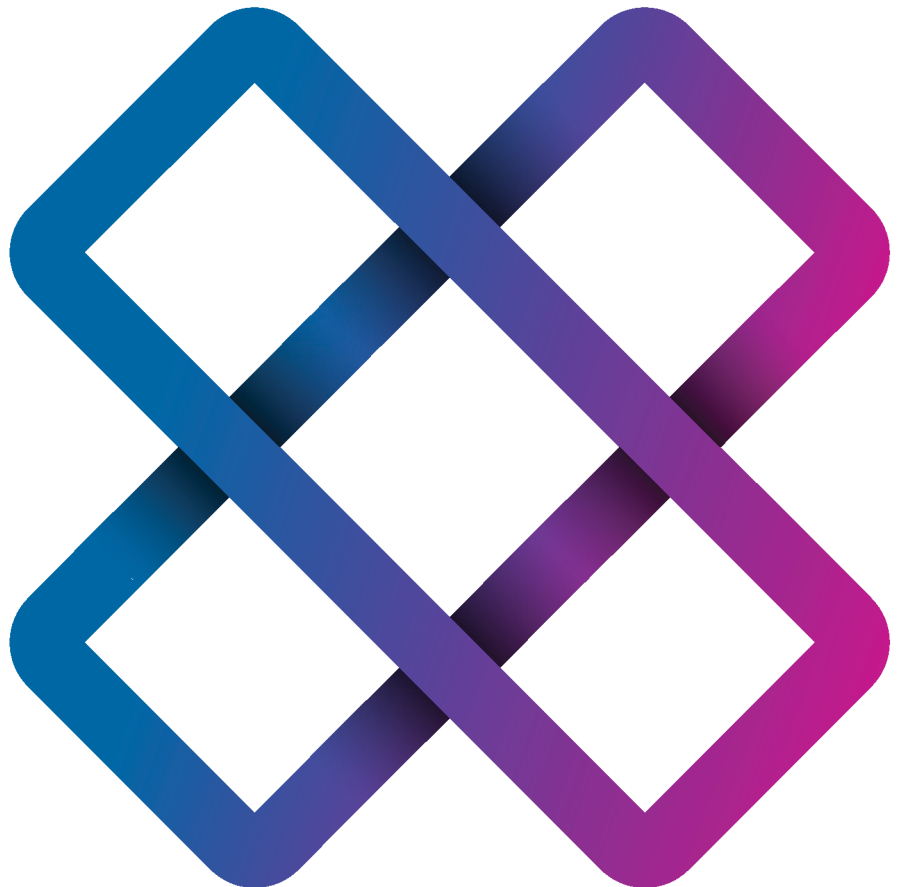


October 2017

Create your Space Impact Evaluation – Development Phase



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Create your Space Impact Evaluation Report – Development Phase

A report to: Big Lottery Fund Wales

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1. Introduction

OB3 was appointed to provide Applicant and Grant Holder Evaluation Support for the Big Lottery Fund's Create your Space programme in Wales.

The £8.8m Create your Space programme was developed to fit with the Fund's vision of 'People in the Lead' whereby 'people in communities will be supported to lead on transforming their outdoor spaces, building on people, physical and natural assets'¹. It has been designed so that its aim and outcomes are consistent with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Programme Outcomes

The overarching outcomes for Create your Space are as follows:

Create your Space Programme Outcomes

- People are fully involved in shaping the transformation of their local outdoor spaces and genuine strong partnerships have been formed between local people and organisations
- By enabling people to transform the way they view and use outdoor spaces, they will:
 - Have the confidence and ability to influence and get involved in decisions about their communities with more control over their local environment
 - Have a greater understanding and appreciation of the value of outdoor spaces, in particular their contribution to health and well-being, and the potential for creating sustainable business, jobs and leisure opportunities.
- As a result of the programme and what communities learn, organisations and communities will have the confidence and desire to take further action, to get involved in activities that improve their local communities.

These outcomes should be the core focus of Create your Space projects and they should be fully reflected in the programme-level theory of change model.

¹ Create your Space ITT, p.10

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

The Well-being of Future Generations (WFG) (Wales) Act became law in Wales on 29 April 2015 with the aim of improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The WFG Act intends to strengthen existing governance arrangements for improving the well-being of Wales, ensuring that present needs are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In particular, the WFG Act identifies seven well-being goals for Wales, including ‘A resilient Wales, and ‘A Wales of cohesive communities’ as arguably the ones most relevant to the Create your Space objectives as outlined above. However, given the broad ranging nature of the WFG Act, it could be argued that Create your Space might contribute to greater or lesser degrees to each of the well-being goals.

The WFG Act also introduces national indicators that will measure the difference being made to the well-being of Wales. These indicators are intended to be used by the Welsh Government as the basis of its annual reporting (via the Annual Well-being Report), to update progress being made in Wales in achieving the seven well-being goals.

The Welsh Government proposed a series of 46 indicators² and during the foundation phase, three of these were chosen by the Big Lottery as core indicators which all Create your Space project should be able to contribute to. They include:

- Indicator 26: Percentage of people satisfied with local area as a place to live
- Indicator 27: Percentage of people agreeing that they belong to the area; that people from different backgrounds get on well together; and that people treat each other with respect
- Indicator 43: Areas of healthy ecosystems in Wales

In addition, there are also a number of other Future Generations indicators which may be relevant to funded projects and which they will be able contribute to, for example:

- Indicator 3: Percentage of adults who have fewer than two healthy lifestyle behaviours
- Indicator 12: Capacity (in MW³) of renewable energy equipment installed.
- Indicator 23: Percentage who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area

² How to measure a nation's progress? National indicators for Wales as required by section 10(1) of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Welsh Government. Cardiff. March 2016.

³ megawatts

- Indicator 28: Percentage of people who volunteer
- Indicator 29: Mean mental well-being score for people
- Indicator 30: Percentage of people who are lonely
- Indicator 40: Percentage of designated historic environment assets that are in stable or improved conditions.
- Indicator 44: Status of Biological diversity in Wales
- Indicator 46: The social return on investment of Welsh partnerships within Wales and outside of the UK that are working towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The funding for Create your Space projects is available for up to seven years and 100 per cent of project costs can be covered including capital expenditure.

As a result of the programme the aim is that the lessons learned by organisations and communities will mean that they have the confidence and the ability to take action and gain control of their local environment, implementing changes and improvements in their communities. They will also have a greater understanding and appreciation of the value of outdoor spaces in creating sustainable economic opportunities and in contributing to the health and wellbeing and individuals within the communities.

The seven-year Create your Space programme is split into three defined stages. During the development phase (stage 2) OB3 provided bespoke evaluation support to a total of 16 applicants to:

- Understand the role and purpose of evaluation within their project
- Set a robust baseline and suitable indicators for self-evaluation of their project
- Advise on useful sources of evidence, research instruments and approaches
- Advise on preparing evaluation plans and on the allocation of necessary resources
- Peer review the evaluation section (section K) of their project plan stage one applications.

16 stage 2 applications were submitted to the Big Lottery Fund during December 2016. Six projects were successful in their applications for funding for the development phase of the Create your Space programme namely:

- Roots to Shoots – Brymbo Heritage Group (Wrexham)
- Cwlwm Seiriol Bond – Menter Môn (Anglesey)
- Our Back Yard – Groundwork North Wales (Conwy)

- Vision for our Valley – Ynysybwl (RCT)
- Woodland Routes to Wellbeing – Duffryn Community Link (Newport)
- Welcome to our Woods – Interlink (RCT)

In addition to supporting projects in the further development of their own self-evaluation plans during the next year (the foundation phase of the Create your Space programme), OB3 is also tasked with undertaking an impact evaluation of the programme as a whole.

The impact evaluation will provide overarching evidence to demonstrate the extent to which the programme is achieving its intended outcomes of:

- helping people transform their outdoor spaces by giving them the confidence to make informed decisions and
- sharing lessons to help people implement change to improve their communities.

This is the first impact evaluation report for the programme and its main aim is to:

- take stock of the situation to date and the extent to which individual project-level evaluation plans fit with the intended programme outcomes
- set out the methodological approach for the impact evaluation of Create your Space during years 2-7
- explore opportunities for meta-analysis of evaluation evidence at programme level, including counter-factual impact evaluation methods
- suggest a number of recommendations for any areas of specific support/action required during the foundation phase to ensure the evaluation structure at both project and programme level is fit for purpose.

The structure of the remainder of this report is therefore set out as follows:

Chapter 2 sets out the overall programme logic model and provides a brief analysis of how the individual project-level logic models will link with the overall theory of change.

Chapter 3 contains an overview of the project level evaluation activity conducted to date by the funded projects and an assessment of how they will feed into and inform the formative and summative evaluation stages. We also highlight any potential gaps and include recommendations on how we aim to address these by conducting our own primary research.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed methodological statement setting out the work programme for the overall impact evaluation during the foundation phase (year 2), the interim evaluations (at the end of year 4 and year 6) and the summative evaluation at the end of year 7. The chapter also highlights any specific methodological challenges in relation to the impact evaluation and how these might be addressed.

Chapter 5 explores the potential for counterfactual impact evaluation, and Chapter 6 summarises the key process lessons and areas for the evaluation support service to focus on during the foundation and delivery phases in order to strengthen the robustness of the impact evaluation.

2. Theory of Change and Logic Models

This chapter articulates the theory of change model for the Create your Space programme. It also provides analysis of how the individual project-level theory of change models and related evaluation plans dovetail with the intended outputs and outcomes for the programme as a whole.

Theory of change and logic model for Create your Space

Theory of change is an approach to planning and evaluation that begins by identifying needs and describing a change to be brought about to address those needs. It provides a framework for explaining how activities are expected to bring about change and thus lead to the achievement of outcomes and impacts. It also allows assumptions made about the expected causal linkages between activities and outcomes to be set out, as well as the things or conditions that need to be in place in order for the desired change to happen.

Theory of change begins with the development of a logic model of how an intervention is meant to work. This provides a structure for assessing whether an intervention works as expected and for identifying its effects upon those targeted. It also provides a mechanism for recognising where things do not work out as planned and for understanding the extent, nature, causes and consequences of any divergence. The intention is that the theory of change model acts as a benchmark for the evaluation research covering outputs, outcomes and early impacts.

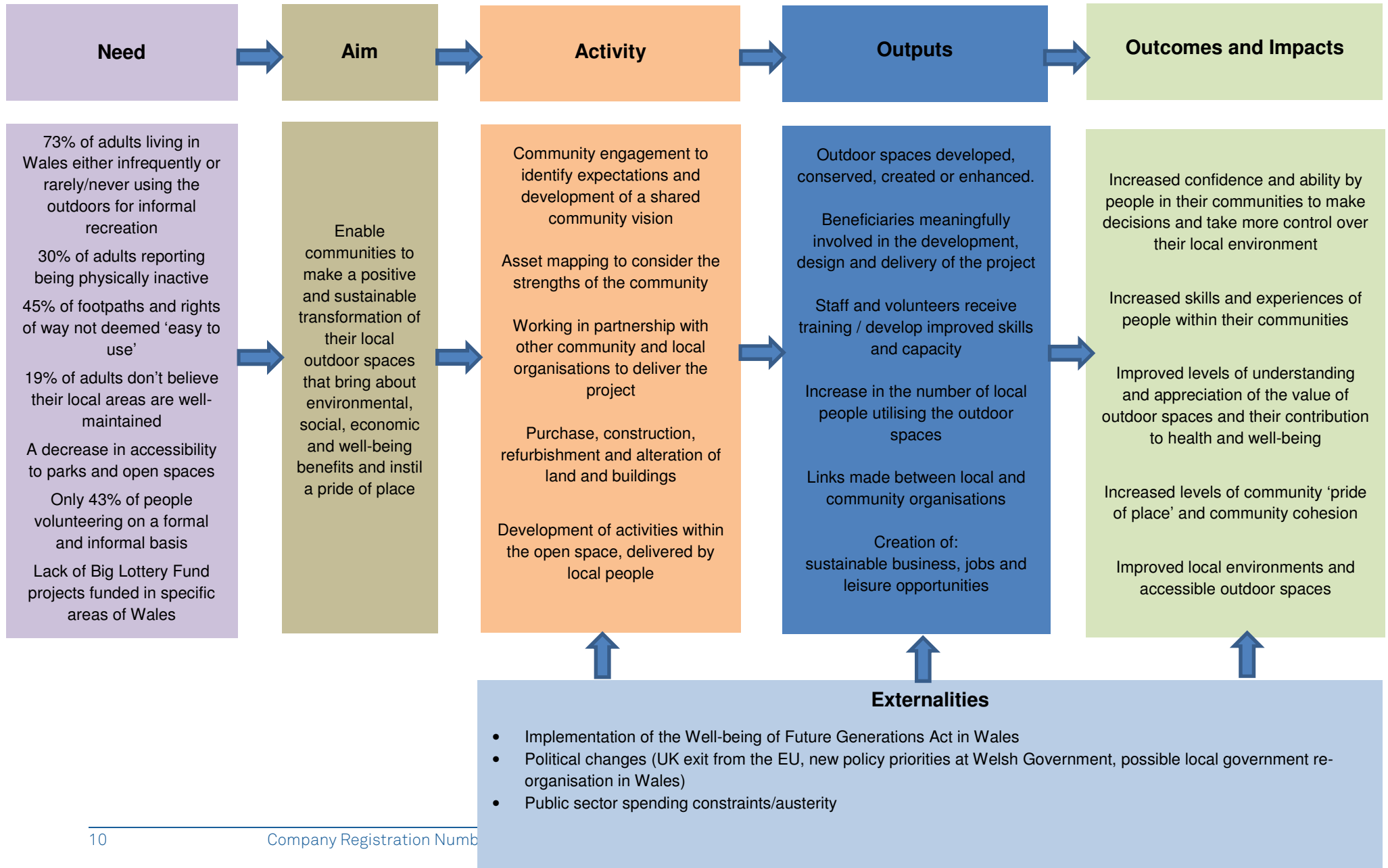
The logic model outlined below sets out:

- The context and need for the Create your Space programme
- The aim
- The inputs and activities being delivered
- The outputs and targets set
- The intended outcomes and impacts to be achieved.

The identified needs in the logic model above are based on statistics gathered by Welsh Government that are gathered using the research questions that will be used to measure WFG Act indicators (mainly from the annual Living in Wales survey). The outcomes and impacts have been drafted so

that they demonstrate a clear link with the previously identified programme level outcomes and WFG Act priority indicators (as outlined in Chapter 1):

Programme Level Theory of Change Model – Create your Space Evaluation



Analysis of project-level theory of change models

In-depth evaluation diagnostic assessments have been conducted on the applications submitted by the successful projects, with particular focus given to the theory of change sections and monitoring and evaluation sections. This process has highlighted that project level theory of change approach and understanding, and their associated logic models (where relevant) vary in terms of both structure and quality. Two projects have relied heavily on the programme logic model above as a structure for their project level logic models which is beneficial in terms of 'fit', at least another two have barely outlined their theory of change during the development phase and will require further assistance over the coming year to develop their thinking. As a result, it is difficult to assess the fit with the programme level Theory of Change at this stage.

Whilst all projects clearly articulate their aims and associated activities, there are currently some gaps that need to be addressed around:

- Identified need
- Outputs
- Outcomes and Impacts.

These gaps are discussed in more detail below:

Identified need

Projects have generally consulted well with their local communities and highlight the demands and requests generated from such consultation activities. All projects have also clearly understood the importance and relevance of the WFG Act's sustainable development principles and goals and articulate this well throughout their applications.

Most of the successful projects have gathered some relevant local data to further make the case for the identified need, but some might require more work in this area in order to ensure a robust baseline situation can be established. Projects are often aware of this and highlight their intention to 'draw up baseline figures from a mix of people already involved and online surveys to track changes in attitude, engagement and behaviour' for example. During the Foundation Phase further work will be required to ensure that appropriate data and evidence can be secured at both project and population level.

The theory of change sections in the successful applications for the foundation phase do not tend to link identified needs in any great depth to any specific policy or strategic documents. There is a tendency to list local and national strategies but there is no discussion or demonstration as to the specific policy priorities the project is aligned with. As such, during the Foundation Phase it is recommended that work will need to continue to help projects to prepare strong baseline policy sections that draw out the key issues relevant to their projects from local and national level strategies.

Outputs

The outputs currently suggested for individual projects are generally well-thought out and are, in our view, reflective of planned intervention. They are also very well aligned to the relevant WFG Act indicators identified for the Create your Space programme. However, in some instances the natural 'flow' and linkages between the aim, activities and outputs isn't entirely clear. In one project, for example, the work streams for the project do not correspond to activities outlined in the Theory of Change model. As a result the information collected as evidence could struggle to sufficiently capture the outcomes of the projects in full.

Although it was clear from Big Lottery Fund guidance that Create your Space as a programme was not prescriptive or overtly focussed on data collection for output measures, projects nevertheless have tended to present a long list of indicators to measure progress. For example, one project currently has 18 identified indicators whilst two others have several different work streams with a list of outputs and outcomes for each one. During the Foundation Phase, support should be focussed on further enhancing and simplifying the agreed outputs for the successful projects so that they are manageable and relevant.

It would be beneficial if projects considered the methodology used by Welsh Government to gather the data for their WFG Act indicators and look to replicate where possible (e.g. wording of questions in beneficiary surveys). However, under the 'people in the lead' philosophy underpinning all Big Lottery Fund activity, and the guidance provided by Welsh Government it is quite clear that projects have an opportunity here, to demonstrate, by more qualitative approaches, how their activities are contributing to the ethos of the WFG Act. In this sense gathering qualitative evidence from the Create your Space projects against the core indicators (and possibly the sub-set of other indicators that could be relevant to projects) would enrich the quantitative, local authority level or national level data collected by statutory organisations.

Outcomes/Impacts

Projects have generally realised that the Create your Space programme has a strong focus on gathering qualitative evidence that can be used to enrich data collected as part of the WFG Act indicators at a local level. Only one project (Interlink) has a well-developed Theory of Change model outlined, with outcomes that closely align with Create your Space and WFG Act outcomes. Their Theory of Change includes a detailed narrative of the problems (or identified need), the externalities which could impact on the project and a clear list of outputs and outcomes. Further work is therefore needed to develop a clearer rationale and logical approach that is underpinned by robust evaluation plans. We propose that this good practice example is used during the evaluation network event of the foundation phase.

3. Overview of project level evaluation activity to date

In general the applications provide a relatively brief outline of the type of evaluation activity that the successful projects intend to undertake during the Foundation and following delivery phases of the Create your Space programme.

Indicators and intended outcomes

Using the outcomes/impacts outlined in the programme level logic model (as described in Chapter 2), we have analysed the indicators that have been developed by each successful project. The chart below provides a summary of the intended outcomes of each of the six successful projects, which demonstrates that there is some commonality with the programme level outcomes (outlined in the proposed theory of change model) in terms of the key themes:

Programme Outcome 1: Increased confidence and ability by people in their communities to make decisions and take more control over their local environment

(WFG Act Indicators 23)

Cwlwm Seiriol	Welcome to our Woods	Woodland Routes to Wellbeing	Vision for our Valley	Roots to Shoots	Our Back Yard
<p>Number of people participating in practical environmental activities</p> <p>Number of participants testifying to personal development benefits from project involvement</p> <p>Number of community led groups managing and maintaining green spaces</p>	<p>Percentage who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area</p>	<p>Number of community members participating in the project</p>	<p>No. of people accessing provision</p> <p>% increase in number of local people utilising outdoor space</p> <p>No. of beneficiaries involved in development, design and delivery of project</p> <p>No. of volunteers receiving training</p>	<p>No. and range of people running activities</p> <p>No. and range of constituted community groups organising activities</p> <p>Increased percentage of people feeling more able to influence decisions</p> <p>Increased percentage of people confident in helping others to influence decisions</p> <p>Increased percentage of people associating spaces with community activities and groups</p>	<p>Percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area</p>

Programme Outcome 2: Increased skills and experiences of people within their communities

(WFG Act indicator 28)

Cwlwm Seiriol	Welcome to our Woods	Woodland Routes to Wellbeing	Vision for our Valley	Roots to Shoots	Our Back Yard
<p>Number of people trained to work on improving/enhancing green spaces</p> <p>Number of training courses</p> <p>Number of community led groups managing and maintaining green spaces</p>	<p>Number of people who volunteer</p>	<p>Number of volunteers involved</p> <p>Number of participants taking part in training opportunities</p> <p>Number of participants gaining an accredited qualification</p> <p>Number of community members involved in training activities out of the classroom</p>		<p>No. and range of people using space for learning</p>	<p>Percentage of people who volunteer</p>

Programme Outcome 3: Increased levels of community ‘pride of place’ and community cohesion

(WFG Act Indicators 26 & 27)

Cwlwm Seiriol	Welcome to our Woods	Woodland Routes to Wellbeing	Vision for our Valley	Roots to Shoots	Our Back Yard
Number of new community events arising from projects	Percentage of people agreeing that they belong to the area, that people get on well together and treat each other with respect	Community members reporting they are proud of area and happy for children to play outdoors Children are happy with their outdoor environment		Increased percentage of people considering spaces around them accessible, welcoming and safe Increased percentage of people feeling connected through the use of space Increased percentage of people feeling connected within their community	Percentage of people agreeing they belong to the area, that people get on well together and treat each other with respect Percentage of people feeling safe in local area

Programme Outcome 4: Improved local environments and outdoor spaces

(WFG Act Indicator 40, 43 & 44)

Cwlwm Seiriol	Welcome to our Woods	Woodland Routes to Wellbeing	Vision for our Valley	Roots to Shoots	Our Back Yard
Number of habitat corridors established		Hectares of land now accessible for community use	No. of outdoor spaces enhanced	No. and area of spaces physically improved No. and area of spaces accessible	Percentage of people satisfied with local area

		Improved Local Environment Quality (LEQ scores)		Increased % of people perceiving positive change in quality of space Increased prominence of heritage connections	Percentage able to access their green space
Programme Outcome 5: Improved wellbeing of people in the community					
(WFG Act Indicators: 29 & 30)					
Cwlwm Seiriol Bond	Welcome to our Woods	Woodland Routes to Wellbeing	Vision for our Valley	Roots to Shoots	Our Back Yard
Number of people gaining health benefits from involvement in green space	Number of people who are active Mean mental wellbeing score for people involved in project Percentage of people who are lonely	Number of GP referrals accessing project Number of community members supported to develop greater understanding of mental and physical health and wellbeing Space developed for use by children and families		No. and range of people using space for leisure Increased % of people feeling more confident to take part	Percentage of people participating in physical activity Percentage of adults who have fewer than two healthy lifestyle behaviours (including children) Mean mental wellbeing score Percentage of people who are lonely

Whilst the chart above demonstrates a general consensus and strategic fit between project and programme level outcomes, the indicators themselves differ somewhat which could make the process of undertaking impact evaluation at a programme level more challenging. During the foundation phase, it would be beneficial, for the purposes of reporting on the collective impact of the projects, to find common ground within each of the five themes outlined above, and explore the possibility of developing a collective solution to the measurement of some indicators across all six projects. For example, through the development of a consistent form of wording within surveys or a core set of key questions for inclusion in discussion guides. This could be discussed and agreed at evaluation network meetings during the foundation phase.

Methodological approach

Most of the successful applicants intend to undertake some sort of survey with their local communities, with many also raising the need for these surveys to gather both hard data and also more subjective and perceptive qualitative information. For meta-analysis purposes, it would be useful if projects used a consistent core set of questions where possible, and some research instruments already exist which could support this approach, particularly in measuring wellbeing. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)⁴ offers the opportunity to achieve this, and can be highlighted as an option via the evaluation support offered, although it will ultimately up to projects whether they wish to utilise that approach.

Many applicants also highlight the intention of undertaking in-depth case studies of participants. In this respect, support to develop suitable discussion guides will be useful during the foundation phase, and again this could be provided by OB3 as part of the evaluation support offer.

Some innovative approaches are outlined in the applications such as the ‘Sensemaker⁵’ tool for capturing stories, and there are opportunities for the successful applicants to use the foundation year to explore other interactive and different options for capturing the required data and information for their agreed indicators. This is another identified gap that the OB3 evaluation support provision could look to fill.

From an impact evaluation level perspective, it would be pertinent to discuss the methods for capturing the evidence in more detail with projects during the foundation phase network meeting to

⁴ <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>

⁵ <http://cognitive-edge.com/sensemaker/>

see whether best practice can be shared, and the most effective approaches possible utilised for the collection of evaluation and monitoring information. This would provide more robust data and evidence for the purposes of the impact evaluation meta-analysis activities too.

Undertaking evaluation activities

It is apparent from the project applications that there is variation in the type of organisation funded, in terms of structures in place for capturing monitoring data and the systems in place. Some organisations have sophisticated systems in place and staff with evaluation expertise. In others, this is the start of a relatively new and unknown journey into the world of evaluation, and as a result, some support might be needed in developing adequate monitoring structures and ensuring that all the necessary data/security requirements are in place early on. This will need to be a key focus of the Foundation Year evaluation support provided in some cases.

Three of the successful applicants outline their intention to allocate some resources to engaging an external evaluator. One project has allocated a £10,000 budget over the life of the programme, to include a summative evaluation report at the end of the seven year period. Another example is a project which has allocated £20,000 for M&E but with the intention of using it for training, equipment and only £5,000 for the summative final evaluation report. It is imperative that the support provided to projects continues to ensure that project staff are able to undertake the necessary evaluation processes internally, in order to make best use of the funding made available for external expertise. This might mean that some of the evaluation network events are utilised in a way that provides ‘training’ on various aspects of evaluation for project staff and volunteers e.g. tools and techniques for capturing feedback from children and young people or digital storytelling.

Dissemination

Several applicants give thought to how they intend to disseminate the findings from their local project. In particular, key local partners, both at community level and at strategic level are identified. Projects are also aware of the need to demonstrate additionality beyond what is currently being achieved within their local area.

Projects have not tended to consider wider opportunities to disseminate – either at a national level or in terms of influencing policy at a more strategic rather than operational level. As a result the development phase and subsequent years, will offer an opportunity for the evaluation support to

develop the necessary knowledge and expertise within the groups to enable this to happen. The meta-analysis to be conducted by OB3 will also support this aim.

Several projects also summarise their innovative ideas for dissemination in their successful applications, including the intention to capture photographic and video evidence, and to use social media platforms to promote key findings. Again, this highlights the need for the OB3 evaluation support during the next phases of the programme to support the projects with their dissemination planning and to facilitate the sharing of experiences around the success or otherwise of various dissemination techniques.

4. Methodological Statement

The programme-level impact evaluation activity undertaken by OB3 for the Create your Space programme will aim to consider the true effect of a project, making adjustments for outcomes that would have happened anyway, and looking for any unintended consequences elsewhere. At the core of the impact evaluation will be an assessment of the following key issues:

- **Relevance:** How relevant are the programme's objectives to the changing policy environment and analysis of need at a local, regional and national level?
- **Efficiency:** How effectively are the resources generating the anticipated outputs?
- **Effectiveness:** How is the programme contributing to the achievement of its overall outcomes and objectives?
- **Impact:** Was the programme utilised in a way that had an impact on the target groups or populations in relation to their needs (or were there any unintended consequences that need to be captured)?
- **Sustainability:** To what extent can the changes (or benefits) be expected to last after the programme has been completed?

The section below outlines a detailed methodological statement which sets out the work programme (including deliverables and milestones) for the overall impact evaluation including the mid-term and summative evaluation.

As the project progresses, we will also include detailed and targeted, primary research fieldwork that we ourselves would conduct to add to the monitoring information and self-evaluation evidence provided by projects themselves if it were deemed necessary. The evaluation network for Create your Space projects, arranged annually, will also provide an opportunity to consider how meta-analysis of the collective evaluation evidence could be disseminated in conjunction with appropriate policy or strategic developments in Wales.

Foundation Phase of the Impact Evaluation (June 2018)

This phase will be conducted shortly after the completion of the foundation phase (between March-June 2018). This is an important phase of the evaluation process as it will need to help inform the Fund as it makes decision in relation to projects progressing from the foundation phase to full delivery.

In particular, this phase of the evaluation will involve:

- Undertaking a detailed analysis of the monitoring information and self-evaluation evidence supplied by the eight projects after their first year of operation (March/April 2018)
- Undertaking a light-touch desk based review of relevant policy literature (e.g. Well-being of Future Generations Wales Act) and annual reports submitted by the Create Your Space projects to the Fund. (March/April 2018)
- Undertaking a targeted programme of fieldwork in each of the 8 projects. The focus of this work would be to address any specific gaps in the evidence base and to ‘sense check’ monitoring information and self-evaluation submitted to us by projects themselves. This would typically include for each project:
 - A group based session (ideally a workshop or focus group) to gather the views of ‘beneficiaries’. (March/April 2018)
 - Conducting semi-structured interviews with the project manager, staff and volunteers. (April/May 2018)
 - Interviewing the overall Programme Manager and individual grant officers at the Fund to gain their perspective on progress, outcomes and lessons identified to date. (April/May 2018)
 - Interviewing staff from the Learning Support contract (SWE/Bro) to gain their views on progress, outcomes and lessons identified to date. (April/May 2018)
 - Preparing a draft phase 2 report, taking comments from the Fund and preparing a final report. (early June 2018)

Interim Evaluation of the Impact Evaluation (June 2020 and June 2022)

Preparing a phase 3 interim evaluation report at the end of year 4 and a phase 4 interim report at the end of year 6. Phases 3 and 4 of the evaluation would involve (at each stage):

- Undertaking analysis of monitoring information and self-evaluation evidence supplied by the 8 projects and the meta-evaluation work.
- Reviewing annual reports submitted by the projects to the Fund and providing analysis on overall progress and performance.
- Undertaking targeted fieldwork in each of the five (or six?) projects to address any gaps in monitoring information and to ‘sense-check’ self-evaluation evidence. This would typically include for each project (for each of phases 3 and 4):

- Semi-structured interviews with the project manager, staff and volunteers.
- A group based session (ideally a workshop or focus group) to gather the views of 'beneficiaries'.
- Interviewing the overall Programme Manager and individual grant officers at the Fund to gain their perspectives on progress, outcomes and lessons identified to date.
- Interviewing staff from the Learning Support contract (SWE/Bro) to gain their views on progress, outcomes and lessons identified to date.
- Preparing draft phase 3 and phase 4 interim evaluation reports, taking comments from the Fund and preparing final, agreed versions of these reports. The interim reports would include specific recommendations on any evidence based changes we may feel ought to be considered at both programme and individual project levels.

Summative Impact Evaluation (December 2023)

Preparing a final phase, summative evaluation report at the end of year 7. The final phase, summative evaluation would involve:

- Undertaking analysis of monitoring information and self-evaluation evidence supplied by the 8 projects and the meta-evaluation work.
- Undertaking an updated desk based review of relevant policy literature.
- Reviewing annual reports submitted by the projects to the Fund and setting out conclusions in relation to overall progress and performance.
- Undertaking targeted fieldwork in each of the 8 projects. This would typically include for each project:
 - Semi-structured interviews with the project manager, staff and volunteers.
 - A group based session (ideally a workshop or focus group) to gather the views of 'beneficiaries'.
 - Interviewing the overall Programme Manager and individual grant officers at the Fund to gain their overall perspective on outcomes achieved and forward looking lessons.
 - Interviewing staff from the Learning Support contract (SWE/Bro) to gain their overall perspective on outcomes achieved and forward looking lessons.
 - Preparing a final, summative evaluation report setting out clear conclusions as to the overall achievements and impacts of Create Your Space and forward looking, evidence based recommendations to help the Fund make informed decisions about future commissioning of this type of programme.

5. Scoping the potential for counter-factual impact evaluation (CIE)

The longer term aim of the evaluation is to understand the effectiveness of the Create your Space programme in achieving the intended outputs, outcomes and impacts, including the extent to which the operations will have been a key and attributable factor in achieving these.

At this early stage of the impact evaluation process, the objective is to establish a framework for a robust impact assessment, in so far as this is achievable. Chapter 2 sets out an over-arching logic model for the Create your Space programme and the direct outcomes of the programme relate to

- increased confidence and ability by people in their communities to make decisions and take more control over their local environment
- increased skills and experiences of people within their communities
- improved levels of understanding and appreciation of the value of outdoor spaces and their contribution to health and well-being
- increased levels of community ‘pride of place’

Ultimately, these outcomes should lead to a positive and sustainable transformation of community outdoor spaces that in turn contribute to environmental, social, economic and well-being objectives.

Nature of Counterfactual Impact Evaluation

Counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE) is one method of evaluation which will sit alongside and supplement theory of change methods which will also be used at the mid-term and summative evaluation stages. CIE aims to attribute the change in key impacts and results measures to the Create your Space programme, allowing for other observable factors which may contribute to these changes.

In essence, by attributing the change to the programme’s specific activities, the CIE aims to establish the difference between changes to local outdoor spaces and the associated outcomes achieved as a result of the Create your Space programme, and the change in those outcomes which would have happened in the absence of the programme.

Thus, the CIE needs to disentangle the influence of the Create your Space programme from other factors (such as other local interventions, or relevant policy changes) on impact indicators to isolate the impact of the programme.

There is potential to measuring these by using various counterfactual methods, which can be selected based on the nature of the intervention, the impacts it is aiming to support, and practical considerations such as the data which is available to carry out the CIE.

Establishing a Counterfactual

Establishing the counterfactual is the essential step in isolating and understanding the actual impact that an operation has created.

The most technically robust approaches to the counterfactual draw upon comparator or control groups of non-participants for the intervention being evaluated. The main assumption is that the post-policy outcome in the control group can provide an estimate of what would have happened to the treatment groups had the project not been implemented. As part of a robust CIE it is necessary to demonstrate that this assumption is plausible.

Approach

Our proposed CIE method has been informed by the undertaking the following tasks:

- Reviewing guidance on counterfactual impact evaluation methods and the types of requirements for different methodological approaches.
- Reviewing good practice evidence for CIEs primarily in a community development context but also more generally for regeneration.
- Examining the successful applications which were submitted to the Big Lottery Fund for the Create your Space programme
- Considering the application of these methods to Create your Space, allowing for the current and future policy, social, economic and environmental context.

Guidance

This review has covered:

- The UK Government's Magenta Book (evaluation guidance). This covers the purpose of CIE but is limited in terms of its coverage of methodologies.
- Evaluation material and guidance from WEFO and the What Works Centre website. This provides high level coverage of both CIE and ToC approaches with some focus on making the case for CIE and objective measures of the robustness of CIE methods. However, there is little information relating to lessons from the adoption of different CIE methods.

Good Practice

It seems that there is currently little use of the more robust CIE methods to assess the impact of policies or investment programmes in community regeneration settings, including randomised control trials, quasi-experimental methods or simple matched comparator groups.

The more common approach is theory of change, using mixed methods to explore the nature of change and the factors which contribute to this including consultations, stakeholder focus groups and beneficiary surveys i.e. the triangulation of evidence generated from various methodological approaches.

Consequently, there are few comparable examples and hence the opportunity to learn from the experience of other evaluators.

Project monitoring data

Monitoring data is collected as part of the project, which is a rich source of quantitative and qualitative information. The gathering of data is reported upon annually. However, as there is flexibility in terms of both the qualitative and quantitative information that projects will be required to gather, then for the purposes of the CIE this raises difficulties.

For the purposes of the CIE, the quantifiable information from the monitoring reports is likely to be the more valuable source. Evidently, the data which is collected is only available for the project participants who are being monitored. This poses a constraint for the CIE, as the information cannot be replicated across projects within the programme nor can it be compared to other non-treated

projects or programmes. This lack of comparability within the programme's own confines (which is of course a core ethos for the people-led approach) does limit the extent to which any data can be used in the context of a CIE approach, although it is still a useful source of information on the progress of the programme as a whole.

Approaches to use of CIE in the context of the Create your Space programme

In broad terms, the main methods of CIE are Randomised Control Trials (RCT) and Quasi Experimental Methods.

RCTs aim to approximate natural experiments by randomly assigning participants treatment and control groups, and then observing the outcomes for both groups. In RCT, any differences in outcomes can therefore be attributed to the intervention. However, RCT is not a feasible method for a programme such as Create your Space as there is neither a selective process for the assignation of beneficiaries to the programme nor is there any controlled or consistent approach to the participation or involvement of beneficiaries within project's own activities or between various projects funded at the Foundation Phase of the programme.

When RCTs are not feasible, there are methods that resemble randomisation by selecting a control group of non-participants that closely resemble those receiving the intervention, i.e. quasi-experimental methods. Examples of quasi-experimental and other CIE techniques used to evaluate policy interventions include regression discontinuity, matched comparison groups (such as propensity score matching), difference in-difference (pre and post, with and without comparisons), non-equivalent comparison groups etc. The ease of application and robustness of the methods varies. However, for the same reasons as given above for RCTs and due to the localised, small scale nature of the programme and the (understandably) lack of targeting of any particular cohort of beneficiary, they are not appropriate for use in a programme such as Create your Space and can therefore be discounted.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research can be used to supplement the quantitative analysis of beneficiary data collected by projects. During the semi-structured group discussions with beneficiaries and interviews with project staff and support consultants, as set out in our methodological statement in Chapter X, it will be possible to gain an understanding of the difference in context at each of the funded projects. Over

the time period of seven years for the impact evaluation it will be possible to query project staff and beneficiaries alike about the potential additionality achieved by the programme.

Additionality is a key evaluation concept and involves considering what outcomes have been achieved as a result of a specific intervention that would not otherwise have happened. Measuring additionality usually involves reference to a baseline position, which is currently being developed by projects. The net difference between the baseline position and the observed outcomes of the programme then provides a basis by which net additional impacts can be considered.

This process of assessing the additional benefits and impacts achieved will take account of:

deadweight – the extent to which activity would have occurred regardless of the intervention;

displacement – the extent to which activity promoted may have displaced activity from elsewhere;

double-counting – where outputs are attributable to more than one programme;

multipliers – where an output has a further “knock-on” beneficial effect.

Conclusion

Based on the considerations outlined in this chapter, a plausible approach to the CIE of the Create your Space programme is simply to ensure that a section of the semi-structured interviews undertaken at key periods during the programme evaluation include specific questions on the additionality, displacement, deadweight and multiplier factors of individual project impact which can then be aggregated, meta-analysed and reported upon at the appropriate interim and summative impact evaluation stages.

6. Conclusions - Key Lessons from the Development Phase

This report has attempted to set the scene in terms by:

- outlining a programme level logic model with a set of core outcomes (combining the Create your Space programme outcomes and the requirements of the WFG Act indicators);
- identifying how project level evaluation activity and defined indicators underpin the programme level approach
- explaining the methodological approach required for impact evaluation activity to bolster the self-evaluation activities of individual projects and
- discussing the options for counter-factual impact assessment evaluation activities at programme level.

The learning from the analysis of project level evaluation plans provides us with a series of identified tasks and activities to be undertaken during the foundation phase to deal with current gaps in evaluation knowledge. It has also identified the necessary steps that need to be taken to ensure the impact evaluation to be conducted effectively and to gather meaningful programme level evidence.

The key process lessons are outlined below:

- 1) During the foundation phase, discussions on, and further development of the drafted project level Theory of Change models should be continued. Some of the successful projects have already worked on detailed theory of change models. In these instances, the project level evaluation activities dovetail well with the programme level logic model. However, in some instances, the theory of change model is not as well developed and will require substantial support to reach the stage where a clear and defined logical approach with clear linkages to programme outcomes is in place. For all projects, it will remain good practice to re-visit the theory of change model, and adapt as necessary as the project matures and activities adapt.
- 2) Further work is required to ensure all six projects have undertaken sufficient baseline activity so that progress can be measured against. OB3 has developed a diagnostic approach for working with projects to identify specific requirements, and it is suggested that this should be a particular area of focus during the foundation phase, with a programme level baseline to be outlined in the impact evaluation report at the end of the year.

- 3) A flexible and people-led approach is part of the ethos of the Create your Space programme and this is reflected in the self-evaluation plans developed by each project. However, there seem to be opportunities to measure progress in more consistent ways across the various projects, particularly by adopting some key common indicators, and this should be discussed and explored further with projects during the foundation phase. This could prove to be beneficial for the purposes of the impact evaluation where aggregated results can be meta-analysed and disseminated more widely.

- 4) Although a number of CIE assessment approaches have been considered for the Create your Space programme evaluation, we conclude that the qualitative approach is the most suitable and pragmatic and reasonable approach for a programme of this nature. OB3 will develop suitable questioning themes in impact evaluation level research instruments during the foundation year.