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Evaluation of the Democratic Engagement Grant

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Evaluation of the Democratic Engagement Grant

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Democratic Engagement Grant

DEP

Democratic Engagement Partnership. This is the regular meeting grant recipients are required to attend as part of receiving the grant.

ERSO

Electoral Registration Support Officer

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 The Elections policy team (Welsh Government) commissioned the Internal Research Programme (IRP, Knowledge and Analytical Services, Welsh Government) to undertake an evaluation of the Democratic Engagement Grant (DEG).

1.2 The DEG was introduced in January 2023. It is aimed at third sector, not-for-profit organisations and local authorities that can demonstrate the need for funding to pursue an innovative approach to engaging under-represented groups, newly enfranchised groups and disabled people in democracy.

Background to democratic engagement

1.3 As noted in a Wales Centre for Public Policy report (2023), in Wales (and the UK) there are issues regarding low electoral registration and turnout and a general lack of political understanding among citizens. A report from the Electoral Commission (2023) reviewed December 2022 electoral registers in the UK, of which there is a Wales-specific annex (Electoral Commission, 2023). This showed overall levels of registration (register completeness) had improved since 2018. However, there was a lower level of registration among certain groups, including young people aged 18 to 34[1]. This was also supported by the Electoral Commission report (2021) and Electoral Commission report (2022) who reported low levels of overall turnout in Senedd and local government elections in Wales (46.8% in 2021, 38% in 2022). Turnout was also reported as lower for age groups under 55 (2021) and under 35 (2022).

1.4 Young people, qualifying foreign nationals, disengaged adults and disabled people face barriers to democratic engagement, which can be different across these groups. The Welsh Government have commissioned a number of research projects in order to better understand barriers to democratic engagement for these particular groups.

1.5 The Welsh Government research paper 'Democratic renewal: evidence synthesis to support local government electoral reform' (2019) synthesised existing evidence regarding methods for engaging citizens in democratic processes, including 16 and

[1] The report suggests register completeness in 2022 in Wales was 79% for 18 to 34 year olds. The percentage for register completeness increased with age band and was 97% for those aged 65 and over.

17 year olds and foreign nationals. Findings noted that level of engagement varies across groups, and that engagement methods should be tailored to the needs of different disengaged groups. The importance of education and awareness and perceived influence for engagement with democracy were also noted.

1.6 Building on this, the Welsh Government commissioned research paper 'Renewing democratic engagement: exploratory research' (2020) collected primary data, speaking with young people, foreign nationals and disengaged adults. Various barriers to engagement were cited including a lack of knowledge, the topic being viewed as unappealing or boring, that getting involved makes no difference, and feeling disconnected from democracy. The authors gave suggestions for methods to overcome these barriers.

1.7 Focusing specifically on the accessibility of elections for disabled people, the Welsh Government commissioned research paper 'Accessibility of democratic engagement in Wales: evidence review' (2024) synthesised existing evidence. Barriers include a lack of access to information (including voter registration and the process of voting, election literature, the media, and wider education); logistical challenges relating to the location of the polling station and its proximity to public transport and accessible parking facilities; problems within the polling station itself; and difficulties with the experience of voting.

Policy background: electoral reform and previous Welsh Government democratic engagement initiatives

1.8 Responsibility for Senedd and local government elections were devolved through the Wales Act 2017. The Welsh Government's Programme for Government (2021 to 2026) includes a commitment to reform local government elections to reduce the democratic deficit. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 extended the right to vote in devolved elections to 16 and 17 year olds and foreign citizens legally resident in Wales (qualifying foreign nationals). These are 'newly enfranchised' groups. The first elections in which these groups could vote were the 2021 Senedd elections and 2022 local government elections.

1.9 In the lead up to the May 2021 Senedd elections Welsh Government policy officials worked with external stakeholders, such as the Senedd Commission and Electoral

Commission, to develop a national communication campaign and educational materials to increase awareness and registration in newly enfranchised groups.

1.10 In a report of the 2021 Senedd elections (Electoral Commission, 2021), turnout was 46.8% and broadly similar to 2016. Turnout for those aged 16 to 17 was similar to other younger age groups, which was notably lower than turnout for over 55s.

1.11 In two written statements on electoral reform (July 2021), the then Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution highlighted the need for equity of participation in democracy. They noted that a healthy democracy means empowering citizens to participate in many ways, including extending beyond the act of voting. Removal of barriers to participation is important for democratic engagement. The first 'Written Statement: Framework for electoral reform' set out six principles to guide electoral reform and support democratic engagement and participation:

- Equity: Every person that wishes to participate in democracy must be enabled to do so, and to do so in a safe and respectful environment, so that our institutions are diverse and representative of the people they serve.
- Accessibility: Changes to electoral systems and electoral law should be based on the principle of making voting and participation in democracy as accessible and convenient as possible, building capacity to allow that to happen and encouraging creativity at every level of democracy.
- Participation: We want as many people as possible to exercise their democratic right to vote. It is the role of everyone involved in electoral administration to maximise the number of people turning out at elections.
- Improving citizen experience: Citizens should be provided with the tools to shape their communities and country through engagement, representation and participation.
- Simplicity: The administrative electoral system and electoral law in Wales must be modernised to make registering to vote, voting and participating more straightforward for citizens.
- Integrity: Integrity and transparency must underpin all electoral reforms in Wales. We must have a system that citizens trust and a sharing of information from legitimate sources.

1.12 The second, 'Written Statement: Electoral Reform', set out four strands of work in advance of the May 2022 local government elections, which included increasing

registrations, and increasing overall democratic engagement (particularly for young people and their understanding of the impact of government on their lives).

1.13 In accordance with these strands of work and the principles in the electoral reform framework (particularly equity, accessibility, participation and improving citizen experience), Welsh Government policy officials launched several initiatives in the lead up to the May 2022 local government elections. The aim was to increase registration and engagement, particularly for newly enfranchised groups. The intention was also to build on the lessons learnt from the activities developed for the 2021 Senedd elections. The initiatives were:

- A Wales-wide communications campaign ('Because I Can')
- Targeted postal communications
- Providing resources and holding engagement events for schools, in partnership with an external organisation
- Making additions to an online tool for the provision of voter information, in partnership with an external organisation
- Introducing grant schemes

1.14 Regarding the targeted postal communications, 17 of 22 local authorities applied for and used additional funding which was available to send two Household Notification Letters (HNL). In six local authorities, a HNL was addressed directly to young people, through use of education data.

1.15 One grant scheme was for electoral services teams in local authorities to fund a dedicated Electoral Registration Support Officer (ERSO) between September 2021 and March 2022, to increase capacity to engage and register newly enfranchised groups. Twenty of 22 local authorities received the grant. As part of the grant, ERSOs joined a network in which they shared updates about the work they were undertaking to increase registrations.

1.16 Another was the 'Voter Registration Support Grant', which was a competitive grant scheme for third-sector organisations. This had a value of £100,000 and was awarded across six organisations to deliver bespoke projects to reach and engage newly enfranchised groups and increase registrations. Each organisation produced an evaluation report at the end of their project.

1.17 An independent, published evaluation of the initiatives which Welsh Government launched prior to the 2022 local government elections was not conducted. Therefore, it is not in scope of this report to comment on the outcomes of these initiatives, including increasing registrations and engagement. In a report of the 2022 local government elections in Wales (Electoral Commission, 2022), turnout was lower than in 2017 by four percentage points at 38%. Turnout was lowest for those aged under 35. The report did note positive feedback regarding the ERSO scheme:

'...This additional resource was welcomed by local authorities and was crucial in delivering key areas of work to local target groups, especially young people. The strongly held opinion of those local authorities that we talked to was that this resource should continue to be made available to ensure that the foundations already laid are built upon and this important work can continue.'

1.18 Following the May 2022 local government elections, The Electoral Administration and Reform White Paper (October 2022) was published. This was a consultation that set out proposals for Welsh Government's long-term vision for electoral reform for the 2026 and 2027 devolved elections. In the 'Written Statement: Electoral Reform White Paper' (March 2023), the then Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution highlighted the reforms that were intended to be taken forward considering the responses to the consultation.

1.19 The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill followed, setting out the legislative measures. In the 'Written Statement: Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill'

(October 2023), the then Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution outlined elements included in the bill. They noted the bill, alongside the wider reform package, aims to help increase participation in Welsh elections. This is now the 'Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024' (September 2024). Some of the reforms include the following, and more detail can be found in the 'Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill – Bill Summary' (Senedd Research, 2023):

- Designing and piloting the automatic registration of eligible electors.
- Improving the accessibility of elections for disabled people by placing duties to provide equipment to help disabled people vote independently.
- Establishing an online voter information platform with information about the Senedd and local elections, to help build understanding about elections in Wales.
- Increasing opportunities for underrepresented groups to stand for elected office, supporting and representing their communities. This seeks to build on the pilot scheme of financial assistance to help disabled candidates in Welsh elections remove barriers to their participation.

Background: wider initiatives

1.20 There are other initiatives relating to democratic engagement outside of electoral reform.

1.21 As noted in the 'Electoral Administration and Reform White Paper' (2022), the Curriculum for Wales launched in September 2022. Within the humanities area for leaning and experience learners are encouraged to be active and informed citizens, understanding how to exercise their democratic rights. Therefore, there are also opportunities in education settings to support young people to engage in democracy.

1.22 The Electoral Commission and the Senedd Commission also do regular outreach and engagement work. The Electoral commission have a 'Welcome to your vote' campaign and have also produced resources for democracy education as part of the Curriculum for Wales humanities area of learning at primary and secondary education level. The Senedd Commission also offer education and youth engagement, such as sessions, resources and Senedd visits. This includes how to stand and vote in the Welsh Youth Parliament.

Other grant schemes

1.23 As part of their inquiry, The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales set out to engage with the people of Wales about the way their country is governed and the options for the future (Final report, 2024). As part of this, the 'Community Engagement Fund' grant scheme was established for third sector organisations or community groups to engage their communities in the national conversation, particularly those who may not feel their voice is heard. A grant value of £5,000 per organisation was available and activity was short-term. Projects launched in September 2022 and were to feed into the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales interim report (2022), which included work up to November 2022.

1.24 The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust have a 'UK Democracy Fund'. While this fund supports some activity in Wales, it is not specific to Wales and Welsh elections. The fund was set up in 2019 and is non-partisan. It broadly seeks to address unequal participation in democracy, particularly focusing on registration, voting and elections. It is a relatively large fund, where applications for grants of up to £10,000 are open at any time, and applications for over £10,000 have quarterly funding rounds.

Background: developing the DEG

1.25 As part of the initiatives for the 2022 local government elections, Welsh Government policy officials received feedback from recipients of the 'Third-sector Voter Registration Support Grant'. The feedback highlighted a need for a long term approach to discussing the democratic process with the newly enfranchised groups to overcome barriers and to embed information. Initiatives to engage groups in democracy solely around the time of elections were not viewed as sufficient.

1.26 Welsh Government introduced the DEG which intended to build on the initiatives from the 2022 local government elections by providing funding to support projects to engage with the population over a longer period (outside election cycles).

1.27 The grant received approval for an initial 3-year period, 2022/23 to 2024/25 (financial years, running April to March). In total £900,000 was available across this period. As the DEG was introduced in January 2023, the first full financial year was 2023/24 (April 2023 to March 2024). One organisation received funding in 2022/23 (January to March 2023), and fifteen organisations received funding in 2023/24 (April 2023 to March 2024).

1.28 The grant is for third sector, not-for-profit organisations and local authorities that can demonstrate the need for funding to pursue an innovative approach to engaging the following groups in democracy:

- Under-represented groups.
- Newly enfranchised groups, including 16 to 17 year olds and qualifying foreign nationals.
- Disabled people.

1.29 The aims of the grant funding are to:

- Enable several organisations to encourage and support people in their stakeholder communities to participate in democracy.
- Help funded organisations ensure as many people as possible are engaged, motivated, and empowered to take part in democracy, giving them the tools to make their voice heard and impact positively on the Wales around them.
- Support projects to engage with the population over a sustained period.

1.30 Also, as part of the DEG, organisations which received the grant were expected to take part in the Welsh Democratic Engagement Partnership (DEP). This is a

meeting which brings together grant recipients and organisations with an interest in the democratic process. The aim of this is to:

- Allow for any collaborative opportunities to be explored.
- Enable projects to benefit from a wide range of insight and expertise.

1.31 The DEG application form guidance notes (Welsh Government, 2024) outline that Welsh Government policy officials intended the funding to benefit as many people from the target groups as possible and to fund projects from across Wales. A particular interest was noted in funding projects that have a digital element, or that encourage collaboration with organisations outside Wales that are leaders in this space and can demonstrate best practice.

1.32 There were two types of projects that Welsh Government policy officials sought to fund. Applications were encouraged for larger projects which build on work that has already demonstrated activity and impact. Applications were also encouraged for smaller pilot projects, including those taking an innovative approach to overcoming identified barriers to participation in democracy. This includes barriers identified in 'Renewing democratic engagement: exploratory research' (2020). There were separate application forms for organisations applying for £1,000 or less and over £1,000.

The wider context

1.33 The DEG forms part of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government (2021 to 2026) commitment to reform local government elections to reduce the democratic deficit. As set out in the principles to underpin Welsh Government's approach to supporting democratic engagement and participation, the DEG aligns with:

- Equity and Accessibility: By aiming to reach groups across Wales, including a focus on engaging groups who are under-represented or face additional barriers to participation in democracy.
- Participation and Improving citizen experience: By aiming to help funded organisations support groups to engage and participate in democracy, and provide them with the tools to make their voice heard.

1.34 Approaches to improving democratic participation should also reasonably align to the wellbeing goals within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. In particular, 'A more equal Wales', through helping funded organisations support groups to engage and participate in democracy, particularly those who face barriers. Moreover, it aligns with the 'collaboration' way of working by providing funding for organisations who are knowledgeable about and have links with their communities or target groups. In addition, through the DEP which aims for organisations to share their approaches, resources and any challenges faced. The DEG also aligns with the 'long-term' way of working through offering funding over a multi-year period with the aim for organisations to engage with the population over a sustained period.

1.35 In the Welsh Government response to the final report of The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales (Welsh Government, 2024), one of the recommendations highlighted the need for stronger democratic innovation and inclusive community engagement in Wales, as well as new strategies for civic education. The DEG was noted (alongside other initiatives) as part of improving innovative engagement as per the recommendation.

1.36 During development of the DEG overlap with other grant schemes (as discussed in the report section 'Background: wider initiatives') was considered. The Community Engagement Fund had already allocated funding when DEG launched, funded projects were short-term and were for a very specific purpose of engaging citizens in a national conversation. The UK Democracy Fund seeks to fund projects that

operate at scale, so will support larger projects than the DEG, and does not have a Wales-specific remit.

Aims and remit of the evaluation

1.37 The evaluation will primarily focus on the first full year of the scheme, where 16 organisations were delivering projects. There are four projects that had a multi-year grant award: three applied for multi-year funding from the outset, and one applied for an additional year of funding after their first year. These four projects will continue activity into the 2024/25 financial year (April 2024 to March 2025) and so are underway at the time of writing. The evaluation will cover the design and delivery element of the multi-year award, and the perceived impacts at the time of the research fieldwork.

1.38 Three research aims were developed, with specific research questions within each aim.

1.39 **Aim 1: Review the design and delivery of the current grant funding scheme, including the Democratic Engagement Partnership element.**

Research questions:

- Which organisations received DEG funding, how was it used; and did it reach the target groups?
- How was the DEG, including the Democratic Engagement Partnership, delivered and what are the experiences of grant recipients?
- Overall, what aspects of the design and delivery worked well and less well?

1.40 **Aim 2: Understand the perceived impact of the grant funding scheme. Including the Democratic Engagement Partnership element and the wider context.**

Research questions:

- What are the perceptions regarding the impact the DEG has had, and what gap the DEG fills, in the wider democratic engagement context?
- What are the perceived project-level outcomes and impacts of DEG funding for grant recipients and grant beneficiaries?
- What do grant recipients view as the outcomes from taking part in the Democratic Engagement Partnership?
- What, if any, were the unintended consequences of the grant scheme?

1.41 **Aim 3: Understand how monitoring and evaluation can be improved.**

Research questions:

- How is the DEG currently monitored?
- Where monitoring and evaluation have not occurred, what were the reasons for this?
- How can monitoring and evaluation of the DEG be improved and potentially streamlined across projects in the future?

2. Methodology

2.1 The following approaches were taken to address the overarching aims of the research, and each are described in further detail within this section:

- Desk research and secondary analysis of policy documentation
- Creation of a retrospective logic model
- Conducting interviews with grant recipients, local authorities, and wider external stakeholders in the democracy field

Desk research and secondary analysis of policy documentation – June to October 2024

2.2 The core activity was to review the available materials relating to the DEG and its policy context.

2.3 Materials relating to the policy landscape and context included:

- Strategy documents regarding the development of the grant
- Previous Welsh Government commissioned research regarding democratic engagement

2.4 Materials relating to the specific grant activity included:

- Grant application forms (completed by successful and unsuccessful applicants)
- Grant award letters issued by Welsh Government to successful applicants and outcome letters issued to unsuccessful applicants
- Quarterly grant claim and progress forms completed by grant recipients
- Democratic Engagement Partnership meeting notes
- End of project evaluation reports completed by grant recipients

2.5 The information relating to the policy landscape and context of the grant was summarised. This also informed the ‘rationale’ element of the Logic Model developed in the following stage of this research.

2.6 As all projects funded by the grant were unique, the information relating directly to the funded activities and the grant recipients was compiled into a framework. This framework included:

- Contextual information about the grant and recipients– value, length, organisation type
- Contextual information about the project – target beneficiaries, geographic reach, whether it's a pilot or continuation of a previous project
- Planned project activities
- Intended outcomes and what the project aimed to achieve
- How grant recipients intended to measure outcomes
- Reported project progress

2.7 The content of the framework was summarised by an analyst and reviewed by a separate analyst. Additionally, two analysts separately coded the planned project activities, intended outcomes and reported progress, of which the codes were then refined and agreed to form themes.

2.8 Information regarding unsuccessful applicants was compiled into a separate framework, covering the same content as noted in point 2.6 (except progress), alongside the application feedback from the policy team. The content of the framework was summarised by an analyst, which grouped the types of activities proposed and reasons why the applicants were unsuccessful. This was reviewed by a separate analyst.

2.9 An assessment of the quality and content of the evaluation reports was also undertaken – produced and refined by two separate analysts. This considered the planned project activities and outcomes and how grant recipients intended to measure outcomes from their application, the agreed targets and evidence required as per their grant award letter, and the content of the evaluation reports.

Data considerations for the desk research and secondary analysis of policy documentation

2.10 At the time of writing, 11 of the 16 end of grant evaluation reports were available. Four grant recipients were working across multiple years so a report would not be expected. One recipient had a single year project but had not yet provided their report.

Development of the DEG Logic Model – July to October 2024

2.11 A retrospective logic model was developed, which presents information about the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the programme, but did not include causal links or assumptions and risks (Government Analysis Function guidance, accessed 2024). Each of these categories is represented in a column in the visual model, under which constituent elements sit and can interact.

2.12 Information collated at the desk research stage was used to develop an initial logic model. The themes regarding project activities and outcomes developed from the framework (points 2.6 and 2.7) became objects in the model within the outputs and outcomes headings.

2.13 Inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes in the model were separated into two levels, the fund level and the project level, to aid understanding of the different parts of the scheme.

2.14 After the initial version of the model was developed a workshop was held with four Welsh Government officials (three participants were within the Elections policy team, and one participant was from a separate policy area who sat on the grant assurance panel). The purpose of the workshop was to discuss each stage of the logic model to check the understanding of the programme theory and to refine and further develop the initial model. This also included a discussion of assumptions and risks, to be included in the accompanying logic model narrative.

2.15 A topic guide was developed ahead of the workshop. The research team facilitated the session, which was recorded and automatically transcribed in Microsoft Teams. Two analysts separately reviewed the feedback from the workshop and discussed and agreed how to incorporate it into the logic model. The revised model was circulated for further feedback from workshop participants.

Methodological considerations for the logic model

2.16 Although it is important to include a wide range of stakeholders when developing a logic model (Government Analysis Function guidance, accessed 2024), due to research time constraints only one workshop could be held, and external stakeholders and grant recipients were not included in the logic model workshop. Areas of questioning in the topic guide for the research stage 'Conducting interviews with grant recipients, local authorities, and wider external stakeholders in the democracy field' were aligned to the research aims and questions, and, as such, covered the processes of DEG delivery and perceived impacts (Annexes A and B). This meant the areas of questioning in interviews with participants broadly covered the different stages of the logic model. The elements of the logic model regarding grant recipients and the wider sector, from inputs to outcomes, were reviewed against the themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews. This ensured that the logic model captured elements from inputs to outcomes relating to grant recipients, local authorities, and external stakeholders that Welsh Government officials may not have had insight into.

Conducting interviews with grant recipients, local authorities, and wider external stakeholders in the democracy field – July to October 2024

2.17 Seventeen semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted. There were two broad groups of participants, with a separate topic guide developed for each. These were grant recipients, and local authorities and wider external stakeholder organisations.

2.18 Contact details of participants to invite to interview were obtained from the policy team. All those invited to an interview had agreed for the policy team to share their contact details with the IRP for the purposes of this research. All interview correspondence was sent via email.

2.19 Interviews were offered in Welsh or English and accessibility requirements and preferences were asked for upon initial email contact. Interviews took place over Microsoft Teams. The Microsoft Teams recording and automatic transcription functions were used to capture the details of the interviews for the analysis stage, where participants agreed for recording and transcription to take place.

Grant recipients

2.20 The policy team contacted all 16 grant recipients who were funded in the 2023/24 financial year (April 2023 to March 2024) regarding whether they agreed for their

contact details to be shared with the research team. During this process, the project details of those who agreed to be contacted were reviewed by researchers to ensure the sample represented a range of grant values, whether the project was multi-year, single year or short-term, the type of activities that were delivered, and whether the organisations had presence in Wales and in other UK countries.

2.21 Eleven of the 16 grant recipients agreed to be contacted and were sent an invitation. Recipients were also sent a reminder if an invite response was not received.

2.22 Ten interviews were conducted. The interviews were on average around 1 hour in duration. The topic guide (Annex A) generally covered the following broad areas of questioning:

- The processes and delivery of the grant, including monitoring and evaluation
- Perceived impact of the grant, for their target groups/end-beneficiaries, their organisation, and the wider sector
- Reflections on funding needs

2.23 Based on introductory probes during the interview, participants from the grant recipient organisations had varied roles within their organisations. In some cases, the research participants were the founder or head of the whole organisation. In other cases, the research participants were responsible for project or programme delivery. This was either just for the DEG funded project, or for a portfolio of different projects. There were also instances where participants had been hired specifically to a role to deliver the activities for their organisation's DEG funded project. The majority of participants were involved directly in delivering the DEG funded activity. Some participants were actually running events or activities direct to the target groups. Other participants had more of a coordination role, where they had oversight of the project and what was being delivered, and were involved more so in the grant administration side (application, grant claims, attending meetings, reporting). There were also those in a coordination role who were also involved in, or responsible for, running events or activities direct to target groups. There was an instance where a participant had a broader role, with more of a high-level oversight of different activity in their organisation and co-ordination across Wales.

Local authority staff

2.24 The IRP worked with the Elections policy team to agree an appropriate sampling approach. Contacting all local authorities was deemed unsuitable as not all would be aware of the DEG. Therefore, the agreed alternative was to sample from the local authorities that applied for the DEG. There were 10 local authorities, of which four received grant funding and six were unsuccessful at application. Researchers initially sampled seven local authorities. This sample was purposively drawn to include a split of successful and unsuccessful local authorities and from each of four geographic regions of Wales (North Wales, Mid Wales, South East Wales and South West Wales). These regions and constituent local authorities were based on those in the Welsh Government statistical release 'Summary statistics by regions of Wales: 2020'.

2.25 Representatives from six of the sampled local authorities agreed to be contacted by the research team and were invited to interview. Reminders were sent where there was no reply to the invite. There was low up-take from local authorities, with two interviews conducted. Therefore, the remaining three local authorities from the original sample were also contacted by the policy team. Two agreed to be contacted by the IRP and were sent an invitation, of which one interview was conducted.

2.26 Overall, three local authorities were interviewed. One received grant funding and two were unsuccessful at application. The interviews were on average around 59 minutes in duration. The topic guide (Annex B) generally covered the following broad areas of questioning:

- The democratic engagement context and wider support or funding that is available
- Views on the DEG funding considering the sector context
- (For successful local authorities) The perceived impacts of the DEG for their organisation
- The perceived impacts of the DEG within the sector
- (For unsuccessful local authorities) The application process

2.27 Based on introductory probes during the interview, some participants from the local authorities worked directly in democratic services, with a remit of fulfilling their respective local authorities' statutory duties. Another was stationed in a central corporate division which had responsibility for policy and best practice regarding engagement. Where unsuccessful, participants were involved in developing and coordinating the application to the grant. Where successful, participants were involved directly in delivering the DEG funded activity and coordinating this activity.

Wider external stakeholders

2.28 Four wider external stakeholder organisations were identified by policy colleagues as important to engage at this stage in the research, to provide expert insights from the broader democracy and elections sector. This sample included two organisations that operate in Wales, an organisation that operates in Scotland, and an organisation that operates primarily in England but is active across the UK. Organisations were either a government body, a regulatory body, or a company.

2.29 All four of these organisations agreed to be contacted by the research team and all four were interviewed. The interviews were on average around 43 minutes in duration. The topic guide (Annex B) varied slightly depending on the organisation's country but generally covered the following broad areas of questioning:

- The democratic engagement context and wider support or funding that is available
- Views on the DEG funding considering the sector context
- The perceived impacts of the DEG for their organisation, and whether they have worked with any of the recipients
- The perceived impacts of the DEG within the sector

2.30 Based on introductory probes during the interview, participants from the wider external stakeholder organisations had varied roles within their organisations. In some cases, the participants were the head of the whole organisation. In other cases, the participants were responsible for a specific area, such as communications, or elections (including accessibility).

2.31 Participants reported that they were either broadly aware or very aware of the DEG. This awareness was attributed to the organisation working in the 'democratic engagement space' and because they have a close working relationship the Elections policy team in Welsh Government. Some participants noted an understanding of some of the project activity happening with the funding. Others had a broader awareness regarding the policy and strategy of the DEG.

Analysis of interview data

2.32 The interview transcripts were anonymised and checked and amended against the interview recordings for accuracy. There was an instance where a participant did not agree for the interview to be recorded or transcribed. In this case non-verbatim interview notes were written up by the interviewer. The interview data (transcripts, or in one case, notes) was imported into Microsoft Excel for qualitative thematic analysis. For analysis purposes data was organised by topic guide probes and analysed for emerging themes. This analysis was reviewed by a separate analyst and themes were then refined and agreed.

Data considerations for the qualitative interviews

2.33 There are some important considerations and limitations to the research to keep in mind when interpreting the findings presented:

- Not all grant recipients were interviewed and therefore the views expressed in this report cannot be said to represent the views of all those who received grant funding.
- The views expressed by local authority staff are those of a small number of individuals who are employed by a small number of the local authorities. The views and opinions are therefore not representative of all staff within the included local authorities, and are not representative of all local authorities.
- The wider external organisations interviewed were recommended for engagement by the Welsh Government Elections policy team. They cannot therefore be considered representative of the view of the wider democratic engagement and elections space.
- The 2024 UK General Election was announced during the research period, and interviews were conducted shortly after the 2024 UK General Election took place. Therefore, as this research piece pertains to democracy, views of interview participants may have been affected by this event.

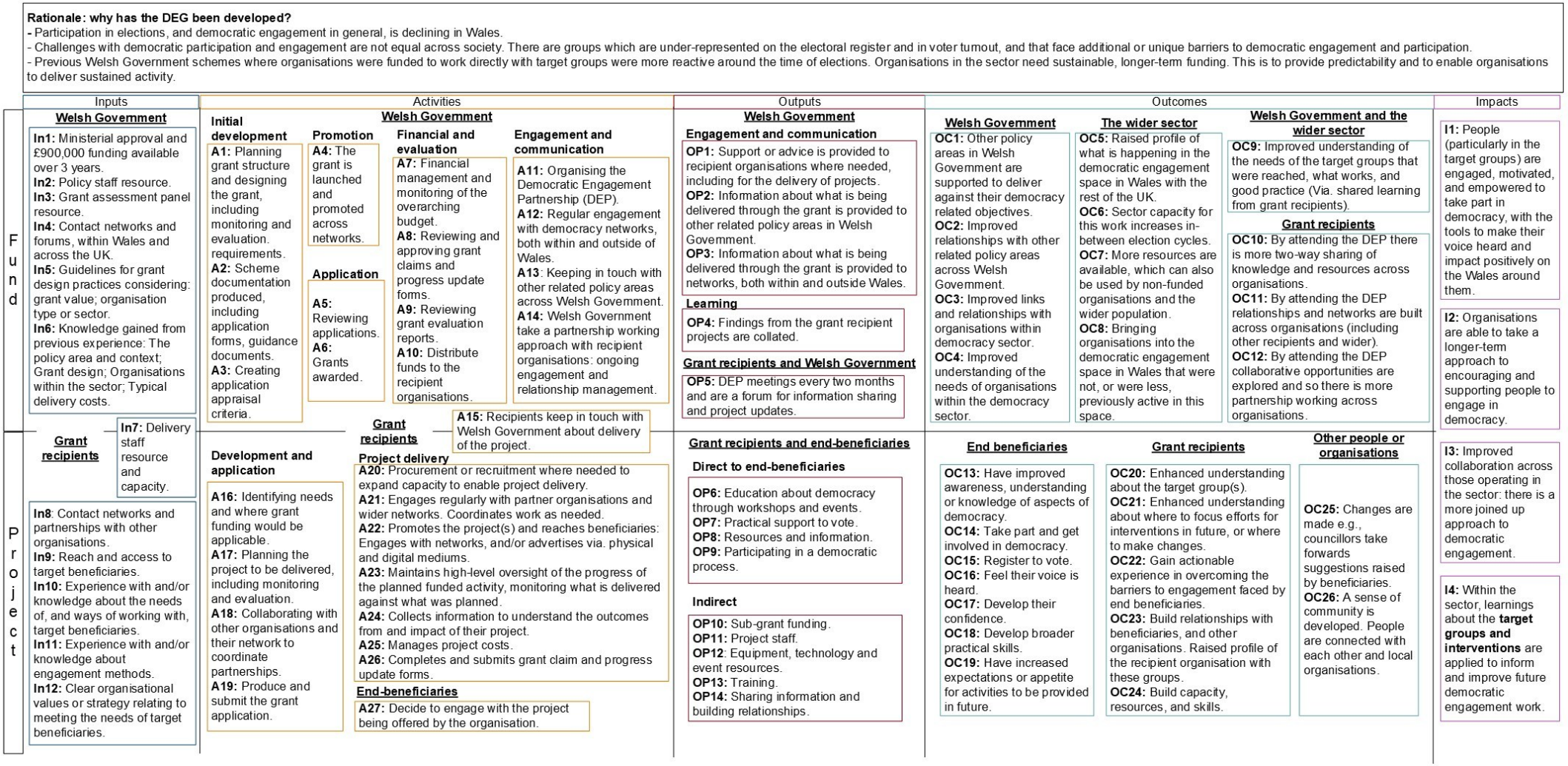
3. The DEG logic model

3.1 This section contains the DEG Logic Model diagram (Figure 1). It also contains an expanded description of certain components of the diagram within the report text, main assumptions, and links between some of the components in different stages of the logic model.

3.2 Definitions of each stage of the logic model were guided by Government Analysis Function guidance (accessed 2024). These are:

- Inputs: What resources are needed?
- Activities: What action needs to occur? What needs doing with the resources to bring about change?
- Outputs: What needs to be delivered or produced?
- Outcomes: What are the changes that follow the outputs? These may be more immediate effects of the programme or projects
- Impacts: What does the DEG aim to achieve overall? These may be longer-term

Figure 1: The DEG logic model



General assumptions

3.3 Throughout this report section assumptions will be stated in relation to the specific components of the logic model to which they correspond. The following are general assumptions that underpin the DEG more broadly. These are factors that do not necessarily describe the underlying logic of how the DEG is expected to lead to the intended impacts and so they are not included in the logic model diagram. However, they are principles or thinking that were described by participants in the logic model workshop that underpinned development of the DEG.

3.4 The following core assumptions must be borne in mind when reading the logic model:

- That there is an appetite for this kind of funding from the sector and it meets sector needs.
- That the DEG approach to funding encourages sustainability.
- Visible political neutrality is essential. Welsh Government should not be perceived as attempting to lead democracy, including but not limited to leading in a specific political direction. Therefore, the DEG is non-prescriptive about the specific democratic engagement projects and outcomes to be delivered by grant recipients.
- To impact or change behaviour of the target groups, incremental and consistent work is required rather than one-off of short-term projects. It is also important to fund organisations who work directly with target groups, enabling local level activity and more intensive contact with target groups.
- Because there are diverse democratic engagement practices across the sector, driving collaboration across organisations in the sector is important for the sharing of practices and resources. The DEG sought to fund innovative and creative practices (as is reflected in introduction point 1.2 and the application documentation regarding grant aims).
- That work undertaken by the projects will be renewed or continued over time.
- The DEG is targeted at affecting engagement with devolved elections specifically, but it is accepted that there may be some unintended effects on engagement with UK elections.
- That grant recipient organisations must be able to apply for and deliver the project in line with Welsh Government financial year timings.

- That core funding and overhead costs can be covered by the organisation for the duration of their project, unless overhead costs are specifically requested and costed for in their application.

Expanding on elements of the logic model

Additional information regarding inputs

3.5 Regarding the Welsh Government input ‘In3: Grant assessment panel resource’, the DEG grant assessment panel consisted of members from the Elections policy team and other areas of Welsh Government. Workshop participants reported the intention of including resource from different policy areas was to encourage collaboration regarding work in the engagement space.

3.6 Regarding the grant recipient input ‘In7: Delivery staff resource and capacity’, this sits between the ‘Fund level’ and ‘Project level’ as it is required to deliver the intended projects but also to engage with Welsh Government and other organisations at the fund level.

Describing links between inputs and activities

3.7 The grant recipient inputs ‘In10: Experience with and/or knowledge about the needs of, and ways of working with, target beneficiaries’, ‘In11: Experience with and/or knowledge about engagement methods’ and ‘In12: Clear organisational values or strategy relating to meeting the needs of target beneficiaries’, underpin the grant recipient activities ‘A16: Identifying needs and where grant funding would be applicable’ and ‘A17: Planning the project to be delivered, including monitoring and evaluation’. It is not about the organisation necessarily having worked in this space before, as workshop participants reported the intention of the DEG was to reach new organisations. It is about there being a clear need in a group the organisation works with, which aligns with both the organisation’s values or strategy and the objectives of the grant.

3.8 The Welsh Government inputs ‘In5: Guidelines for grant design practices considering: grant value; organisation type or sector’ and ‘In6: Knowledge gained from previous experience: The policy area and context ; Grant design ; Organisations within the sector ; Typical delivery costs’ underpin the ‘Initial development’ activities (A1 to A3), as these inputs provide a basis of what is reasonable to ask of the organisations receiving grant funding. For example, workshop participants noted application requirements were different for

organisations applying for over £1,000 and £1,000 and below, and so requirements were tailored to be proportionate and reasonable to the value of the grant. Moreover, the use and production of information in the Welsh language was required where appropriate. For example, if the target group was foreign nationals for whom English is a second language, then information was required in the relevant community languages only.

3.9 Additionally, the Welsh Government input ‘In6: Knowledge gained from previous experience: Organisations within the sector ; Typical delivery costs’ underpins the Welsh Government ‘application’ activities (A5: Reviewing applications, A6: Grants awarded) as this input provides a basis for due diligence to be conducted and to assess whether the requested grant value reflects value of money on the basis of the proposed activities and outputs.

3.10 The grant recipient activity ‘A22: Promotes the project(s) and reaches beneficiaries: Engages with networks, and/or advertises via. physical and digital mediums’ is underpinned by the inputs ‘In8: Contact networks and partnerships with other organisations’ and ‘In9: Reach and access to target beneficiaries’, where the recipient organisations must be able to promote the grant in a way that reaches the intended beneficiaries, in order for the beneficiaries to come across the project to lead to a decision about whether they take part or not (Beneficiary activity ‘A27: Decide to engage with the project being offered by the organisation’).

Additional information regarding activities

3.11 The Welsh Government activity ‘A6: Grants awarded’ includes sending outcome letters to all applicants who are successful and unsuccessful, and grant award letters to applicants who are successful outlining their grant conditions.

3.12 The Welsh Government ‘Promotion’, ‘Application’ ‘Financial and evaluation’ and ‘Engagement and communication’ activities are ongoing throughout the grant.

Assumptions regarding activities

3.13 An assumption specific to the Welsh Government activity ‘A4: The grant is launched and promoted across networks’ is that the promotion of the grant reaches the organisations which are eligible for the grant (third sector, not-for-profit, and local authorities). As workshop participants reported the intention was for the grant to reach new organisations (also mentioned at point 3.7), another assumption for activity ‘A4’ is that the engagement to advertise the grant has a wide reach, enough to extend beyond the pool of organisations already active in the democratic engagement space or working with Welsh Government in this area. This is, in part, underpinned by ‘In4: Contact networks and forums, within Wales and across the UK’.

3.14 An assumption specific to the Welsh Government activity ‘A14: Welsh Government take a partnership working approach with recipient organisations: ongoing engagement and relationship management’ is that trust is built with the recipient organisation. Workshop participants highlighted this creation of trust is important to support the recipient organisations in delivery, and for ensuring that the work is being taken forwards as intended. Also, in mirror for the recipient activity ‘A15: Recipients keep in touch with Welsh Government about delivery of the project’, an assumption is that trust is built with Welsh Government.

3.15 An assumption specific to the grant recipient ‘Development and application’ activities (A16 to A19) is that the grant recipient organisation has decided that the benefits of applying for the funding outweigh the burden resulting from grant compliance activities and requirements and is more attractive than competing priorities.

3.16 For the grant recipient activity ‘A24: Collects information to understand the outcomes from and impact of their project’, an assumption is the recipient has the knowledge or tools to do so.

3.17 For the beneficiary activity ‘A27: Decide to engage with the project being offered by the organisation’, an assumption is that is that the project being promoted reaches the intended beneficiaries in the first place (described at point 3.10). There are also a set of assumptions that underpin the beneficiaries’ decision to engage, which includes:

- Their ability to engage, regarding factors such as time, travel, access to technology
- How they prioritise it against other competing priorities
- Their initial willingness to engage in something related to democracy, which will be affected by their perceptions of the democratic process

Additional information regarding outputs

3.18 For the fund-level output for Welsh Government and grant recipients ‘OP5: DEP meetings every two months and are a forum for information sharing and project updates’, while attending during their grant term is stipulated in their grant award letter, grant recipients can continue to attend the DEP if they wish after their grant term.

3.19 The project-level outputs under ‘Direct to end beneficiaries’ include outputs that are delivered directly to the intended target groups/end-beneficiaries. ‘OP6: Education about democracy through workshops and events’ is where information about democracy is delivered to, and discussed with, target groups directly. This includes learning sessions, engaging with people who work in democracy, visiting democratic sites (such as the Senedd, local council). Sessions often (though not always) offer something to encourage attendance, such as free refreshments, or a creative activity. ‘OP7: Practical support to vote’ includes where project staff provide direct support to the target groups with doing a practical voting-related task, such as registering to vote, or checking and applying for voter ID. ‘OP8: Resources and information’ includes the creation and/or sharing of physical or digital resources. This is for and/or by the target groups. ‘OP9: Participating in a democratic process’ is where target groups either take part in a real-world democratic process (such as a community forum), or take part in something which simulates a process (such as a mock election, a hustings). This can involve those who work in democracy.

3.20 As a culmination of these outputs (OP6 to OP9), workshop participants reflected that end-beneficiaries have a broader range of channels through which they are

able to access or engage with democracy. This gives opportunities to engage with democracy to end-beneficiaries who may not have been able to previously owing to a lack of opportunities or the accessibility of available opportunities.

3.21 The outputs under ‘Indirect’ include outputs where funding is used to deliver something which ultimately feeds into something delivered directly to end-beneficiaries. ‘OP10: Sub-grant funding’ is where funding is redistributed to other organisations, who will then deliver direct activities to target groups. This is in partnership or working with the grant recipient organisation. ‘OP11: Project staff’ is where staff are hired to deliver the funded project and/or have oversight of the project. ‘OP12: Equipment, technology and event resources’ is where there is investment in technology or equipment, to be used to produce ‘OP8: Resources and Information’, or elements required to deliver an event (OP6, OP7, OP9) such as venue hire, speakers, or refreshments. ‘OP13: Training’ is where professionals (those who work with target groups) or end-beneficiaries themselves are trained or supported, to go on to deliver activities under the ‘Direct’ outputs. This can also include the development of training materials. ‘OP14: Sharing information and building relationships’ includes working with other organisations to develop or promote a project.

Assumptions relating to outputs

3.22 An assumption underpinning the project level outputs (grant recipients and end-beneficiaries, OP6 to OP14) is that after the end-beneficiary activity 'A27: Decide to engage with the project being offered by the organisation', the beneficiaries take part: the decision or intention is translated into actual behaviour. Some projects involve engaging with the same beneficiaries over time. Therefore, there are also a set of assumptions that underpin the beneficiaries' sustained behaviour, which include:

- Their ability to engage, regarding factors such as time, travel, access to technology
- How they prioritise this against other competing priorities
- Perceptions and experiences from initially taking part

Additional information regarding outcomes

3.23 Regarding the fund-level 'The wider sector' outcome 'OC8: Bringing organisations into the democratic engagement space in Wales that were not, or were less, previously active in this space', this refers to both organisations in Wales that had not done democratic engagement previously, and those who had operated in England in the democratic engagement space but had little or no experience in Wales.

3.24 Regarding the fund-level outcome for 'Welsh Government and the wider sector', 'OC9: Improved understanding of the needs of the target groups that were reached, what works, and good practice', workshop participants raised that this builds on Welsh Government's knowledge from the inception of the grant (In6). This includes understanding regarding new approaches - as specified in the 'General assumptions' (point 3.4), the DEG sought to fund innovative and creative practices.

3.25 The grant recipient project-level outcome 'OC20: Enhanced understanding about the target group(s)' includes barriers, level of democratic education, topics where there are knowledge gaps, and successful approaches to engagement. The grant recipient project-level outcome 'OC24: Build capacity, resources and skills' includes for example: production of accessible information, hiring, training and upskilling of staff, and ensuring project content can be sustained post-grant.

3.26 The end-beneficiaries project-level outcome ‘OC13: Have improved awareness, understanding or knowledge of aspects of democracy’, includes areas covering the whole democratic system and processes, how to get involved, the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government, political parties, elections and voting, acts or conventions, and citizenship. For ‘OC14: Take part and get involved in democracy’, depending on the outputs of the project, this is either beneficiaries taking part within the project, or taking part outside of/after this. It includes:

- Social action: campaigns, consultations, petitions, community forums
- Engaging with those who work in democracy, such as their representatives (whether local or wider)
- Contacting those who work in democracy (whether local or wider)
- Coming up with ideas or making suggestions for how to improve or change something locally
- Voting in an election

3.27 ‘OC15: Register to vote’, relates to ‘OP7: Practical support to vote’, where the project involves delivering practical voting-related support, and this is what leads to an increase in registrations. ‘OC16: Feel their voice is heard’ particularly includes feeling heard on issues important to the beneficiaries. ‘OC18: Develop broader practical skills’ includes transferable skills not specific to democracy, for example, digital skills, or presentation skills.

Links between outputs and outcomes

3.28 The project-level outcomes for end-beneficiaries (OC13 to OC19) are the result of the direct and indirect outputs delivered at the project level (OP6 to OP14). Each project funded by the DEG is unique, and so will have different combinations of these outputs and outcomes.

3.29 In addition to the fund-level ‘The wider sector’ outcomes in the logic model (OC5 to OC8), an additional indirect or unintended outcome at this wider level is that Senedd members become aware of Welsh Government democratic engagement funding activity. This is a result of the project-level outputs that involve engagement with those who with in democracy, where in some cases this involves Senedd members (‘OP6: Education about democracy through workshops and events’ and ‘OP9: Participating in a democratic process’).

3.30 Regarding the fund-level outcomes for grant recipients, an additional indirect or unintentional outcome of the DEG is improved links and relationships between recipient organisations and other policy teams across Welsh Government (i.e. outside the Elections policy team). This is partly underpinned by the Welsh Government fund-level output 'OP2: Information about what is being delivered through the grant is provided to other related policy areas in Welsh Government'.

3.31 Regarding the fund-level outcome for 'Welsh Government and the wider sector', 'OC9: Improved understanding of the needs of the target groups that were reached, what works, and good practice', this is in part underpinned by the Welsh Government 'OP4: Findings from the grant recipient projects are collated' and so 'A9: Reviewing grant evaluation reports'. It is also in part underpinned by the Welsh Government's 'engagement and communication' activities and outputs. In addition, there are project-level outcomes which fund level OC9 is underpinned by, described next at point 3.32.

Links between project-level and fund-level outcomes

3.32 The grant recipient project-level outcomes 'OC20: Enhanced understanding about the target group(s)', 'OC21: Enhanced understanding about where to focus efforts for interventions in future, or where to make changes', and 'OC22: Gain actionable experience in overcoming the barriers to engagement faced by end beneficiaries' underpins the Welsh Government and wider fund-level outcome 'OC9: Improved understanding of the needs of the target groups that were reached, what works, and good practice'. The project-level outcomes also relate to the fund-level outcomes for grant recipients 'OC10: By attending the DEP there is more two-way sharing of knowledge and resources across organisations', 'OC11: By attending the DEP relationships and networks are built across organisations (including other recipients and wider)' and 'OC12: By attending the DEP collaborative opportunities are explored and so there is more partnership working across organisations'. This is because the project level outcomes OC20 to OC22 comprise the information to be shared by grant recipients with Welsh Government and the wider sector, including via. the DEP.

Assumptions relating to outcomes

3.33 As noted at point 3.16 an assumption for grant recipients for 'A24: Collects information to understand the outcomes from and impact of their project' is the

recipient has the knowledge or tools to do so. This also relates to ‘A23: Maintains high-level oversight of the progress of the planned funded activity, monitoring what is delivered against what was planned’. The recipient having the knowledge or tools to monitor delivery and understand outcomes and impacts relates to another set of assumptions which underpins the fund-level outcome for ‘Welsh Government and the wider sector’, ‘OC9: Improved understanding of the needs of the target groups that were reached, what works, and good practice’. These assumptions are:

- That grant recipients have evaluated their project in a way that enables these insights (the needs of the target groups that were reached, what works, and good practice) to be made
- That grant recipients feel comfortable to be honest about what worked and did not work
- There needs to be a means/mechanism by which this information is shared and reaches the wider sector

3.34 An assumption that sits between the outcomes for end-beneficiaries (OC13 to OC19) and outputs delivered at the project level (OP6 to OP14) is that the projects have genuinely reached - and had participation from - those who were less engaged or not engaged at all in democracy, rather than those who already had an interest or were engaged. This includes those who do not have the right tools or understanding, who may find it difficult to take part, or who are not likely to take part. Another assumption is that the what the project delivered did address and meet the specific needs of the target group (underpinned by recipients ‘In10: Experience with and/or knowledge about the needs of, and ways of working with, target beneficiaries’, which led to ‘development and application’ and ‘project delivery’ activities).

Additional information regarding impacts

3.35 For ‘I3: Improved collaboration across those operating in the sector: there is a more joined up approach to democratic engagement’, a more joined up and collaborative approach improves efficiency through the sharing of practices and resources, reducing duplication of work.

3.36 For ‘I4: Within the sector, learnings about the target groups and interventions are applied to inform and improve future democratic engagement work’, this includes

learnings about new approaches: as specified in the ‘General assumptions’ (point 3.4), the DEG sought to fund innovative and creative practices.

Links between outcomes and impacts

3.37 ‘I1: People (particularly in the target groups) are engaged, motivated, and empowered to take part in democracy, with the tools to make their voice heard and impact positively on the Wales around them.’ is primarily related to the outcomes for end-beneficiaries (OC13 to OC19) and other people or organisations (OC25 and OC26). Again, each project is unique and will have different outcomes for beneficiaries and other people or organisations in different combinations, which will map onto the impact differently. As an example, ‘OC25: Changes are made e.g., councillors take forwards suggestions raised by beneficiaries’, could link into ‘I1’ as this could lead to being engaged, motivated and empowered through ‘OC16: Feel their voice is heard’ – seeing that their voice does make a difference. Moreover, through the project-level outputs (OP6 to OP14) work is delivered which relates to ‘OC6: Sector capacity for this work increases in-between election cycles’, which makes the impact for those in the target groups possible.

3.38 ‘I2: Organisations are able to take a longer-term approach to encouraging and supporting people to engage in democracy’ ultimately links back to ‘In1: Ministerial approval and £900,000 funding available over 3 years’. In terms of links to the outcomes, impact 2 relates to the project-level outcomes for recipients ‘OC23: Build relationships with beneficiaries, and other organisations. Raised profile of the recipient organisation with these groups’ and ‘OC24: Build capacity, resources, and skills’, as these outcomes reflect elements built which enable organisations to work within this space in the long-term. Impact 2 also relates to the fund level ‘The wider sector’ outcome ‘OC7: More resources are available, which can also be used by non-funded organisations and the wider population’, as long as where resources created continue to contain up to date/correct information, these can be used over time by organisations. In addition, ‘OC6: Sector capacity for this work increases in-between election cycles’, whereby being able to do work outside of the lead up to elections supports a longer-term approach. Impact 2 also relates to the fund level outcome for Welsh Government ‘OC4: Improved understanding of the needs of organisations within the democracy sector’ as through understanding organisation’s needs, these can be applied to consider the Welsh Government role in enabling a longer-term approach.

3.39 ‘I3: Improved collaboration across those operating in the sector: there is a more joined up approach to democratic engagement.’ is related to the grant recipient fund-level outcomes ‘OC10’ to ‘OC12’ (which as noted at point 3.32 are underpinned by grant recipient project level outcomes OC20 to OC22). This relates back to the fund-level output for Welsh Government and recipients ‘OP5: DEP meetings every two months and are a forum for information sharing and project updates’. Impact 3 is also related to the ‘The wider sector’ outcome ‘OC6: Sector capacity for this work increases in-between election cycles’ as being able to do the work enables collaboration. In addition, ‘OC5: Raised profile of what is happening in the democratic engagement space in Wales with the rest of the UK.’ and ‘OC8: Bringing organisations into the democratic engagement space in Wales that were not, or were less, previously active in this space’, as these broaden the opportunities for collaboration in the sector. For Welsh Government, impact 3 links to the outcomes ‘OC1: Other policy areas in Welsh Government are supported to deliver against their democracy related objectives’, ‘OC2: Improved relationships with other related policy areas across Welsh Government’ and ‘OC3: Improved links and relationships with organisations within democracy sector’. Through improving relationships and links this provides the basis to identify collaborative opportunities.

3.40 ‘I4: Within the sector, learnings about the target groups and interventions are applied to inform and improve future democratic engagement work’ relates to the Welsh Government and the wider sector ‘OC9: Improved understanding of the needs of the target groups that were reached, what works, and good practice (via. shared learning from grant recipients)’. As noted at point 3.32 ‘OC9’ is underpinned by grant recipient project level outcomes ‘OC20’ to ‘OC22’ and grant recipient fund-level outcomes ‘OC10’ to ‘OC12’, which therefore also relate to impact 4. These outcomes all relate to the learnings and sharing of information which enable these to be applied in future democratic engagement work within the sector. Impact 4 also relates to ‘OC7: More resources are available, which can also be used by non-funded organisations and the wider population’, which is underpinned by the project-level outputs. Through delivering resources as part of the projects, these can be used by others and thereby applied in future work.

Assumptions related to impacts

3.41 An assumption underpinning ‘I1: People (particularly in the target groups) are engaged, motivated, and empowered to take part in democracy, with the tools to

make their voice heard and impact positively on the Wales around them' is that the end-beneficiary outcomes are sustained longer term after the beneficiary stops taking part in the project.

Risks

3.42 For this purpose, a risk is an internal or external factor that can influence the programme either positively or negatively. One is that due to the speed of internal Welsh Government processes for funding approval a commitment to funding being available beyond the initial 3-year period (2022/23 to 2024/25) cannot be made. This poses a risk to the continuation of projects and therefore to the DEG impact 'I2: Organisations are able to take a longer-term approach to encouraging and supporting people to engage in democracy'.

3.43 Another risk is that grant recipient organisations are unable to deliver in line with what was agreed, which poses a risk to ensuring money is being utilised effectively and achieving the intended outcomes and impacts of the grant scheme. This is mitigated through regular communication between Welsh Government and grant recipients (A14: Welsh Government take a partnership working approach with recipient organisations: ongoing engagement and relationship management). This is also mitigated by the Elections policy team conducting due diligence on organisations at the grant assessment stage (A5: Reviewing applications), ensuring they demonstrate evidence of sound business principles. This is underpinned by 'In5: Guidelines for grant design practices considering: grant value; organisation type or sector' and 'In6: Knowledge gained from previous experience: The policy area and context ; Grant design ; Organisations within the sector ; Typical delivery costs'.

3.44 A loss of policy staff resource and the continuity of personnel is a risk, due to the small size of the Elections policy team. This poses a risk to the 'fund-level' activities and outputs required of Welsh Government.

3.45 A loss of grant assessment panel capacity or resource poses a risk to making panel decisions and therefore providing application outcomes to recipient organisations. This poses a risk to project-level activities and outputs being delivered by recipients.

3.46 Another risk is the ability to consider impact and value-for-money when the panel are assessing grants due to the nature of the grant being non-directive regarding project outputs and outcomes. This risk is a result of the 'General assumptions' that

Welsh Government have clear political impartiality in this space and are not directive in democracy (point 3.4). The value-for-money element is in part mitigated by In5 and In6.

3.47 Another risk is that there is turnover of staff within the grant recipient organisation, where knowledge from the project is lost before lessons learnt and evaluation findings can be captured and communicated from the recipient organisation to Welsh Government. This poses a risk to the outcomes related to knowledge sharing and improved understanding (OC9, OC10, OC 20 to 22), and ultimately 'I4: Within the sector, learnings about the target groups and interventions are applied to inform and improve future democratic engagement work'.

3.48 Finally, a risk is that grant recipients do not cooperate or share information with Welsh Government and other organisations within the sector, for example about what they have delivered and learnt. This poses a risk to 'I3: Improved collaboration across those operating in the sector: there is a more joined up approach to democratic engagement' and 'I4: Within the sector, learnings about the target groups and interventions are applied to inform and improve future democratic engagement work'.

4. Findings – aim 1: Design and delivery of the current grant funding scheme.

Which organisations received DEG funding and how was it used?

4.1 In the 2022/23 (January to March 2023) and 2023/24 (April 2023 to March 2024) financial years, a total of 16 organisations received grant funding. Applications were received in tranches, and a total of 38 applications were received. The total number of applications in each tranche split by successful and unsuccessful applications is in Table 1. This shows most applications were received when the grant first launched.

Table 1: The number of successful and unsuccessful applications for funding between January and September 2023 [Note 1]

	Tranche 1: January to February 2023	Tranche 2: April to May 2023	Tranche 3: July to September 2023
Successful	12	2	3
Unsuccessful	14	7	0
Total applications	**26**	**9**	**3**

[Note 1] One of the organisations who was successful in tranche 1 was unable to deliver in line with their grant schedule and therefore they were removed as a grant recipient.

4.2 The value of the grants awarded to the 16 organisations ranged from around £900 to around £87,000. The mean grant value was £17,700. Nine of the grants were for one year of funded activity, four were for short term activity, and three were for multi-year activity (two or three years). One organisation which received one year funding re-applied in the 2024/25 financial year (April 2024 to March 2025) to continue and so became a multi-year project. All short-term projects had an award of below £2,000.

4.3 Applications came from six organisations based within local government (three local authorities, three town or community councils). One local authority was the lead applicant for two separate successful applications, one of which was in partnership with two other local authorities. Therefore overall, considering partnership applications, four unique local authorities were involved in DEG projects. Seven applicants were charities, and three were community interest companies.

4.4 The grant intended to reach across Wales (DEG application form guidance notes, Welsh Government, 2024). Six organisations stated in their applications they intended to have a national reach. Four organisations outlined a regional reach – which for these purposes includes reach across multiple local authority areas or one local authority area. The regions were South West Wales, Mid Wales, and South East Wales. Six outlined a local reach which for these purposes is a specific town or city, and included places in North Wales, South West Wales and South East Wales. Therefore, in terms of geographic reach North Wales was not represented at the regional level.

4.5 Nine of the applications were a partnership application with other organisations while seven were a sole organisation applying. This did not vary by grant award value. Four of the applications were for a new project, where the organisation was trying something they have not done before. These grants were of the value £1,000 or below. Ten of the applications were for a new project following on from a previous project. This is where there had been some previous activity in the area to base the format of the DEG funded project on that the organisations wished to build on. For example, building on activities previously done in the run up to the 2021 or 2022 elections, continuing a scheme into another year, or bringing a scheme into Wales. Two of the applications were part of an existing ongoing project. That is, the

funding was being used to fill gaps within a wider programme of work that was already happening, including expanding the remit of the current project.

4.6 Regarding how the grant funding was used, the 'Outputs' section of the logic model (see Figure 1 and points 3.18 to 3.21) details the themes regarding the broad types of what was delivered, which was based on analysis of grant applications, available evaluation reports and interviews. Most had multiple elements to their grant funded project in their application, and so what they planned to deliver covered multiple output themes. Overall, the most common output was 'OP6: Education about democracy through workshops and events', noted by 11 of the 16 grant recipients in their applications.

4.7 In general, for the 12 completed projects, recipients appear to have used the funding as intended and delivered what they set out to.

4.8 While some projects delivered what they set out to overall, there were certain elements that were not delivered. For example, there were instances where 'OP6: Education about democracy through workshops and events' was the primary planned output, but recipients were unable to provide 'OP7: Practical Support to vote' as part of this (providing beneficiaries direct support or the opportunity to register). There were also cases where fewer workshops/events were held than initially planned for. Similarly, there was an instance where 'OP9: Participating in a democratic process' was the primary planned output. However, while the core part of a forum was set up, another part of the forum with a different remit did not come to fruition.

4.9 For other projects the overall picture is more mixed in terms of which elements were and were not delivered, with larger delivery gaps. There was an instance where 'OP8: Resources and information' was the primary planned output, these were created but dissemination within the grant period was not possible. There was also an instance where 'OP9: Participating in a democratic process' and 'OP7: Practical Support to vote' were the primary planned outputs, but in some cases progress was not made beyond planning. There was also an instance where 'OP6: Education about democracy through workshops and events' and 'OP8: Resources and information' were the primary planned outputs. However, it is unclear from reporting whether the planned resources (OP8) were produced or not.

4.10 There were also projects that delivered more outputs than originally intended. For example, there were instances where ‘OP6: Education about democracy through workshops and events’ was the primary planned output, recipients also delivered outputs under ‘OP8: Resources and information’ and ‘OP9: Participating in a democratic process’. Examples of additional outputs included videos, mock elections or providing the support needed to make a change in the beneficiaries' community.

4.11 Summarising the 21 unsuccessful applications, the range of values applied for was around £1,000 to around £114,000, with a median of around £4,800 and a mean of £18,851, highlighting that many were on the lower value end of the scale. All were short term or single year projects, or for something one-off. Regarding target groups, 11 aimed to reach young people, and in one instance a project was aimed at young people from a particular marginalised background. Nine aimed to reach the community in general, two aimed to reach specific groups (including disabled people, people from under-represented or seldom heard groups), one national application targeted the general population. Regarding the sector of the 20 unique organisations, 16 were local government (six local authorities, one specialist authority, nine town or community councils), three were charities and one was a ‘start-up’.

Did it reach the target groups?

4.12 The grant intended to reach under-represented groups, newly enfranchised groups and disabled people (DEG application form guidance notes, Welsh Government, 2024). Desk research findings show some grant recipients had multiple target groups for their projects. The majority of applications (10 of the 16) specified young people as a target group, which included different age ranges. Four applications stated disabled people as a target group and three stated foreign nationals as a target group. Two of the local applications were targeting the community in their area, and one national application targeted the general electorate.

4.13 Notably, ‘under-represented groups’ is undefined in Welsh Government DEG documentation. Two applications aimed to target young people from a particular background (Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, or deprived communities). Two aimed to target young people or adults with any of a range of specific characteristics or circumstances. These included protected characteristics (age, disability, race, sex, sexual orientation and gender reassignment) as well as wider factors (economic

status, digital exclusion, students, carers, employment status, housing situation). It can be inferred that these are what recipients have considered to be ‘under-represented groups’.

4.14 Findings from interviews with grant recipients suggest the main beneficiaries aligned with the organisation's activities more widely. When targeting young people, disabled people and foreign nationals, the recipient organisations worked specifically with these groups. For a more general target group, the recipient organisations either were based in a particular town or city which they intended to reach, or developed online content that therefore meant they had a Wales-wide reach.

4.15 Participants discussed the methods they used to reach the intended target groups. One set of methods was a less direct form of engagement, which included advertising the activity using flyers, posters, social media, or putting information on their organisation’s website. In some cases, organisations had a physical presence in a town centre/high street in which they advertised activity. There were also instances where participants mentioned using word of mouth. Those who had taken part previously, whether organisations that work with the target group or people from the target group, would encourage others to take part.

4.16 Another method was a more direct form and involved harnessing networks. This included reaching out to, and building relationships with, other organisations that worked with the target group. The organisation that participants reached out to would then promote the activity to people from the target group which they worked with, or the partner organisation would work with the recipient to set up a session with the target group. In some cases, participants had existing relationships and contacts they knew they could reach out to due to their experience working with particular groups. Harnessing networks also included participants reaching out to people who worked in democracy to encourage them to be a speaker as part of the project. Participants reported that they found this buy-in increased the likelihood of organisations which worked with the target group taking part in the project. There were instances where participants used both more and less direct methods of reaching the target groups.

4.17 There were instances where participants reported explicitly that they faced no challenges in reaching the target group, because their organisation was well established, and it had strong links with the target group.

4.18 There were however participants which did note challenges in reaching the intended target groups, including attendance and the capacity of the target group (discussed further at point 4.66). In addition, that particular sub-groups or those in a particular region were harder to reach than others in the target group. Examples included young offenders and target beneficiaries based in North Wales.

4.19 Reported methods to overcome low attendance (in both interviews and desk research) included trialling different times, places and formats for the events, and having topic specific discussions. In some cases however, the amount of time and funding was a barrier for recipients to reflect on how to overcome low attendance.

4.20 The following (4.20 to 4.25) includes assessment across desk research and grant recipient interviews. Overall, it appears the target groups stated in applications were reached (projects funded for a year or less) or are being reached so far (multi-year projects). However, there was an instance for a completed project with the sole output to deliver digital information and resources (logic model OP8) where the target groups did not appear to be reached. While the project produced the intended information and resources, these were not disseminated.

4.21 Even where projects funded for a year or less reached the target groups overall, findings indicate there was some variance in the extent of reach. Variation occurred in the following ways: projects reaching fewer of the target group than originally planned, and where projects were aiming to reach those less democratically engaged but instead reaching those already somewhat engaged. This also included projects not reaching a broad cross-section of the target group, but this was expected due to the smaller scale nature of the project.

4.22 The findings also highlight that there is variance in evidence regarding reach to the target groups, for both multi-year projects and those funded for a year or less, which in some cases impacts the ability to draw conclusions.

4.23 For projects with outputs involving delivering activities which beneficiaries take part in, there are cases where reach to the target groups is clear. This is through the consistent provision of the numbers of those in the target group who took part (a year or less) or took part so far (multi-year) across project activities, as well as general descriptions of activity. In other cases, reach must be inferred. In these cases general activity was also described. However, data were incomplete or inconsistently provided, for example, approximate numbers were sometimes

included or the data for some activities were included but not others, meaning the overall reach to the target groups cannot be ascertained. Finally, there were some cases where no numbers were provided at all.

4.24 For projects with the sole output to deliver digital information and resources (logic model OP8), in some cases reach to the target groups is indicated through feedback from partner organisations that shared the information and (limited) social media analytics. In other cases, there was no indication of reach to the target group beyond anecdotal evidence or the resource being made publicly available.

4.25 There were instances where projects aimed to target young people or adults from specific under-represented or marginalised groups. For the relevant projects funded for a year or less, no information about the characteristics of those reached was provided. For multi-year projects, findings suggest that the recipients worked with specialist organisations to reach these groups, however detailed evidence is not currently available to assess the extent to which each of these specific groups have been reached.

4.26 The grant intended to reach across Wales (DEG application form guidance notes, Welsh Government, 2024). Of projects that are completed, three stated a national reach in their application. From desk research specifically, in one case, the recipient did appear to work nationally, including working across organisations in different regions (North, Mid, South-West and South-East Wales). In another case the recipient hosted sessions online and reported this enabled attendance from across Wales, but the actual reach was not provided. In another case, it appears the recipient worked predominantly with authorities in South-East and South-West Wales, as well as Mid-Wales, however information was not produced for authorities in North Wales. This should be considered with point 4.4 which shows for regional applications North Wales was not represented, and point 4.18 where recipients noted difficulties engaging their target group in North Wales.

Delivery of the DEG and the experiences of grant recipients

Applying for the grant

4.27 As noted in the logic model (Activity 'A4'), a part of the process involves Welsh Government launching the grant and organisations becoming aware of, and applying for, the grant. As noted at point 3.7, logic model workshop participants reported the intention of the DEG was to reach new organisations. Interview findings show there were multiple ways in which organisations became aware of the grant (both grant recipients and unsuccessful applicants). This ranged from very direct links with Welsh Government to simply finding the information:

- Some heard about the opportunity via. an existing link with the Elections policy team in Welsh Government. This included having general communication links with this team, previously receiving grant funding to do democratic engagement work via. the team, or through attending a forum regarding democratic engagement. Four organisations who worked with Welsh Government on their set of initiatives for the lead up to the 2022 local government elections (introduction points 1.13 to 1.16) received DEG funding, three of which received a multi-year award from the outset. This includes two organisations who received the Third Sector 'Voter Registration Support Grant'.
- Some had existing links with Welsh Government through related work which was not specifically democratic engagement.
- Some heard about the opportunity at an event where Welsh Government spoke about the grant.
- Some heard about the opportunity via. a communication or the website.

4.28 In some cases, local authority participants reported the grant may not have reached some organisations:

'…I'm[…]not confident that all partnership leads would have been aware of this grant activity[…]how it could reach some of those partners as well, I think would be, probably be, the most value...'

4.29 Interview participants (both successful and unsuccessful) commonly described the application process as 'straightforward'. There were instances where participants discussed the application process for the DEG in comparison to previous grants they had applied for. In these cases, grant recipients' overall sentiment was they had a more positive experience with the DEG application process: it was 'easy' or 'accessible' in comparison. In cases where views were less positive, some participants (unsuccessful applicants) felt it was 'basic' in comparison as they were used to applying through an online form.

4.30 There were also instances where grant recipient participants noted that because the process was straightforward this encouraged them to apply, and that smaller organisations do not have the capacity to fill in complicated or time-consuming applications. An area for improvement noted was that the application was not available in British Sign Language (BSL) and so support is needed for BSL users to convert the English application to BSL.

4.31 Regarding the clarity of the requirements, there were instances where grant recipient participants noted that they had worked with the Elections policy team previously and so their understanding of what was required and what they wanted to achieve was underpinned by this. There were also instances where participants (grant recipients and unsuccessful applicants) noted reaching out to the team to understand the requirements to shape their application or ask questions about what to include.

4.32 The communication from the team was seen as a positive element of the application process (both grant recipients and unsuccessful applicants). In some instances (unsuccessful applicants), participants felt there could have been greater clarity on the financial boundaries of the grant, and what value of projects the grant was seeking to fund, even if these were provisional. This is to help organisations assess whether it is suitable for their organisation before deciding to invest time and resource into the application. Findings from interviews also suggest that it was unclear that social media campaigns were not in scope.

4.33 Clarity of requirements can also be assessed considering the desk-research where unsuccessful applications were reviewed. Overall, this suggests there are areas where clarity of requirements could be improved. Three of the applicants (specifically local government sector) had proposed communication campaigns (including creating videos, materials) and events, with the primary intention to increase voter registrations, but also taking part and getting involved in democracy (logic model OP6, OP7 and OP8). However, the nature of what was proposed was deemed as statutory or 'business as usual' activities, and so out of scope. Additionally, some applicants (specifically local government sector) wished to fund an ERSO, and eight sought to buy technical equipment or services to support business as usual meeting activities, which are also out of scope. Application guidance was subsequently updated to reflect that buying equipment for meetings was not in scope.

4.34 For five applicants project costs were deemed too high, either in general, considering the scale of what was proposed (such as a short-term project or one-off event, and how engagement would be sustained), or considering the reach of the project (such as a small reach geographically). Additionally for four applicants, there was not enough focus on wider democratic engagement or specific democratic processes.

4.35 Regarding completing the application form, overall interview participants were positive. In some cases, participants reported that the number of questions and the level of detail required was proportionate to the value of the grant. Some participants mentioned the word count and appreciated this element of the form, as it indicated the level of detail required. Keeping it low helped them to keep to the point. Participants noted the questions were straightforward or clear in what was being asked. However, there were instances where participants raised that they would expect more prompts to help pull out more of their explanation, or felt the word limit was not helpful (unsuccessful applicants). This also emerges when considering the desk research review of unsuccessful applications, where in three cases not enough detail was supplied on the target groups to be engaged, and proposed outcomes. Where submitting a partnership application, there were instances where unsuccessful applicant interview participants reflected on how a lack of clarity or detail arose from challenges working with a third sector organisation, in terms of incorporating multiple views and condensing information.

4.36 Some participants felt they had enough time to apply. There were instances where participants noted they liked having a clear deadline of when the window closed. There were also instances where participants liked that they knew the dates for future rounds of funding that would be open, to make a decision of whether a future window would be more appropriate to apply for. An area for improvement noted was that participants would find a reminder useful when the next rounds of funding become available. On the other hand, some participants felt the amount of time was not sufficient. They felt that unless applicants have an 'off the shelf' proposal ready, it is difficult to put an application together within the time frame (unsuccessful applicants).

4.37 Some participants mentioned the turnaround time of finding out they were successful was quick. However, unsuccessful participants felt the decision was slow and in some cases they had to chase for a decision. Participants highlighted that this can impact planning due to the time it takes to organise grant-related activities. Also, this may delay the project and mean the most effective time of year to run a project considering beneficiaries' needs is missed. This is a potential area for improvement.

4.38 Unsuccessful participants were positive about the feedback and explanation they received as to why their application was not successful.

Grant administration processes

4.39 Overall, interviewed grant recipients were positive about the amount of communication with Welsh Government officials. There were instances where participants highlighted that there were multiple ways to communicate with the Welsh Government Elections policy team, including the quarterly reports, the Democratic Engagement Partnership (DEP) meetings, or ad-hoc communication directly with the team.

4.40 In general, grant recipient participants had positive sentiment regarding interactions with the Welsh Government Elections policy team. A common term used by participants was 'supported'. Participants noted that they felt that the team were available. They felt comfortable in going to the team if they needed to ask any questions or needed guidance. Participants highlighted that the team were quick in responding to any questions or requests. Participants were confident that they were on the same page with the policy team regarding delivery, and that there was sharing of resources between Welsh Government and the recipient organisation.

> '…[Elections policy team] *would always be really open with their time and capacity[…]we've[…]felt very supported as we've gone through the grant…'*

4.41 There were certain situations where participants felt there were some issues with communication regarding grant reporting, partnership meetings and project delivery.

4.42 There were instances where participants raised that they were told with short notice that the deadline for their final grant claim form and end of grant report was earlier than initially stated. Participants highlighted that they would need more notice in future, as this created additional, unanticipated workload to gather final finances and meant some final planned activities were not conducted as they would be unfunded. There were also instances where participants had submitted their report but were later chased for the report. Moreover, there were instances where participants reported that they received no feedback following the submission of the report and, as a result, they were a little unsure as to whether they had completed it correctly or not. Participants felt this would be useful.

4.43 Regarding partnership meetings, some participants felt the wording of the communications are unclear as it suggests the DEP meetings are mandatory to attend even when their grant term is completed.

4.44 There were instances where participants raised that there was miscommunication or misunderstanding of project delivery expectations. Participants reported they had approval to pause a specific element of their project due to the potential to cause confusion for eligibility for the (what was upcoming) 2024 UK General Election. However, subsequent communication indicated this element would not be eligible for funding in future rounds of the DEG.

4.45 Finally, there were instances where participants raised that as (at the time of the interviews) the end of the current grant is approaching (March 2025), clarity is needed on the upcoming next steps and timelines, so organisations can ascertain whether they may be able to continue activity and retain staff.

4.46 Grant recipients are required to complete a quarterly grant claims form, which contains costs they are claiming for in arrears and space for a project update. Interview participants had mixed opinions regarding the grant claims process.

4.47 There were participants who felt the grant claims process was simple. There were instances where participants felt it was a useful tool to reflect on their progress and next steps. Where participants highlighted parts of the process, they noted they received regular reminders, and that the quarterly frequency was proportionate. Where the format was mentioned, participants were positive about having a blank space for their project update, allowing them to provide a relevant update based on their unique project, rather than being restricted. They indicated if the policy team required specific information, then this might need both specific questions and the blank space. Related to this, the completion of grant claims forms is discussed at point 6.11, which highlights grant recipients took varied approaches and varied in the level of detail provided.

4.48 A part of the process that participants found less simple was the payment of grant funds in arrears by Welsh Government. This was a particular issue for smaller organisations. Participants found this *'...Slightly more complicated...'* and were not sure how to claim for larger items when the grant was split into four quarterly claims, as this way of working was new. There were cases where if participants had difficulties with the claims process, either with claiming in arrears or due to delays in their ability to submit the form, they noted they were supported by the Welsh Government Elections policy team. The application guidance states an alternative can be considered if there is organisational need, and this case-by-case support should continue to be available.

4.49 Another part of the process that participants reported worked less effectively was that project funding periods were tied to Welsh Government's financial year. Where participants were working to a specific democratic event, such as an election, the timeline of the financial year did not line up with their project. This meant that the quarterly project update process was not useful or applicable. The ability to have the grant awarded in accordance with the timespan of the democratic event around which project activities are planned would be an improvement.

'...we were working with elections[...]I think their budget was to do with financial years[...]the timelines of the two things didn't line up[...]So I would, the only so change I would say is gonna be like allow the grant to be awarded over the actual election that it's being funded and then have the deadlines line up with that a little bit better…' [...] '…there was a midway point form that we had to fill out that sort of said "give us the status update" and it[...]felt like sort of reporting for the sake of reporting[...]It didn't feel like it was particularly useful for either of us [the recipient and Welsh Government]*...'*

4.50 There were also instances where participants needed more support or clearer communication from the outset regarding the end of the financial year being a hard deadline for delivery. Participants were not clear that when the financial year ended, even if the full grant value had not been claimed, further project progress could not be made.

'...I would have benefited from more support, because we were a new grantee and new to Wales[...]the financial year[...]ended, and therefore, like we just have to stop because we can't claim any more money from this point forward, which is more rigid than other grants than we've had...'

Planning project delivery

4.51 Some grant recipients discussed how they planned their programme of work as a continuation of a previous project, using this experience to inform what they wanted to do and how it should work, and applying lessons learnt. There were instances where participants had run a previous Welsh Government funded project in the democracy space. Specific examples where experience and learnings gained from a previous project were used in planning included:

- setting realistic targets
- anticipating and mitigating potential barriers
- deciding operational factors (such as timing of when sessions were held, how to encourage attendance, facilitation methods)
- the content or topics to be delivered in activities

4.52 Another factor was that participants used their existing knowledge or relationships in planning the programme of work. This included knowledge of, or relationships with, stakeholders, networks and target beneficiary groups. This informed what might be feasible to deliver, how to reach target groups, and how or what to deliver to target groups.

'…designed the content you know based on[…]experience and understanding[…]of what would be appropriate for English learners[…]language, you know, is potentially a barrier for democratic engagement, and so[…]we sort of decided it would be around, you know, like an entry two sort of level...'

4.53 Another factor was that participants used feedback from target beneficiary groups received during either their day-to-day work or a previous project. This feedback either led to the idea for the grant funded activity as a whole, or was used to shape the content of activities or information delivered with the grant funding (such as what areas of democracy they would cover). For the latter, by using feedback, content was tailored to the democratic education needs of the specific target group, where gaps or barriers were identified.

'…Something that a lot of people told us in the past was the barriers that they'd faced to to accessing information, either it wasn't in accessible formats, it required them to sort of be online[…]So something that was really important in our planning was actually that all the activities, all the workshops, were about providing access to accessible information so people could make an informed choice...'

4.54 In some cases, where participants were from an organisation that was not specifically in the democracy sector, they noted they had gaps in existing knowledge about democracy to deliver sessions. Participants reported using generally available resources to develop session content. Related to this, there were instances where wider external stakeholder participants felt that a change to the DEG design that would be useful to apply to any future grant funding programme was that guidance and resources should be provided on the topic of democracy where needed, such as organisations who are new to this area or who are delivering content as part of their project. They felt this guidance should be done in partnership with other lead organisations in the sector.

4.55 There were also instances where participants did not specifically note the project was planned using knowledge or feedback, but was based on their organisational aim to connect more with the target group. Where participants work in other parts of the UK, there were instances where participants raised that they specifically considered adapting to the context in Wales as part of their planning. For example, when working with young people of school age, considering how their project fits in with the Curriculum for Wales, which. contains requirements for democratic education.

4.56 Organisations were required to use Welsh language and produce bi-lingual information where reasonable. For example, if working with a group of foreign nationals who have English as a second language, then Welsh language materials were not required. Regarding the bi-lingual element of project delivery, there were instances where wider external stakeholder participants noted that it can be difficult for third sector organisations to apply statutory Welsh Government standards on Welsh language. Some participants from third sector organisations echoed this point, noting that they needed more support with Welsh language requirements. This included additional guidance as to when simultaneous interpretation is and is not needed, as well as practical support to arrange translation. Participants noted

that they may not have received support from project outset as different grant funded projects started at different times.

Barriers and enablers to delivery

4.57 Grant recipient interview participants were asked to reflect on barriers and enablers to delivering their projects. This information was also extracted from end of grant evaluation reports as part of the desk research.

4.58 An enabler to delivery that emerged was working with existing groups or using peer-to-peer influence. Recipients found that engaging via. an existing network or group was more effective than trying to reach the target beneficiaries generally. Reasons noted included people feeling more comfortable to discuss democracy in a familiar setting with familiar people. Additionally, some reported using word-of-mouth, the influence of local individuals who are politically active from the target group, or community engagement officers as a means to reach people from the target group and encourage others to attend or get involved.

4.59 Another enabler to delivery that emerged was existing knowledge of the target group and experience of working with them. A specific example of this was taking either an individual and person-centred approach, or tailoring to a specific group, so activities and content consider specific needs. Recipients recognised a blanket approach across a whole target group is not appropriate (for example, young people all have different circumstances) and adapted activities accordingly. Related to this, there were instances where the co-production of content with the target groups was noted. As examples, session content was amended iteratively based on feedback during the project, or target groups came up with ideas for events they felt others would enjoy and would encourage attendance. Moreover, some recipients noted that for their target groups, it was found that relating content back to their own community helped them to develop their understanding of elements of democracy (The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community and those with learning disabilities). A related barrier was where the production of session content was not co-developed with the partner organisation which had target group expertise, and so content had to be tailored to be relevant ad-hoc.

4.60 Recipients also reported using creative or interactive methods with the target group as an enabler. It was noted that for their target group, using typical presentation methods are not appropriate or suitable for engagement. Recipients highlighted

using approaches such as stop motion animation, interactive activities, games, or visual modes to engage their target group. Recipients also noted that this was important where democracy is perhaps not always a topic of interest (as noted at point 4.66, low interest contributed to low attendance). Moreover, findings suggest the importance of not just relaying information but giving the space for target groups to raise what's important to them: a two-way communication.

4.61 Knowledge of, and experience with, the target group also arose where recipients discussed engaging over time as an enabler. Participants noted that while one-off engagement can work, they reported building trust over time supports beneficiaries to engage in conversations about democracy.

4.62 Other enablers to delivery related to the target groups were discussed. One example was that the funding enabled the organisation to provide elements that encourage or support attendance. Examples included refreshments, childcare, the ability to pay volunteers, providing Welsh translation, providing interpreters for those with English as a second language. Secondly, recipients reported certain methods were more effective. This included providing an informal means for people to engage with those who worked in democracy. This also included providing face to face sessions rather than just written resources or information (particularly for those for whom English is a second language), or using small groups for discussions, to encourage sharing. Finally, the recipient's existing knowledge of the democratic engagement method used as part of their funded project. This enabled delivery through applying what was effective such as how to advertise and promote the event, how to run discussion sessions, and arranging guest speakers.

4.63 Drawing on networks emerged as an enabler to delivery. In these cases, participants noted both the DEP and other external networks. Drawing on networks was seen as important to both develop the content of the project, and to access the organisations which needed to be involved in delivery for the project to be successful.

4.64 Support from Welsh Government or those who work in democracy was also beneficial to delivery. There were instances where recipients discussed that as the grant was from Welsh Government this helped them to engage stakeholder organisations to get involved because it provided an element of legitimacy to their project.

4.65 In other instances, reporting indicated that support for the project from politicians in Wales, or where those who work in democracy were engaged, proactive and formed a specific link between the target group and the political institution, made it easier for the recipients to facilitate the involvement or attendance of representatives at events. This supported the recipient's provision of activities.

4.66 A number of barriers also emerged. Firstly, regarding low attendance at activities/events, or low take-up by target groups. Recipients explained that a contributing factor to low attendance was target groups' capacity, where other commitments meant that getting involved in or attending project-related activities was not a priority for intended beneficiaries. For example, activity falling over exam periods when working with young people at school or college age. Another contributing factor to low attendance cited by recipients was that this may have been due to a lack of interest in the topic of democracy. Finally, a factor that emerged was difficulty getting target groups (specifically young people) to attend project activities where they lacked confidence, or where the project activity was outside their comfort zone.

4.67 Building relationships and getting people on board when working with other organisations was also reported as a barrier. In some instances, recipients noted that where they did not have an existing relationship with organisations, or where there were not existing structures within these organisations to support the activity, that needing to bring people on board before activity extended delivery timelines. There were also instances where there was a reported lack of motivation and engagement from representatives from other organisations, or that other organisations lacked confidence in engaging their target groups on the topic of

democracy. In these cases, reporting indicated that certain activities could not be provided or that this limited opportunities for the target group to take part.

4.68 Capacity constraints of people or organisations were another related barrier, though this was in relation to different elements for different projects. One element was recipients noted that organisations or people they work with can have limited capacity, which impacts their ability to engage with the project activities, even if they are interested or want to provide this opportunity for the target groups. Examples included working with schools or local councillors. Another element was low capacity within the recipient organisation to run the project. From a slightly different angle, where participants were creating a resource that required information to be provided manually by other organisations, they raised the capacity demands on organisations to provide the information and the capacity of their own organisation to process it. This was a barrier to taking projects from one-off pilots to a larger scale, regular delivery.

4.69 Time to deliver the projects was seen as a barrier. As discussed at point 4.50, the hard delivery deadline of the financial year meant in some cases participants could not continue to deliver, ending some partially completed activity despite not having claimed their full grant value. Reporting also suggested the challenge with delivery deadline was exacerbated by lack of alignment between financial year funding and the school year. Moreover, in some cases recipients felt more time would have been useful, as it takes time for word to spread, and new requests for sessions were coming in towards the end of their project, so there was appetite for delivery to continue. In these cases, recipients were funded for a single year.

4.70 Uncontrollable external factors also acted as barriers to delivery. For multi-year projects funded into the 2024/25 financial year (April 2024 to March 2025), the 2024 UK General Election was one such example. In some cases, this was a barrier because it impacted planning the delivery of certain content as the date was unknown. Another external factor mentioned was the changes in the Senedd, which impacted being able to get those who work in this space to engage with the target groups. The impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis were also external factors raised, which meant some networks or groups in the community had closed, making it more difficult to reach the target groups. Findings also highlight rising costs, particularly to engage in very rural areas.

4.71 A lack of accessible information available to deliver sessions also emerged as a delivery barrier. For example, recipients reported a lack of impartial information on what political parties stand for, to be able to develop session content for beneficiaries on this topic.

4.72 Another barrier faced during delivery was that guest speakers who worked in democracy did not always have knowledge of the target group and therefore did not tailor their answers accordingly. This meant the target group could not relate to the guest speaker and this affected engagement negatively. Conversely, there were also instances where an enabler to delivery was preparing beneficiaries before meeting those who work in democracy about who they are and what they do. This was reported as leading to a more in-depth conversation and well-considered questions from beneficiaries. This enabler shows that preparation needs to go both ways to maximise effectiveness of delivery when beneficiaries and those who work in democracy meet.

'…politicians often go and speak in front of a room full of young people who don't really understand who they are, why they're there, what the point of it is. Whereas, that doesn't happen with our stuff, because [the young people] *prepared those questions, they've done that research, and definitely leads to a better conversation…'*

'…the politicians didn't deal with some of the questions very well and you know, so that the, and off the back of that we've applied for more funding now to, from this funding, to do a toolkit to put together with the young people to give back to the Senedd, to the politicians, on how they engage with young people better…'

Working in partnership

4.73 Nine applications were specifically partnership bids. From both the desk research and grant recipient interviews, types of partnership working included:

- Working with organisations and networks who have established or trusted relationships with the target groups and therefore through these can reach the intended groups or a broader audience.
- Working with organisations who can offer a specific service/activity or have knowledge required. For example, have digital expertise, have Welsh language expertise, have specific/relevant training, specific event expertise, can feedback on the feasibility of a project.
- Co-designing and/or co-delivering the activities (such as events, workshops, resources) with their partner organisations.
- Working with organisations to expand the offer across multiple geographic areas.
- Using resources shared by partner organisations.

4.74 Some grant recipients spoke positively about their partnerships, in terms of how this supported the ability to provide activities, including in-addition to what they originally planned. There were some challenges noted with partnership working, but responses were limited. This included instances where partner organisations did not engage with the recipient until near the end of their project or too late, or as noted in the desk research did not respond to the recipient at all, which meant more could have come from the partnership or more beneficiaries could have been reached.

4.75 Wider external stakeholders and local authorities also reflected on partnership working in the sector and in some cases answered this from the angle of delivering projects (rather than a wider sector view). A potential challenge that emerged from local authorities was collecting robust evidence for evaluation when partner organisations are largely responsible for delivery but are not experienced in evidencing activities and outcomes. In terms of what a grant could put in place, regular communication with Welsh Government to ensure the project is on track was reported as sufficient.

4.76 A challenge that emerged from wider external stakeholders was co-production. They felt that the capacity, commitment and budget needed is high for organisations to work fully in partnership with target groups. That is, involving target

groups/beneficiaries in the process of developing a project, rather than just delivering activities to them. They felt this is a more effective way of learning. Participants felt that the terms of the grant could be clearer regarding what constitutes co-production and related activities because this would allow applicants to match themselves against a defined set of metrics, and may help organisations see how their work relates to democratic engagement.

'…explaining the different stages [of co-production] *and what the different impacts could potentially be…' [...] '…So, I think anything that just makes it clearer like this is what we mean[...]I think is helpful.'*

Funding source and suitability for delivery

4.77 There were instances where grant recipients highlighted the DEG was the sole source of funding for the work. In other instances, participants reported the funding was mostly the sole source of funding, or was not the sole source for the work. In these cases, participants mentioned that the organisation's own resources and staff partially subsidised the project (core costs). For example, involving a member of staff funded via. the organisation in the project to reach the target groups, or work had been conducted before and after the grant period. Participants also mentioned having funding from another source, which meant when they delivered sessions, they covered other areas as well as what was in their specification. Participants also noted doing other work around the project by building networks in Wales, and that this was not covered by the grant.

4.78 Some participants reported that without the grant the activities would not have been possible at all. This included instances where the grant was a spur to innovation and led to the development of activities which they would not have otherwise thought of. In other instances, participants noted that without the grant there would not be the infrastructure, capacity, resources or staff required to support the work.

4.79 Other participants noted the activities would have been to a much-reduced scale without the grant. This included running occasional activities where promoting rights is part of the organisation's values. This also included instances where the grant enabled participants to build and extend capacity and reach within Wales.

4.80 When discussing whether the amount of funding had been suitable, participants often discussed the time available in tandem with the amount of funding.

4.81 For those who had multi-year funding, there were instances where participants felt the amount of funding was suitable. There were also instances where participants did not feel the amount was suitable, where the costs they used in their application to calculate the value of funding for travel, subsistence and venue hire were not high enough. This created some delivery constraints. Participants reported that this may have been due to feeling worried about the application being unsuccessful with higher costs. They also reported not feeling comfortable during the application stage to ask a member of the policy team whether the costs seem appropriate. There were also instances where participants raised that they conducted additional work that they did not anticipate or plan for, so were flexible or reactive in delivery to meet the needs of their target groups. This involved putting on additional events or creating videos. In some cases, participants noted they would need more funding if they were to deliver again in future due to the additional opportunities that arose. In other cases, participants noted that the additional work delayed their other activities and affected workload, but did not mention requiring more funding.

4.82 Another element raised by multi-year funding recipients was that participants were positive about the length of the funding. In these cases, participants noted having multi-year funding meant there was time, and a feeling of security, to support building stronger relationships with organisations and partnerships. They felt this then then underpins successful delivery, rather than trying to reach delivery targets immediately. This also gave the flexibility to change and adapt project activities according to circumstances. This was compared to previous projects which had been shorter-term and so more pressured.

4.83 For those who had single year funding, there were instances where participants felt that the amount of funding was suitable, but that the amount of time was not. In some cases, participants again raised the point about relationship building, but from the opposite side as discussed by recipients of multi-year funding. They felt in future they would need to have a multi-year project, so that relationships can be built in the first year, to then later enable delivery. One year to do both elements was not sufficient. In other cases, participants felt that when the year ended, they lost momentum. As discussed at point 4.69 (time as a barrier to delivery)**,** participants noted that there was appetite for delivery to continue at the end of the funding period. There were instances where participants delivered sessions ‘for free’ due to the appetite despite the funding ending. Participants also raised that with a longer-term approach they could have created more sustainable resources. They were unclear whether the project could be delivered again in future without further time and money invested, again highlighting a loss of momentum.

4.84 Finally, for those with short-term funding, participants felt the amount of funding was suitable and covered what they needed it to for a pilot. Participants did however discuss that again, with additional funding or a longer-term approach, they could have achieved more. This includes for example ensuring that actions are sustained post-project, or being able to put plans in place to encourage attendance.

Design and delivery of the Democratic Engagement Partnership (DEP)

4.85 Grant recipient interview participants were positive about the requirement to join the DEP. Some discussed that it was positive that Welsh Government as the funder were using their unique position of having a link to all the different projects to bring them together. There were instances where participants felt this should be done across other grants more. In some cases, grant recipient interview participants raised that the requirement to join the DEP was not demanding due to the frequency and length of the meetings.

'...It actually feels like a positive thing for a funder to use that convening power and get everybody in the same room because they're kind of the only person that can.'

'...I think grant makers are often in a[...]position of power, but also networking, where they will have a sort of bird's eye view of lots of different parts of a sector that they're all funding simultaneously, but they won't do an awful lot to take advantage of that position they have. They won't encourage grantees to talk to each other or collaborate in any way, and I think the fact that this grant did that is, is really good. I think that should be encouraged more...'

4.86 Similarly, there were instances where wider external stakeholder interview participants mentioned the DEP and were generally positive. Some noted that project updates made the grant feel like it was part of a wider conversation rather than isolated processes. Others noted it can help recipients to identify links and common challenges.

4.87 Grant recipient interview participants were asked whether they intend to continue to attend the DEP after their grant period ended. In general, participants noted they would possibly still attend, but caveated this would only be if they had the time or capacity, for smaller projects in particular. Reasons included it being useful or interesting to hear what is happening in this space. There were also instances where participants noted they may continue to attend particularly in the lead up to the next set of Senedd and local government elections in Wales, for planning and preparation purposes and to maintain their connections built during the grant. There were instances where participants felt it was unclear whether they were still able to attend, or whether it was still mandatory to attend (as also noted at point 4.43).

Changes to the DEP

4.88 Grant recipient interview participants reported areas where changes to the DEP process could be considered. Participants raised that there are other networks in Wales, for example run by the Electoral Reform Society Cymru. A positive was that participants felt neither were demanding, but noted that awareness should be maintained in terms of the amount organisations are required to attend or do. Participants felt that areas for consideration were how the DEP works with the other networks, what its role is, and how these can be harnessed when leading up to the next elections. This was regarded as a future opportunity by participants.

'…I don't know whether there's something in terms of particular in the lead up to elections[...]for there to be that, that collective voice. Or if there was like an action that we could all take[...]Sort of shared, joint communications. Just something I suppose to harness the the networks within that group[...]There's also as well. I know the Electoral Reform Society in Wales have a have a similar group[...]So so possibly an opportunity to kind of work together or yeah.'

4.89 Participants from both larger and smaller projects discussed project differences. From the perspective of the smaller projects, participants raised that the larger grants were leading the partnership and that it would be interesting to know more about what smaller projects were happening. From the perspective of the larger projects, participants raised that they felt the chance for collaboration between larger projects and those with a smaller focus were limited. They suggested sub-groups or topic specific meetings may be useful where everyone would be able to be more actively involved.

'…So I wonder if perhaps there's a bit of kind of a subgroup of people who do in person stuff and another group of people who do more policy stuff or something might be useful…' [...] '…Or maybe even topic-based meetings where you can still go along, but if you're not doing the topic, then you're sort of less actively involved, and if you are, then you're more actively involved or something along those lines.'

4.90 There were also instances where participants felt that there were missed opportunities for collaboration with other grant recipients because the meetings do not align with when their project starts. In particular, for projects which only have short-term funding, it makes it difficult to feed in resources from other recipients. This is due to the grant being open on more of a rolling basis, so different grant recipients join at different points.

'…I kind of wish I had, you know, attended the meeting like right at the beginning of our project, I suppose, because I think it, you know it could have maybe influenced or informed[…]the materials we used[…] [others' activities] *would have been great to know earlier on, because I think we could have done more to kind of make use of the materials they were developing[…]or even[…]maybe found a way to maybe work together on it, or bring some of their staff in…'*

4.91 Another suggestion raised by both grant recipients and external stakeholders included considering occasionally meeting in-person. For example, a longer event, less frequently. Reasons included wanting to share wider information about what their organisation is doing outside their DEG project, which may help to uncover opportunities for collaboration.

4.92 Finally, other improvements which were suggested by grant recipients included the need to ensure technical jargon in meetings is minimised and clarified. This is due to the range of levels of experience across the recipient organisation attendees. External stakeholders suggested offering more training opportunities as part of the sessions. Additionally, incorporating a 'participatory practice approach', hearing directly from end-beneficiaries and providing them the opportunity to showcase what they've done.

Supporting collaboration and information sharing

4.93 Grant recipient interview participants were asked to reflect on any other ways the DEG could support partnership working. One area raised was around peer-to-peer communication outside meetings. Participants suggested that a written form of communication outside of the DEP meetings could support ongoing collaboration. This included a newsletter/mailing list, or an online forum tool. The potential benefits of this raised by participants included:

- being able to catch up on information when it is not possible to attend the meeting
- being able to look at things in their own time
- having information in one place so it is easier to keep track of who they wanted to follow up with
- being able to identify links or opportunities for collaboration
- being able to draw on ideas

4.94 Suggested content included: an overview of all the projects (such as project outlines, link to their website, contact details), sharing resources or materials, sharing events happening, and space to mention other democratic related work the organisation is working on, not limited to their funded project.

4.95 In some cases, participants noted this would be useful to be able to go directly to other recipients. They felt currently a barrier was that communication was 'hub and spoke' where they had to go via. the Welsh Government policy team to reach other recipients. There were also instances where participants noted anything additional should be light touch, and to avoid creating too much extra work for the recipient organisations.

4.96 Another area raised was that participants noted they supported information sharing by making the resources they produced available on their website.

4.97 Wider external stakeholders and local authorities also reflected on areas of the DEG where changes would be useful to make to any future grant funding programme. One area that emerged was the need for more effective and wider sharing of lessons learnt from the DEG funded projects. Participants reported they were not clear on what the DEG funded projects have done and what the outcomes were, and would find the sharing of best practice around what worked more useful than information on the activities delivered.

4.98 Relatedly, in some cases grant recipient participants reported there could be greater consideration from Welsh Government in future on how to create a picture of what works and has not worked collectively across recipient projects. This requires honesty and a context where recipients feel comfortable to share.

4.99 Local authorities and wider external stakeholders noted the importance of sharing learnings within the context of low resources and capacity in the sector. Grant recipients noted that sharing learnings helps to inform future projects.

4.100 To support sharing of learnings, local authority and wider external stakeholder participants raised the ideas of sharing via. something written, a specific event, or using existing forums. Participants (wider external stakeholders) also raised the need to support organisations with how to measure and evaluate impact**.** Relatedly, there were also instances where grant recipient participants raised that it would be useful to have a resource that outlines possible democratic engagement activities based on what has and has not been successful at improving democratic engagement, so that organisations can apply approaches:

'...That's always the hard bit, isn't it, to come up with the projects in the first place, you know, to think what, what can I try doing which I think might actually work around here. So yeah, a resource bank of possible activities. For varying sized communities that, that help improve democratic engagement. That that would be great…'

5. Findings - aim 2: Perceived impact of the grant funding scheme.

Context

5.1 The remit of this evaluation is to report perceived impacts only. A systematic evaluation of impact is not possible as the grant design means that funded projects are unique, and due to the way that evidence from each project was collected and reported (discussed in section 6).

5.2 The grant guidance notes state the funding is for recipients to “pursue an innovative approach to engaging under-represented, newly enfranchised, and disabled people in democracy.” As the grant aims (stated at 1.29) are wide ranging and the concept of participating in democracy is quite broad and without specific definition, the research interview participants were asked for their views on the grant aims and the concept of democratic engagement.

Aims of the DEG

5.3 Grant recipient participants were asked to reflect on their understanding of the aims of the DEG. Participants either discussed this question in the frame of their own project aims, or discussed the aims of the grant more broadly.

5.4 Regardless of the frame of their response, participants discussed aims in relation to target groups. Re-occurring terms used included 'Understanding', 'Knowledge', 'Awareness', 'Education', 'Support', 'Involvement', 'Participation' and 'Empower/Empowering'. A particular aim noted regarding target groups was improving understanding of how democracy works. Another aim regarding target groups discussed was involving people in democracy by empowering them to have their say and improving understanding of how to get involved, or making it easier to get involved. There were instances where participants noted the type of person the grant was trying to involve, which included those who do not have the right tools or understanding, who may find it difficult to take part, or who are not likely to take part.

5.5 There were instances where participants noted the aims (whether of the grant as a whole or their project) were to support those from specific target groups, which included underrepresented groups, young people, and disabled people. There were also instances where participants specifically noted the aims (whether of the grant as a whole or their project) were broader than just being about registering to vote and voting.

5.6 For those who discussed the question in the frame of the grant more broadly, there were instances where participants talked about the aims in relation to the wider system. In these cases, participants noted that by funding a lot of different areas of work, different types of organisations, with different supported groups, the aim is to improve the system for encouraging engagement with democracy. Moreover, aiming to build system capacity in between election cycles to ensure things are in place so people can take part if they wish - whether that be technical infrastructure or building communities and networks. There were also instances where participants discussed aims in relation to the sector, in particular that the grant aimed to build up a sector that can work together through taking an approach that particularly encourages collaboration.

Defining democratic engagement

5.7 In the interviews, all participants (grant recipients, local authorities and wider external stakeholders) were asked to reflect on how they would define democratic engagement. All participant's answers varied, demonstrating the breadth of the topic, but there were commonalities.

5.8 A key theme in response to this question was that democratic engagement was defined as interacting with, or taking part in, democratic processes or society.

'…people[...]engaging with different democratic systems and processes[...]engaging in kind of collective civil society in different ways...'

5.9 Participants defined democratic engagement as much broader than just involvement in election activity: it is the system as a whole, and a continuous process that includes what happens in-between elections.

'...not just think it's putting your cross in a box every 4, 5 years.'

5.10 Examples given of what involvement or engagement with the democratic system would look like varied across participants and included:

- Voting and elections
- Contacting a local councillor, MP or MS
- Engaging with institutions
- Petitions or consultations
- Advocacy, protesting, campaigns
- Involvement in decision making processes, or things like Citizens Assemblies
- Potential future involvement in working in politics
- Being a member of a political party

5.11 However, another key theme that emerged was that primarily awareness, knowledge, understanding, tools, skills and confidence are needed for someone to then be able to actively take part or engage in democracy.

'To have the skills, knowledge, and confidence to actively take part in society...'

5.12 Particular topics included an understanding of rights, how things work and decisions are made, what areas are devolved to Welsh Government, what different representatives do, who to ask or contact about things, and through what mechanisms people can take part. For elections specifically this included the basics of political parties and knowing who one can vote for, to be able to make an informed decision.

5.13 Additionally, grant recipients and local authorities noted that people need to be able to connect their everyday lives with democracy, and at the community/local level, to extrapolate this to other levels (such as a Wales-wide level). Local authorities also specifically defined democratic engagement as involving communities in decision making. In these cases, participants discussed having a deliberative dialogue with the community and empowering the community to be involved in local decisions. There were also instances within this theme where participants related democratic engagement back to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, specifically the involvement way of working.

Perceived project-level outcomes and unintended consequences for beneficiaries

5.14 Grant recipient interview participants reflected on their perceptions of the key outcomes for beneficiaries that took part. It was not in scope of this research to collect data directly from beneficiaries. It should be noted that discussing outcomes for beneficiaries was based on the recipient's views or anecdotes. Regarding the six recipients not included in these interview findings, beneficiary outcomes within end of grant evaluation reports fit within the broad areas discussed in this section. However, again, in the reports beneficiary outcomes are typically either implied based on the project activities conducted or anecdotally reported, rather than explicitly measured. For one grant recipient, beneficiary outcomes are not possible to discern as there is no report available at the time of writing. The collection of information for evaluation is discussed in further detail at Section 6 (points 6.13 to 6.15).

5.15 One outcome cited for beneficiaries was improved knowledge, awareness, and understanding. This was in relation to different topics across different participants, and topics include (but are not limited to):

- Democratic processes, institutions, roles of elected representatives, political parties
- Rights and responsibilities
- The practicalities to be able to participate actively in democratic processes – such as knowing how to contact a representative, knowing who they can vote for to make an informed decision, knowing what facilities are at the polling station

5.16 Another outcome that emerged was beneficiaries getting involved or participating in democracy. This took different forms across projects. One way in which beneficiaries got involved was outside of project activity, for example beneficiaries going on to contact politicians, doing petitions, or registering to vote and voting. Reporting also indicated beneficiaries took part in another project or activity after engaging in the recipient's project. In some instances, this included encouraging or fostering participation from beneficiaries previously disengaged.

'…in fact after the project, after we'd finished[...]there was a request there to, to go and visit the Senedd, from that group, that was really well attended, you know, they really enjoyed going there. So I think that was just a sign of the fact that you know what they've learned in the sessions had really sort of stayed with them…'

5.17 In other cases, the outcome of getting involved or participating in democracy was though the beneficiary taking part in the grant-funded project, rather than going on to do something after. For example, speaking with or asking questions to those who work in democracy, beneficiaries being trained to deliver sessions to other beneficiaries, or attending local discussions/forums.

'…And something we're looking at in the coming months is with the elections for the Welsh Youth Parliament, for young people again to, to have an active, an active voice and a say in who, which young people in Wales are elected…'

5.18 Another outcome that emerged was beneficiaries feeling their voice is heard, particularly about issues that are important to them. Participants reported that beneficiaries were given the space to raise these issues through the project. In some cases, these were raised by the recipient organisation with a council at the appropriate level for consideration. There were instances where this led to change, a further outcome. Changes through the sharing of views also emerged in evaluation reports. In these cases specifically, councillors made changes to, or developed a new process to engage with the target group, or councillors made a commitment to addressing the raised issues.

'...so we had meetings with the local councillor[...]got on the news, on the TV, to actually fight to lobby the council for the reinstatement of that, and that was another example for our participants of how their actions can actually change things. So that worked really well as well...'

5.19 Some participants reported that beneficiaries had improved confidence as an outcome of the project. This covered different areas for different projects. One example included confidence to be able to access and assess information and make judgements. Another way included confidence to get involved or take part – such as feeling confident about the voting process or how to register.

'…our feedback on our website suggested that because someone had the confidence that there was a disabled parking space near the polling station, for example, they were able to go and you know they felt more confident about their journey going there…'

5.20 Another reported outcome was that other or wider skills were developed through training as part of the project. For example, delivering sessions or presentations developed beneficiaries' presentation/public speaking skills. Others discussed digital skills, through using equipment and software.

5.21 Finally, participants also reported that an outcome for beneficiaries has been a sense of community. This was either less tangible, such as feeling part of a community, or it was raised in a more practical sense – such as instances where beneficiaries created community groups as a result of the project activity.

5.22 There were, however, some barriers noted in terms of outcomes. Firstly, some participants noted that outcomes of their project have been bigger for some beneficiaries in the target group than others. For example, level of improvement depends on beneficiaries' pre-existing level of understanding or knowledge. Secondly, some participants noted that they did not always see the desired outcomes. For example, some beneficiaries did not go on to take part in democracy after the project, as there were still barriers that needed to be overcome to impact behaviour.

'…we were quite disappointed because we actually did quite a bit of work to try and encourage people to vote in the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May[...]when we actually went out and spoke to people, they said "no, we didn't vote"[…]it came down just quite simply, to they didn't know what each party was kind of standing for, so they just stayed at home[…]there was no accessible manifestos[…] "What's the point of me going? because I may as well not be checking the box. And I don't really know why I'm doing it."...'

5.23 Grant recipient interview participants also reflected on unintended consequences for beneficiaries. It should be noted that answers to this question were limited. Some participants did not feel there were any unintended outcomes. Where they did, in some cases participants reported their events led elected representatives to take further action for the beneficiaries or that engaging in the project activity improved beneficiaries' wider learning in school. Others noted that there were instances where beneficiaries went on to be involved with other organisations as they had developed an interest in the democracy sector. Informal unintended outcomes include post-event discussions involving beneficiaries.

Perceived project-level outcomes and unintended consequences for grant recipients

5.24 It should be noted that when discussing key outcomes for their organisation resulting from the grant, again grant recipient participants mostly discussed this informally, in that outcomes were based on their views or anecdotes.

5.25 One outcome that emerged was enhanced profile, networks and increased presence in Wales for organisations with little or no previous experience of operating in Wales. Another outcome noted by participants for their organisation was that they were able to build relationships with beneficiary groups, or relationships and networks with their stakeholders/other organisations. Some noted that the activity conducted through the grant had raised their organisation's profile with beneficiaries, or with the wider sector.

'…it's another opportunity for us to get out and build relationships with the[…]community in Wales because historically[…][there's been a] *feeling that [recipient organisation name] wasn't engaging enough[...]we've had more opportunities to go out and[…]build a relationship…'*

5.26 A further outcome that emerged was organisations reporting they had gained increased understanding and experience of working with intended beneficiary groups. This included specific groups with particular needs. Also, audiences in Wales in general, for those with little or no previous experience working in Wales. For example, this included understanding the barriers the intended beneficiaries face (reported barriers are discussed at points 5.40 to 5.44), or how to best engage beneficiaries. Some also noted that activities which had been funded through the grant have been integrated into their organisation's routine activity.

5.27 Where organisations were new to working in the democratic space, there were also instances where conducting activities through the grant meant their staff upskilled in this topic, and they were inspired to consider future work in this area.

5.28 Reflections on unintended consequences for the recipient organisations in interviews were limited. In some instances, participants could not think of any unintended consequences for their organisation. In the positive, as discussed at point 5.25 participants reported building relationships with other organisations. In some of these cases, participants felt this was an unintended outcome: they either built a relationship with another organisation who happened to be looking to do something similar, or built more relationships or a bigger network than expected at project outset. Moreover, in the desk research, an unintended outcome included presenting a case study of use of an engagement/learning method at a Wales-wide event.

5.29 A more negative area recipient interview participants raised was that it was unanticipated/unexpected to not be able to complete the project activities within the strict financial year deadline, and this was negative for building relationships. Though an isolated point, another negative consequence included project events becoming a forum for anger directed towards representatives of the recipient organisation due to an attendee's general discontent with the wider state of politics. In this case, political impartiality was stressed at the start of each session to avoid recurrence.

Engaging over a sustained period

5.30 As noting one of the DEG aims was to 'Support projects to engage with the population over a sustained period', grant recipient interview participants were asked to reflect on whether the grant supported their organisation to do so.

5.31 There were instances where participants felt the funding did support their organisation to engage with the population over a sustained period. Grant recipients raised the importance of multi-year projects which supported them to develop networks and relationships over the years of delivery, either with partners in other organisations or their beneficiaries. In some cases, participants compared this to the shorter-term or pilot nature of their previous democratic engagement projects, or compared to previously where their organisation would only provide activities in the lead up to elections.

'… for example in the run up to the election, we would we would be be doing everything that we could to share information[…]But actually having that capacity to provide that one to one support to, to provide those workshops over a sustained period of time and build up those relationships with people. I mean the grant has been been invaluable in enabling us to do that.'

5.32 For participants who had multi-year, single year, and short-term projects, some reflected on sustained engagement through the grant's provision of resource and capacity, in the form of staff time and financial support. This enabled them to plan and run project activities over the period. For some participants this provided the opportunity to do something new, for others it enabled them to build on work and provide things in addition to what the organisation already does.

'…definitely. Because it meant that we've, you know, we were able to spend, you know, a focus on trying to get the forums going[…]might not have actually happened if we hadn't of, you know, had the funding[…]And now it's [the forum] *become more of a regular, an automatic thing, you know. So it* [the funding] *was good as a kick-starter.'*

5.33 There were, however, also instances where participants felt the funding did not support their organisation to engage with the population over a sustained period. Some who had single year or short-term funding reported that the funding was not large enough or long-term enough to allow them to sustain activity and that the resource was such that activities were limited to the lifetime of the grant. Additionally, there were instances where participants reported the nature of the funding size was such that it did not enable recruitment of staff resource. In some instances, these participants noted that in future they felt multi-year funding would be more appropriate. For example, a multi-year approach to planning would better support developing sustainable resources or better support development of relationships and networks.

'…It hasn't allowed us to, like, hire more people, or not have to seek funding from other sources or, you know, kind of it wasn't a big enough grant to kind of change the organisation shape in a dramatic way. Or like I said before, it wasn't a big enough grant to like continue to run [the project]*…which we would have liked to have done, but haven't, weren't able to do.'*

5.34 In some instances, participants with a multi-year grant reported that the multi-year approach meant activity could be sustained post-grant, as organisations they were

working with built up knowledge and skills to continue to deliver activities to beneficiaries without the recipient's support. There were, however, also instances where participants with a multi-year award noted the challenge with sustaining activity post-grant as funding is needed to be able to provide this (the reliance on funding is also discussed at point 5.65). They discussed methods for how they were trying to sustain activity post-grant which included volunteer beneficiary led activities.

'…[people]*who have been taking part in the programme[…]the more times* [people] *do it […]* [they are] *like[…] "I've got the confidence, I've kind of got the know how, I know how to run these sessions. You know, I've kind of got your resources now and I can take this forward."[…]that's been fantastic to see…'*

'…So in in the long term[…]we have a bit of an issue with the fact that you know when we talk about sustainability[…]It is difficult because[…]you've had your three years to do, deliver a service and it needs to be sustainable thereafter and then your bottom line is how is it going to be sustainable? The only thing that sustains it really is is the money to have staff to provide a service, you know. So you know, we do hope[…]this phase is about us trying to identify those leaders and you know, trying to get them to sort of start, you know, working together…'

Applying learnings in future

5.35 Participants were asked to reflect on whether they intended to apply learnings from their DEG funded project to future projects. To note, not all recipients spoke of actual plans to implement these, but more so the potential to do so.

5.36 Some participants reflected on how they learnt about the most effective operational elements of their activity such as time, place, topic or content. For example, through trial and error they learnt what worked and what did not, which they can apply to future activities. Additionally, some reported that as they had learnt the timescales for different project elements, if they were to repeat the project activities, they would adapt their approach. For example, take a multi-year and staged approach, or tailor the project to a timetable that suits the intended beneficiaries (such as considering the school year for young people).

'...because we've been working on our[…]peer led [approach], *where you train up young people, every time we get an opportunity to do that in different settings, we've learned so much from it about the best way to support them and the best, and kind of, what we need to make sure they're successful. So like things like identifying colleges that already have structures and things like that, and if not, having a longer time frame to work with them. So it's really helped us to kind of hone our overall approach to that type of project.'*

5.37 In some instances, participants reported they planned to share their experiences from their DEG funded project with other, new democracy projects happening at their organisation.

5.38 Participants also noted the key issues, barriers to democratic engagement or areas of lack of knowledge which were discovered through working with beneficiaries as part of DEG project activities, which they intended to cover in future activities. In some cases, participants were seeking funding for a new project based on what they learnt.

'...I absolutely know that we'll be looking for future funding to do similar work again. And because we've got, you know, links with the Electoral Commission, we've got better links with sort of local election services as well now[...]there's some really important work to be done around our current electoral systems and making the whole process more accessible[…]it would be doing more of the same, but also expanding on some particular areas that we've discovered in the evaluation.'

5.39 However, in some cases participants noted barriers to applying learnings. Where participants wanted to further develop their resources and share these with other organisations in their field of work or wanted to action what was suggested by beneficiaries at their project activities, they noted time, staff or budget as constraints to doing this.

'…in an ideal world if we had all the time and the money to do it[…]we spoke about how great it would be to be able to offer those resources to, you know, other[…]groups who could make use of them…'

Learnings from projects about the target groups

5.40 As discussed at point 5.26 and point 5.38, participants discovered democratic engagement barriers or areas of lack of knowledge about democracy through working with beneficiaries during their project. In both grant recipient interviews and desk research these were raised in relation to young people, disabled people, foreign nationals and the general population. Barriers to democratic engagement included both a person's circumstances and the system.

5.41 Personal circumstances that were reported to create barriers included where people are digitally excluded or have low digital skills, experiences of democracy in foreign national's country of origin, and for young people having the confidence needed to engage.

5.42 One barrier in the system reported was accessibility of polling stations and the whole voting system. For polling stations it was noted while some progress has been made for physical impairments, this is less so for those who have a cognitive impairment, learning difficulty, mental health condition, or are neurodiverse. For these individuals, being able to discuss the ballot paper with a support worker, or changing how the ballot paper is laid out may improve accessibility. A related factor was that some have anxiety about attending the polling station.

5.43 Another barrier in the system was the accessibility of information and resources. This includes easy read formats and provision in required languages, including both BSL and community languages. For written materials, a lack of provision of accessible information up-front means having to request a specific version. For events, there is a lack of provision of interpreters. A repeatedly raised area where information was not accessible was the information from political parties and political representatives.

5.44 Another barrier was the requirement for voter ID (Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and general elections). In particular, depending on housing situation such as for those in insecure housing, in care, or without a fixed address. This issue is related to the digital skills barrier (point 5.41) because for those without photo ID, the primary way to apply for a voter authority certificate requires going online. Finally, recipients reported another barrier, which was finding young people they worked with had not had an introduction to discussing topical political issues within school.

5.45 A summary of the specific areas in which recipients identified gaps in knowledge as part of their project include:

- Who has the right to vote, including that people with learning disabilities can vote and when foreign nationals can vote
- Being unsure how to register or not knowing whether they are registered
- What is accepted as voter ID
- The role of the PCC and the PCC election
- Differences between types of bills, and the bill process
- Understanding of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and commissioner
- The different levels of government and their roles and responsibilities, decision making, and areas that are devolved
- How voting affects daily lives
- How to take action – including contacting representatives, attending surgeries
- What each political party stands for

5.46 There were instances where participants noted gaps in knowledge to address are not limited to target groups, but also those around them (such as those working in the care system, support workers, family members).

What do grant recipients view as the outcomes from taking part in the Democratic Engagement Partnership?

5.47 Grant recipient interview participants were asked to reflect on the key outcomes for their organisation resulting from being in the DEP. The main outcome that emerged was being able to learn about what other organisations are doing, and the two-way sharing of information and resources. Through learning about what others are doing, participants raised that this generated ideas.

'…I found that meeting really, really helpful. It was really interesting to hear what other people were doing elsewhere[…] it was inspiring[…]picked up on a number of kind of ideas or resources...'

5.48 There were also participants who gave specific examples of where they applied information shared from another organisation in the DEP to shape their project, or considered changes to their project in future. In some cases, participants used the partnership as a sounding board during their project to get views on ideas to feed into delivery. There were also instances where participants noted that they were able to raise awareness of the barriers their target group faces, and conversely other participants reported learning about the barriers of different groups. Additionally, there were participants who reported the partnership was seen as a supportive environment or network in which reflection or learning could take place. In some cases, this was noted as useful where the participant was the only one in their organisation working in this space.

'…in our project, we hadn't taken on board[…] whether there were people who needed sign language, for example[…]we didn't actually have anybody turn up who needed that[…]but then maybe they didn't turn up because we didn't have it[…]so the things that people were learning about were the particular issues that stop people from participating in democracy. So that was one. Ethnicity or language could be another, and you know, for example[…] we've recently had some projects here for refugees in the town. So that's another area[…]where we could perhaps learn for some of the projects who were working on that….'

5.49 It was also reported that the DEP enabled grant recipients to make connections and collaborate with other organisations. In some cases, participants attributed these connections or collaborations to the DEP - where the connections would not have been made or collaboration may not have happened otherwise. In other cases, participants felt they would have made the connections or collaborated regardless of the DEP, as they are relevant organisations within the democratic engagement

space. Even so, in some of these cases participants acknowledged that the DEP helped them to identify who to speak to from these relevant organisations.

5.50 There were multiple ways participants collaborated with other organisations, ranging from more to less intensive. Specific examples included: working together and getting involved in delivery, harnessing networks, using resources, and getting feedback.

5.51 Regarding working together and getting involved in delivery, some participants noted that they collaborated to co-deliver events, such as hustings, or visits to democratic sites. Others, particularly organisations who represent disabled people, noted they were involved in another organisation's project in the production of videos regarding accessing the polling station. In some cases, participants noted they met with another recipient organisation to discuss approaches to engagement. There were instances where participants reported that collaboration helps to avoid duplication.

5.52 Regarding harnessing networks, there were instances where participants reported utilising other recipient's networks. This involved sharing details of the project and being put in contact with relevant organisations. By doing so, the participants were able to access new organisations or individuals, who then got involved in their project. For example, organisations delivered their activities to beneficiaries who were identified via. another recipient's network.

'The main things were they shared our information with their network and vice versa, which actually supported us to get into a couple of the FE colleges, them helping us to open that door...'

5.53 Another common form of collaboration, though less involved, was that participants reported using resources from other recipient organisations within their own projects. Participants noted that because these resources that had already been created it meant they could be added to their project delivery without having to locate sources from elsewhere. Another collaboration raised was getting feedback from other recipient organisations regarding certain elements of a project, particularly where the other recipient represented a specific target group.

5.54 There was, however, also a barrier regarding collaboration through the DEP. As discussed in point 4.90, due to timings participants felt they could have worked together on sessions with other recipients but this opportunity was missed.

5.55 A final area that emerged when discussing organisation outcomes from the DEP was that grant recipient participants found the updates from guest speakers and Welsh Government around wider electoral policy and reform useful. In some cases, participants reported that this was important because it ensured they had up to date knowledge which they could embed in their work.

How the DEG addresses gaps in the wider democratic engagement context

Defining 'the gap': Key democratic engagement issues to address

5.56 Wider external stakeholders and local authorities were asked to reflect on the key issues to address regarding democratic engagement in the population in Wales. One theme that emerged was low turnout and registration. Within this, there were instances where participants noted that the extension of the franchise for devolved and local elections enhanced pre-existing issues with registration and turnout, with challenges arising from the complexity of different voting rules for different elections. Participants noted that while there are groups who are less likely to register or to vote, this is also an issue for the whole population in Wales. Participants referenced specific demographic groups that may be less likely to vote, this included young people, newly enfranchised groups, foreign nationals, being of lower socio-economic status, housing tenure status, and being part of an ethnic minority community.

5.57 Another theme that emerged was that a lack of democratic education was a key issue to address regarding democratic engagement in Wales. Within this, participants noted that low voter registration and turnout could be considered a "symptom" of lack of awareness, knowledge or understanding and so the need for better democratic education across the population in Wales. Participants felt until this is addressed, this will affect engagement in local government and Senedd elections. Additionally, some participants noted the key areas in which there is a lack of understanding are the different levels of local and national government and their respective responsibilities, which areas of policy are devolved, and where particular decisions are made (also found by grant recipients as a gap part of their projects, see point 5.45). Moreover, participants also noted that work within Wales can often separate devolved and UK elections, focusing on devolved elections alone, which creates an issue where the population do not see the whole picture. Another area participants noted is a lack of awareness of who the candidates for local and Senedd elections are (a related gap found by grant recipients at point 5.45 is what each party represents). Again, where discussing specific groups, participants noted that knowledge and understanding is a general issue for the whole population. Participants also expressed the view that awareness, knowledge and understanding may be influenced by an individual's general interest in democracy, or the level of democratic engagement in the family.

5.58 Another theme was that media coverage is a key democratic engagement issue to address. Participants reported the view that in Wales there is lack of media coverage of the local and Senedd elections, or about decisions made in Wales.

5.59 The issues regarding democratic engagement were considered to be long-standing. From a Wales-wide perspective, participants reported that while the extension of the franchise in 2020 has led to more work and conversation on democratic engagement, they felt democratic engagement issues have been around since the beginning of devolution. From a local perspective, participants reported that over many years the perception has built that feedback from the community is not taken on board by local bodies and this can create disillusionment.

'...numerous polls. And elections, really, have shown that there is an issue with democratic engagement in Wales, especially at a devolved level. There have been a number of surveys or polls conducted showing that people aren't really clear where decisions are made around particular policy issues.[…]extending the franchise to both 16 and 17 year olds and foreign nationals obviously gave space to kind of start having that conversation about, how to improve engagement, which I think is[…] [an] *ongoing conversation actually[…]but the issues are kind of persisting...'*

5.60 Finally, there were instances where participants reported the view that there will be a compounded set of democratic engagement challenges in Wales for the upcoming 2026 Senedd elections, as many reforms are taking place at once.

'...as much as I kind of emphasize the stuff between elections, the big challenge I think, is really gonna be in the lead up to 2026. You know, we're gonna have a very different voting system, different number of members elected. We're going to have a voter information platform in place, new boundaries, voter ID won't be required[...]the new franchise work[...]Like all of this is a little bit of a kind of ticking time bomb of information that needs to be given to the public and they need to be aware and confident about this information…' [...] '...It's gonna be, I think, probably the biggest challenge that we've ever had in Wales in terms of communicating things to voters, because it's not like one change, it's like 10 changes all at once.'

Defining 'the gap': Other funding and initiatives

5.61 Wider external stakeholders and local authorities were asked to reflect on other funding and initiatives for democratic engagement in Wales. There were instances where participants noted past funding from Welsh Government. This included local

authority funding for ERSOs, and the Third-Sector Voter Registration Support Grant. Participants also noted the work around the constitutional future of Wales (see point 1.23).

5.62 In some cases, participants noted they were not aware of any other funding available. In other instances, participants reported that there are or have been other pockets of other funding available, though this is limited and not always explicitly for 'democratic engagement'. Sources cited included Lottery funding, The UK Democracy Fund (Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust), Waterloo Foundation, Arts Council of Wales, Institute for Welsh Affairs, Public Service Boards and Regional Integration Funds, and smaller community group funding. Additionally, participants reported the Electoral Commission and Senedd Commission have undertaken initiatives, though these are not solely 'grant making organisations', and have done more engagement or outreach related work. In some instances, participants reflected on research funding, whether through universities or the Wales Centre for Public Policy, although it was noted that this research tends to explore what the issues are rather than funding for taking action on democratic engagement.

Defining 'the gap': Challenges with funding and initiatives

5.63 The main challenge with funding in the democratic engagement sector in Wales that local authority and wider external stakeholder participants raised is the lack of funding available. This means that there is a lack of funders and in diversity of funders. Some grant recipients also raised the lack of funding and funders when reflecting on their needs for funding in the democratic engagement space.

'It's fairly bleak. I would say the, outside of governmental funding, there's only really one, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation[…]one organisation who funds things to do with democratic engagement. And they don't fund to the tune of very much[…]but like I think more diversity of funding is really important...'

5.64 Related to the lack of funding and funders, another challenge that wider external stakeholder participants raised was that where funding is available in the sector, this tends to be smaller, individual pockets of funding. The funding is not centralised. Participants noted that this leads to duplication or overlapping of activity, and competition between organisations.

5.65 Moreover, wider external stakeholder participants reported that in general organisations like charities often continue to try to conduct democratic engagement

work unfunded, out of a sense of obligation to promote social inclusion and self-advocacy. Related to this, when reflecting on their needs for funding in the democratic engagement space, some grant recipient participants approached this from the perspective of stating that they require funding in this space. This is because funding is core to their organisations' ability to operate. Without funding, organisations either cannot undertake activities altogether, or they cannot undertake them sustainably, thereby impacting engagement with their target groups/beneficiaries. This relates back to point 5.34 where participants discussed challenges with sustaining work.

'…organisations like ours are running on a shoestring as it is[…]if you want organisations to take on roles of engagement of people in communities, it has to be recognised as proper work…'

5.66 Wider external stakeholder participants also raised that funding has tended to be focused on election periods, meaning there has been a funding gap for in between election cycles and for focusing on the whole picture of democracy.

5.67 Additionally, wider external stakeholder and local authority participants noted that the pockets of other funding tend not to be specifically or explicitly for democratic engagement, but are for related or community topics that could be considered a broader form of democratic engagement. For example, participants cited Public Service Boards and Regional Integration Funds, which fund community engagement primarily through the lens of the involvement way of working under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, and co-production. Participants also noted that a challenge is other pockets of funding do not often have a specific Wales focus. For example, while The UK Democracy Fund covers Wales, this can be UK organisations doing work in Wales rather than Wales-based activity, and there is not a dedicated Wales funding stream.

5.68 Wider external stakeholder participants did highlight some reasons that may lead to the lack of funding and funders. One element was impartiality, where participants reported that for funding democratic engagement, organisations may be concerned about how to do this in an 'impartial' or 'charitable' way. Another element is that the impact of democratic engagement activity is difficult to evaluate. Participants reported this issue contributes to the lack of funding and funders (as noted in 5.63), and, where funding is available, a focus on election periods (as noted in 5.66), since

registration and turnout are considered easier to measure than concepts like knowledge or understanding.

5.69 Another challenge wider external stakeholder and local authority participants reported was that the value of funding often is not sufficient. Participants noted that the pots of funding available are often smaller, which makes them ill-suited for large organisations. The lower sums of funding were also noted to be an issue because engaging certain groups of the population, especially seldom heard voices, can be challenging and incur high costs. There were also instances where participants felt continuous funding and the longevity of funding was a gap.

5.70 Though not directly about funding, participants also raised related challenges and gaps. For local authorities specifically, participants reported that low public sector resources, capacity and budgets limits the ability to undertake democratic engagement activities and projects. Participants also noted these constraints can lead to lack of innovation and the ability to do basic forms of engagement only (such as sharing information via. website, social media, print). Wider external stakeholders also noted capacity and resource as a challenge. Across both local authorities and wider external stakeholders, participants noted even if they have the budget for a project, organisations still need to be able to resource this as it is additional workload, which may not be possible. Therefore, even where there is funding available, organisations may not be able to pursue it. From wider external stakeholders in particular, participants noted staff may need to be trained to deliver democracy related activities where this is not the organisation's core function.

5.71 Participants from local authorities also raised challenges with collaboration. In some instances, participants noted the difficulties collaborating with organisations outside of other public bodies (such as community organisations and the private sector) to draw on expertise due to funding requirements and the length of time this takes (procurement, due diligence). This can limit innovation and may mean missing out on collaborating with the most suitable partners. In other instances, participants noted the difficulties collaborating with other public bodies. More could be done for public bodies to work together, for example at a regional or wider level, to enhance value for money of engagement activity. Participants noted challenges with the landscape and infrastructure for pooling funding.

To what extent has the DEG helped to address democratic engagement challenges and funding challenges?

5.72 There were instances where wider external stakeholder participants were positive about the DEG addressing challenges or gaps in funding. In the most basic sense, participants highlighted that the DEG helps to fill a gap simply because of the lack of other funding in this space. In some instances, participants felt the DEG is a "step in the right direction". Related to this, when asked to reflect on what the funding and support landscape would look like if Welsh Government did not provide the DEG, one area that emerged from wider external stakeholder participants was that there would not be much or any funding available.

'…So I think the democratic engagement grant really came about as a compensation for there not being anything else. Like we have a particularly weird funding sector in Wales anyway, um, we have particular issues with democratic engagement. So it feels like that, that grant kind of filled a gap where there wasn't existing funding or existing emphasis or efforts going on.'

'I think it'd [the funding landscape] *probably look quite bleak to be honest. Because I think, there isn't a huge amount of funding, um, in this space…'*

[Note] The term 'bleak' was also used to describe the funding landscape by a grant recipient when discussing their funding needs at point 5.63.

5.73 There were also instances where wider external stakeholder participants reflected positively on Welsh Government providing a centrally funded scheme. In addition, acknowledging that work in democratic engagement should be funded and taking action. Related to this, when asked to reflect on what the funding and support landscape would look like if Welsh Government did not provide the DEG, there were instances where wider external stakeholder participants reported this could impact the relationships that have been built with organisations in the sector. Participants noted that without support, the onus of tackling democratic engagement issues would be put back onto the organisations.

'...it's a centrally funded scheme, which I think is a positive because[…]this is work that the government should be funding, you know, rather than relying on smaller funders…' [...] '...lots of them [charities] *feel obligated to do stuff around democracy, just because of kind of what they stand for as an organisation, but[...]it's not really charities jobs to to plug the gap[…]we should be funding them properly.'*

5.74 From a slightly different angle, grant recipient participants were asked to reflect on their needs for funding in the democratic engagement space. There were participants that raised that it would be important or useful to continue the DEG. In some cases, participants noted this in relation to the upcoming local and Senedd elections in Wales. Participants felt a grant awarded in the lead up to and over this period would be useful, for example to continue to build on their work.

5.75 There were however instances where participants were less positive about the DEG addressing challenges or gaps in funding. Wider external stakeholder and local authority participants highlighted that the DEG has still tended to fund pockets of activity, typically on a smaller or shorter-term scale. In this way the funding has not necessarily addressed the gaps regarding continuous funding and the longevity of funding. Participants noted that to address democratic engagement issues, funding would need to be continuous, and grant funding has a shorter-term nature which does not provide that certainty. Due to organisational resource and capacity activity stops with the funding, meaning the benefits achieved are limited and are difficult to build on. While there are areas of improvement at the time, this is for certain groups at a smaller level.

'…[The DEG] *still suffers from[…]I think some projects for example have been funded for like a year[…]come to an end, and then the funding has come out again[…]it is still probably victim to being a little bit bitty[…]funding little things[…]individual projects and then, you*

know, the longevity of those projects, it's difficult[…]lots of kind of charity organisations, they obviously can only do what they're funded to do. So if the funding stops, they they will stop that activity…'

'…I'm not convinced that the grant does plug the gap effectively because[…]there's no certainty around it[...]I think it's very, very, short, short term. It might bring some benefits at that time, but I don't think those benefits are built on, because you can't carry on with the projects.'

5.76 Relating to the challenges and gaps pertaining to resource (5.70), some wider external stakeholders reported that without the DEG there would be less activity in this space, in particular in-between elections. Again, participants cited the challenge of organisations not being able to resource and conduct work without grant funding. Participants reported this could also lead to a smaller pool of organisations working in this space, as with less activity happening fewer organisations develop or maintain expertise. Some local authority participants also noted that due to a lack of resources in their organisation, without the DEG, activity would not be possible. Another related area reported by local authorities was that if Welsh Government did not provide the DEG there would not only be less activity in this space, but less innovative activity. The DEG was reported as providing the opportunity to try new approaches to democratic engagement in the context of lack of resources and capacity in public bodies.

'...so I think if you don't have the DEG[…]You don't have[…]organisations in the third sector working on democratic issues[…]and you don't have that kind of persistence[…]from other organisations who would primarily do stuff around elections.'

'…public sector bodies, we should be involved with communities in a capacity anyway. And I see the grant is very much the place for that risk and innovation[…]without the grant is probably a risk of very much public bodies reverting to doing what they've always done because it's within their existing resource envelope…'

5.77 However, other local authorities were less positive about resource, noting one gap is that the DEG does not provide funding for staff resource, which is what is required to be able to do engagement projects.

'…the biggest hurdle for us is that we do not have capacity within our current staff resource to take on more work…' […] '… the benefit of the previous [Welsh Government funding] *which we really valued was that the funding could be used to employ a staff resource…'*

5.78 An assumption within the logic model (point 3.4) is that the recipient organisation can cover overhead costs during the project unless costed for in their application. Activity 'A20: Procurement or recruitment where needed to expand capacity to enable project delivery' and output 'OP11: Project staff' highlight that there were instances where staff were hired to support DEG project delivery. Greater clarity on the circumstances in which hiring staff as part of DEG projects is and is not eligible would be beneficial.

5.79 There were instances where wider external stakeholder and local authority participants commented on the grant value, where some felt the amount was enough and others felt the DEG was too small.

'...my sense is that it has kind of filled the space that was existing. Um, it feels like a significant enough amount of money on an annual basis…'

'…£300,000 per year. But because of commitments that we've already made in reality[…]there is only £40,000 available. So it does kind of make you think, well, what, what is the point, you know?...'

Changes for future grant funding

5.80 In terms of changes that would be useful to apply to future grant funding programmes, an area that emerged (both wider external stakeholders and local authorities) was the need to fund larger scale or longer-term projects. Participants raised the need for multi-year projects (such as a 5-year grant), or more continuous funding. Participants noted that it takes time to impact democratic engagement.

5.81 Related to this, when reflecting on their needs for funding in the democratic engagement space, there were instances where grant recipient participants (from multi-year, single year and short-term projects) discussed the need for long-term funding. This was regarded as important because it allows organisations to maintain momentum and learning, to address barriers and support their target group at a larger scale, and to understand why people do not engage. The importance of multi-year projects was also discussed at points 4.82 to 4.83 and points 5.31 to 5.34.

'…I think longer term funding is essential[...]three year funding now is is incredibly difficult to get. So most of our projects are funded a year, 18 months. And as I say, you get a certain momentum going, and then the project finishes...' […] '…the momentum is actually really important because actually that saves so much time. There's all that publicity time, that then you you can[…]focus on spending the time and the resources on[…]actually delivering activities and getting outcomes.'

'…I think that's where there's a gap in funding and kind of a gap in conversation about[…]more like deeper interventions or longer term interventions…'

5.82 When reflecting on their needs for funding in the democratic engagement space, some grant recipient participants raised the suggestion of in future having a higher value of funding available as part of the DEG.

5.83 Additionally, wider external stakeholder and local authority participants felt that the DEG could support larger scale or more coordinated projects. For example, the sector needs to coordinate on what action is required regarding democratic engagement. Also, rather than funding individual local authorities or organisations, work could be done at a higher level (such a regional or Wales-wide level) for the democratic engagement issues that affect the population in general or where there are known engagement issues with certain groups across that higher level of geography. Some participants felt this would offer value for money, or help beneficiaries to connect the different levels of government.

'...it's less the role of the, the, the DEG now I think to be prescriptive, and more kind of for the sector, I think, to coordinate conversation about what is truly needed in terms of action[…]how do we learn from activity that the grant has funded on a kind of more longer term basis[…]and can that be done kind of cross third sector in Wales?'

'…I think what it's potentially missing is just thinking about how this can be joined with other, bigger, initiatives to try and kind of bring more players together and and kind of solve, try and kind of approach some of these issues at a more national level…' […] '…perhaps there's something there around funding, like bigger projects over a longer period of time[…]giving an organisation the chance to, to prove some of those outcomes, and that could be like a five year grant[…]follow that project over time[…]But that's slightly different to how the grant is set up at the moment.'

5.84 Aligning with this, when reflecting on their needs for funding in the democratic engagement space, there were also instances where grant recipient participants discussed taking a more structured or organised approach, either within Wales or across countries.

5.85 Regarding across countries, in some cases participants felt that a partnership approach to funding could be taken to address certain democratic engagement issues, so to achieve larger or longer-term impacts. A group of key issues to address across nations could be set, and work could be done simultaneously in different nations where organisations have a UK-wide reach.

'…I would say if the Welsh Government has objectives they're trying to achieve with the fund, then perhaps[…]enhance the fund around a set of objectives[…]if they could do it in partnership[…]you then[…]get more money, which means you can either buy bigger projects or fund more people[…]the Welsh Government doing something on their own definitely has merit, but perhaps trying to kind of build a bit of a funding coalition that makes repeated investments in projects over multiple years, would probably have a, have a bigger effect than just the kind of the one off...'

5.86 Regarding within-Wales, there were instances where grant recipient participants felt that to have a wider sector impact there is a need for a more organised approach across Wales. For example, taking an approach that was used for local democratic engagement, and introducing this in areas across Wales through the grant and setting up a network of local organisations involved. Another example was having one large project being delivered across Wales.

'…rather than giving pockets of different funding to different people, I think it would be good to set up, set up the project[…]on a wider scale, with more people delivering[…]get into the education settings and to the third sector organisations[…]get the same programme rolled out throughout Wales.'

5.87 Another point raised by grant recipients (particularly organisations which represent disabled people) was the need for funding to reach a wide range of organisations, even if they appear to be working with the same target group on the surface. This is because they will have different remits or work with sub-sections of target groups, or as the view is there is a lot of work still to do on supporting the target group to engage with democracy.

'…we've got a specific sort of group[…]deaf, BSL signers. So obviously the people who are actually deaf or deafblind is a far bigger number of people who might be sort of prioritised by other organisations[…]they might, you know, want to benefit from a similar sort of project […] [for] *different sort of cohorts of people that they might be concerned with…'*

5.88 Participants (wider external stakeholders and local authorities) were asked to reflect on whether there were any key engagement issues that the DEG should have addressed. There were instances where wider external stakeholder participants discussed that the DEG cannot address everything, and should be considered as addressing democratic engagement issues as part of the wider context. As part of this participants noted the changes that will result from the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024 (automatic voter registration pilots, electoral management board, voter information platform). Participants also noted that a greater commitment to democratic education within schools is required from Welsh Government, as small projects can only go so far to address knowledge, understanding and awareness. Additionally, participants felt the issues regarding media coverage in Wales (discussed at point 5.58) are not addressed via. the DEG, and so again it must sit alongside broader work. The need for DEG funding alongside funding for bigger initiatives was reported.

'...there's things like[...]democratic education in schools, citizens assemblies[...]But again like they would still need[...]government funding[…]charities wouldn't have a role there. So sort of like either way, I think you have to put money[,..]you need to do a combination of both. You need to kind of have those big ticket things and do this kind of more detailed work…'

5.89 Related to the idea of the wider context, there were instances where grant recipient participants reflected on wider elements of democratic engagement they wanted to see from Welsh Government. They discussed a need for Welsh Government to adopt ways of working to engage people in decision making processes. This includes from Wales-wide to local levels of democracy. Participants highlighted the importance of target groups being able to discuss their opinions on pieces of policy and for the public to input into decisions made.

'I really want Welsh Government to take this on board[…]as to how we can bring deliberative democracy into decision making in government[…]the public having an input into decisions made in the democratic process[…] [including] *citizens assemblies.' [...] '...we need something more coherent and less fragmented.'*

5.90 There were also instances where local authority participants felt the DEG should have sought to address specific democratic engagement issues or focus on a specific group, rather than taking a broad approach. This included youth engagement or aligning activities to the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan. The reason for this was that multiple workstreams or projects on a specific group or area of engagement would lead to a stronger collated understanding and actionable insights regarding democratic engagement that could be applied at a national level. (This is a similar angle to points 5.83 to 5.86 where participants discussed taking a more coordinated approach).

Areas that could be retained for future grant funding

5.91 In terms of reflections on areas that worked well with the DEG that could be retained for future funding programmes, wider external stakeholders noted the provision of a funding opportunity to support organisations to do work in between elections. Some participants also noted that the yearly commitment over three years was a positive. Relatedly there were instances where grant recipients raised a need to continue to have funding that is not just focused on voter registration but covers wider elements of democratic engagement.

5.92 Wider external stakeholder, local authority and grant recipient participants also felt the grant should retain the ability to provide smaller grants to smaller projects and those that are aimed at specific communities, and provide the opportunity for organisations to do these projects to see what works. Although at points 5.80 and 5.83 a need that emerged was funding larger scale or longer-term projects, participants raised there still needs to be an offer for smaller projects alongside this. Another related positive element raised by wider external stakeholders and grant recipients was the flexibility of the DEG, in that Welsh Government were not prescriptive in the activities to be carried out, allowing organisations who are experts with their target group to shape activity.

'...I think that's probably the value of the grant[…]particularly the smaller funding, even though of course it would have been great to maybe do something on a bigger scale over longer term, but when it's not your kind of prime activity of your organisation[…]it was actually felt kind of fairly risk free to go for this small pot of funding[…]it led to us developing something that we maybe hadn't thought about before.'

5.93 Finally, wider external stakeholder participants noted that it was positive that while the focus of DEG projects was on devolved elections, projects could discuss the UK picture. Grant recipient participants noted the need to continue to support organisations based in Wales.

Comparison of democratic engagement challenges and funding in other UK nations to Wales

5.94 It should be noted that comparison to other UK countries is limited by the small wider external stakeholder research sample and so these views may not represent the picture in other UK countries. The sample included two Wales based organisations, one Scotland based organisation, one England based organisation, and no organisations based in Northern Ireland.

5.95 Wider external stakeholder interview participants noted that the issues in Wales regarding low registration and turnout were similar across other parts of the UK. Related to this, participants in Scotland noted there is a particular focus on low registration, and accessibility of voting for disabled people. However, some participants noted that some issues were exacerbated in Wales. This included the different rules or eligibility for different elections and the piloting of automatic voter registration which were viewed as creating additional challenges for voters in Wales. Moreover, while participants (Wales based organisations) acknowledged that Scotland also has lower turnout in Scottish parliamentary elections compared to general elections, participants reported this is overall higher compared to Wales.

5.96 Participants also reported that the issue regarding lack of awareness, understanding and knowledge was similar across Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland compared to England, as in general devolution means there is an additional level of democracy to learn about. However, there were also instances where participants (Wales based organisations) noted differences in Wales compared to Scotland and Northern Ireland. This included the media coverage, which was noted as a "particular" or "unique" problem for Wales. Moreover, these participants raised their perception that where Scotland has strong democratic education in schools, and Northern Ireland have a strong civil society, they felt less work is required to improve the foundation of democratic engagement compared to Wales.

5.97 When comparing funding available in Wales to other UK countries, where wider external stakeholder participants were in a Wales based organisation, some felt that in England there was a much greater amount of charity or trust-based organisations providing funding than in Wales. Though not strictly democratic engagement, there were also instances where participants noted there is minimal funding in Wales for piloting automatic voter registration, compared to in England. Others felt that the lack of funding available for democratic engagement was a UK wide issue.

5.98 Where participants were in an England based organisation, they noted that there were disparities across areas of England regarding democratic engagement funding, such as Greater London Authority funding. Also, that there is a lack of UK central government funding.

5.99 Findings from wider external stakeholders in Scotland and Wales based organisations indicate a lack of funding in Scotland. Participants from a Scotland based organisation noted that most engagement work is done via. the Electoral Commission Scotland, rather than something the government is involved in directly. Some from a Wales based organisation discussed that work in Scotland tends to be ad-hoc or election focused.

5.100 Participants (Wales based organisations) discussed that in Northern Ireland there has been funding for democratic engagement through a civil society lens. This included a specific Northern Ireland funding stream from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, and funding to create a citizen's assembly.

5.101 In discussing how organisations continue democratic engagement in other parts of the UK without an equivalent to the DEG, responses are limited, and so findings should be interpreted considering this.

5.102 As noted at point 5.98, wider external stakeholder participants in an England based organisation highlighted lack of UK government funding. When comparing activity in England to Wales, wider external stakeholders from a Wales based organisation perceived that democratic engagement activity can continue without an equivalent grant as there are likely more organisations working in this space and more funding and funders. Those in an England based organisation highlighted this in mirror: that in Wales there is little funding besides the DEG, and due to the comparative size of the population a smaller pool of organisations with reach and expertise. In Scotland, it was reported the Electoral Commission Scotland receive funding from Scottish Parliament and do outreach activities such as promoting registration and voter education.

5.103 Regarding grant recipient interview participants whose organisations operate within and outside Wales, their level of democratic engagement in other parts of the UK varies. Where specifically a democracy organisation, participants reported that their organisation has core funding, so they can continue work in the democracy space. However, grant funding would need to be sought for more innovative work.

5.104 Where organisations are not specifically democracy organisations, some participants reported that the branches of their organisation in other parts of the UK are still involved in democratic engagement through advocacy. This involves getting the target group involved in advisory groups for bills. This relates to point 5.65, where external stakeholders noted that third-sector organisations often continue to conduct democratic engagement without funding where this relates to organisation's values. Finally, other participants reported that their organisation's branches in other parts of the UK have not been able to do democratic engagement work and would need to seek funding to do so.

Perceived impacts and unintended consequences for the wider sector

5.105 One wider sector impact that emerged in interviews from grant recipients, wider external stakeholders and local authorities was the DEG broadening sector capacity in Wales. There were various elements within this.

5.106 One element was that the DEG has helped to bring organisations into the sector in Wales. This included those that may not typically work on democratic engagement, such as those who work with underrepresented groups but are not specifically democracy focused. This also included where grant recipient participants reported their organisation had not specifically done a democratic engagement project in Wales before but had done democratic engagement in another UK country. However, other grant recipients noted their organisation was quite established in their previous involvement in democratic engagement in Wales.

5.107 Another element was that the DEG has supported and brought work into the sector in Wales. From both wider external stakeholder and grant recipient participants (notably, recipients with a multi-year award) it emerged that the DEG has facilitated sustained work within the sector, in-between election cycles, by providing some baseline support or '*a safety net'* in an area where there was little support previously. Some grant recipients, including those from organisations based outside of Wales, noted that whilst their organisations may have undertaken pieces of related work in Wales previously the grant funding enabled them to undertake a further/new project, or projects on a greater scale. In some cases, a more sustainable long-term presence in Wales was established, including where organisations reported undertaking another project in Wales because of working in Wales as part of the DEG.

'...the fact that there's funding available has meant[…]there's a few people who have that kind of cross UK, or[…]an England remit, who've come to work in Wales…' […] '...we've been funded by [funder name] to do some work[…]and we could work anywhere in the UK to do that and we're prioritising[…]FE colleges in Wales[…]as a single example of how like the, that has kind of brought us into wanting to do more work in Wales...'

5.108 Another element reported was the sector in Wales is becoming a space where more innovative work in the democratic engagement field can take place. However, participants felt the changes in approaches to engagement and innovation in the sector may be a general sector shift, and not wholly attributable to the DEG.

5.109 Grant recipients and wider external stakeholders also reported a wider sector impact was that the DEG has facilitated collaboration, information sharing and relationship building across the sector in Wales. There were instances where participants compared this to England and felt while there is a network in England, the network in Wales is less *'muddled'*.

5.110 On the topic of facilitating partnerships and information sharing, for wider external stakeholders specifically, participants noted how new/novel resources produced by DEG funded projects were available to the sector. Some wider external stakeholders also noted an outcome for their organisation is the DEG has raised their profile and provided a basis or common ground for engagement with organisations which have been funded by the DEG. There were cases where wider external stakeholder organisations reported working with recipients as part of DEG funded projects. Where less involved, this was interacting with recipients through network meetings (whether the DEP or another network), keeping abreast of what the projects are doing. Where more involved, this included providing a letter of support for applicants, or providing training, resources and advice for the recipients.

'…we provide a lot of resources[…]I think it's almost like brought us an audience[…]knowing that they [charities and organisations] *are receiving kind of funding to do it[…]we feel more confident about working with them[…]and we can also offer them[…]that advisory role[…]So I guess it's[…]increased our reach to different organisations and and kind of improved the impact that that we can* [have]*…'*

5.111 However, in some cases, particularly for larger recipient projects, the wider external stakeholders had an existing relationship with the recipients. Wider external stakeholders noted they would work with the recipient regardless of the DEG as they are in the sector, though it was acknowledged that the funding enabled recipients to conduct more work, which the external stakeholders could support.

5.112 There were also wider external stakeholders which noted that it is positive for their organisation that there is another funding source, as all organisations in the sector are working towards the same goals. Therefore, regardless of the funding source, the activity of the grant recipients supports their organisation or the sector in reaching the goals.

5.113 Another wider sector impact reported by grant recipient participants was that the DEG facilitated improved sector understanding regarding the target groups, such as the barriers they face and successful approaches in getting target groups involved. There were however instances where grant recipient participants raised that impact on the wider sector was limited by certain factors, one of which was a lack of sharing of outcomes across recipients. This lack of wider sharing and sharing of outcomes was also discussed at point 4.97, raised by wider external stakeholders.

'…I haven't seen any other outcomes from any other third sector organisations[…]which is a bit of a shame…'.

5.114 Some grant recipients (short-term projects) reported that their specific project did not have a wider impact. In some cases, they felt impact on the wider sector would be limited unless a more structured approach across Wales was taken (discussed at point 5.86).

5.115 Finally, grant recipients and wider external stakeholders reported that the DEG has had a wider sector impact in terms of the grant, or the project-specific activity, influencing future work in the sector both within and outside of Wales. Notably, this is an unintended impact.

5.116 In terms of the grant more broadly, wider external stakeholder participants noted that Scottish Government have an electoral reform bill going through Scottish Parliament at the time of this research (Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bil, Scottish Parliament). This contains a proposal to introduce a grant funding scheme to improve democratic engagement. With the Scotland based organisation, reasons why Scottish Government decided to address democratic engagement challenges through a grant were discussed. It was noted that Scottish Government included scope for a grant like the DEG as a means to address registration and accessibility issues and in light of Welsh Government's scheme. Participants reported they *"…have definitely been influenced by what Welsh Government have done…",* including consulting with Welsh Government regarding

the design of the DEG. Moreover, participants noted that while Scottish Government works in partnership with larger organisations which represent disabled people around the accessibility of elections, there is less engagement with smaller or local organisations. A grant scheme may also support work with these organisations and support reach to specific communities.

5.117 In terms of specific DEG project activity, grant recipient participants noted cases where other organisations were looking to do a similar project to their DEG funded project. In some cases, this was other organisations at a more local level within Wales. In other cases where the recipient organisation operated across the UK, this was in other countries outside of Wales.

'…we've had chats with the Scottish Government who wants to do a similar thing and the UK Electoral Commission might want to do something. So it's kind of, it has helped us, make the case for this to happen permanently...' […] '...adding more information online is the trend and[…]I think we've probably kind of, you know, blazed that trail in this aspect of things that others could probably replicate or we could replicate in future…'

'...we've had some[…]visitors to the assemblies who have been really impressed and wanted that to take them back to their own town[...]I think it is inspiration…'

5.118 For other grant recipients whose organisations operate both within and outside of Wales, there were instances where organisations reported they had developed a more bespoke approach when doing work across UK countries as a result of their experience of delivering the grant in Wales. This is because it developed their understanding that audiences across the UK have different needs. In some cases, where participants were in a Wales based arm of a UK wide organisation, they noted they were discussing how to run a similar project with an arm of the organisation from another UK country.

6. Findings - aim 3: Improving monitoring and evaluation.

6.1 This section sets out to answer the following research questions: How is the DEG currently monitored? Where monitoring and evaluation have not occurred, what were the reasons for this? How can monitoring and evaluation of the DEG be improved and potentially streamlined across projects in the future?

6.2 The terms of the DEG award letters stipulated that all grant recipients had to meet the following monitoring and evaluation requirements:

- Submit quarterly project progress reports (within the grant claims forms)
- Attend monitoring meetings as required by Welsh Government's Grant Manager
- Attend Welsh Democratic Engagement Partnership (DEP) meetings[2]
- Submit an end of grant evaluation report

6.3 Regarding the end of evaluation reports, the expectation was different for small (projects valued at £1,000 or less) and large grants (projects valued at more than £1,000). For small projects, the application guidance stated that Welsh Government required 'feedback covering the pilot including how success has been measured'. For large projects, the application guidance stated Welsh Government required an 'evaluation of activities, successes and barriers faced at the end of their grant period'.

6.4 In addition to these requirements for small and large projects, Welsh Government set out targets in the grant award letter that each recipient was expected to deliver by the end of their project. These targets were individual to each grant recipient. The grant award letter also included details of the evidence which Welsh Government required grant recipients to provide to demonstrate that targets had been achieved. The targets and evidence required are broadly based on the question from the application form: 'What are your expected outcomes and how would you measure success against these? (Max word count 100)'. This question is the same for small and large grant applications.

6.5 While point 6.3 suggests that the reporting expectations were consistent across small and large grants, further discussion of the content of the grant award letter is

[2] The grant award letter stipulated that a project manager – or another agreed person from the grant recipient's organisation – should attend all meetings with Welsh Government.

at point 6.21 to 6.23, which highlights that reporting requirements were inconsistent for both grant sizes. This analysis reveals that Welsh Government set out different evaluation requirements for equivalent types of grant. The result was that not all small grants were required to provide less information than large grants. There were cases where some small grants were required to provide more detailed evaluation-related information than some large grants.

6.6 At the time of writing, one of the 12 projects which closed in the 2023/24 financial year (April 2023 to March 2024) had not submitted their end of grant report, which meant 11 evaluation reports were available for desk-research. Reasons included incomplete project delivery.

Methods for monitoring progress

6.7 Desk research and interview analysis suggests that grant recipients' approach to progress monitoring varied in its quality and robustness across both small and large grants.

6.8 Grant recipient interview participants were asked to reflect on the processes in place for recording project progress. There were instances where participants reported that they had a bespoke project management system, spreadsheet, or other internal monitoring system to record information relating to events, end beneficiaries, and training.

'…we've got like a project spreadsheet[…]list of all the[…]contacts[…]any updates on like how far they've got and what they're going to be doing between now and the next update, so that at all times we had essentially a live tracker…'

6.9 In contrast to these systematic approaches to monitoring, some participants reported that they relied on more informal methods to monitor progress. These informal mechanisms for monitoring progress included post-event reports, a diary or calendar, and the quarterly grant claims forms:

'...just making notes of sort of what happened and things so that I was able to give a report at the end. You know about what happened and what was good and what wasn't and things. So yeah, quite informal really...'

6.10 There were also instances where participants did not reflect on monitoring progress. They discussed instead how they measured outcomes and impacts, or gathered

feedback from end-beneficiaries, rather than the processes they used to oversee project progress.

6.11 Grant recipients' varied approaches to monitoring progress were also evident when it came to the quarterly progress updates – again varying across both small and large grants. Of the 16 grant recipients whose progress reports were analysed as part of the desk research, 10 grant recipients provided key metrics. This included information pertaining to partner organisations, end beneficiaries (such as participant numbers) and outputs (such as event and training details including dates, location, content covered, and some basic analytics relating to digital resources). In some of these cases, however, the progress updates were slightly repetitive, and it was not clear what had been delivered that was new or in addition since the previous quarter. The remaining six grant recipients provided progress updates that were largely brief and lacking detail. These updates described what the grant recipient had done to date and in some instances what future activities were planned. However, no key metrics or detailed information relating to end beneficiaries, outputs, or resources were included. In some quarterly updates (but not others) recipients noted they instead shared their update verbally with the policy team.

6.12 Organisations' varied approach to progress monitoring suggests that not all grant recipients were experienced with standard project management tools. However, it is not possible to draw a firm conclusion based on the available research data, particularly in the case of the interview analysis where participants interpreted the question about progress monitoring differently (point 6.10).

Methods for evaluating outcomes and impact

6.13 Grant recipients' approach to evaluating their project's impact on democratic engagement also varied. During interviews recipients were asked to reflect on the processes in place to evaluate project impact regarding democratic engagement. Some participants reported formal methods which included the collection of timed feedback from beneficiaries, such as collecting feedback after, or both before and after, participating in project-related activity. This feedback was used to assess whether beneficiaries' knowledge and understanding had improved, what skills were gained, levels of motivation, levels of confidence, and whether resources helped them to participate in democracy.

'…ask them to complete a baseline, they complete an evaluation after they were trained, and then they complete an evaluation once they've[…]finished their[…]initial run on the programme. So we can see[…]if their understanding and knowledge has progressed...'

6.14 Grant recipient participants also reported that metrics were collected to evaluate impact. Relevant metrics included the numbers of end beneficiaries who registered to vote following their participating in a project-related activity. Methods for capturing voter registrations varied in robustness. There were instances where organisations directly supported beneficiaries to register and recorded these numbers. Other methods used are a proxy that may indicate registration but do not confirm this. This included tracking the numbers who visited the registration webpage via. project specific web-analytics campaigns and recording how many said they would go on to register.

6.15 There were instances where organisations did not appear to have a system in place to evaluate impacts regarding democratic engagement. In these cases, grant recipient participants discussed the evaluation of the activities they conducted, rather than evaluation of impact. These participants noted they collected feedback from end-beneficiaries, or those who work with end-beneficiaries, after events about the event itself. This included the content, what people were interested in, what did and did not work, and how people felt about it. In some cases, this feedback was captured through formal methods, including surveys, forms, and interviews. Some grant recipients also utilised informal methods to capture this feedback, including post-activity discussions with end beneficiaries.

6.16 In some cases, whether using formal or informal methods, participants noted they then used this feedback to shape the content or operational elements of future sessions.

'...after every session that I deliver, the young people fill in a feedback form, and also the professionals that support in on the day[…] [and] *when we did the hustings, we did the interviews afterwards[…]I evaluate as well after the session, what works well, what doesn't, how things can be changed[…]So it's just adapting...'*

'...We did think about doing feedback forms, but when it was quite small numbers coming, we just thought, "oh, we're just going to chat to them", you know[…]Each time we sort of had a chat about "What do you think? Could we do something different? Was this good? What did you like?"...'

6.17 Interview analysis is corroborated by the desk research. As noted at point 6.4, applicants were asked to specify outcomes and measures. Recipients approached this requirement differently.

6.18 Some recipients stated their intended outcomes in their application, but did not include how they would measure these. These outcomes were either solely in the frame of what they would deliver as part of the project (such as hold a certain number of sessions) or outcomes were a mixture of what they would deliver as part of the project and what would be the outcome for the beneficiaries/target groups from the project (for example, as a result of the project, a certain number of people register, or a certain number of people have improved understanding).

6.19 Other recipients included both their intended outcomes and how they would measure these in their applications. The outcomes varied in framing in different combinations across recipients, which included the outcomes for beneficiaries from the project, learnings for their organisation, or about what would be delivered as part of the project. Measures either solely related to outcomes about beneficiaries or organisational learnings, or covered these and also included measures related to delivery. Sometimes the measures included were vague, such as measures to use 'indicators' or 'evaluations', but it was not defined what these were.

6.20 There were also instances where intended outcomes did not relate to the measures stated, for example where outcomes were framed as what would be delivered as part of the project, but the stated measures were about beneficiaries.

6.21 The way in which the application form content was applied by Welsh Government to the target and evidence requirements in the award letters also varied.

6.22 In some cases, both ‘outcomes’ and ‘measures’ from the application form were in the ‘targets’ section of the award letter. The ‘evidence required’ section of the award letter was a general statement about report content (such as proposed outcomes, actual output and findings; or a report about barriers and successes). In other cases, ‘outcomes’ made up the ‘targets’ section, and ‘measures’ made up the ‘evidence required’ section.

6.23 Where application ‘measures’ were not related to the proposed ‘outcomes’, or where small projects did not provide ‘measures’ at application, in some cases Welsh Government set out ‘measures’ and put these in the ‘evidence required’ section of the award letter. These measures were delivery focused – such as attendance records, agendas and discussion content, resources created, and beneficiary feedback about the delivered activities. However, for large projects where ‘measures’ were not provided at application, these were not set out, and the ‘evidence required’ section was a general statement.

6.24 Overall, the variation at application indicates that there is not a clear definition of ‘outcome’: sometimes outcomes concern what projects are delivering and sometimes to what change this leads to for those taking part, or what the recipient will learn. Variation at application also indicates different levels of recipient understanding in setting appropriate measures for outcomes. These factors may have fed into the variation in Welsh Government’s subsequent adoption of these outcomes and measures as targets and evidence requirements in the grant award letters. As a culmination of these challenges, the target and evidence requirements set out in the award letter did not always include the anticipated democratic engagement outcomes for end-beneficiaries.

6.25 Related issues were raised in interviews with wider external stakeholders. As noted at point 4.97, participants discussed issues with the sharing of outcomes from projects. Participants raised the need to support organisations with how to measure and evaluate impact as they reported that the focus is often on what was delivered and not the impact this had on democratic engagement. Participants noted that evaluating impact can be a challenge, particularly for concepts such as knowledge and understanding, and that third sector organisations may not have experience of evaluation. The difficulties associated with evaluating democratic engagement

projects can create difficulties for funding recipients to demonstrate that they met requirements, and difficulties for funders to demonstrate scheme impact.

'…The third sector in Wales, especially in this space[…]lots of conversations of you know, how effective was your project and they'd be like, "well, we had X number of Twitter impressions that day." and I'm like, "is that really trying to assess how effective your project is?" Like how many of those impressions then went on to register. Like can we kind of quantify this stuff a little bit more?'

'…can picture people doing a lot of talking about what they're doing, but that's not the same necessarily as sort of talking about the impact. You know, that's almost just being like, you know, we did this session, we did this session…' [...] '...everyone focuses on the delivery, and I think we often lose that like[…]how do we prove this impact so. Yeah, I think that that is just a challenging thing, but, it'd be nice to see a bit more of it I think so, yeah.'

6.26 There were also difficulties noted with evaluating longer-term impact. At the logic model impact 'I1: People (particularly in the target groups) are engaged, motivated, and empowered to take part in democracy, with the tools to make their voice heard and impact positively on the Wales around them', an assumption is that outcomes for end-beneficiaries are sustained after the beneficiary stops taking part (point 3.41). Recipient interview participants reflected on collecting information on democratic engagement impacts beyond the immediate end of the project. Participants acknowledged the importance of evaluating long-term impacts. For example, participants reported that they would 'love to know' whether the target beneficiaries were applying the knowledge they had gained through the project in a few years' time. However, the overall view among participants appeared to be that collecting information relating to the long-term impact of their respective projects was challenging because of resource and time constraints. This point was raised by participants from short term, single year and multi-year projects.

Assessment of end of grant reports

6.27 As part of the DEG there was not a specific evaluation report template or structure for recipients to complete or follow.

6.28 When assessing whether recipients met their target and evidence requirements, it is important to keep in mind that these requirements were inconsistent for equivalent grant types (see points 6.21 to 6.24). One result was that some small grants were required to provide more detailed evaluation-related information than some large

grants. Inevitably, where a grant recipient has less specific target and evidence requirements, it should be easier for the recipient to provide the requisite information to demonstrate how they have met these requirements.

Small grants/projects

6.29 The reports for the six small projects (value of around £1,000) ranged in length from one page to eight pages. Three of the reports contained headings, typically outlining the background to their project, what they did, and lessons learnt. Of the other three reports, one only had headings towards the end and two had no headings. These reports broadly followed introducing the project and then what was done, as well as challenges or learnings. However, what was done was often vague, and in one case the challenges faced were also hard to interpret. There was also an instance where the DEG project was part of an existing ongoing project, it was not clear what pertained to DEG funded elements and what pertained to the broader project.

6.30 The methods and metrics expected of the six small projects (based on their grant award letter) were:

- Discussions or interviews with beneficiaries. This was to gather feedback either regarding their gaps in understanding of democracy and the barriers they face, how they found taking part (about the project/event), or outcomes/changes (such as changes in knowledge)
- Management information, including dates of sessions, content of sessions, attendee numbers, resources distributed, decisions made and further actions, and which organisations were involved

6.31 In three of the six small grant reports (the same ones that had headings), it was clear that the required methods and metrics had been used and reported (both feedback from beneficiaries and management information). Overall, these three small project reports appear to meet or mostly meet the targets and evidence requirements in their award letter: they are missing no elements or one element. Two of these are largely an account of the barriers faced by the target group when participating in democracy and gaps in understanding, and barriers in delivering the project. One is largely an account of feedback from participants about how they found taking part (about the event) and enablers and barriers to delivery. Where outcomes for beneficiaries are reported (two of the reports) these are narrative based or anecdotal – such as stating improvements in knowledge or engagement without substantiating this. Or, evidence has been collected but outcomes must be inferred, such as for those that had minimal prior knowledge, learning about a topic through project activities has improved participants' understanding.

6.32 In the other three reports, some of the expected methods were not reported on, thereby indicating these methods were not used. In one case, there appeared to be no attempt to incorporate any of the expected methods or metrics into the report (both feedback from beneficiaries about taking part in the project and management information). In the two other cases, the methods or metrics were inconsistently provided - only some management information was provided, and there was no feedback from beneficiaries. It cannot be said that these three reports met the targets and evidence requirements in their award letter as multiple elements of information are missing. Two of the reports are largely an account of barriers encountered during the delivery of the project and lessons learnt or changes to

delivery to make in future. One of these reports touched on outcomes for beneficiaries, but this was anecdotal.

6.33 Four of the six reports were largely narrative based, making broad or sweeping statements without clarity of evidence. This included one which met the target and evidence requirements – likely as these requirements were more general - and the three which did not.

Large grants/projects

6.34 The reports for the five large projects ranged from two pages to 44 pages. Three of the reports contained headings and had a clear structure, outlining the background to their project and what they aimed to achieve, a detailed description of what they specifically did, and reflected on learnings and proposed next steps.

6.35 Of the other two reports, one also had headings and provided a detailed description of what they specifically did. However, in the case of this report, as the DEG project was part of an existing ongoing project, it was sometimes unclear whether a described activity was delivered with DEG funding. Moreover, while the report closed with reflections on performance against aims, learnings and recommendations of next steps, this was for the programme as a whole and not specifically related to DEG activity. The other report was brief. While reflection on challenges was included, this report did not include the background and aims, the description of what they specifically did was vague, and there was minimal reflection on next steps.

6.36 The methods and metrics expected of the five large projects (based on their grant award letter) were:

- Surveys, discussions, interviews or creating media (videos, podcasts) with beneficiaries. This was to gather feedback either regarding their gaps in understanding of democracy and the barriers they face, how they found taking part (about the project/event), or outcomes/changes (such as changes in knowledge)
- Management information, including attendee numbers, project delivery indicators (undefined), creation and provision of resources/information (either counts of distribution, or evidence that the resources were created)
- Other metrics: Unique views of resources, voter registration data

6.37 Whether these methods or metrics were provided in reports was mixed. There were two reports where it was clear that the methods and metrics expected had been used and reported, but to different extents. In one case, only one element of management information was expected, and this requirement was met. In the other case, all of feedback from beneficiaries, management information and other metrics were expected. The management information was provided. The feedback from beneficiaries about barriers and taking part was provided but appeared to only use one of the proposed methods (feedback at sessions but not surveys). Other metrics were not provided but this was acknowledged, barriers to collection explained, and a proxy provided.

6.38 These two large grant reports appear to meet or mostly meet the targets and evidence requirements in their award letter: they are missing no elements or minimal elements. One of these is largely an account of the barriers faced by the target group when participating in democracy and gaps in understanding. It also touched on the outcomes for beneficiaries regarding democratic engagement (such as what changed for them as a result of taking part or receiving information), and used illustrative quotes from participants. However, this feedback was sporadically presented and did not systematically represent all the beneficiaries who took part.

6.39 There were two reports with large gaps in methods and metrics. In one case there was no indication of their methods and metrics. Instead, alternative, less robust metrics were provided (social media views provided in place of voter registration data). In the other case, some voter registration data was provided, though the methods to measure this were not robust and did not enable the metrics to be provided in the format as stated in the award letter. There was a lack of information pertaining to management information (distribution of information) and no information regarding feedback from beneficiaries (regarding outcomes and changes in democratic knowledge from taking part).

6.40 Finally, in one report it appears the methods and metrics expected were broadly used and reported but this is unclear in places. Regarding management information, as project delivery indicators were undefined in the award letter it is not possible to comment on whether these were provided. The feedback from beneficiaries was provided (creating media, discussions and surveys), related to both how they found taking part, barriers they face in democratic engagement and outcomes/changes relating to democratic engagement. Though again, this was sporadic for different sessions/events rather than collated systematically to draw overall conclusions for the project.

6.41 For these three reports it cannot be said that they met the targets and evidence requirements in their award letter as multiple elements of information are missing.

6.42 Though the five large reports are generally (though not always) more comprehensive and clearer to follow than the small grants, they mostly suffer from reporting by individual activities, rather than tying together these experiences to reflect on the collective outcomes from the grant.

6.43 There were instances where participants mentioned in interviews that they had feedback relating to outcomes for democratic engagement for beneficiaries that took part. Desk research shows this was not included in their reports. The inclusion of this feedback would not necessarily be expected as it was not stipulated in their award letter. However, this information would have been useful to include to help the assessment of outcomes and impacts of the grant. In some cases, even if it had been a requirement in the award letter, this information would not have been included in the report due to the lack of alignment between the grant period and the timing of their project.

'...on our websites, we already collect feedback from people where we asked them[…]"did you find what you're looking for?" And then ask them an open ended question, to say, like, "can you tell us anything more about that?" And we were able to take a cut of that feedback[…] [to] *analyse if the[…]information kind of helped people vote or like with any feedback on that[…]were only able to cut the feedback after the election, and that was after the grant period. So it wasn't sort of tracking as we went...'*

'…the young people to get feedback from them verbally or in written[…]an estimate, an approximate count of like the amount of people that they'd spoken to, that had taken action…' […] '…also feedback from the young people about how they found the project and what they got from it...' [...] '...like whether they felt they had improved their political knowledge, if they felt that they'd gained skills, and if they felt more motivated to be active citizens in the future…'

6.44 Overall, then, there were some common issues with the end of project reports which negatively affected their utility as a monitoring and evaluation tool. These issues included a reliance on anecdotal, impressionistic, and proxy evidence; inconsistent and insufficient information and metrics pertaining to outputs and outcomes; and a focus on projects' barriers and enablers and successes and failures to the exclusion of data and analysis that evaluated outcomes for those who took part.

6.45 Some grant recipients' inexperience with evaluation reports may have contributed to the observed inconsistencies and gaps in reporting.

6.46 Another contributing factor may have been the differing levels of guidance grant recipients reported receiving from Welsh Government. Some participants reported receiving guidance from the policy team about how to structure their report:

'...[they] gave [a] *good[…]idea of what to say[…] [They] gave quite good guidelines.'*

6.47 Other grant recipient participants, however, reported they did not receive a framework to fill out or any guidance. Where no guidance or framework was recalled, some participants were happy to not have a structure. Some participants also commented positively on the requirements for report, noting that they were sufficiently flexible that the report could be completed irrespective of what type of activities the grant recipient had undertaken. Others, however, felt that more guidance or structure could have been provided. There were instances where participants reported that they were feeling “overwhelmed” as this would be the first attempt at writing an evaluation report. This view was echoed by more experienced participants, who questioned whether grant recipients without experience of writing end of grant reports would understand what was required owing to the lack of structure or guidance from Welsh Government.

'... don't think there was a kind of framework that we had to fill out. I think we just kind of wrote a document that talked about it. I think it probably could have benefited from a little bit more structure...’

6.48 There were also instances where participants reported that they received no feedback following the submission of the report, and, as a result, they were a little unsure as to whether they had completed it correctly or not.

6.49 Moreover, participants from multi-year projects had not reached the end of their projects and, as such, had not yet completed the report. These participants noted they were unsure of the expected format or raised they had not received a template. In some cases, participants were confident in reporting against their delivery plan, but felt greater guidance concerning the format and template for the end of project report would be useful to have at project outset, to ensure they cover any specific elements Welsh Government wish to capture.

'...Sometimes that [the report template] *is useful to receive at the[…]outset of the project, just so that it can be sort of a living document, and[…]if there are particular questions or[…] particular data sets or evidence that the funder is looking to capture[…]having[…]that from the outset can[…]be useful...’*

Recipient experiences of evaluation processes

6.50 Despite the challenges discussed with evaluation reports, grant recipient participants acknowledged the importance of completing an end of grant report,

primarily because they accepted the need to inform funders about the activities and corresponding outcomes which had been realised through a funded project.

'...it's really important[…]to be able to let[…]the grant provider know what we've done with the money...'

6.51 Grant recipient participants also reported that they welcomed the requirement to submit an end of grant report because it was an opportunity to reflect on a project's failures, successes, and lessons for future activities relating to democratic engagement.

'...Obviously important for, for any funder to, to know the impact of the work, but it's important for us as an organisation to, for us to have that understanding and obviously it's something we[…]do [on] *an ongoing basis. But to see what's working, what needs to change. For us to have that ongoing[…]learning and reflection. So yeah, I think it's[…]it's really, really important.'*

6.52 Participants' emphasis on lessons learnt was reflected in the content and focus of the end of project reports. Common learnings identified by grant recipients in their end of project reports included enhanced understanding of the needs and interests of the target beneficiaries, as well as an improved understanding of the barriers and enablers to the delivery of events and activities. Some end of project reports also stated that the grant recipient was in the process of applying these learnings to future activities, including the planning of events and the development of digital resources.

6.53 In addition to commenting positively on the opportunity to reflect on a project's successes and failures, grant recipient participants also reported that providing an evaluation report at the end of the funding period was 'proportionate' or 'sensible'. When asked how the DEG monitoring and evaluation requirements compared with other sources of grant funding their organisations had received, participants also expressed the view that the monitoring and evaluation requirements for the DEG compared favourably with other funding schemes, which in comparison were overly structured, requiring general metrics or questions unrelated to the specific project.

6.54 Grant recipient participants noted that that they encountered certain barriers when it came to collecting data and feedback for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Some organisations reported that it could be difficult to obtain feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders, including those who work with beneficiaries. Cited

barriers included: stakeholder and beneficiary capacity, reluctance to give negative feedback, and longstanding indifference about feedback and evaluation due to barriers faced by the target group. In some instances, participants noted that the barriers they encountered created an administrative burden as they needed to chase for feedback.

'…[beneficiaries are] *all over the show in terms of like geographic location, in terms of like where they're at in the project timeline[…]requires a lot of like tracking, I guess. And just chasing them, they can go for ages without coming back to you, and then all of a sudden they resurface and like "oh I was just in exams", or "I was just XYZ"…'*

6.55 Another challenge to collecting information for the evaluation raised was time. Some participants felt they did not have enough time available to collect feedback, notably for short term projects. Other participants were collecting feedback regarding resources developed for the PCC election. Feedback was only available after this election, and so after the grant period.

6.56 Some grant recipient participants explained how they adopted methods designed to overcome these barriers. For example, approaches to overcome reluctance to give negative feedback included amending feedback questions so that the questions focused on specific elements of the activity, rather than general questions:

'… it's very hard for them [stakeholders who work with the target beneficiaries] *to say, "Oh, I didn't really like talking to these young people", so they're often going to go quite positive. So we really tried to get information […]* [by asking] *"is this, this method of talking to young people - was this successful? Did you feel the young people, compared to other times you've spoken to young people, did you feel they were perhaps more prepared?"...'*

6.57 Approaches adopted in response to capacity issues included asking intermediaries, who had more regular contact with the target groups, to prompt the beneficiaries to return feedback to the grant recipient organisations. However, burden on the intermediaries also had to be considered. Approaches adopted to overcome some beneficiaries' ambivalence involved using creative methods. This included encouraging beneficiaries to record feedback via video. However, while this method was reported as successful in some instances, some beneficiaries were 'uncomfortable' giving video feedback.

6.58 Some grant participants expressed the view that they did not face any barriers or challenges regarding monitoring and evaluation. In some cases, they noted

enablers to collecting information for evaluation purposes. These enablers included incentivising, collecting feedback immediately after the session ends rather than sending a feedback form at a later date, keeping the level of feedback appropriate to the target group, and using flexible or person-centred approaches tailored to the activity and target group.

'...it's simple, keep the feedback really simple and young person friendly, you know.'

6.59 In some instances where flexible approaches were adopted, participants noted using both quantitative and qualitative methods and felt that because the grant was not solely focused on turnout and registration, this supported the grant recipient organisation to collect information that provides a more comprehensive picture of the project's impacts:

'...looking at democratic engagement as a whole, it hasn't purely been the numbers of, of who's registered, and you know, who's voted or things like that. You know, we've been able to, to look at the bigger picture and kind of think about[…]people understanding their rights. Do they feel they have increased voice and confidence? Do they feel they've got increased[…]access to the tools[…]to take part in democracy and to shape things in their community?...'

6.60 Participants were asked whether they would make any changes to the DEG's monitoring and evaluation requirements. In some instances, participants felt there were no changes to make to the monitoring and evaluation process of the grant. Where participants did discuss potential changes, suggestions centred on the theme of communication.

6.61 The general view among participants was that more feedback from Welsh Government was required on whether the reporting was in line with expectations.

'...So we submitted our grant [report] *a few weeks back[…]and I haven't heard anything back from the team[…]just making sure that there's a kind of. A nice wrap up process, because it feels[…]* [like it is] *sort of hanging at the moment…'*

6.62 Additionally, as discussed at point 4.42, there were instances where participants raised that their reporting deadline changed with short notice.

6.63 There were also instances where those responsible for delivering a multi-year project reported that they would find a yearly meeting with the Welsh Government policy team useful. They felt a longer meeting would enable them to provide a more detailed update than is possible with the DEP meetings. Moreover, a one-to-one update meeting with the Welsh Government would also enable grant recipients to raise project-specific questions and issues which might not be appropriate to discuss in the DEP meetings where all grant recipients are present.

Monitoring and evaluation in the sector

6.64 Wider external stakeholder participants (Wales based organisations) discussed the metrics and tools used to measure democratic engagement. Participants cited the over-reliance on metrics such as voter registration and turnout as a potential issue. The potential benefits of such metrics were accepted by external stakeholder participants. This included that such metrics are easily measured, they are easier to understand than other more nebulous concepts such as knowledge, understanding, and confidence, and there are few alternative quantitative metrics. However, participants also reported that metrics such as voter registration and turnout are not unproblematic concepts. For example, there are many factors which affect voter turnout so it can be hard to draw conclusions from this. Participants also pointed to concerns regarding the gaps in the national registrations data in Wales, noting that while there is registration data for young people, there is no equivalent data for foreign nationals. Similar concerns were also raised regarding gaps in demographics and the 'veracity' of national registration data in Scotland. Finally, participants also pointed out that if the change is made to move to automatic voter registration, then registration as a metric will be lost.

6.65 To overcome the difficulty of evaluating a 'nebulous' concept such as democratic engagement, where there are few suitable metrics, external stakeholder participants suggested that a sector-wide outcomes framework should be developed. This framework should contain outcome metrics for different facets of democratic engagement, and guidance on how to measure these and demonstrate the extent to which they have been achieved. This consistency would help organisations who receive funding to demonstrate impact. Participants expressed view that this framework should be agreed in collaboration by lead organisations in the sector, including Welsh Government.

6.66 While this is a suggestion for improving monitoring and evaluation across the sector, this could also be considered as something to apply within the DEG considering the challenges discussed within this section.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The DEG was launched in January 2023, with total funding of £900,000 to March 2025. The grant is for third sector, not for profit organisations and local authorities to fund innovative projects to engage under-represented groups, newly enfranchised groups (including 16 to 17 year olds and qualifying foreign nationals), and disabled people in democracy. In funding projects of this kind, the DEG aims to:

- Enable organisations to encourage and support people in their stakeholder communities to participate in democracy.
- Help funded organisations ensure as many people as possible are engaged, motivated and empowered to take part in democracy, giving them the tools to make their voice heard and impact positively on the Wales around them.
- Support organisations to engage with the population over a sustained period.

7.2 The aims of this evaluation are to:

- Review the design and delivery of the current grant funding scheme, including the Democratic Engagement Partnership element.
- Understand the perceived impact of the grant funding scheme. Including the Democratic Engagement Partnership element and the wider context.
- Understand how monitoring and evaluation can be improved.

7.3 Alongside these aims, the remit of the evaluation included producing a logic model for the DEG (Figure 1). Overall, these aims were satisfied through desk research, a logic model workshop, and a series of interviews with grant recipients, local authorities and wider external stakeholders. The findings for each research aim and the relevant research questions are detailed within their own section of this report (Sections 4, 5 and 6). The following conclusions summarise the most pertinent findings from across these aims.

Review of the design and delivery of the current grant funding scheme

Reach of the grant and delivery of projects

7.4 In the 2022/23 (January to March 2023) and 2023/24 (April 2023 to March 2024) financial years, a total of 16 organisations received grant funding.

7.5 Overall, the findings regarding the sector of the lead applicant, how organisations became aware of the grant, and the mix of previous experience of democracy projects in Wales suggest the intention of the DEG (as noted in the logic model) to reach new organisations has been achieved to an extent. However, areas for future consideration include further broadening the promotion of the grant to continue to reach a range of organisations, as well as greater clarity of the availability of multi-year awards for those without a direct or existing relationship with the Elections policy team. Also, as the grant is aimed at local authorities (point 7.1), the findings suggest reach and involvement across the 22 local authorities in Wales could be improved.

7.6 The grant guidance also stated funding intended to reach across Wales and within applications there was a mix across the 16 funded projects of proposed local, regional and national reaches. ‘Regional’ ranged from one or multiple local authority areas. Notably, North Wales was not represented at the regional level in applications. Moreover, when considering three completed projects which aimed for a national reach, there was an instance where North Wales was not part of the project outputs. Considering the clarity of reporting, it was either clear which regions were reached, or evidence of reach across Wales was not provided. Overall, findings suggest that focused activity at the regional level in North Wales is perhaps a gap and in future there should be consideration of the reach of the grant to this region. Findings also suggest there is a need for greater information to be provided by recipients on the geographic reach and attendance for their project outputs. There may also be benefit in defining what is meant by ‘Regional’ compared to ‘Local’ to ensure consistent use across applications and so application assessment.

7.7 Overall, findings suggest that for the 12 completed projects at the time of writing (short-term or single year) the projects delivered what they intended to with the grant funding. However, this varied. Some projects overall delivered what they set out to but with some gaps in elements delivered. Other projects did not necessarily deliver what was intended with greater elements missing, such as the production or

the dissemination of resources, or not reaching the delivery stage for participatory events. Conversely, other projects delivered additional outputs such as videos, mock elections or providing the support needed to make a change in the beneficiaries' community.

7.8 The DEG is primarily for projects to engage under-represented groups, newly enfranchised groups (16 and 17 year olds and qualifying foreign nationals) and disabled people. Overall, desk research findings show that all intended groups were covered within the target groups of the 16 recipients at application. However, some consideration could be given as to the utility of the term ‘under-represented’ and what this means in the context of democratic engagement, to help organisations identify how the funding may relate to groups they work with. Additionally, to consider how to support an increased number of projects focusing on the target groups other than young people.

7.9 Overall, findings from the desk research and interviews suggest the target groups stated in applications were reached (projects a year or less) or are being reached so far (multi-year projects), albeit to a varying extent. Examples of this variation include where projects reached fewer in the target group than originally planned, did not tend to reach those less democratically engaged, or did not reach a broad cross-section of the target group. There was an instance where the target groups did not appear to be reached, as the resources created were not distributed. The desk research also shows there was variance in the evidence available and in some cases it was necessary to infer reach which impacts the ability to draw conclusions. Variance in information across recipients in monitoring and evaluation is discussed at the sub-section ‘Improving monitoring and evaluation’.

7.10 Research findings from interviews and desk research indicate that a combination of factors accounted for grant recipients’ successful planning and delivery of their projects (7.7) and ability to reach the target groups (7.9). This includes where grant recipients were able to draw on existing knowledge of the target group or experience working with the target group, as well as harnessing existing networks and relationships with other organisations or the target group. Whilst grant recipients may have in general delivered their planned for outputs and reached their intended target groups, several barriers to delivery were also identified through the desk research and interviews. One barrier was low attendance from beneficiaries at project activities due to various factors including their level of interest in democracy,

their capacity and the relative priority of attending, and lack of confidence to get involved. Grant recipients also reported that not having existing connections with key organisations impacted delivery. Moreover, representatives of organisations that were important to involve as part of the project did not always have the capacity, the motivation, or the knowledge of the target group to support delivery.

7.11 Full detail of the barriers and enablers are within findings section 4. Overall, it may be beneficial to ask applicants to reflect on potential barriers and how they intend to mitigate these, so to be accounted for in project design. For organisational knowledge it may also be beneficial for the Elections policy team to continue to retain a record of project's barriers and enablers to help with application review and to support any future organisations with delivery.

7.12 Findings also indicate that there were specific areas of project delivery where more support or guidance from Welsh Government would be beneficial. This includes the availability of standardised democracy resources to use in DEG funded projects, particularly for organisations new to working in democracy or where this is not their core function. Also, greater guidance on the specific Welsh language requirements depending on the project and more support on how to practically arrange translation, especially where the grant has brought in organisations that have had little or no previous experience working in Wales.

Fund-level processes

7.13 In general, interview findings regarding the application and grant administration processes were positive and indicate that in principle these could broadly remain similar for any future grant funding programme. Specific positively reported areas include:

- That for grant recipients and unsuccessful applicants the application process was ‘straightforward’
- That for grant recipients there was sufficient communication with the Elections policy team and various channels to communicate through
- That grant recipients felt ‘supported’ and ‘comfortable’ communicating and interacting the with the Elections policy team; they were able to ask questions and for guidance about delivery
- That in general the grant claims process for recipients was simple and that a blank space enabled un-restricted and relevant project updates
- That in general a quarterly frequency for completing claims was appropriate for recipients

7.14 However, findings also show there are some areas for consideration. Desk research and interviews with grant recipients and unsuccessful applicants indicates there was some lack of clarity at the application process regarding scope: the financial boundaries of the grant (size and value of projects), what type of activity the grant is not seeking to fund and so what outputs and resources were eligible for funding, and what falls within the remit of democratic engagement. Clarity for eligible outputs and resources was particularly apparent with local authorities, a number of which applied for funding for social media and communication campaigns.

7.15 While the application form and questions were seen by recipients as ’proportionate’, findings from interviews (unsuccessful applicants) and desk research suggest that more guidance or prompts could have been provided to help applicants detail what is most relevant and indicate what level of detail or specificity was required in terms of target groups, outputs, and outcomes.

7.16 The involvement of beneficiaries in project development emerged as a delivery enabler. During interviews, a suggestion raised by wider external stakeholders was for the grant to provide greater clarity or guidance in terms of the different levels of involvement of beneficiaries, and to ask what level of involvement the applicant is proposing. This is to help potential applicants in the third sector identify or relate to how the work they do could be considered democratic engagement, and to embed involvement in projects.

7.17 There were instances where communications from Welsh Government could have been clearer or issued sooner. For grant recipients this included end of grant evaluation reports and final grant claims, such as unexpected deadline changes at short notice, and post-grant expectations regarding DEP attendance. This also included project delivery, such as clarity at outset that the financial year is a hard deadline even if the full grant amount has not been claimed. Grant recipients and unsuccessful applicants reported the need for a quicker turnaround time and communication about the outcome for unsuccessful applications. Finally, grant recipients reported the need for more information on next steps and timelines as the DEG comes to an end in March 2025.

Partnership working

7.18 For those that had partnership bids, some grant recipients spoke positively about their partnerships, in terms of how this supported the ability to provide activities, including in-addition to what they originally planned. There were some challenges noted with partnership working, but responses were limited. For grant recipients, these challenges mainly centred around communication between partner organisations that affected aspects of delivery. More broadly, a potential challenge with partnership working was being able to collect robust evidence for evaluation.

Delivery of the Democratic Engagement Partnership (DEP) and the perceived outcomes for grant recipients

7.19 Overall, findings indicate the DEP was a useful element of the DEG, and in principle should be retained for any future grant. Interview participants (grant recipients and wider external stakeholders) were positive about the requirement to join the DEP as part of receiving DEG funding. However, there are areas of delivery to consider that could help to maximise the benefits for attendees.

7.20 One of the main perceived outcomes for recipient organisations that emerged from interviews was being able to learn about what other organisations are doing, and the two-way sharing of information and resources. Another was making connections and collaborating with other organisations. Examples of collaboration included working together and getting involved in delivery, harnessing networks, using resources, and getting feedback.

7.21 In some cases, however, recipients did not attribute collaborations and making connections as part of their project to the DEP because they would have sought out these relationships regardless. Also, a barrier to collaboration through the DEP was that due to rolling project starts and timings of the DEP meetings participants missed the opportunity to work together with other recipients.

7.22 Grant recipients felt the frequency and length of the meetings were generally suitable but there were also suggestions in interviews for improvements to the format (recipients and wider external stakeholders). These included occasional meetings in-person to enable informal networking, greater use of plain and non-technical language for the benefit of organisations with less experience of democratic engagement work, greater space for smaller grants to share their work so all recipients can be heard regardless of grant size/project scale, offering training opportunities, and hearing directly from end-beneficiaries (‘participatory practice’).

7.23 There were also specific areas raised by grant recipients for consideration on the topic of collaboration. This included the role of the DEP and the relationship between the DEP and related networks (particularly in the lead up to the next Senedd and local government elections). Another area for reflection was how to maximise collaborative opportunities by considering sub-groups where areas of interest or scale/size of the grants align. Also, ensuring that at whichever point recipients receive funding, they are connected with other projects (rather than waiting for the next DEP meeting) so collaboration can be explored from project

outset and reduce opportunities being missed. Related to the point about connecting recipients, when asked to reflect on any other ways the DEG could support partnership working, direct peer-to-peer communication outside meetings emerged. Recipients provided various suggestions for formats and content which they would find useful.

Perceived impacts of the grant funding scheme.

Beneficiaries

7.24 One of the DEG aims which relates to beneficiaries was reflected as an intended impact in the logic model (Figure 1). This is 'I1: People (particularly in the target groups) are engaged, motivated, and empowered to take part in democracy, with the tools to make their voice heard and impact positively on the Wales around them'. The extent to which this impact can be assessed is limited by certain factors. Firstly, the concepts within the intended impact were not defined or measured in a specific way. Secondly, an assumption underpinning this impact is that the end-beneficiary outcomes are sustained longer term after the beneficiary stops taking part in the project. This is unknown, as recipients reported in interviews that they are not able to assess longer-term impacts beyond the immediate end of the project. Thirdly, findings indicate varied approaches to evaluating outcomes for those who took part, and that this was not within the targets and evidence required for all recipient's projects (7.68).

7.25 Despite this, what findings do indicate is that even though projects were unique, there were common high-level outcomes for beneficiaries reported. These ranged across developing knowledge, participation in events and activities linked to the DEG-funded project and beyond the initial scope of DEG-funded activity, feeling one's voice is heard, feeling more confident, and developing wider skills. These are summarised within the logic model. Where challenges to achieving outcomes were noted, this included dependence upon level of prior knowledge, and the persistence of barriers to getting involved in democracy in Wales.

Grant recipients

7.26 Overall, findings from recipient interviews and desk research suggest the DEG funding had positive perceived outcomes for grant recipients. Key outcomes which emerged were building networks and relationships with both other organisations

and with beneficiaries. Also, building experience and knowledge from working with beneficiaries.

7.27 Regarding the topic of building experience and knowledge, grant recipients also reported either the potential to, or actual intention to, apply their own learnings from their DEG funded project. This included operational or delivery elements of their projects. This also included key issues, barriers to democratic engagement or areas of gaps in knowledge which were discovered through working with beneficiaries. However, there were also challenges to applying learnings which included resources (time, staff, budget) as a constraint.

The wider sector

7.28 The small and limited research sample of local authorities and wider external stakeholders should be considered when interpreting wider sector impacts, in that their perceptions cannot be considered as representative of the whole sector.

7.29 One area raised by all interview participant groups was around the DEG broadening sector capacity in Wales. Reporting included bringing some new organisations into the democratic engagement space in Wales such as organisations in Wales who are not democracy focused but work with specific groups, or organisations who had done democratic engagement in another UK country. Reporting also included enabling organisations to undertake a project that expanded on previous work, and facilitating work in-between election cycles. Findings also suggest the DEG played a part in creating the space for more innovative work, though this was viewed as part of a general sector shift.

7.30 Another wider impact was around influencing future work in the sector in Wales. In some cases, the DEG project helped grant recipients to establish presence in the democracy sector in Wales which provided the means to undertake another democratic engagement project. In other cases, though an unintended impact, other local organisations in Wales were reported as looking to take forward a similar project to that of recipients. There were also reports of influencing future work in the sector outside of Wales (unintended). At the project level, where recipient organisations work across the UK, this included reports of looking to take forward recipient's projects in the branches in other nations, or the organisations adapting their approaches to be more bespoke when engaging across countries based on

learnings in Wales. At the grant level this was by way of a similar grant scheme being considered in Scotland.

7.31 One of the logic model impacts (Figure 1) which relates to the wider sector is 'I3: Improved collaboration across those operating in the sector: there is a more joined up approach to democratic engagement'. Grant recipients and wider external stakeholders reported the view that the DEG has facilitated collaboration and relationship building across the sector in Wales. In some cases however this was not wholly attributable to the grant, such as where wider external stakeholders noted they would likely work with recipient organisations regardless of the DEG and that particularly for larger projects there was an existing relationship. Despite this, the DEG was acknowledged as providing the capacity and funding for recipients to do work in the sector which the external stakeholders can support.

7.32 Another wider sector impact reported specifically by grant recipient participants was that the DEG has facilitated improved sector understanding regarding the target groups. However, from all interview groups it emerged that an area for improvement is the sharing of the outcomes and lessons learnt from the DEG funded projects. In some cases, grant recipients reported there could be greater consideration from Welsh Government on how to collate learnings across the grant funded projects to create a picture of what works and has not worked, and wider external stakeholders and local authorities raised a need to understand what the learnings are to take forwards for the sector. Therefore, it appears greater focus is needed on the content of the information shared, as well as how this information reaches the wider sector. Suggestions included a wider outcome-focused event, or sharing via. other wider networks alongside the DEP. Creating a written resource was also noted, including for example possible democratic engagement activities based on what has been successful.

7.33 One of the logic model impacts (Figure 1) is 'I4: Within the sector, learnings about the target groups and interventions are applied to inform and improve future democratic engagement work.' While as noted at 7.27 grant recipients reported being able to apply their own learnings from their DEG funded project, this impact being realised at the sector-wide level may be limited through the reported issues with the sharing of learnings (7.32). Currently this may be more so at the individual 'organisation' level, or within the DEP network.

Learnings about democratic engagement issues

7.34 Learnings arose across different areas of research aim two: defining democratic engagement (all participant groups), findings about the target groups from projects (grant recipients) and discussing the key democratic engagement issues in Wales (wider external stakeholders and local authorities). Overall, these findings indicate the importance of a foundation of building awareness and knowledge to support people to take part in democracy. Findings also highlighted the reported areas or topics where there are particular gaps in, or lack of, knowledge about democracy.

7.35 Findings from recipient's projects also indicated various individual level barriers to engaging in democracy such as digital skills, confidence, feeling anxious, and negative prior experiences. System level barriers were also reported such as the accessibility of polling stations and information/resources, and the voter ID requirement for PCC elections.

7.36 Other key democratic engagement issues to address according to wider stakeholders and local authorities included low turnout and registrations (in part related to low awareness/knowledge). Other areas included media coverage, and people feeling their voice will not make a difference.

7.37 Noting the importance to draw together learnings (7.32), for organisational knowledge findings in this report should be considered by the Elections policy team alongside previously commissioned Welsh Government research regarding barriers to engagement (introduction points 1.5 to 1.7).

The overarching design and approach of the grant funding scheme

Sustainability

7.38 One of the DEG aims was to 'Support projects to engage with the population over a sustained period' (point 7.1), this is also reflected in 'I2' of the logic model (Figure 1) and the logic model assumptions. The research findings regarding taking a sustained approach are mixed, suggesting that the approach to funding has not encouraged sustainability in all circumstances, particularly where the grant award was a year or less.

7.39 For some recipients across multi-year, single year and short-term projects, participants reported that the grant provided the financial support and the staff time or capacity needed for sustained engagement. In this frame 'sustained engagement' was enabling recipients to plan and run project activities over the grant period.

7.40 For multi-year projects specifically, grant recipient interview participants were positive about the length of the funding and being supported to engage over a sustained period. Key benefits included certainty and reduced pressures which supported the development of networks and relationships over time, both with organisations and beneficiaries. Regarding beneficiaries, this reflects one of the 'General assumptions', that to impact or change behaviour of the target groups, incremental and consistent work is required rather than one-off or short-term projects.

7.41 On the other hand, for some grant recipients with single year or short-term funding participants noted that the time limited nature of the funding and associated pressures on resources affected sustainability. One year was reported as insufficient to both build relationships and deliver and some with single year projects discussed losing momentum, as ultimately activity was limited to the grant period. In some cases, participants reported delivering unfunded activities following the DEG project owing to continuing demand. Taking a longer-term approach, including a multi-year award, was regarded as enabling these organisations to think about sustainability in planning and delivery, as well as build upon the progress made during the DEG-funded period.

7.42 Regarding sustaining activity post-grant, reflections from multi-year projects were mixed and depended on the engagement activity. For some, organisations which the recipients worked with could continue delivery without the recipient as they had

the tools to do so. Others similarly (7.41) noted that ultimately funding is needed to deliver, and so when the grant period ended likely so would any activity. However, through the multi-year approach participants reported trying to build post-grant sustainability into the project, such as developing peer-led groups.

Reflections on the extent to which the DEG funding fills any gaps

7.43 Related to the discussion on funding length and sustainability, one of the logic model assumptions is 'That there is an appetite for this kind of funding from the sector and it meets sector needs'. Overall, findings suggest there is a need for a democratic engagement funding scheme in the sector in Wales. Findings also suggest the DEG has met funding needs to an extent, but that there are certain needs it has not met which are elements to consider for the direction of any future grant scheme.

7.44 During interviews all participant groups reported there is a lack of funding and funders in the democratic engagement space in Wales. Challenges with funding were also identified (local authorities, wider external stakeholders). This included fragmentary pockets, which are not always specifically or explicitly for democratic engagement, or do not have a Wales specific focus. This also included gaps in considering the broader democracy picture due to focus on election periods, continuous funding and the longevity of funding, as well as insufficient funding values.

7.45 Considering these challenges, in interviews wider external stakeholders and grant recipients indicated the need for democratic engagement funding for organisations in the sector.

7.46 Reasons for the need for funding (wider external stakeholders and grant recipients) also included that without funding there is an unsustainable reliance on organisations to do work out of good-will (particularly where promoting rights is part of the organisation's values) or that organisations will not be able to do engagement work as funding is core to their ability to operate. Relatedly, when reflecting on their DEG project grant recipients either reported that without the DEG funding there would not have been the idea to develop the project, the resources to deliver activities at all, or that such activities would have had to have been delivered on a much-reduced scale. This also emerged where recipient organisations have branches in other UK countries. Though the research sample is limited, for non-

democracy sector organisations, reporting suggests limited democratic engagement work in the branches in other UK countries or work in the form of advocacy. For democracy sector organisations, core funding underpinned their activity in other UK countries, but participants noted grant funding would need to be sought to do more innovative projects. Overall, these findings relate to the sustainability challenges discussed regarding activity ending with funding (points 7.41 and 7.42).

7.47 Both wider external stakeholders and local authorities discussed low capacity and resources in organisations as an additional challenge in the sector. Democratic engagement projects are an additional workload which need resourcing, which may not be possible even with delivery funding. Owing to this challenge, some local authorities (unsuccessful applicants) reported the usefulness of the previous ERSO grant scheme. Indications of this broader challenge also emerged in desk research where some sought to fund an ERSO, though this was not in scope. Relatedly, in interviews with recipients while some participants highlighted the DEG was the sole source of funding, others noted it was not by way of using the organisation's own resources and staff. One of the logic model assumptions is that core funding and overhead costs can be covered by recipients for the duration of their project, unless specifically requested and costed in their application.

7.48 In the public sector low resources and capacity (including budgets and staff) were reported in interviews as leading to reliance on standard engagement practices. Where application process findings indicate local authorities were proposing social media or communication campaigns considered statutory activities rather than something innovative (7.14), this is perhaps indicative of this broader issue, such that with low resources any engagement practices may be challenging to deliver without a funding source.

7.49 Where interview participants (wider external stakeholders and grant recipients) were positive about the DEG helping to fill a gap in sector funding this was in terms of creating more and centralised funding in the sector, specifically for democratic engagement in Wales. Also, acknowledgement from Welsh Government that democratic engagement work should be funded rather than the onus being on organisations. In some cases, participants reported that it is important or useful to continue the DEG, and to continue providing an opportunity for organisations to do work focusing on wider democratic engagement and in-between elections – not just registrations during election periods. The DEG in this way was regarded as

important for increasing activity in the sector and there being a wider pool of organisations working in the democratic engagement space (and so developing or maintaining expertise). The DEG was also regarded by some local authorities as providing the opportunity to try new approaches to democratic engagement in the context of low resources.

7.50 Where interview participants (wider external stakeholders and local authorities) were less positive about the DEG helping to fill a gap, this included a lack of continuity or longevity of funding, and the DEG tending to fund pockets of activity on a short-term or small scale. This was reported as limiting the ability to address democratic engagement issues, where momentum is lost when funding ends, limiting impact beyond a certain point in time for a certain group. This reflects the challenges with sustainability which grant recipients reported regarding activity ending with funding (points 7.41 and 7.42).

7.51 Regarding the challenges raised for organisations to resource projects (7.47), some local authorities felt a gap is that the DEG does not fund staff resource. However, as per the logic model outputs, some organisations did hire project staff as part of their DEG funding. Greater clarity on the circumstances in which staff resource can and cannot be funded would be beneficial.

7.52 Considering the points raised regarding continuity (7.50) and the reported need for multi-year funding and its importance in sustained activity and momentum from grant recipients (point 7.40 to 7.41), a need that emerged (from all participant groups) for any future grant funding was to fund longer-term projects to a greater extent (multi-year and continuous funding).

7.53 Also considering the limitations of funding pockets of activity for addressing democratic engagement issues (7.50), the need emerged (across all participant groups) for a future grant to support larger scale or more coordinated democratic engagement projects, taking a more strategic approach to tackling democratic engagement issues. This was mostly discussed in the frame of within Wales (a regional or Wales-wide approach), but in some cases included coordinating across UK countries. Participants gave suggestions including coordinating on which democratic engagement issues action is most needed, a focus on specific democratic engagement issues or target groups, or working beyond issuing grants at the individual organisation or area level.

7.54 In taking a more coordinated approach, this may also help meet the need raised by grant recipients, which was for the funding to reach a wide range of organisations working with a broad target group, to reach different cross-sections within the broad group.

7.55 Despite these points about larger and longer projects (7.52 and 7.53), all participant groups felt it was important to retain the ability to make small grants alongside this. In addition, grant recipients and wider external stakeholders felt it important that any future grant continues the flexibility which enables organisations to shape how they specifically carry things out.

7.56 Findings regarding grant value were mixed: while some (wider external stakeholders) felt it was sufficient, others (local authorities) felt it was too small, or raised in future having a higher value of funding available as part of the DEG (grant recipients). Relatedly, overall grant recipients felt the amount of funding they received for their DEG project had been suitable (multiyear, short term and single year projects). However, for some it was not, and reported funding issues included higher than anticipated costs which impacted the delivery of events, and the provision of unplanned additional resources and events in response to the needs of the target groups (multiyear projects).

7.57 An assumption in the logic model is that ‘grant recipient organisations must be able to apply for and deliver the project in line with Welsh Government financial year timings’. However, findings suggest there were challenges with this element of the funding, particularly for single-year projects. Findings highlighted a lack of alignment between financial years and other periods, where examples from recipients included school years and elections. This created some challenges including not being able to adapt the project outputs to suit beneficiaries’ schedules, that the quarterly project update process was not useful or applicable, or that full delivery could not be achieved by the hard financial year deadline. The ability to have the grant awarded in accordance with the timespan around which project activities are planned for and over the relevant period would be an area to consider for improvement. Particularly in the context of upcoming elections in Wales in 2026 and 2027, a grant period should reasonably cover the lead up, election date and time after to assess outcomes.

7.58 Though not necessarily the remit of the DEG, wider external stakeholder and grant recipient participants noted areas of the wider context which the DEG sits within

where they required greater commitment or funding from Welsh Government. This included democratic education in schools, and involving the public in decision making from local to Wales-wide levels (such as citizens assemblies). This relates to elements of the wider context discussed within the introduction, including the Curriculum for Wales and The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales recommendation for stronger democratic innovation, community engagement and civic education.

Improving monitoring and evaluation

7.59 The findings from this evaluation suggest that the monitoring and evaluation process is a particular area of the design and delivery of the DEG where improvements for future grant funding schemes should be considered.

7.60 The monitoring and evaluation requirements for DEG recipients were set out in the application guidance and the grant award letter. For end of grant reports DEG application guidance stated that small grants (£1,000 and less) had to provide ‘feedback covering the pilot including how success has been measured’. Large grants (£1,000 and more) had to provide an 'evaluation of activities, successes and barriers faced’. In addition to these expectations, the grant award letter set out details of unique targets and evidence which each recipient was expected to deliver and report on in their end of grant report.

Progress monitoring

7.61 As noted at point 7.13, grant recipient interview participants reported the blank space in the project update section of the form gave them the freedom to provide updates relevant to their project. However, desk-research found that grant recipients took a varied approach to completing this form across both small and large grants. Some provided progress updates which contained detailed information about organisations they had worked with, the beneficiaries who had taken part, and what outputs they had produced or delivered. Others provided brief updates which lacked detail regarding project beneficiaries and outputs. Some updates were also repetitive, which meant it was difficult to establish what the grant recipient had achieved since the last update.

7.62 The differences in clarity and level of detail may be attributable to the varied approaches to progress monitoring reported by grant recipients in interviews. Some had formal processes, such as using project management software, while others relied on informal processes (including using the grant claim form). Moreover, for some grant recipient interview participants it was not clear what progress monitoring systems they had in place, as they discussed evaluation processes instead.

7.63 Overall, the variation in progress monitoring systems and reporting across all grant recipients means there is not always a clear audit trail which Welsh Government can use to track project progress. Some guidance on project management (such as how to keep track and log progress) and the expectations for progress reporting in the quarterly forms may be beneficial. Any guidance regarding progress reporting should set out expectations that are proportionate to the amount of grant funding.

7.64 Reflecting on ideas for changes to the DEG monitoring process, some recipients felt an annual meeting with the Elections policy team for those with a multi-year award would be useful.

End of grant evaluation

7.65 In addition to the issues with project monitoring, the research also found that a combination of factors negatively affected the grant evaluation process. These factors, which are discussed in more detail below, include:

- No clear definition of the term 'outcome' at the application stage
- An inconsistent approach to setting targets and evidence requirements by Welsh Government in grant award letters
- A focus on evaluating project delivery at the expense of evaluating outcomes
- The variable quality of end of grant project evaluation reports and the extent to which they met the target and evidence requirements
- A need for greater guidance, feedback and communication from Welsh Government regarding monitoring and evaluation requirements

7.66 The grant application form asks for expected outcomes and how success against these would be measured. 'Outcome' was interpreted inconsistently by grant recipients, including what projects are delivering, anticipated changes for project beneficiaries, and learnings for the grant recipient organisation. In some cases there were also issues with measures that were proposed by grant recipients in their applications, such as vague measures, measures which did not correspond with an outcome, and the provision of no measures at all. These desk research findings are corroborated by interview findings with wider external stakeholder participants who suggested that third sector organisations are not always experienced in doing evaluations. This suggests that applicants require more guidance regarding what constitutes an outcome and what measures should be used to evaluate particular

types of outcomes. Any guidance on the use of measures should contain those that are proportionate for both smaller and larger grants.

7.67 Inconsistencies regarding outcomes and measures were also observable in the requirements set out by Welsh Government in the grant award letters. Welsh Government inconsistently transferred outcomes and measures which grant recipients provided in the application form to the targets and evidence requirements which it specified in the grant award letters. ‘Targets’ either included just outcomes, or both outcomes and measures. ‘Evidence requirements’ either included specific measures, or a general evidence statement. This approach meant that some ‘large’ grants had less detailed target and evidence requirements compared to some ‘small’ grants. In conclusion, a more consistent and proportionate approach should be taken when determining target and evidence requirements for small and large grants in future. In tandem with the previous point 7.66, more guidance at application regarding appropriate outcomes and measures may help to ensure greater consistency when specifying targets and evidence in grant award letters.

7.68 Whilst some grant recipient interview participants reported the use of relatively sound methods to evaluate changes in democratic engagement resulting from their project, others did not appear to have a system in place to evaluate such changes. Instead, desk research and interview analysis suggests that grant recipients focused on collecting feedback regarding the events or sessions they delivered. This indicates that many grant recipients’ evaluations (regardless of if the grant was considered ‘small’ or ‘large’) tended towards a focus on delivery, rather than changes to end-beneficiaries’ democratic engagement. This may be expected considering the target and evidence requirements set out in the award letter did not always include the anticipated democratic engagement outcomes for end-beneficiaries, in part resulting from the challenges discussed at 7.66 and 7.67.

7.69 The challenge of evaluating democratic engagement was raised by external stakeholder interview participants, who also noted reporting in the sector tends to focus on delivery. Participants stated that evaluating change can be difficult for concepts such as knowledge and understanding and that organisations need support with how to measure and evaluate impact. Some wider external stakeholders also felt that creation of a sector agreed framework, which should include relevant outcomes and how to measure these, would also support the evaluation of projects’ impact on democratic engagement.

7.70 In conclusion, greater evaluation support for recipients is needed throughout their grant period, and Welsh Government have a role to ensure that outcomes regarding democratic engagement are included within the application form and the award letter, with appropriate measures or metrics that are proportionate the to the grant award amount.

7.71 Grant recipient interview participants acknowledged the importance of providing an end of grant evaluation report which was described by participants as ‘proportionate’ and ‘sensible’. However, around half of the available end of grant reports were assessed as not meeting the target and evidence requirements set out in their respective grant award letters. Desk research identified several common issues with end of project grant reports, including an unclear report structure and a lack of reporting of the expected methods and metrics. Again, reflecting the approach to evaluation in a delivery frame (7.68), reports tended to have a particular emphasis on barriers and successes, rather than outcomes for project beneficiaries. Where outcomes for beneficiaries were noted, these tended to be reported ad-hoc or by individual activities rather than collated to draw overall conclusions for the project.

7.72 The variable quality of the end of grant reports may have been a culmination of the factors discussed thus far. However, it is also important to note that there was not a specific evaluation report template or structure for recipients to follow, nor consistent guidance from Welsh Government. In interviews with grant recipients, some were happy to not have a structure, while others felt more guidance could have been provided or would have liked to received information regarding the format expected. Relatedly, there were instances where participants felt not enough or any feedback had been received from Welsh Government, so they were unclear whether the end of grant reports had met expectations. Participants also reported differing levels of experience in evaluation reporting which may have contributed to the reports’ variable quality.

7.73 In conclusion, whilst each project is unique meaning that proportionality and flexibility in evaluation reports is important, more structure, guidance and feedback from Welsh Government would be beneficial. This should help to ensure all relevant elements and broad areas are covered in reports. Consistency is important considering the reported need to bring together outcomes and lessons learnt for the sector (point 7.32).

7.74 Also considering that variations in award letter evidence requirements did not always match the ‘small’ versus ‘large’ grant guidance distinction (7.67), the application guidance on the reporting expectations for small and large grants (7.60) could also be amended dependent on any changes in reporting structure. Greater detail could be given on these expectations, and the distinction between small and large grants could be re-defined, such that while both could be required to cover the same broad elements in end of grant reports, the depth of evidence and methods expected would be the varying factor.

7.75 Grant recipient interview participants also reflected on challenges and enablers to collecting evaluation information. It may be beneficial to ask applicants to reflect on potential barriers and how they intend to mitigate these, so to be accounted for in project design. For organisational knowledge it may be beneficial for the Elections policy team to continue to retain a record of these to help with application review and to support any future organisations with delivery.

8. Recommendations

Delivery

Application and guidance

8.1 **Recommendation 1:** The grant application form and accompanying grant guidance notes are reviewed and expanded. The specific areas for consideration are as follows and should be considered alongside any changes proposed in the recommendations for the monitoring and evaluation process (Recommendations 9, 10, 13 and 15).

8.1.1 For the grant aims, the Elections policy team should clarify what is meant by 'under-represented group' in the context of democratic engagement to help organisations identify how the funding may relate to groups they work with. Consideration should also be given as to whether 'under-represented' is a useful term to describe and reflect this context or whether alternative terminology may be more appropriate.

8.1.2 In the guidance notes, greater clarity should be provided regarding the following:

- The availability of multi-year grant awards.
- The financial boundaries of the grant. It should also be made clear that the policy team can be contacted to discuss questions about costs in advance of applying.
- What outputs are not eligible for funding. Areas to cover include standalone communication and social media campaigns (including where for local authorities this constitutes statutory duties), and activities concerned with organisation's internal democratic structures.
- The eligibility criteria for using funding for staff resource.
- What project outputs fall within the remit of democratic engagement without diminishing potential for innovation and novelty. Evidence in this report such as the logic model and findings regarding how democratic engagement was defined may support this.

8.1.3 In the application questions:

- A definition of regional compared to local should be provided for the question ‘Is your geographic reach national, regional or local?’, to clarify the difference and to ensure consistency in usage and when assessing applications.
- The addition of guidance or prompts to questions should be considered regarding the expected areas or content applicants need to cover within the word count.
- To consider in future asking questions about potential delivery barriers and barriers to collecting evaluation information, and how applicants intend to mitigate these, so these are accounted for in project design.
- To consider in future asking what level of beneficiary involvement in project development the applicant is proposing, alongside guidance on the different levels. For projects with multiple beneficiary groups, applicants should highlight if the extent of each group’s involvement varies.

Welsh Government processes

8.2 **Recommendation 2:** To support those with less experience in the sector with disseminating information during projects, the Elections policy team should consider which standardised democracy resources recipients could be directed to. This should be made clear in grant guidance notes to encourage applications from new organisations and re-stated at project outset.

8.3 **Recommendation 3:** The Elections policy team should consider enhancing the provision of guidance at project outset and support during projects to assist organisations to meet Welsh language requirements.

8.4 **Recommendation 4:** There are learnings within this report for organisational and sector knowledge which the Elections policy team should consider and keep a record of. This should be a working record and added to from all current and future DEG-funded projects. These learnings are:

- The reported project barriers and enablers – including delivery, reaching target groups, and collecting evaluation information.
- The reported barriers target groups face to engage with democracy (individual level and in the system), areas where there are gaps in knowledge, and key democratic engagement issues to address. These should be considered alongside previously commissioned Welsh Government research regarding barriers (introduction points 1.5 to 1.7).

8.5 **Recommendation 5:** The following communications would benefit from greater clarity:

- At the application stage, confirming the expected timeline for notifying successful and unsuccessful applicants.
- At project outset and during the project, the requirements and associated deadlines relating to how the funding operates around the financial year end, including making final grant claims and the delivery of final activities towards the end of the grant period.
- At project close, the expectations regarding DEP attendance post-grant.
- At project close, confirmation that the end of grant report has been received and whether it is in line with expectations.

Collaboration and information sharing

8.6 **Recommendation 6**: The Elections policy team should consider how to implement the suggestions within this report regarding the format of the DEP and for enhancing collaboration between recipients and other networks.

8.7 **Recommendation 7:** The Elections policy team should consider and implement approaches to support the sharing of outcomes and lessons learnt between recipients, as well as with the wider sector, including the collation of learnings across the grant funded projects.

Reach

8.8 **Recommendation 8**: The Elections policy team should consider how to further broaden the promotion of any future grant funding. This includes how to involve a greater number of local authorities, increase reach to North Wales at the regional level, and support a greater number of projects which aim to engage target groups other than young people.

Monitoring and evaluation

8.9 When considering recommendations 9 to 18, it should be kept in mind any changes to the monitoring and evaluation requirements for the DEG should remain proportionate and feasible relative to the amount of grant funding and the grant recipient's capacity. While this includes adjusting expectations for 'small' grants, if taking a longer-term or strategic approach more robust monitoring and evaluation processes would need to be in place.

8.10 **Recommendation 9:** That the application form question 'What are your expected outcomes and how would you measure success against these? (Max word count 100)' is amended, guidance added, and the word count expanded. Evidence from this report could be used to assist the development of outcomes and measures guidance. Suggestions are as follows:

- Defining the term 'outcome'.
- Asking applicants for both delivery outcomes and outcomes regarding changes in democratic engagement for their target groups. If applicable, also outcomes regarding changes and/or potential learnings for their organisation.
- Asking applicants for a clear measure or set of measures for each individual outcome they are proposing.
- Providing applicants and recipients with guidance and/or support regarding best practice for identifying appropriate outcomes and related measures, proportionate to project value and scale.

8.11 **Recommendation 10:** Asking applicants to outline how the proposed geographic reach (especially where regional or national) and reach to target groups would be measured and reported.

8.12 **Recommendation 11:** Related to recommendation 9, any changes to the evaluation process should reflect on how the following DEG aim could be measured in future by recipients: 'People are engaged, motivated, and empowered to take part

in democracy, with the tools to make their voice heard and impact positively on the Wales around them'. This would involve defining the concepts within this aim in the democratic context with related measures mapped out. Measures would not necessarily have to be direct but those which can be used to indicate changes in these concepts (for example, whether going to complete a petition indicates the concept 'impacting positively on Wales').

8.13 **Recommendation 12:** The provision of support to identify appropriate outcomes and measures at the outset (Recommendation 9) should provide the basis for Welsh Government to consistently and proportionately apply outcomes and measures to the targets and evidence requirements within grant award letters, alongside ensuring that the award letters always contain beneficiary outcomes.

8.14 **Recommendation 13**: A structure is provided for the progress update in the quarterly claim forms to improve project audit trails and consistency of reporting. These expectations could be outlined in the grant guidance and re-stated to recipients at project outset. It is important any structure is sufficiently flexible so it is relevant to all projects. This could be achieved by using subheadings with a brief description or examples of content for each, where the description/examples may vary by 'small' or 'large' grant. An additional blank space could be used for anything else the recipient wants to provide. Areas one might expect to be covered within the specific period being claimed for include:

- Progress towards stated delivery outcomes - descriptions of what has been delivered or produced for the target groups.
- Reach to the target groups - including complete detail on all target groups stated at application.
- Working with others. Descriptions of relationships or collaborations with other organisations/networks as part of delivery.
- Whether there have been any challenges with delivery faced in the quarter.

8.15 **Recommendation 14:** Recipients should be provided with more guidance and a structure for the end of grant evaluation reports. It is important any structure is sufficiently flexible to ensure it is appropriate for all projects, but it should also enable greater consistency in end of project reporting to support clarity, and collation of learnings. The provision of subheadings should help to ensure all relevant elements are covered, including: background and aims, what was

delivered, target group and geographic reach, what were the challenges and successes in delivery (and so the learnings about the engagement method), what was learnt about the barriers the target group face to engage in democracy, what were the outcomes for the beneficiaries who engaged with the project or took part, what are the next steps or recommendations. Recipients should be reminded of their evidence requirements (their specific outcomes and measures) near project close to ensure these are included in reporting.

8.16 **Recommendation 15**: The grant guidance should contain greater detail on the end of grant reporting expectations. The reporting requirements could be revised so that 'small' and 'large' grants are required to provide the same areas of information in the end of grant evaluation report (as recommendation 14), but stipulating that 'large' grants are required to provide more detailed information pertaining to evaluation methods and evidence (which would also be reflected in the outcomes and measures and targets and evidence requirements – recommendations 9, 10 and 12).

8.17 **Recommendation 16:** Grant recipients, where needed, should be provided with additional guidance regarding progress monitoring. This should include how to record and log measures relating to outputs during the course of project delivery. This would help to ensure that recipients have the tools to collect the information they will need for the progress updates, as well as the end of grant evaluation report.

8.18 **Recommendation 17:** For projects which are not short-term activity, the Elections policy team could consider a mid-point (single year) or yearly (multi-year) project meeting. Discussion could include progress towards outcomes and how these have been measured to indicate if the recipient is on track or if greater evaluation support is required**.**

8.19 **Recommendation 18:** The Elections policy team, with analytical support, could explore approaches to enable longer-term impacts to be captured. This includes considering the factors that would need to be in place at the outset, such as funding and data availability and requirements.

The remit of the grant funding scheme

8.20 **Recommendation 19**: In developing any future grant funding scheme, the Elections policy team should consider the direction of this scheme based on the needs of the sector within this report. They should reflect on how approaches could be developed to meet these needs through a grant scheme, which include:

- Supporting more long-term or multi-year projects.
- Encouraging organisations to take a more coordinated, strategic approach to addressing democratic engagement issues and reaching a broad cross-section of target groups. Related to recommendation 4, while retaining the importance of Welsh Government not to be directive in democracy, findings from this report and previously commissioned research could help to support determining what areas constitute a strategic priority for democratic engagement.

8.21 **Recommendation 20:** If longer-term and strategic projects are funded as per Recommendation 19, considerations should be made regarding the overall value of available funding so that it accommodates an appropriate balance between these larger projects and short-term or ‘small’ projects.

8.22 **Recommendation 21**: The Elections policy team should consider whether it is feasible to award grants over a period that is aligned with grant recipients’ proposed outputs, rather than a timescale which is tied strictly to the financial year.

The wider democratic engagement context

8.23 The following recommendations are not necessarily within the remit of the DEG or any future iterations of the grant. However, these recommendations are important for broader organisational consideration.

8.24 **Recommendation 22:** Related to recommendations 9 and 11, the Elections policy team could consider the suggestion of working with other lead organisations in the sector to create an agreed democratic engagement outcomes framework. While wider than the DEG and likely a longer-term ambition, a consistent approach would help in future in identifying common outcomes for beneficiaries across unique projects, and in the provision of guidance and application requirements around outcomes and measures.

8.25 **Recommendation 23:** The Elections policy team should inform the relevant Welsh Government policy teams of the needs raised by interview participants for the DEG to sit alongside initiatives for greater democratic education in schools and involving the public in decision making at all levels in Wales.

8.26 **Recommendation 24:** The Elections policy team should consider the reported challenges for local authorities with fulfilling engagement duties and associated resourcing issues. It may be beneficial for the team to engage with local authorities to share best practice regarding utilising the DEG funding in the context of these challenges.

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Annex A. Topic guide questions for grant recipients.

[Section: Role and involvement]

1. Can you **briefly** tell me about your role within your organisation?
2. And what has been your level of involvement in delivering the Democratic Engagement Grant funded activity?

In the next section we'll focus on defining democratic engagement and also the design and delivery processes of the DEG.

[Section: Awareness]

3. How did your organisation become aware of the Democratic Engagement Grant?
4. To your understanding, what are the aims and objectives of the Democratic Engagement Grant?
5. In your own words how would you define the term 'democratic engagement'?
    - [PROMPT]:What do you feel it means for someone to be 'democratically engaged'?

[Section: Application]

6. Tell me about your views on the application process for the grant?
    a. [PROMPTS if needed: only ask what isn't covered at the main question (6)]. What are your views on…
        - The clarity of the grant requirements and criteria?
        - Completing the application form?
        - The guidance available?
        - The time available to apply and the quarterly cycle?]

[If anything is difficult or any issues, *probe about what changes could be made].*

[Section: Grant administration/management]

I'd now like to ask you about the grant administration and management processes.

7. What are your opinions on…
    a. The amount of communication with Welsh Government officials throughout the grant?
    b. And what about whether there was sufficient support available from Welsh Government officials?
    c. And what about the grant claims process and completing the grant claims form, including providing a project update within this?

[***If anything is working less well**, probe about any changes that would help]*

8. And what are your views about the requirement for grant recipients to join the Democratic Engagement Partnership?
    a. Is there anything about the partnership process that works particularly well?
    b. Are there any changes or improvements to the process you would like to see and why?
9. If any, what would you say were the key outcomes for your organisation resulting from being in the partnership?
10. Did your organisation collaborate with other organisations as a result of the partnership or not? *[If so, ask what they collaborated on]*
    a. To what extent do you feel the partnership supports cross organisation collaboration and why?
11. Did your organisation learn any useful insights or best practices as a result of being in the partnership or not? *[If so, ask what]*
    a. To what extent do you feel the partnership supported sharing of information and best practice, and why?
12. Are there other ways you think the grant could support cross-organisation collaboration and information sharing?
13. Do you intend to continue to attend the DEP meetings [*for finished projects*: now] / [*for multiyear/not finished:* after] your grant period is finished or not? Why is this?

[Section: Delivery of projects]

I'd now like to talk about the specific work your organisation delivered with the grant funding.

14. Tell me about how your organisation planned the programme of work you intended to deliver with the grant funding?
    - [PROMPT]: What process or steps did you take to decide what to do and how to do this?
15. Overall, what did the project **aim to do** or **set out to** deliver?
    a. [for finished projects] And can you give me an overview of what was delivered?
    b. [for multiyear/not finished] And can you give me an overview what has been delivered so far?
16. Were there any barriers to delivering any aspects of the project?
    [For example, amount of time available to deliver]. [***If any barriers**, probe about how overcome/lessons learnt]*.
17. Were there any enablers to delivery or processes that worked particularly well?

[*Interviewer note: skip any probes about the beneficiaries that are already answered – this may have come up when discussing project aims, general barriers and enablers]*

18. Who or which groups were intended to be the main beneficiaries of the funded activity?
    a. How does this align with your organisation's activities more widely?
19. Overall, what is your view on whether the project engaged the intended groups?
20. What did you do to reach these beneficiaries?
21. Were there any challenges to reach these beneficiaries?
    a. Was this different for different groups?
    b. How did you overcome these?
22. And what about successes – was there anything that worked particularly well?

23. Was the democratic engagement grant funding the sole source of funding for the work, or were there other sources?
24. Has the amount of funding you applied for been suitable, considering the aims and objectives of the grant and what your organisation wanted to achieve?
25. [For partnership bids only] Tell me about how you worked with your partner organisation(s) throughout the delivery process?
    a. Were there any barriers or challenges to working together?
    b. Were there any enablers that led to successful partnership working?

[Section: Monitoring and evaluation]

26. Did/Do you have any processes in place to maintain oversight of the project and record progress? What were these?

27. What processes, if any, did/do you have in place to evaluate the **impact** your project has had regarding democratic engagement?
28. Did/do you have any processes in place to understand impacts beyond the immediate end of the project or not? What are these?
29. Were there any barriers or challenges to collecting information for the evaluation? How did you overcome these?
    a. Did anything prevent you from maintaining oversight and recording progress, or make doing so more difficult?
30. Was there anything that helped you to collect information for the evaluation?
    a. Did anything help you to maintain oversight and record progress?
31. What is your view on providing an evaluation report at the end of the funding period of the grant scheme?
32. Was it clear or not how you should structure your end of grant evaluation and what to include?
33. How do the monitoring and evaluation requirements of the DEG compare to other sources of grant funding your organisation has received? If applicable, particularly other funding for democratic engagement.
34. Overall, are there any changes you feel could be made to the monitoring and evaluation process of the grant?

In the next section we'll focus on the perceived impacts of the grant scheme. These can be both positives and negatives.

[Section: Beneficiaries]

You mentioned earlier the target beneficiaries for your project were <>.

35. What are the key outcomes for, and impacts on, the beneficiaries that *[for finished projects]* took part? / *[for multiyear/not finished*] have taken part so far?

[Further specific probes aligned to DEG aims- *only ask what didn't mention at probe 35*:]

    a. To what extent has the project supported and encouraged the intended groups to participate in democracy? In what ways?
    b. To what extent has the project motivated and empowered people to take part in democracy? In what ways?
    c. To what extent has the project given people the tools to make their voice heard and make an impact? In what ways?

36. Were there any unintended consequences for beneficiaries as a result of the grant scheme? These could be positive or negative.

[Section: Organisation]

Now moving on to think about your organisation.

37. To what extent has the funding supported your organisation to engage with the population over a sustained period?
    a. How does this compare to any previous democratic engagement projects?
38. Overall, what have been the key outcomes and impacts for your organisation as a result of the grant?
39. Do you have plans to apply any learnings from this project to future projects? If so, how?
40. Were there any unintended consequences for your organisation as a result of the grant scheme? These could be positive or negative.
41. Prior to the DEG, was your organisation involved in democratic engagement in Wales? In what way?

42. Is your organisation involved in democratic engagement in other countries besides Wales?

    a. **[IF YES]:** Has operating in Wales changed your organisation's approach to democratic engagement elsewhere in the UK?

[Section: Wider]

Now thinking more widely.

43. Overall, would you say there are any outcomes and impacts the grant has had on the wider sector?

And just thinking about funding.

44. If you had not received funding, would your organisation still have been able to undertake the activities. If so, to what extent? *[i.e. couldn't have done at all, could have done but reduced scale, could have achieved the same].*
45. How would you describe the needs of organisations in the sector for funding in the democratic engagement space?
46. To what extent do you feel the DEG meets these funding needs?
    a. Is there anything that could be done differently to meet the needs of the sector?
    b. What funding needs to be in place?
47. **[For those whose organisation is involved in engagement outside Wales (42)]:** How does your organisation continue your democratic engagement activity in other parts of the UK without something like the democratic engagement grant?

Annex B. Topic guide questions for local authorities (LAs) and wider external stakeholders.

[Section: Introduction]

1. Can you **briefly** tell me about your role in your organisation?
2. [Wider stakeholders only]
    a. Before being contacted for this interview, how aware were you of the Democratic Engagement Grant?
    b. Were you aware of the specific activities being undertaken with DEG funding?
        i. [If they were aware of the grant or activities]: How did you/your organisation become aware of the DEG?
3. [All Local Authorities (LAs)] How did you/your LA become aware of the DEG?
4. [Recipient LAs and wider stakeholders]
    a. How has your role been involved with the Democratic Engagement Grant, if at all?
    b. And what about the level of involvement for your organisation/LA?
5. [Unsuccessful LAs] What was your level of involvement in the process when your organisation applied to the Democratic Engagement Grant?

[Section: Democratic engagement]: **In the next questions I'll ask about democratic engagement more widely and what's happening in the sector.**

6. In your own words how would you define the term 'democratic engagement'?
    - [PROMPT]: What do you feel it means for someone to be 'democratically engaged'?
7. In your view, what are the key issues to address regarding democratic engagement in the population in Wales?
    - [PROMPTS]: Are there any groups that are less engaged? Which elements of democratic engagement and participation? *[e.g. low registration, declining participation in elections, lack of political awareness]*

8. [Wider stakeholders only]
    a. And what about other countries in the UK, do you think they face similar issues?
    b. [If issues have been identified at 7 or 8]: Have these issues tried to be addressed previously, and if so has this been successful?
        i. [If not]: Why do you think this is?
9. In your opinion, does the DEG seek to address any key engagement issues which are not currently being addressed by other work or funding in the democratic engagement context?
10. In your opinion, are there any key engagement issues that the DEG should have explicitly sought to address, but did not?

[Section: Other funding]

11. Apart from the DEG, are you aware of other funding support for democratic engagement **in Wales,** both present and past?
    a. Government support
    b. Other
12. [Wider stakeholders only]: Are you aware of other funding support for democratic engagement in **other countries in the UK**?
    a. Government support
    b. Other
13. What are the main challenges with, or gaps in, the funding and support for democratic engagement in the sector in Wales?
14. [Wider stakeholders only]: Do you receive feedback from the organisations you work with about the funding gaps, and what sort of things do they say?

[Section: DEG funding]: **We are going to move our focus back to the DEG for the next part, in the context of what we've just discussed.**

15. What are your views on the extent to which the DEG has helped to address the challenges or gaps within democratic engagement?
    - [PROMPTS, VIEWS ABOUT]:
        - The cycle where applications for DEG funding open every quarter.
        - The approach of running for 2 full financial years.
        - The amount of funding available.
        - That projects could apply for multi-year funding.
        - That smaller or pilot projects could re-apply for more funding if a successful outcome.
        - Being open to third sector and local authorities only.
16. How does the DEG compare with previous **Welsh Government** democratic engagement funding programmes?
17. How does the DEG compare with **other ongoing** democratic engagement funding programmes in **Wales**?

And so, considering the extent to which the DEG has helped to address challenges, and comparisons to other schemes [for 18 to 21]:

18. Are there any changes to the DEG design that would be useful to make or apply to any future grant funding programmes?
    - [PROMPTS]:
        - Is there anything that could be done differently to meet the needs of the sector?
        - What funding approach needs to be in place?
19. And what elements of the DEG do you think work well? *[i.e. what should remain the same if repeated in future]*
20. [Wider Externals only]: How do organisations continue democratic engagement activity in other parts of the UK without something like the democratic engagement grant?
21. Overall, if Welsh Government didn't provide the DEG, what would the funding and support landscape look like?
    - [PROMPT]: What are the alternatives?

[Section: How the DEG impacts on the organisation- Wider stakeholders and recipient LAs]

22. What, if any, have the impacts of the DEG been for your organisation/LA?

23. Has the grant scheme supported your organisation/LA in any way?
    - [PROMPT IF NEEDED]: This could include effects on your organisation and the work that you and your colleagues do. Examples of this could be new relationships, opportunities for knowledge exchange, support to existing work, or inspirations for new work.
24. Were there any unintended consequences for your organisation as a result of the grant scheme? These could be positive or negative.

[Section: Wider impacts]

25. Do you think the DEG has had any wider impacts on the sector? If so, what would you say these are?
26. What, if any, do you think are the unintended consequences of the grant scheme for the sector? These could be positive or negative.

[Section: Application – Unsuccessful LAs]

27. Tell me about your views on the application process for the grant?
    - [PROMPT IF NEEDED]: clarity of requirements and criteria, completing application form, guidance available, time available to apply.
28. Was there anything you felt worked particularly well or less well regarding the application process?
29. Are you considering re-applying for the DEG or not? Why is this?
30. What, if anything, would your organisation need to support applying again?

[Section: Partnership working]: **Finally, we'd like to discuss partnership working in the sector.**

31. What are your views on partnership working across organisations working in democratic engagement?
    a. What are the key challenges?
32. Are there any processes or structures that a grant funding programme could put in place to address these challenges?
33. Do you feel the democratic engagement partnership element of the DEG helps to address the challenges?
34. [If time: Wider stakeholders]:
    a. Have you or your organisation worked with any organisations on projects that have been funded by the DEG?

- [PROMPT]: In what ways *[i.e. delivery support, training, advice, quality assurance, providing resources]*

b. Can you describe the process of how you or your organisation worked with the grant recipient organisation(s)?
    - [PROMPT]: Were there any parts of the process that worked particularly well or less well?