk/english/about-us.html>

place ... it wasn't for us to come up with these targets'. [case-study MtC officer]

The generally satisfactory resolution of these issues was attributed by Chief Officers, national stakeholders, and MtC officers themselves to a large extent to a change in WCVA project managers, with the new incumbent of the post, a 'CVC insider' seen as having 'operated in the spirit of trying to make it work' and having been more sympathetic to the need to deploy the MtC resource flexibly according to the needs of each CVC.

Generally sound project management processes were also evident in the financial management of the project, though there was a modest under-spend of around 5.5% on the total project budget of £2.595 million. This appears mainly to have related to under-spends on staff, as a result of staff leaving post early as the project came towards an end, as well as a significant under-commitment of the original budgets for consultancy support, audit costs and publicity.

At the same time, in at least two of our five case-study areas, MtC officers themselves even at the end of the project felt that they had been marginalised within their own CVC and that this had contributed to what they perceived as a general lack of success. In one, the MtC officer highlighted that a barrier had been 'a lack of understanding and promotion of the role within the CVC' and the unwillingness of other managers to allow staff 'to work together which could have enabled joint targets especially around equalities and environment to be achieved'. In the other, the MtC officer felt that she had found her feet towards the end of the project by working closely with colleagues in other CVCs rather than expecting support or guidance from her line manager and even recently had not been involved in a key meeting between her Chief Officer and the LSB support staff. In the second of these, although the officer felt that WCVA staff had been generally supportive, she felt that they could have done more to resolve difficulties with her line manager.

Views on the RBA framework as such were mixed. Some national stakeholders and at least three of the five non-case-study CVC Chief Officers responding to the questionnaire thought that it remained unwieldy and unhelpful, not well suited to what was essentially a capacity-building initiative:

‘I recall that the process of completing the RBA framework was onerous and I am not sure how beneficial it ended up being in terms of enabling us to measure the outcomes’.

‘The RBA process did not work well as there were so many iterations coming out of WCVA...I didn’t need the RBA to see what worked well in terms of activity. I just looked at the activity sheets and the feedback from the clients’

Others, however, felt that the framework ultimately adopted was no more onerous than any other monitoring system which would have been needed to meet WEFO requirements. From our own observation, while the report cards undoubtedly contain much useful information and detail on individual MtC officers’ activities, and has enabled WCVA to extract relevant data to measure progress against targets, the approach of different CVCs/officers to completing them seemed to vary very widely, making it quite difficult to draw out common threads and to make meaningful comparisons between them.

One view which was expressed much more consistently by stakeholders in the final stage fieldwork than earlier was that it had been a mistake to conceive of MtC as a discrete project, since many of the aspects of the job-description were in fact intrinsic to the role of the CVC. While CVCs had undoubtedly needed and benefited from the extra capacity, it was argued that there should have been much greater clarity around how the resource was expected to add value to existing resources at the start of the project. Related to this, the short-time scales – and the fact that in almost all cases, individual MtC officers had been recruited on short, fixed-term contracts – were seen as incompatible with an agenda which was seeking to achieve long-term and deep-seated cultural change, and which relied on the post-holder building relationships with key decision makers in the public sector.

Indeed, a common theme from the case-study areas and from national stakeholders in particular was that, whereas early on in the project, there had been a view that it had come too late, there was now a view that it had come too soon. In one case-study area, where slow progress in developing the SIP and gaining clarity about the way in which the LSB would work, all three final-stage contributors argued that it would be useful to have ‘someone on the ground’ over the next twelve months or so to ‘make the connections’ and, thus, help to move LSB working groups’ plans to implementation, while in another area, where the MtC officer had left, a CVC interviewee said:

‘It’s disheartening that we’ve opened doors, people are enquiring about things we might do, but I’m not sure we’ve now got the capacity to deliver in the future’

This was echoed by a non-case-study CVC Chief Officer who said that the main barrier had been:

‘Trying to explain the significance of the LSB to Third Sector organisations and secure their interest and participation in the delivery of various activities such as consultations or projects... Just as I could see we were making progress the funding expires which merely serves to antagonise the communities we serve and creates hostility for any “new “programme that may be introduced by WG in the future.’

3.10 Views on the Future

KEY FINDINGS

There was strong agreement from final stage contributors (most of whom were within CVCs) that there was a continued need for a MtC-type role, but that this should be more closely integrated with the overall work of the CVC and funded from Welsh Government infrastructure funding (though with doubts whether the funding available was adequate).

However, contributors to the research generally believed there needed to be a fundamental culture shift on the part of public sector partners – particularly local authorities – if the changes to public service design and delivery which MtC had aimed to achieve were to come about.

Related to this final point, most of those contributing to the final stage research argued that the work which had been undertaken by MtC officers needed to continue to be funded over the longer term – though it needs to be recognised that the vast majority of these contributors were from within CVCs.

In two of the case-study areas, CVCs were asking their local authorities to fund the post going forward – but the outcome of this was uncertain and in one of them, the local authority interviewee felt that the CVC already had sufficient capacity to maintain reasonable levels of engagement.

Participants in one of the focus groups argued that the role needed to be continued, but with a recognition that changing the mind-set of LSBs via a vis third sector service design and engagement would not be a quick fix, which argued for making the MtC function more about mainstream/core delivery, while a CVC Chief Officer wrote:

‘We need to mainstream the CVC funding so that any MtC officer and the communities know the post is there for as long as the LSB exists or until such time as an evaluation confirms that the MTC is no longer offering value for money’.

Most, including all the national stakeholders interviewed, accepted the argument made in our formative evaluation that the funding of these posts should most appropriately be accommodated within the core funding from Welsh Government, though several questioned whether this was realistic at a time when the Government was clearly aiming to reduce the Infrastructure Grant: participants in another focus group argued that, if this were the case then arrangements would need to be in place a) to uplift the grant and b) to ensure that CVCs actually used the resources for this very specific purpose: there was a suggestion from some that some CVCs left to their own devices

would not prioritise this work compared to say offering more immediately valuable services to their members.

At the same time, there was general agreement that there needed to be greater flexibility allowed to CVCs in how to utilise resources than had been the case with the MtC project – as one non case-study Chief Officer put it:

‘The more flexible the role can be, the better’.

Some focus group participants and national stakeholders believed that there had been a less close working relationship between MtC officers and LSB support staff than was desirable, and than might have been expected given both were ultimately funded from the LSB ESF project.

Within the focus groups, there was some discussion as to whether in the event of the funding being mainstreamed, any specific MtC type posts should be retained within CVCs or whether it would be sensible to co-locate them with LSB secretariats within local authorities, or even free-standing LSB secretariats: while some participants believed there were arguments in favour of such structural change (particularly if LSB secretariats were moved out of local authorities), most believed that it was essential for staff to continue to be based within CVCs if they were to retain the trust and confidence of third sector organisations. At the same time, some focus-group participants recognised that there was an issue over larger third sector organisations who were not engaged with or represented by CVCs and a strong feeling that some of these had really ‘predatory’ behaviour associated with a culture quite alien to more local third sector organisations – often involving using local supply chains on unfavourable conditions. This group believed the WCVA might have a role here in brokering work with these larger organisations and perhaps developing a code of practice about how to work with smaller local organisations in the delivery of services.

In terms of more general change which might be needed to overcome some of the barriers encountered by MtC officers in terms of their core remit of increasing the engagement of the third sector in the design and delivery of

public services, most final-stage interviewees argued strongly that a fundamental change in the culture of local authorities was needed from the top down. This, it was thought, would require significantly greater sticks – in the form of legislation or regulation – or carrots – in the form of financial incentives – from Welsh Government.

Thus one case-study CVC Chief Officer (echoed by at least two others) argued that a significant change was needed in the political culture in Wales as a whole. In particular, she believed that public sector leaders were prioritising saving public sector jobs over saving public services, and this attitude would need to change if local authorities were to become genuinely committed to using the LSB process effectively. She felt as yet local authorities and (because of their lack of leadership) other public sector bodies were not really committed to the LSB and SIP processes, and that if the Welsh Government stopped championing them, then they would rapidly wither away.

Participants in the focus groups also believed that the Welsh Government was uniquely well placed to strengthen the role and independence of LSBs, and to ensure that existing policies like the Code of Practice for Funding the Third Sector were put into practice.

Some stakeholders were optimistic that change was on the way, with one (non-case-study) Chief Officer commenting on the positive signals with regard to ensuring community and public engagement in decision making given in the Social Services and Well Being Act and in the Public Services Minister's address to the WCVA Annual Conference.

A minority of contributors, however, questioned whether change could ever be achieved top-down, and whether, in particular, continuing to focus on more transparent procurement and building the capacity of the third sector to benefit from this, made sense in a climate of sharp budget cuts and an increasing shift within the third sector back to a focus on community action rather than ever greater professionalisation. These contributors wondered

whether what was required was a fundamental shift towards empowering front-line workers – in both the public and third sector – to work together much more flexibly and locally, but recognised that this would mean an even greater policy shift away from a top-down, target-driven and risk-averse management of public services.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In terms of drawing conclusions from the research, we consider in turn each of the aims set for the evaluation at the outset.

Turning firstly to **the changing role of the third sector in delivering local services and the supply and demand for third sector services**, we found little evidence from our case-study research that the role of the third sector in delivering local services as an agent of public sector organisations is growing: indeed, public sector cuts at least in the short term seem more generally to be resulting in the withdrawal of funding through SLAs and grants to the third sector, while opportunities for most third sector organisations to secure paid contracts through commissioning have not grown: indeed, in some cases, pressure to protect public sector jobs is leading to a tendency to 'in-source' posts which were formerly out-sourced to the third sector.

There is, however, a dichotomy between a relatively small number of larger third sector organisations, who in many cases do not see themselves as represented by CVCs and who are in a relatively strong position to compete for public tenders – and the vast majority of the sector.

Opportunities – or perhaps more accurately challenges – for the third sector to step in to deliver services such as libraries - where the public sector is withdrawing because they can no longer sustain the levels of funding - are probably growing, but there is widespread frustration within the sector at the assumption that it is able to deliver services more cheaply. At the same time, there have undoubtedly been some positive examples of MtC working with local communities to respond to these challenges.

There is little evidence that changes are contributing **to increasing the sustainability** of the third sector, though some stakeholders believe that the changes in the funding environment are leading some organisations to examine the balance between paid and volunteer staff and to step back from

the 'professionalisation' of the sector which was seen to be a feature of the last 20 years or so.

Because there has been no significant increase in the role of the sector in delivering public services, we found little evidence of any impacts **on workforce planning and skills** in the third sector. MtC officers have certainly in some areas contributed and increased CVCs training activity (though this appears to have been less than expected, because of the availability of other resources and staff focused on organisational development within some CVCs), but the value of some of this training which has focused on building capacity to tender for services has been undermined because of the lack of opportunities to tender for work from the public sector, or the nature of commissioning practice, particularly on the part of local authorities.

In terms of the **sustainability of the relationship and network-building and other activities of MtC officers beyond the lifetime of the Project**, this must be questionable. Most MtC officers (as expected) have invested significant time in building working-level relationships through the LSB and the partnerships which sit below it, but LSB structures and personnel have been (and continue to be) in flux, and where good relationships have been established it is questionable whether they will be sustained in the medium term. Indeed, in one of the case-study areas where the MtC officer had left early, and where at the time of our formative evaluation MtC seemed most successful, it was clear that the systems and relationships which had been established had already frayed after less than six months. This is perhaps not surprising: and it is arguable whether it was ever realistic to try to build strong sustainable relationships through a short-term project, mostly involving officers on short, fixed-term contracts. Indeed, in some of our case-study areas, it is clear that from the outset CVC managers recognised this as an issue and consequently employed their MtC officers operationally rather than strategically.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that in some cases, at least, MtC officers have succeeded in generating awareness and altering perceptions of

counterparts in local authorities, and other public sector organisations, of the capacity of the third sector to contribute creatively to the design and delivery of public services.

Turning to **whether and how the third sector's influence on key partnerships, and the activities they pursue, improved through the implementation of MtC**, the evidence suggests that there has been little change in terms of the third sector's influence.

Similarly, there is relatively little evidence that **the design and planning of public services (particularly around Single Integrated Plan [SIP] priorities) has been improved through better integration of the third sector**, though the problem here has been not so much with any shortcomings of the MtC officers, but rather with the apparent lack of progress (identified in our research but also in the Williams Commission report) in many areas in LSBs and SIPs getting to grips with detailed issues of service design and planning. Again, while there would appear to be examples of MtC officers achieving small but significant wins in terms of a more collaborative approach to the development of specific initiatives and projects, there is very little evidence of systemic change.

Finally, in terms of **citizen engagement** in the establishment of LSB and SIP priorities and the design and delivery of services and the role of MtC within this, it is clear that in many cases, MtC officers have played a key role in pushing forward the engagement work of LSBs, though the capacity to engage the interest of the third sector and citizens more generally has varied depending on the extent to which the work of the LSB is seen to relate to grass-roots concerns and changes. More generally, while not all CVCs have been comfortable with seeing themselves as a natural champion of the citizen voice, many MtC officers have played a useful part in facilitating training and organisational development for third sector organisations in terms of engaging with service users, while in one or two cases, work to empower local communities has been central to the achievements of the project.

Overall, we take the view that while MtC officers in most cases added much needed extra capacity to CVCs and found constructive ways of supporting local third sector organisations – by improving the information flow about strategic developments, facilitating connections with public sector organisations, developing their capacity to respond to (the relatively few) opportunities to deliver public services and by engaging in practical projects to demonstrate the capacity of the third sector to make a difference – and while output targets have mostly been met, the project as a whole has not really realised the outcomes which it hoped to achieve.

In large part this is as a result of the context in which the project has operated in particular:

- The often slow progress in terms of moving the work of the LSB from the analysis of needs and identification of issues to the consideration of design and delivery of services, and the sense of disconnect between these high level strategic discussions and commissioning decisions;
- The tendency of public bodies (perhaps particularly local authorities) to turn inwards in response to the pressures brought about by the cuts in public funding, to seek to minimise job losses by taking services in house, and to be less willing to consider innovative and more personalised approaches to public services in the face of such pressures;
- The decreasing capacity of many third sector organisations to engage with more strategic agendas because of the effect of cuts in their own funding (and in some cases, increased demand for services);
- What appears to be confusion and inconsistency in the approach to procurement, with relatively limited opportunities for local third sector organisations to tender, and fewer for them to tender successfully, to provide services;
- A mismatch between the expectations of public sector commissioners that using the third sector might represent a cheap option, and the view of third sector organisations that the added value the sector can bring is through quality and expertise, not lower costs;

- The ‘planning blight’ resulting from the discussion about restructuring local government and the tension between the local focus of most LSBs and the growing importance of the regional agenda.

But while external factors may account for many of the difficulties faced by the MtC project, we also believe the design of the project was flawed:

- There was a mismatch between the scale of the ambition set out in the Business Plan and the resources and timescales of the project. Even in much more favourable circumstances, it is unlikely ever to have been realistic to expect one relatively junior officer in a CVC to be able to deliver the range of activities (and even more outcomes) envisaged;
- The focus on recruiting new staff to fill the MtC Officer post in most areas, while understandable from the viewpoint of demonstrating the ‘additionality’ of the project, did not necessarily recognise fully the extent to which issues around public service design and delivery were, even when the project started, a key part of the work of CVCs and many of their staff. This has meant that, even where MtC has worked well, it is impossible to disentangle the effects of the project from the wider effects of CVC promotion of this agenda. Where it has worked less well, MtC officers have struggled to define their role and in some cases, seem to have become marginalised within their own organisation;
- While the CVCs are recognised by the Welsh Government as having an unique role in terms of representing the sector at a local level, their position is by no means uncontested. Ironically, perhaps, those organisations operating on a larger scale, who may already be quite strongly engaged with influencing the thinking of commissioners on service design and who are already relatively well-equipped to secure contracts for the delivery of public services which are tendered openly, tend not to see the CVCs as representing them, and may indeed, see them as competitors;
- The focus of the project on a top-down model of increasing the engagement of the third sector in service design and delivery, is open

to question, particularly given the view (which would appear to be expressed in the recent Local Government White Paper) that local authorities in particular are, at the most senior level, resistant to the sort of cultural change needed to transform public services. Arguably, a more collaborative way of working needs to be developed from the bottom up;

- In terms of process, the RBA approach adopted appears to have been unwieldy and to have absorbed a disproportionate amount of effort.

In turning to our recommendations, it is important to recognise that the Local Government White Paper presents major new opportunities and challenges for the third sector – opportunities and challenges which will need resources. We are also conscious of the fact that it is highly unlikely that there will be a successor ESF-funded project to MtC, given that the new ESF Programmes for 2014 – 2020 do not contain provision for interventions to support public service reform. We therefore recommend:

Recommendation 1: It is important for the Welsh Government to continue to support CVCs to prioritise their work on the design and delivery of public services. However, this will probably be achieved more effectively by ensuring that resources are clearly available within the Infrastructure Grant to support this work and by ensuring that CVCs do in practice give appropriate priority to this role. CVCs need to have the flexibility to deploy staff resources in the way that seems most appropriate to them and wherever possible to employ staff working on these issues on permanent or long-term contracts.

Recommendation 2: In taking forward its response to the Commission and its White Paper on Local Government, the Welsh Government should recognise the views within the sector of the limited progress made in terms of this agenda and consider what further measures can be taken to incentivise local authorities and other public bodies to engage more actively, particularly given the context of budgetary pressures. In the light of its proposals for a greater focus on community or neighbourhood working, the Welsh Government needs to engage the WCVA, CVCs and the third sector more

generally in a more fundamental discussion on the balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches to increasing the engagement of the sector in public service design and delivery in order to clarify how resources within CVCs ought best to be deployed.

Recommendation 3: CVCs (with support from WCVA where necessary) should review, where possible, their existing staff roles and responsibilities to identify obvious gaps (post-MtC) in terms of ensuring adequate coverage of key LSB sub-groups and other fora. Drawing on good practice developed through the project (particularly in one case-study area) to support third sector representatives to report back, they should consider how far representation from the wider sector (i.e. non CVC staff) can be mobilised to ensure full coverage.

Recommendation 4: CVCs should wherever possible make use of the opportunities presented as a result of the work on merging the Info-Engine and GAVO Connections databases to improve the knowledge and awareness of the third sector within their areas.

Recommendation 5: CVCs should continue to offer training and capacity building relating to tendering to member organisations as part of their core training offer, pooling resources wherever possible, and with a continued strong focus on brokering collaborations.

Recommendation 6: The Welsh Government and WCVA should consider whether and, if so, how, there can be stronger engagement with larger third sector organisations to harness their input into thinking on service design and to ensure consistency of messages from the wider sector to public sector commissioners. In this context, the WCVA may wish to explore the idea of a Code of Practice for sub-contracting within the sector.

Recommendation 7: While recognising that it has already invested significant effort in terms of improving procurement, the Welsh Government needs to ensure that all public bodies both have and take into account clear

guidance on good procurement practice, including with regard to the perception that potential conflicts of interest render third sector input into service design inappropriate. Public sector organisations, wherever possible, should be encouraged to publish annual commissioning plans, highlighting tendering opportunities which are likely to be forthcoming.

Recommendation 8: The Welsh Government should consider what further steps can be taken to ensure greater compliance on the part of all public bodies with the Code of Practice for Funding the Third Sector.