



# Joint Coalfields Regeneration Trust URBAN II Fund

Evaluation 2005-08

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Ernest Dobson  
Carol Meredith



the coalfields  
regeneration trust

## **Acknowledgements**

The consultants acknowledge the input from the wide range of individuals and organisations who acted as respondents throughout this evaluation and who were willing to take part in discussions, interviews and meetings in order to inform the evaluation findings.

## **The Evaluation Team**

This evaluation was conducted by Ernest Dobson and Carol Meredith.

## **Glossary**

<b>CRT</b>	Coalfields Regeneration Trust
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>VCO</b>	Voluntary Community Organisation
<b>VCS</b>	Voluntary and Community Sector

## **Contacts**

### *Coalfields Regeneration Trust*

Andy Lock Senior Regional Programme Manager

[andy.lock@coalfields-regen.org.uk](mailto:andy.lock@coalfields-regen.org.uk)

01709 765584

### *Evaluators*

Ernest Dobson

[ernest@ernestdobson.co.uk](mailto:ernest@ernestdobson.co.uk)

01661 831117

Carol Meredith

[carol@carolmeredith.co.uk](mailto:carol@carolmeredith.co.uk)

01669 620457

# Evaluation Report

## An evaluation of the Joint CRT/URBAN II Fund 2005-08

### Summary

This report documents the impact of the joint CRT/URBAN II grants programme through feedback and issues identified by grantees and other stakeholders. This grants programme was designed to enable voluntary and community groups in Hetton and Murton to access URBAN II funds and build confidence and capacity amongst local residents to engage with developments in the former mining communities. The Coalfields Regeneration Trust commissioned an independent evaluation of this grants programme in 2005-08 in relation to the impact, performance, and legacy of the fund.

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

This report summarises the findings of an evaluation of the Joint Coalfields Regeneration Trust (CRT) and URBAN II Small Grants Programme 2005-08. The partnership project targeted the former mining communities in Hetton and Murton through a pre-matched grants programme designed to ease access to URBAN funds for small groups.

Funding aimed to build the confidence and capacity of local groups to participate in the regeneration of local communities through a grant fund up to £40K, and support through a Development Fund. The fund was approved by URBAN II under Priority Two – Empowering Communities - which is concerned with improving the capacity of community organisations and enhancing the skills and confidence of individuals.

The evaluation was commissioned by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the work was undertaken by two local consultants Ernest Dobson and Carol Meredith between May-June 2008. This essentially qualitative evaluation is a response to the CRT brief that focussed on local impact from a grantee perspective through interviews, case studies, and an e-survey. The evaluation also consulted other stakeholders and assessed the partnership arrangement between CRT and URBAN II that created a pre-matched grants programme.

### **Performance**

The evaluation confirmed that the programme has been broadly successful in meeting its objectives by:

- ❑ strengthening and empowering organisations and individuals as outlined in the ERDF Priority Two funding stream *Empowering the Coalfield Community*
- ❑ helping to promote and extend the impact of both the CRT and Urban II programmes
- ❑ making funding accessible to small community groups
- ❑ enhancing the working relationship between the CRT and URBAN II

The CRT/URBAN II grants programme has met most of the priorities of the two funding streams. Most of the grants awarded fit URBAN Priority Two *Empowering the Coalfield Community*, though a few also contributed to Priority One *Engagement of Young People*. However, the fund's audience by definition was not delivering services linked to economic development and employability and few grants met this theme.

The programme awarded grants that mainly fell within the CRT funding theme of *Supporting Communities* whilst a small number of grants related to the themes of *Learning Communities* or *Enterprising Communities*. Virtually no grants were submitted under the CRT theme of *Supporting People into Work*. Overall, the grants programme met CRT's strategic priorities with a clear emphasis on social rather than economic outcomes.

As the programme was still live at the time of this report, it was not possible to report on the fund's final performance. However, the programme is expected to meet the revised budget spend despite a reduction in grant. It is also on target to exceed the original agreed outputs. The only exception may be residents participating in governance given the revision by URBAN II of individuals aged 65+ as ineligible outputs.

### **Impact**

The evaluation confirmed that this grants programme has had a significant impact on groups, communities, and individuals based in former coalfield communities through grants that promoted greater involvement in the social development of their communities..

Feedback from the survey and case studies has been universally positive and underlines how the grants scheme has enabled smaller organisations to access the URBAN programme and broadened the impact of both URBAN and CRT funding. Grantees commented on how the fund had contributed to building the capacity of groups to become more involved in their neighbourhood.

Survey responses and case study interviews showed that even the smallest grant had been of significant benefit to small groups that often struggle to survive and that the

resulting outcomes and outputs could be mapped against the priorities of both CRT and URBAN II.

The social impact of the fund has been the main outcome on both communities and individuals. Limited economic outcomes have been achieved through new posts whilst the majority of the grants have contributed to social outcomes linked to confidence and capacity building at a grassroots level.

A broad and varied range of projects have been supported by the fund that benefit a wide variety of organisations and individuals. There was evidence of impact on a number of key levels:

- ❑ *community* - case studies highlighted connecting communities across wards, raising expectations of quality services, strategic volunteer support, developing social capital through self help groups, and the development of new services in response to resident feedback
- ❑ *individual residents* - feedback from grantees noted increased involvement in activities and groups, progression into training and education, volunteering or employment supporting local residents, and personal achievement through accredited training and support
- ❑ *groups* – organisations commented on additional staff, improved knowledge through networking, enhanced skills, increased membership, opportunities to test pilot projects and new models of working, and new projects

A significant number of small grants were awarded to sports clubs for capital equipment and improvements. Whilst linkages between these grants and URBAN II's strategic objectives initially appeared tenuous, case studies illustrated clear social benefits including increased membership, opportunities for income generation, intergenerational activities. They also reinforced feedback from many grantees regarding increased numbers of members involved in local activities.

Two case studies highlighted how grants to organisations based outside the coalfield area can bring in valuable new services and pilot new models of working that build on robust networks that exist across the coalfield communities.

## **Good Practice**

The evaluation identified various examples of good practice at both a programme and the grantee level. At the programme level a simplified grants process, flexibility & risk taking by the fund, cashflow assistance, and partnership working between CRT and URBAN II were evident. Whilst amongst groups using the grant to employ staff a number of posts have been filled by local residents who previously were volunteers.

## **Sustainability & Legacy**

Case studies show that the fund has left a legacy of benefits. Grantees highlighted the creation of enhanced skills, personal development, new youth groups, new services, a sense of identity, and increased levels of engagement that will continue to benefit communities and individuals longer-term.

Although there is no identified successor fund, the CRT will continue to offer grants in the URBAN II area.

## **Issues**

The Development/Good Practice fund did not achieve its intended outcome due to underspend linked to a possible lack of understanding by groups of its intention and purpose. Given a surfeit of free provision in the area take-up was low and the budget was reduced and many of the grants awarded were driven by staff rather than applications from groups. Events and a guide to local groups were positive outputs from this fund aimed at providing practical, external support.

Staff changes impacted on the project with three different workers appointed over two years, several months without a Development Worker in post, and no worker in the final months of the project.

## **Grantmaking Process**

Grantees were clear that the fund was easy to access and that the pre-matched partnership arrangement was a valued route into funds they would not otherwise be able to access. Some groups did comment on minor difficulties with monitoring and reporting but overall the CRT acted as a buffer between administrative issues linked to European

funding requirements to make the application and monitoring process relatively easy and accessible. Levels of reporting were generally felt to be appropriate to the size of grant awarded.

The Development Worker was acknowledged by all grantees as a valuable resource, particularly to small, volunteer-run groups less familiar with fundraising and the grantmaking process. Feedback suggests this post was directly responsible for groups submitting applications, improving both the capacity of groups and the quality of their bids.

The flexibility the programme afforded to grantees was a great asset to a number of groups when they needed to amend their plans or projects in response to feedback or issues.

Whilst the partnership arrangement of a pre-matched fund suited applicants, significant administrative work resulted for the CRT.

### **Future Direction**

Whilst the programme has achieved its aims there is still a need for capacity building and support in the former coalfield communities. Reference was made to the strong networks that exist that offer the potential for future development work and strengthening of resources and services.

Any future fund should give serious consideration to the inclusion of a dedicated post to support applicants and a small development fund to add value and support. There is also an opportunity to review the decision making structure and devolve it to a local accountable panel that would contribute to capacity building through the involvement of community representatives bringing local knowledge and ownership.

Given the success of this pre-matched funding arrangement CRT may wish to explore the possibility of developing a pre-matched joint grants fund with local authorities or strategic linkages with the new North East ERDF programme and the Working Neighbourhoods Fund.

## SECTION ONE - BACKGROUND

### 1. Background & Context

#### *Description*

The Joint Coalfields Regeneration Trust (CRT) and URBAN II Small Grants Programme is a partnership project that targeted the former mining communities in Hetton and Murton. These include the former local authority wards of Hetton and Copt Hill in the City of Sunderland and the wards of Murton East, Murton West, South Hetton and Haswell in County Durham. These villages share a common mining heritage and the need for additional support to help them develop socially and economically.

The original project 2003-05 was a £125k small grant pot for grants up to £5k with capacity building. The second bid built on lessons learned to initially offer larger grants up to £20k with development support, to build more capacity within groups and develop new groups.

The URBAN II programme was designed to improve community engagement, access to services, employment, training and education. The small grants programme aims to build the confidence and capacity of local groups, and build strong communities that are essential to effective and widespread participation. The grants programme supports communities to develop their own activities, services and assets, to respond to opportunities from outside and engage with their local communities.

There have been three types of grants:

- ❑ Main grants - up to £40k for larger projects. CRT was able to provide grants above this level where appropriate through its main grants programme.
- ❑ Bridging the Gap - up to £10k for smaller projects
- ❑ Development/Good Practice Fund - for support/capacity building. This took the form of small grants to organisations and events/activities organised by the CRT

The majority of grants were Bridging the Gap. This is a continuation of a previous CRT/URBAN II Small Grants Programme. All applications to the programme are processed through the CRT's existing grant application routes.

### *Purpose*

The grants programme was developed in recognition of the need to develop the capacity of local groups and to ease access to URBAN II and CRT funding. The fund was established to increase the impact of both programmes and to promote community development by providing community groups easier access to smaller grants without having to go through the full URBAN application and monitoring process. URBAN II is an ERDF programme and therefore requires matched funding of around 50%. URBAN funds were pre-matched with CRT funds so that applicants did not have to secure their own match funding.

A Development Worker helped groups bid for funding and also provided support in the delivery of projects and capacity building. Larger grants were approved by the CRT Board of Trustees with smaller grants delegated to a Grants Committee.

## **2. Evaluation Brief**

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust commissioned an independent evaluation to assess the impact, performance, and operation of the grants programme. In keeping with the brief, the emphasis of the evaluation is on local impact with less attention given to performance and the grant making process. The evaluation of the grant making process is mainly concerned with grantees' experience and perception. The evaluation was also intended to assess the relative merits and wider implications of the CRT managing and collaborating with the European URBAN II programme through a partnership approach.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Overview**

This is predominantly a qualitative evaluation based upon people's views and experiences. This approach has been taken because this is a single project which was part of a range of interventions by CRT and URBAN. Though there is evidence of an improvement in the socio-economic conditions within the URBAN II area, it is not possible to attribute this to a single project.

The following methods were employed:

- ❑ desk-based research using programme fund documentation, grant application forms, assessment reports, monitoring reports, monitoring data, minutes of panel meetings, award data, Urban II programme evaluation, policy and strategy reports etc
- ❑ five individual interviews with stakeholders involved in delivery of the grants programme: CRT/Urban II staff and CRT trustees.
- ❑ eight site meetings plus telephone interviews with case study applicants, grantees, consultants, and beneficiaries
- ❑ an e-survey of grant applicants covering performance, impact and grant procedure. Almost 40% of successful applicants responded
- ❑ data analysis and production of draft and final reports

Though case studies are named throughout the report, quotations are not attributed to individuals.

The evaluation has been undertaken in the context of some constraints. Notably, it was not possible to interview any of the former Development Workers since they are no longer employed by the CRT. Although it was possible to interview two key CRT and URBAN II staff at the start of the evaluation, both are now on maternity leave, As a consequence, it has not been possible to test out the key findings of the evaluation with those staff who were closest to delivery.

### **3.2 E-survey**

All grantees who received either a Main Grant, a Bridging the Gap grant, or support through the Development Fund, were contacted as part of the joint CRT/URBAN II programme evaluation. 38 organisations and individuals received a survey (Appendix 1) either electronically or by post. (Three organisations had received more than one grant.)

The survey asked grantees for their views on the impact of the joint CRT/URBAN II programme and their perspective on the grantmaking process and support provided. 15 responses to the survey were received from a variety of groups including:

- bowls club
- football club
- male voice choir
- boxing club
- scout group
- community centres
- transport project
- homing society
- history group
- brass band music society
- community allotment

### **3.3 Case Studies**

Eight case studies were undertaken. This involved a site visit to the project and interviews with both grantees and beneficiaries wherever possible. Note that for many of the small groups, grantees are also beneficiaries. The case studies were drawn from a mix of projects in terms of CRT funding priority, activity, geography, type of fund and type of organisation. However, practical considerations such as availability of individuals also affected selection.

#### ***Main Grants Programme***

##### *East Durham Community Transport - linkED bus service*

East Durham Community Transport was invited to be part of the 'Communities that Work' programme by the CRT Regeneration Manager and to apply for a Main Grant through the joint CRT/URBAN II programme as CRT had identified through feedback from local residents that transport was a key issue in the Haswell and Haswell Plough neighbourhoods. The Main Grant of £80,916 over 12 months from the joint CRT/URBAN II fund was for research into and piloting of a linkED bus service, staffing costs, and a new minibus. The new bus route was designed as a feeder service to link into transport interchanges and also provide travel to nearby villages and communities that were difficult to access due to no direct transport links.

### ***Bridging the Gap***

#### *Easington Lane Community Action Point*

Easington Lane Community Action Point (ELCAP) is an established community centre that offers a variety of training and support services to local people. ELCAP has been successful previously in securing substantial CRT and URBAN II grants including capital funding from the main URBAN II programme to build an extension with a crèche, training room, and meeting room. The joint CRT/URBAN II Bridging the Gap grant of £10,000 over 12 months was to employ a new, part-time Volunteer Co-ordinator to support and develop the management of volunteers within the centre.

#### *Haswell History Group (inc. Development Fund grant)*

This group made up of local volunteers received a grant in November 2007 of £9,605 to cover the cost of local research, the production of a pamphlet, book, display materials and DVD. Volunteer expenses and room hire were also included. The main outcomes for the project are an increase in voluntary activity, community engagement, building confidence, capacity and pride. The group also received £2,500 from the Development Fund to pay for a consultant to assist the group to develop and implement a plan to deliver the project.

#### *Murton School PTA & Friends of the Ribbon - Oliver production & equipment*

Murton Schools PTA received a Bridging the Gap grant of £9,577 in late 2005 for the production costs of the musical Oliver starring 100 children aged 7-11. The grant paid for dance, singing, drama, craft, and technical editing tutors, lighting, costume, sound, and scenery hire, and the purchase of staging. The success of Oliver led to the formation of the drama and music group that is now a project managed by the Friends of the Ribbon committee formed when two schools and a nursery in Murton merged into an extended school facility. The Friends of the Ribbon applied for a grant of £7,453 for new drama equipment for Murton's Young Theatre Hooligan's (MYTH) for ongoing activities.

#### *Sans Street Youth & Community Centre - Aim High Project*

The Bridging the Gap grant of £8,232 supported outreach work into former coalfield communities targeting hard-to-reach young people to engage them in youth activities. Managed by Sans Street Youth & Community Centre staff with joint CRT/URBAN II

funding over 6 months, the project piloted a new model of peer support work and employed 2 peer advocates, a part-time Inclusion Worker, and a part-time Youth Development worker.

*The Princess Royal Trust Sunderland Carers' Centre*

The Princess Royal Trust Sunderland Carers' Centre received a Bridging the Gap grant of £7,393 towards the costs of a Carers' Development Worker post for six months in Hetton, Houghton, and Easington Lane. The post focused on hard-to-reach families where carers were often providing over 50 hours a week of care and support to family members.

*South Hetton Cricket Club*

This is a well-used and long established club. The club was awarded a grant of £10,000 in March 2007 to provide a portakabin that would provide a women's changing room and fencing to store outside equipment. The main outcome was better facilities for women and an increase in the number of women and girls using the club. The club have received previous grants for equipment and ground improvements that have led to more young people getting involved and more teams using the ground.

*Time Out - Active Time Out sessional costs*

Set up in 2005 by Hartlepool Primary Care Trust as 'Stressbusters' to support mums with young babies and children, this group has since become an independent organisation providing regular activity sessions and mutual support for men and women in the coalfield areas. Run by volunteers, with referrals from health visitors and tutors often drawn from within the community, the weekly sessions aim to build confidence and support new parents. The joint CRT/URBAN II grant of £4,055 over 6 months supported the group's running costs.

Reference is made in the evaluation to two other projects which received grants:

*Little Treasures – Haswell & District MENCAP*

*Passport to Success – Hetton Centre*

These references are based on previous contact and evaluation.

## SECTION TWO - KEY FINDINGS

### 4. Overall Impact and Grant Performance

#### 4.1 Overall Impact

Overall the evaluation confirms that the project has been broadly successful in meeting its objectives. It has:

- ❑ helped promote and extend the impact of both the CRT and URBAN II programme
- ❑ made funding accessible to small community groups
- ❑ enhanced the working relationship between the CRT and URBAN II

This confirms the findings of the URBAN Article 4 audit . The combined grant fund will award close to £400K in small grants. The previous small grants project underspent slightly and it is expected that the current project will spend close to approval.

The current project has recently been revised to take account of the project worker leaving and not being replaced. Some of the savings have been transferred to the grant fund but overall there is a slight reduction in Urban II grant.

The project has met most of its outputs, and in some cases they have been exceeded. Outputs would have been greater except URBAN II rules do not recognise economic activity of people aged 65 and over. This did not become known until part way through the project. The previous project failed to achieve its targets for jobs created and safeguarded.

Grantees were asked to comment on the overall impact of the joint CRT/URBAN II programme in relation to meeting its aim of building the capacity of groups to become more involved in developments and regeneration in their area. 10 grantees felt the fund had 'fully' or 'substantially' contributed to this aim whilst 5 groups commented that it had been of 'partial' help. The majority of respondents felt that the fund had contributed to supporting groups to become more involved in their neighbourhood and the quote below illustrates a clear view from the sector:

A large investment has been made across the board in the special coalfields area by the combination of Urban II/CRT and the area has noticeably benefited from this  
*Grantee - Transport project*

## 4.2 Performance against Targets

It is not possible to report final performance since the project is still live. The following budget variation was approved by URBAN II and the project is expected to meet this revised target.

Budget Heading	Approved	Revised
Salaries	34,952	31,592
Overheads	32,960	18,837
Premises	5,020	4,571
Grant Scheme	328,500	366,605
Best Practice Budget	65,680	20,259
Car Mileage	7,200	5,097
Office costs	6,000	364
Marketing/Publicity	9,000	6,150
Project Co-Ordination	9,500	14,456
Evaluation	5,000	7,500
Grant Appraisal & Monitoring	37,493	39,184
<i>Project totals</i>	541,305	514,615

The revised budget shows a slightly lower overall spend, some reduction in salaries because of the departure of the Development Worker, a significant reduction in the good practice budget, and an increase in the amount available for grants.

There has been a variation in completion dates which are expected to be met.

### *Original approved dates*

Start: 01/03/05      Delivery End:29/02/2008      Financial Completion:      31/05/08

### *Revised dates:*

Start: 01/03/05      Delivery End:30/06/2008      Financial Completion:      30/09/08

URBAN II Outputs were also revised in February 2008. The project is expected to meet the revised outputs.

Output	Ref Code	Original Target	Revised Target
Number of Community Groups/Organisations Assisted	A22	85	100
Number of Residents Participating in Programme Governance Structures	RO10	150	100
Of which females		75	80
Number of Beneficiaries receiving a Positive Outcome	RO1	180	350
Of which females		90	150

Despite a reduction in grant, output performance is expected to be in excess of the original agreed outputs. The exception is the number of residents participating in

governance structures. This is beyond the control of the project and reflects the URBAN II's retrospective removal of people aged over 65 from output definitions.

## 5. Impact on Communities

It is definitely worth having a small grants fund. Without the grant, we would not have carried on. It has given us an impetus for the future

*Grantee – History Group*

As this is a small grants programme, there was never an expectation that it would have a widespread impact on social and economic conditions of the communities of Hetton and Murton. The fund needs to be viewed in the context of the wider investments of the main Urban II programmes, CRT special initiatives such as the Haswell Communities That Work, and other public sector interventions. The impact of this particular grants fund will inevitably be limited and localised:

The overall impact on communities has been limited and probably impacted on social rather than economic development.

*Urban II programme team member*

This limited impact should not be interpreted as a criticism of performance, rather a realistic assessment of the limited scale and scope of the fund.

The grants scheme has opened up the CRT and URBAN programmes to a larger number of smaller organisations and has broadened the impact of both programmes. Feedback from the survey and case studies has been universally positive:

Without the CRT's generous support, we would not be able to move the club forward due to lack of equipment

*Grantee - Sports club*

We are now able to make the sport more accessible to girls and women – we are very excited about the future

*Grantee - Sports club*

The grant made a huge difference as this is the only club within the village that operates on an evening for children aged 0-10. The actual age of the participants was from 0-16 as some older ones came along with their siblings and turned this activity into a great family learning experience. The group has taken ownership and chooses what activities they would like to do. They have just completed an 8-week session in African dance and drumming that culminated in a performance to the public to show off their skills. The children have taken part in art sessions, jewellery making, computing, mask making and many other new skills that they would otherwise not have had the opportunity to access. Although funding has now ended the group continue to meet with each child paying a nominal fee to attend which sustains the group albeit on a much smaller scale.

*Grantee – Community Centre*

All survey respondents either '*strongly agreed*' or '*agreed*' that the fund had brought benefits to their users/the community. Groups illustrated their responses with examples of benefits linked to the grant:

Some of our members rely on the bowls club for their social life style. Some new members are recently bereaved and look to the club as their support. All members are from the local community

*Grantee - Sports club*

Giving young people self esteem and discipline

*Grantee - Sports club*

We have had disabled children come to visit and now have really good facilities

*Grantee - Uniformed group*

Local people have ownership of the project the 15 strong management committee play a vital role in the success of the project all local they can see first hand volunteering is often the first step to employment we have many success stories we have many consultations and fun days to ensure the needs of the community are met and provide 1-1 support and signpost people to services and relevant agencies. The volunteer post enabled us to streamline such activity

*Grantee - Community centre*

The Community Centre has been used more by people bowling, as well as new people who have been encouraged to try the sport for the first time. 2 new players have played in league fixtures”

*Grantee - Sports club*

Connecting communities, raising expectations, volunteer support, promoting social capital, and development of new services, are examples of community impact.

#### *Connecting communities*

The two youth groups established in Easington Flats and South Hetton have brought young men and women together through team working and project days to forge links between the two communities.

#### *Raising expectations*

The full scale, licensed production of Oliver by local children opened people's eyes to local talent and raised expectations about subsequent performances. It also gave the school a good name across and beyond the local community and created a 'buzz' around the village.

#### *Volunteer support*

Having a local person in post to assist volunteers was a significant benefit for the six longstanding volunteer-run groups who use the old hall adjacent to ELCAP.

#### *Social capital*

Women coming to Time Out sessions in South Hetton have become friends outside the group making friendships with other women who live close by but were not known to each other before attending the group. Social capital has been built up as they now rely on each other for help outside sessions, socialise together, and also organise and get involved with local fundraising towards future group costs.

#### *Services*

The linkED bus service has proved a lifeline for some residents enabling them to visit older family members to help with basic everyday tasks as well as visit relations and friends in neighbouring villages. Quotes from regular users show the personal value of the bus service in small communities where car ownership is very low and no direct public transport routes linking villages.

All our family uses the bus. It's just a shame that it's not more widely used by the community

Our daughter would not have been able to work without the bus as she needed it to get to a summer job whilst at college

I don't know what we'd do without it as I use it every Tuesday to go shopping in Haswell village almost 2 miles away

I've used it twice a week since the service started to travel to Wheatley Hill to get to my mother who needs help with shopping and other jobs

*Beneficiaries - Transport project*

## **6. Impact on Individuals**

The joint grants programme has been able to benefit individual local residents in a variety of ways. The impact has been in terms of becoming active, progression, and personal achievement. There is some evidence of progression into employment, but only a small number of beneficiaries have achieved this outcome.

### **6.1 Engagement**

One of the benefits reported by many of the grantees is an increase in the numbers who are engaged in activity. For some, notably the sporting clubs, this has also involved an increase in the numbers of young people and women getting involved. The South Hetton Cricket Club has increased the numbers of young people involved from 45 to 70 and has attracted more women players.

One of our members who was born here, aged 88, is really eager. This is the first time he's been involved in a community group.

*Grantee – History Group – 7370*

The grant provided our organisation with a long overdue boost. New members have come along and volunteered to get involved with committee work in order to 'better sell' our organisation in the area

*Grantee - Music society*

Overall the number of beneficiaries receiving a positive outcome is expected to be 350, double the original target.

## 6.2 Progression

The grants have not only facilitated the engagement of new people, but have also created opportunities for individuals to progress into training, volunteering or employment. Examples from case studies:

### Sans Street Youth & Community Centre

Two young peer advocates employed by the centre have been able to explore and take up opportunities following their training and involvement with a youth project as support workers with young people in Easington Flats and South Hetton. Both peer advocates have been able to move on in their own lives and are taking up further education opportunities through basic skills qualifications at college and continuing with youth work training.

I have learned that my strengths are that you can be capable of doing anything if you have faith in yourself

*Beneficiary - Youth project*

### ELCAP

Recruitment for the new Volunteer Co-ordinator post resulted in the employment of a longstanding volunteer who was already well known within the local community.

### Murton School Association

The grant supported the costs of a drama production of Oliver that targeted pupils with significant behavioral difficulties. School staff who worked as key volunteers noted the changes in self-esteem and attitude of pupils selected for key roles. One pupil, with no previous drama experience, has moved on to small speaking parts in TV dramas and even “surprised himself” at what he has been able to achieve through his involvement in the drama work.

### Passport to Success - Hetton Centre

Former community learners now make up a thriving group of volunteers who help with promotion, course enrolment, and provide support to new learners. Many of these have achieved accredited training qualifications and some are pursuing employment

opportunities. The volunteer co-ordinator funded by the grant is herself a former service user.

#### Time Out

Women attending Time Out sessions have acquired new skills eg self-defence, card making, flower arranging. All members now take part in activities to help raise funds for the group longer-term and have the confidence to help plan and run local fundraising events.

#### Aim High

Training for the two peer advocates echoed the induction and training of a new youth worker. Days spent in different youth settings exposed the trainee peer group leaders to a range of different issues and activities for children and young people - school based work with pupils at risk of exclusion and with behavioral problems, Duke of Edinburgh training, holiday activities. Both trainee advocates undertook the regionally accredited and recognised Introduction to Youth Work course, were CRB checked, and received training in lesson planning, presentations, listening skills, etc to be able do administrative work to support their work in a variety of youth settings.

#### South Hetton Cricket Club

Individuals have benefited from their involvement in sports clubs. For example:

Some players have moved on from here. One plays for a minor county, others have had county trials, and one plays for Durham's Second XI. We've even got some of the 'bad lads' off the streets who now come here instead.

*Grantee – Sports Club*

## 7. Impact on Organisations

The fund has reached a lot of smaller groups. It has managed to provide funding for an audience that otherwise would not have been able to access Urban funds.

*Urban II programme team member*

The fund has helped smaller groups to start off or grow. The fund has given confidence to groups to step up and has instilled confidence in partners. For example, the SPYRAL project has gone from strength to strength and has now developed good links with schools. South Hetton Cricket Club is now more sustainable and also works with schools.

*CRT Trustee*

These views are supported by case study organisations which show how a diversity of grants has strengthened their capacity and helped them to develop. Examples of grants for resources, a new travel service, and drama production and equipment costs evidenced the ways in which the fund was able build the capacity of groups through additional staff, improved knowledge, enhanced skills, increased membership, and new projects.

#### ELCAP

Establishing a new post at Easington Lane Community Action Point (ELCAP) enabled networking and liaison work that led to training opportunities for volunteers. A key benefit to ELCAP came through a dedicated member of staff able to liaise with external organisations. Attendance at the the Volunteer Forum brought the sharing of good practice in volunteering whilst networking has led to strong relationships with the city council and an array of training opportunities for volunteers.

#### East Durham Community Transport

The piloting of a new demand response travel service in Haswell and nearby villages led to an additional 400 residents joining East Durham Community Transport as users of this and other services provided by EDCT.

EDCT's new linkED bus service enabled the organisation to expand its capacity with a new vehicle and recruit 440 additional members who are predominantly older residents.

#### Murton's Young Theatre Hooligans

Two grants to support young people in Murton played a key role in the setting up of a drama and music project that is considered by the community to be a robust project with

a bank of music resources and a professional approach to local drama productions for children and young people.

Murton's Young Theatre Hooligans (MYTH) developed as a music and drama project following an initial joint CRT/URBAN II grant to Murton School Association PTA for a hugely successful production of Oliver by local schoolchildren. This performance, featured on the local ITN news, was a resounding success that showcased local talent in a high quality performance that went far beyond the accepted standard of the normal school drama production. The success led to the formation of MYTH and a further bid for equipment that has enabled the group to achieve a level of self sufficiency and professionalism. A computer package records music on CD to distribute to pupils so they can rehearse at home and recorded music removes the need to employ a pianist.

South Hetton Cricket Club

All the committee members have grown in confidence and ability. Being involved with the process of filling in forms, purchasing the equipment, helping to install and use it has developed the members. But the best result is having the resources to compete on a level playing field with our "competitors"

*Grantee - Sports club*

E - survey

Extending membership and setting up a new project were also amongst the examples of capacity building provided by survey respondents when asked whether the grant had a significant impact on their organisation in terms of capacity and confidence building. The quotes below show how grants have helped to strengthen local organisations:

We have as a group engaged new members and played in informal bowls competitions and won advancement in the league -

*Grantee - Sports club*

Buying equipment and training coaches for the project. Without it we would not have been able to set up

*Grantee - Sports club*

Local people have been given opportunities to train and develop skills and many are now in employment within our organisation and the wider coalfields

*Grantee - Community centre*

## 8. Sustainability & Legacy

There is not a specific successor for this project although the CRT will continue to work in the Urban II area. However, the fund has left a legacy which has helped to sustain benefits and organisations. Enhanced skills, personal development, new youth groups, new services, a sense of identity, increased levels of engagement are all longer-term benefits that grantees highlighted that will continue to benefit communities and individuals.

There has been some improvement in the capacity of organisations although more still needs to be done.

The fund has involved a lot more groups and achieved a higher CRT penetration rate than otherwise would have been the case. Local groups are now in a better position to apply for funding having gone through an application and monitoring process in a supported environment.

*CRT Staff member*

The majority of survey respondents agreed that the fund's positive impact will continue in the longer-term. Examples provided:

The club is looked upon as an established sporting club in the region. A club which members are proud of and worthwhile in the community

*Grantee - Sports club*

We are now fully sustainable with the selling of garden produce, flowers, veg, etc

*Grantee – Community Allotment*

Trained coaches and a recruitment of other volunteers which will help perpetuate the organisation

*Grantee - Sports club*

The post has enabled us to develop many partnerships city wide and offer more services from our buildings ie Job Linkage, Connexions, Children's Services, Volunteer Centre one of our older volunteers has been a volunteer for over 40 years passing cross generational skills and working with the post holder to keep the history alive

*Grantee - Community centre*

One local team has closed, and another has just survived, we are viable and maintaining our members, which keeps alive the sport in the village for future generations

*Grantee - Sports club*

Case studies also illustrate the longer-term impact:

#### Aim High

Aim High has done precisely what its title suggests in terms of sustainability and legacy resulting from this 6-month grant for worker and peer advocate costs. The process of identifying, interviewing, and training two teenagers as peer advocates has created two peer workers who have already been approached to do work with youth projects in the coalfield communities and across the city of Sunderland. The legacy continues through the two new and established groups and ongoing 1:1 support for students not engaging with the education system. Both young men, now trained and CRB checked, bring their own personal experiences to their peer support work as a result of difficulties at school, lack of confidence, or the experience of being a young person with limited access to youth provision and support. As trained peer advocates they are role models who continue to represent what can be achieved by other young people.

#### East Durham Community Transport

The result of setting up a demand response transport system initially intended to provide links between villages and access to services such as GP and hospital appointments has actually resulted in a demand from older residents for regular trips and excursions. The locally based bus service that was the original aim of the scheme has been replaced by a social transport project that combats the social isolation of older residents through a calendar of outings that offers access to local shopping centres plus social trips at weekends.

#### ELCAP

An active pool of 18 volunteers now supports ELCAP and the organisation is confident that it has a valuable resource to call on and that the structures and systems are in place to support the vital volunteer pool that engages and involves local residents whilst supporting the centre.

## MYTH

MYTH now has 10 volunteers including parents and school staff who run the weekly sessions for the 71 members aged 10-14. The club has extended its work in response to members asking for issue based work using drama to tackle the concerns of its young members. New T-shirts give the drama club members a sense of identity when going into residential homes to do mini performances for older people in the village.

## Princess Royal Trust Sunderland Carers' Centre

Carers support work focused on Hetton, Houghton, and Easington Lane raised awareness within the Trust of the need for an ongoing post in an area where acute financial hardship is a major issue. The Trust board has agreed a continuation and extension of the work (from 18 hours a week to a 4 day post) from the charity's core funding. The post will continue to offer 1:1 support and also develop carers support and self-help groups, as well as build further networks with statutory agencies.

### 9. Good Practice

There are several examples of good practice at both programme and grantee level. Areas of good practice at the programme level include:

- simplified grants process
- flexibility & risk taking
- partnership working
- development worker
- cashflow assistance

At a grantee level, the jobs created have predominantly been taken by local residents, some of them former volunteers.

#### 9.1 Simplified Grants Process

Survey respondents were asked to highlight aspects of joint CRT/URBAN II programme that demonstrate good practice. The following quotes illustrate how the simplified grants process and matched funding benefited smaller groups:

The easy process for inexperienced local groups and the useful assistance by support workers

The staff who help administer it. Good publicity support

Local contact made it easy initially to get up and running

As a charity we are committed to do some fund raising for some of the services we provide. However, as a very small and new enterprise we would struggle to match funds. Income that is generated from users is used to cover running costs.

Pre-match funding and only having to complete one application form

*Grantees*

## 9.2 Flexibility

The eligibility rules for URBAN II put limits on how the funding can be used. For example, although one of the objectives of the URBAN II was to improve community transport, the purchase of a bus was ineligible. However, because CRT has access to other funds, it was able to direct ineligible applications to other funding programmes. The main URBAN II programme does not have this flexibility. As it became clear that some groups would not be able to complete their activity by the March 2008 end date, URBAN agreed to an extension to June 2008.

There was a strong awareness and appreciation of the level of flexibility that the fund afforded to applicants even after a grant and its purpose and programme of work had been agreed.

### Aim High

The Aim High project developed by Sans Street Youth & Community Centre in Hendon in east Sunderland took youth work into the coalfield communities using trained peer advocates to engage with hard-to-reach young people in Easington Flats and South Hetton. The initial plan of delivering junior sports leader training to groups of young people encountered difficulty given pupils not able to be released long enough to complete sessions during the school day and limited time in the evenings. An alternative accredited leadership and climbing training programme at week-ends and in holidays was proposed and is ongoing with a group of 20 young people together with 2 peer advocates. The ability to review and then change planned activity and training was critical in delivering support to disengaged young people in two former mining villages.

There is evidence that CRT was willing to take risks. Some applications which scored high in terms of need but low in terms of deliverability were supported. The trustees' local knowledge played an important role here. Despite the risks taken, the failure rate has been negligible. The highest risk project has been successfully delivered.

### 9.3 Partnership Working between URBAN II and the CRT

Partnership working between Urban II and the CRT is an example of good practice, particularly as there has been some criticism of the Urban II programme for not making strategic links with other funds.

The operation of the partnership with URBAN II has worked well and is reflected in the comments overleaf.

The partnership with URBAN II has been excellent. Overall URBAN II have been flexible, easy to communicate with, and have been willing to share ground on claiming outputs

There has been a good working relationship with URBAN II staff – both formally and informally. If I have a query I just pick up the phone and usually get an instant response.

*CRT Staff members*

An unintended outcome has been the establishment of a forum for communication between the two programmes:

There has been a good relationship with the CRT – as strong as with any of our projects – I would not fault it. We are kept aware of the spend and grant approvals. All records are complied appropriately. The mechanism we have established for communication has had an added benefit: it has facilitated wider conversations about the two programmes as well as this project

*Urban II Development Team member*

There were several benefits to the partnership arrangements between CRT and the URBAN II programme that:

- assisted with strategic planning
- added value to both funds

- ❑ avoided duplication of funding. Some of the larger organisations applied to both the main URBAN II programme and also to the small grants fund. Potential duplication was identified and a small number of applications did not proceed.
- ❑ enabled the URBAN II development team to communicate issues around ERDF eligibility.

#### 9.4 Development Worker

The Development Worker has been universally regarded as an example of good practice.

The role of the development worker was crucial. There was a lot of handholding, capacity building, mentoring, and addressing barriers.

*CRT Trustee*

The worker has promoted the fund, supported groups to apply, and ensured a good level of take up. This was confirmed by the Article 4 visit:

An important part of the Development Worker's role was to develop networking among the community groups encouraging them to share best practice and increasing their governance skills. Some events were organised by the Development Worker but the project tended to use a range of existing forums rather than duplicate effort

*Article 4 Visit Project Report*

Many of the smaller groups commented in the survey on the value of the Development Worker post and the survey results scored this resource highly as *good to excellent*. Typical comments from the survey and case studies:

We had excellent advice from the Development Worker

Accessible and straightforward

Assistance from someone who understands saves time, money and frustration

I say a Development Worker is essential, for volunteer groups who lack the know how

Worker was available at the right time to help us

Absolutely brilliant. The guidance was excellent. It made all the difference. We would not have applied without their support

Reassuring in our case to know they were there if needed

*Grantees*

Not surprisingly, small, volunteer-run groups with limited experience of fundraising were most vocal about the benefits that a dedicated worker offers in terms of helping them to understand and engage with the grant application process and refine and amend their bid as a result of worker advice.

The positive feedback on this type of intervention and support underlines the need for dedicated help. It also confirms the model of providing a dedicated resource when trying to reach smaller, volunteer run groups with less experience and skills in fundraising.

## **9.5 Cashflow**

CRT paid grants in advance even though URBAN II refunded these payments in arrears – often several months in arrears. Though advance payments exposed CRT to some risk, it made a massive difference to community groups, most of whom did not have the cashflow to incur expenditure and claim in arrears.

## **9.6 Local Employment**

Several of the employment opportunities directly created as a result of the grants awarded were accessed by local people. A new post at ELCAP followed their tradition of employing former volunteers who are local residents. Similarly, the Hetton Centre employed a former service user and volunteer as a volunteer co-ordinator. Several of the sports clubs employed local people as coaches and the Haswell History Group engaged a local historian on a part-time basis.

## **10. Issues**

### **10.1 Monitoring**

The change of rules over URBAN II monitoring requirements was a problem for the project. Not only were beneficiaries over 65 excluded, but retrospective verification created an onerous administrative burden and meant that some outputs were not captured. This issue is not unique to this project. All URBAN II projects were affected in this way.

Monitoring is universally recognised as the most negative aspect of the programme. In particular, the retrospective verification introduced after a revised interpretation of the requirements, has been roundly condemned by projects and has led to a huge administrative burden. This was beyond the control of the programme.

*Urban II Programme Evaluation, 2008*

This issue was managed by the CRT and does not appear to have had much impact on grantees. This contrasts with recipients of the main URBAN II grants who, according to the URBAN programme evaluation, described the monitoring process as “a nightmare”.

## **10.2 Development Worker**

Staff changes have affected the project. The departure of the original development worker has had a detrimental impact and the most recent worker has not been replaced so there is currently no development worker although the project is still live.

Two stakeholders questioned whether the development worker was too helpful – that some groups needed so much assistance, the worker virtually told groups what to say in their applications. However, this perception is not matched by the experience of local groups who felt that although they were given detailed advice, the groups were left to complete the applications themselves. Despite this support, there is a recognition that some of the smaller community organisations still need to improve their capacity if they are to successfully manage projects and organisations.

Although the development worker undertook outreach work with groups, the worker was based at the CRT’s regional office, so did not have a base in the area. There are mixed views as to whether this impacted on the effectiveness and the accessibility of the worker.

## **10.3 Development/Good Practice Fund**

This fund was a resource managed and allocated by CRT that provided help and guidance eg governance training, business planning, monitoring support etc in addition to support from the Development Worker. In response to local demand, the fund was also used to produce a well-used pocket guide to local voluntary and community groups. There is fair consensus that the Development Fund, also known as the Good Practice Fund, did not live up to expectations. Although the survey respondents were positive

about the Development Fund, it appears most did not understand what it was and confused it with the Bridging the Gap Fund. This was confirmed by the case study visits where many of the grantees did not know what the Development Fund was. Only one of the eight case study organisations had received a Development Fund grant.

CRT staff tended to take the initiative in generating Development Fund proposals rather than groups applying on their own initiative. Unlike the *Main* and *Bridging the Gap* grants, expenditure was approved by CRT officers. The take-up of the good practice/development fund has been lower than expected, though the organisations that did access the fund gave positive feedback. A range of other support was also available via other URBAN II projects. The original best practice budget was reduced from £65k to £20k in February 2008.

#### Haswell History Group - Development Fund

Haswell History Group received a grant of £2,500 to pay for an external consultant to help the group become constituted, develop and implement a plan to deliver the main 'Bridging the Gap' project. He has attended the group meetings on a regular basis. The consultant also helped the group to develop the 'Bridging the Gap' bid. The initiative for this support came from the Development Worker. Members of the group are very positive about the input from the consultant.

The consultant attended the group on a regular basis and he gave us advice on the best way to proceed. Both he and CRT staff have been very helpful. Without this help I don't think we would have managed it. We were novices – the consultant gave us ideas on how to progress.

*Haswell History Group beneficiary*

Given the reference to CRT staff, there is a question as to how much added value the consultants gave compared to the Development Worker. One of the main differences appears to have been that whilst the Development Worker assisted with applications, the consultants were able to provide ongoing advice on project planning and delivery.

Whereas Haswell History Group was newly established, MENCAP is a well-established organisation which had been used to managing quite complex projects. What benefit would the Development Fund have for such an organisation? The grant of £2,205 was awarded to help the organisation manage growth. In particular, to support the training and development of the voluntary Directors and volunteers who play a crucial role in strategic planning. Specifically, the grant was used to train directors on business/sustainability planning, legislative requirements and best value. An external consultant delivered training and mentoring to the board. Although the development fund support was not necessary to assist the organisation develop and deliver its *Bridging the Gap* application for a children's club, it has contributed to the capacity and sustainability of the organisation.

#### 10.4 Links to URBAN II and CRT Strategic Objectives

What is the link between this project and URBAN II's strategic objectives? For this project it may not be immediately obvious. Perhaps the project should have been more focussed.

*Urban II Development Team member*

In relation to the wider URBAN II programme, this question is not unique to this project. URBAN II is funded via ERDF which is predominantly concerned with economic development and improving employability. However, URBAN is distinct from other ERDF programmes in that it is a community initiative. The priority themes for the URBAN II programme are:

Priority One - Engaging Young People

Priority Two - Empowering the Coalfield Community

Priority Three - Building and Sustaining Economic Activity

It is probably fair to say that the grants awarded by this project have contributed to both Priorities One and Two although the fund was only awarded under Priority Two - Empowering Coalfield Communities.

CRT has four funding themes:

- A. Supporting Communities
- B. Learning Communities
- C. Enterprising Communities
- D. Supporting People into Work

Most of the applications made under this programme were under theme 'A' although a small number related to 'B' and 'D'. None of the applications were made under theme 'C'. This confirms that although the grants programme does relate to CRT's strategic priorities, its main contribution was to social objectives that help empower coalfield communities.

One of the noticeable differences between the main URBAN II programme and this project are the number of small grants given to sports clubs - in particular cricket and football clubs for items of equipment and ground improvements. At first sight such grants may seem to have a spurious link to URBAN's strategic objectives. However, the case studies have illustrated the wider social benefits:

South Hetton Cricket Club
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Partly as a consequence of grants for improvements to the ground and facilities, South Hetton Cricket club has been able to compete at a higher level and attract new members. In particular the number of young people involved has almost doubled in recent years to around 70 junior members out of a total membership of 400. Together with the surrounding park, beneficiaries have described it as "the hub of the community". The club and park have become a popular outdoor venue for young people. In particular, it is regarded as a safe place to gather because of the adult presence in the pavilion which overlooks the park and ground. The Parish Council has added value to the CRT/URBAN grants by funding park improvements and play facilities. Young people use it regularly for practice, matches, and for informal sport/gatherings. There is no dedicated facility for young people in the village. The Robin Todd Centre provides indoor activities but the cricket club is the main venue for outdoor activity.

Funding for coaches has also attracted new members. As a consequence of ground improvements, there has been an increase in the number of teams using the ground including local schools and Durham County Second XI. Not only has this raised the profile of the club, but it has brought in income to help sustain the facility and established closer links with schools. The all weather surface funded by the joint fund has ensured that the facility can be used all year round.

People like to come here because it is now attractive

This is a safe place for young people to be

What we've achieved here is bring the kids away from their play stations back to leisure pursuits – they live and breathe it – and the parents support it

Adults and young people respect each other. The young people are now polite and well behaved – they respect what they've got here. When we had some damage, it was the young people who shopped the vandals

*South Hetton Cricket Club beneficiaries and grantees*

Haswell History Group

The eligibility and strategic relevance of other grants has been questioned. For example, the Haswell History Group. However, the case study illustrated clear links with URBAN and CRT priorities:

The group has developed people's skills – some members have never been involved in a community group or committee before

It has improved community spirit. People talk to each other on the streets about the history of the village. People are meeting relatives they did not realise they had.

The group and events such as the exhibition have brought more visitors to the village – we've had people looking into their family history coming here, including one family from America

It has helped to put a forgotten village on the map. It has put pride in the village and built confidence

It has brought young and old together. Schoolchildren and people in their 80's are involved

*Haswell History group beneficiaries*

## The Princess Royal Trust Sunderland Carers' Centre

The dedicated carers' post helped to overcome the image that the Princess Royal Trust Sunderland Carers' Centre was a city-based service and raise awareness of its work in more rural areas. The project was able to tap into a wealth of networks and working relationships between different sectors and organisations across coalfield wards - attributed to previous CRT support - that created a level of awareness between groups and services. This was a key factor in enabling this short-term post to quickly establish a presence in Hetton, Houghton, and Easington Lane and reach the most disadvantaged families with caring needs.

### 10.5 Short Term Grants to Fund Staffing

Some organisations have used grants to fund new posts. A short-term, small grant is not always the best approach to establishing a new post. There are inevitably issues about recruitment, retention, sustainability, and raising expectations of beneficiaries. It appears to have worked for some organisations where they have used the grant to pilot a new approach with a commitment to sustain if the pilot is successful. ELCAP, Hetton Centre, and Sunderland Carers are example of this. Flexibility over recruitment is a key factor. There are still however, sustainability issues.

It is hard to set up good quality projects in short timescales. The flexibility of using existing staff made the project work, and there is an issue over the length of funding and rigidity around recruitment of staff already in post

*Grantee - carers centre*

ELCAP was aware of how much funding it had already received through the main URBAN II programme and this played a part in the decision to apply for a smaller Bridging the Gap grant. Although ELCAP applied for a part-time post, experience has shown that a full-time worker was needed to manage volunteers given the scope of volunteer activity

## 11. Grantmaking Process

The evaluation has not examined the project management of the fund. This was not part of the brief. Project management has already been subject to external scrutiny. Both the original and continuation projects have been subject of an Article 4<sup>1</sup> visit. This found that the project was delivering as contracted and that all necessary management and administration systems and structures were in place and operating well. There were some minor issues around record keeping.

Management of the project, publicity, procurement procedures and implementation of the horizontal themes all appear to be good and the project appears to be on course for a successful delivery in line with the application

*Article 4 audit*

The evaluation did include an assessment of applicants' experience and perception of the grant making process. This was because one of the core objectives was to make funding more accessible to smaller organisations. The evaluation also specifically looked at the experience of matching CRT and European funds so as to inform future practice.

The evaluation asked representatives of grantee organisations for their views on the grantmaking process through an e-survey and interviews with case study organisations. Overall, the response was positive with most applicants indicating that it was a straightforward process with no particular issues highlighted regarding either the initial application or subsequent monitoring requirements.

CRT understand the problems groups encounter when applying for funding and make the application process as simple, but responsible, as possible

*Grantee - Transport group*

Grant workers at CRT were always approachable and helpful, both regionally and at head office

*Grantee - Sports club*

Compared to other funders who had catastrophically inappropriate monitoring requirements in relation to funding awarded, there was a proportionality to the amount of reporting required in relation to the size of the CRT/URBAN II grant.

*Grantee - Carers' Centre*

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<sup>1</sup> Audit carried out for URBAN II

Although respondents tended to score grant guidelines and the application form highly, there were also additional comments and small concerns worth noting.

Even though I had contact with the local co-ordinator and then sent the application form in there still were a lot of items asked for afterwards. The accounts were not presented the way they wanted even though they were not asked for in a certain way at the outset

*Grantee - Uniformed group*

Volunteer groups fail, because of the lack of know how in applying for grants

*Grantee - History group*

The help and guidance which was at hand from CRT was reassuring but in our case not required as everything was pretty straightforward (7343)

*Grantee - Music society*

Most groups who completed the survey found both the application form and the grant claims and monitoring requirements either 'very easy', 'easy', or 'relatively easy'. Only one group scored the financial monitoring, 'difficult'.

Straightforward

*Grantee - Sports club*

There is a need of professional help, when filling in application forms

*Grantee - Sports club*

Respondents were also asked to describe any advantages or disadvantages associated with pre-match funding from the joint CRT/URBAN II programme:

The pre-match funding was excellent as obtaining any funding is difficult, but having to secure support from two unconnected funders is more than twice as difficult. Having the match already in place was excellent

*Grantee - Transport project*

One case study applicant with experience of previously applying to the main URBAN II programme was able to contrast the complex process of applying for a larger grant with the ease of application and processing of the joint CRT/URBAN UII grants scheme. There is some indication from those who have received more than one grant that the process got easier. This appears to be a combination of changes in the process (rationalisation of outputs) and improvements in capacity of the applicant.

The first application was very difficult but the process is now a lot easier.

*Grantee - Sports project*

Whilst most applicants found the performance monitoring requirements relatively straightforward, three groups scored this question '*difficult*'.

Straightforward

Simple response form

Everything is laid out for you in the monitoring forms and there are opportunities for sensible negotiation over underspend and overspend against specific items

Compared to other funders who had catastrophically inappropriate monitoring requirements in relation to funding awarded, there was a proportionality to the amount of reporting required in relation to the size of the CRT/URBAN II grant.

*Grantees*

Some groups commented on the level of documentation and referred to information which was requested as part of the monitoring process some time after the grant had been awarded.

There is a lot of documentation which is necessary but quite involved

*Grantee - Sports club*

Could not offer names and addresses at time they were asked for because we were not made aware at the start

*Grantee - Uniformed group*

This is a common issue with URBAN II where retrospective verification was introduced for all projects.

### *Publicity*

Publicity has been effective using a combination of promotional material with word of mouth and direct marketing to groups by letter and telephone. Local ward councillors were also briefed on the opportunity. However, making sure grant recipients complied with ERDF publicity rules such as the use of European logo has been a constant challenge.

### *Grant decision-making*

Decisions on grants were made at a national level, either by the full CRT Board or by a grants sub-committee for smaller grants. As the Trustees of the CRT are ultimately

responsible for the operation and finances of the organisation, the potential for devolution of decision-making is limited. The two North East Trustees did meet with the CRT Regional Regeneration Manager prior to board meetings to discuss applications and their local knowledge contributed to the information used for decision-making.

The national decision-making contrasts with some other small community based grants funds in the region where decisions on smaller grants are devolved to local panels involving community representatives. Such devolution strengthens local community participation/accountability, ensures a sense of local ownership, and builds the capacity of local community activists.

#### *Matching CRT with European Funds*

The small grants fund is a matched CRT/URBAN II fund. Though not a requirement, government expects the CRT to seek matched funding wherever possible. URBAN II funds have to be matched – typically by a contribution of 50% from another eligible source. An important lesson has been that not only did a matched fund add value, it helped address a major issue for the URBAN II programme – the difficulty community organisations faced in securing matched funding. Local groups have been exposed to European funding within a protected environment.

Finding matched funding has been a real problem. Some good project ideas were never developed because they could not get the match

*URBAN II Co-ordination Group Member*

Around 50 proposals for the main URBAN programme never came to fruition because they failed to secure matched funding. This experience is reflected in the case studies undertaken for this evaluation.

Apart from grants, most of our income for equipment and improvements comes from local fundraising – raffles, sponsorship etc. Sponsorship is getting more difficult to get. We would not have been able to proceed if we'd had to find 50% of the cost.

*Grantee - Sports club*

Other lessons from the joint funding with ERDF were less positive. Local community groups find it difficult to comply with ERDF rules:

- ❑ URBAN has strict rules around eligibility. Making sure both applicants and all CRT staff apply these consistently has been a challenge
- ❑ The monitoring and retrospective verification requirements of URBAN have been an administrative problem for the CRT. However, the CRT has to some extent acted as a “buffer” between URBAN and local groups, thereby reducing the administrative burden on groups.
- ❑ Though CRT makes grantees aware of the publicity requirements of URBAN, there has been a need to constantly remind groups of the need to comply.

## SECTION THREE – THE FUTURE

### 12. Lessons

#### 12.1 Learned

##### *Programme level*

- ❑ The success of the first project led to an increased continuation fund
- ❑ It was a struggle to get enough projects
- ❑ Having a development worker makes big difference to small grants programmes. Although a full time post was useful in the initial stages, this was reviewed, and part time only was required once the project had been established.
- ❑ The Development Worker identified a need for larger grants. Based on experience, the level of maximum grant has been increased from the original £5k under the 2003-05 programme, to £20k and eventually to £40k. The project view is that the grant levels are now appropriate.
- ❑ The range of outputs in the continuation project was streamlined to focus on key outputs and to reduce the administrative requirement.
- ❑ The requirement for an applicant organisation to be formally constituted with a set of accounts was relaxed by the CRT so that third party/umbrella organisations could apply on behalf of unconstituted groups.
- ❑ The flexibility of the Urban II programme allowed for variations in outputs and spend profile.
- ❑ Small grants can help to create new projects, approaches, and services.

##### *Grantees*

Grantees have also learned lessons:

That we as a small local organisation can find support to continue to provide sport and social support to vulnerable local residents

*Grantee - Sports club*

We now have policies at hand that are required

*Grantee - Uniformed organisation*

At the earliest opportunity a new organisation, needs to obtain professional help and advice!

*Grantee - History group*

- ❑ The Aim High project has shown the peer model approach can engage with hard-to-reach young people.
- ❑ The MYTH drama project has developed from lessons learned as a result of joint CRT/URBAN II grants.

## 12.2 Lessons for Future Practice

### *Community capacity*

Despite the improvements in capacity of community groups, the experience of this project has shown that there continues to be a capacity issue in the area. Many groups needed a high level of support to complete application forms and setting up monitoring systems. One to one support was provided by the development worker who also organised training events funded by the development/good practice fund.

A lot of support was given via the development worker and the development fund. A lot of projects would not have come forward or would have taken much longer to develop without this support. However, with some groups it was hard work and difficult to get the money spent. There is still a need for this kind of support.

*CRT Trustee*

This observation is consistent with the conclusion of the Urban II programme evaluation:

The peer review and other qualitative evidence suggest that the programme has had an impact on the capacity of community organisations. Several community organisations have demonstrated their capacity by managing some quite complex projects. However, there is a consensus that there is more to do in building the capacity of local groups.

*Urban II Programme Evaluation, 2008*

### *CRT Collaboration with the European Funds*

Despite the administrative burden and eligibility limitations, the CRT collaboration with an ERDF programme has brought a number of benefits to both organisations and small community groups. This suggests that further collaboration between CRT and European programmes is worth consideration, provided opportunities are available. There is to be a 2007-2013 ERDF programme for the NorthEast. There will be no community programmes similar to URBAN. Apart from technical assistance, there are to be two priorities:

Priority One: Enhancing and Exploiting Innovation

Priority Two: Business Growth and Enterprise

Priority One will mainly be concerned with large-scale science and technology projects. Though this will include positive action to engage disadvantaged communities with related employment opportunities, it is unlikely that a small grants fund would have a role to play.

Priority Two will include actions to:

- ❑ Cultivate and sustain enterprise, including social enterprise, in disadvantaged areas. ERDF funds will be used to deepen and extend the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) Approach.
- ❑ Enhance the competitiveness of and growth of existing SME's, including social and community based enterprises

Because of the absence of a community ERDF programme and the limited focus of the new ERDF programme, the scope for matching CRT with ERDF programme will therefore be limited. It seems unlikely that Bridging the Gap activities would be seen as adding value to the new programme. However, there may be some scope for a matched main grant programme to support and develop social and community enterprise. Some of the larger community organisations that have benefited from this grants' programme may well be able to take advantage of the new ERDF programme, provided support mechanisms were in place. There is a role for an umbrella body such as the CRT since locally based voluntary/community organisations will find it more difficult to access ERDF funds in future.

The new Working Neighbourhoods Fund which has a more local focus and a stronger focus on employability may offer more opportunity for strategic linkages. However, opportunities will depend in part on the governance arrangements that are currently being developed in Sunderland and East Durham.

Any exploration of the possibilities should start with local authorities given their newly enhanced role for economic development and regeneration.

*Pilot vs. Continuation funding*

Small grants can be the catalyst to pilot and trial run new services and models of working.

East Durham Community Transport

Although the new LinkED transport service was created in response to expressed need from local people, and subsequently adapted and changed as a result of further consultation with residents, the model was not one that people chose to use. A number of factors played a part in the original aims of the scheme not being achieved and can be seen as influencing this outcome. Residents were loath to pay for a bus service when they had a concessionary pass that entitled them to free travel. A culture of a bus stop style service still prevailed.

Whilst perceived demand originally led to the invitation to EDCT to bid for a grant to pilot this model of transport, the reality of take-up and usage proved rather different. The experience of this project suggests that there may be a difference between what residents say they want and what they will actually use. Piloting services is therefore a way of testing out expressed need.

Some grantees have questioned the presumption that grants should be used for new activity and have argued for continuation funding for successful projects. This view has also received support from a CRT trustee.

Projects cannot ask for the same thing again and that can sometimes be a problem. What is wrong with continuation funding with new beneficiaries?  
*CRT Trustee*

An area for improvement is continuation funding for successful projects  
*Grantee - Transport project*

This is perennial problem with short-term grant funding. From the funders point of view there is concern about grant dependency. However, many other short-term grants are for three years rather than the one allowed under this funding programme. Perhaps there is an argument for re-funding some successful projects for a second and third year where there is evidence of need, successful delivery, and a realistic succession plan.

### *External organisations*

Whilst supporting groups located within the area is an important objective of the fund; external organisations can bring in new perspectives and ideas.

#### Sans Street Youth & Community

Staff at Sans Street Youth & Community Centre who live in a former coalfield ward were aware of the lack of youth provision and were already working with young people who traveled into the city centre to access youth activities. Personal knowledge and links with workers in former coalfield villages enabled the youth organisation to pilot and develop a peer support model of youth engagement work.

### *Tapping into Local Talent*

Using the skills and knowledge of local people who are recognised within their community and are aware of the issues is a key feature of some of the CRT/URBAN II grants that are worth consideration in future grant programmes. Employing local residents develops existing capacity and supports the neighbourhood economy.

### *Relevance of the Fund to the VCS*

All the survey respondents scored the relevance of the fund highly and it was clear that the fund provided the scope and range of grant purposes that were both appropriate and useful.

When asked what had changed for their organisation and/or community as a result of the grant, survey responses showed tangible benefits directly linked to grants:

<p>We are now up to full membership and have improved up to top league position <i>Grantee - Sports club</i></p> <p>We have a partially sighted leader who has been able to stay with the group and a physically disabled leader who has remained with the group <i>Grantee - Uniformed organisation</i></p> <p>The sound now of our band has much improved and also the vast improvement in our visual impact has made us more eager to go out into the community and perform <i>Grantee - Music society</i></p>
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### 13. Conclusions & Recommendations

#### *Conclusion One*

The programme has achieved its aim of building capacity and strengthening community-based organisations to continue to support residents across former coalfield wards longer-term. However, there is a need for further capacity building amongst smaller groups.

#### *Recommendation One*

Capacity building should be one of the outcomes of any future small grants fund

#### *Conclusion Two*

The pre-match aspect of the fund made a big difference to smaller groups. The partnership between CRT and the URBAN European programme worked well although the monitoring burden for CRT was onerous.

#### *Conclusion Three*

The grants fund has made CRT and ERDF funding more accessible to small community organisations. It has been well managed, has brought resources to support local groups and acted as a “buffer” between ERDF administrative requirements and local groups

#### *Recommendation Two*

CRT explores with local authorities the possibility of developing a pre-matched joint grant fund and or strategic linkages with the new NorthEast ERDF programme and the Working Neighbourhoods Fund.

#### *Conclusion Four*

There has been a beneficial impact on both communities and individuals. The impact has been more social than economic, though there have been some economic outcomes.

#### *Conclusion Five*

The broad range of projects that the fund is able to support benefits a wide variety of organisations and individuals

*Conclusion Six*

Small grants can make a big difference to the sustainability of very small groups that struggle to access funds and by their own admission would not survive. Acquiring even the most basic new and replacement equipment builds confidence and energy in the smallest of volunteer run groups. Small capital grants that help projects operate more efficiently, impacted strongly on the enthusiasm and spirit of small communities.

*Conclusion Seven*

Increased engagement is a feature of all the grants. Grants have enabled social capital to be built through groups and clubs working at neighbourhood level with local residents.

*Conclusion Eight*

The flexibility afforded by the programme is highly valued by projects when they need to make changes in the light of experience.

*Conclusion Nine*

The development worker post made a difference. It led to a greater take up, improved the quality of applications, and built the capacity of local groups.

*Recommendation Three*

Development worker support should accompany small grants programme aimed at community groups

*Conclusion Ten*

The development fund has been of some use to some organisations but the level of resource allocated was much greater than the need or demand

*Conclusion Eleven*

There is a demand for both pilot and continuation funding.

*Recommendation Four*

Consideration given to including pilot funding and continuation funding in any future grants programme

## Appendix 1 - Survey Results

### Background

This survey is being conducted by external evaluators who are independent of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust (CRT) and URBAN II. Your responses are confidential and will be reported anonymously. We are asking for contact details so that we can follow up any queries. You may also be contacted as part of a sample of organisations for a more detailed study.

#### 1 Contact information

Applicant Name	
Job Title	
Organisation	
Email	
Telephone	
Project Title	

2 How did you hear about the joint URBAN II/CRT grants programme?

3 What were the main reasons for applying to the joint URBAN II/CRT grants programme?

4 What did your project/grant aim to achieve?

#### PROGRAMME IMPACT

5 How far do you think the joint URBAN II/CRT grants programme has achieved its aims of building the capacity of groups to become more involved in developments and regeneration in their area?

Fully	4	Slightly	0
Substantially	6	Not at all	0
Partially	5		

*Please provide reasons or examples for your response.*

6 How relevant/useful has the fund been to your organisation?

Very relevant/useful	14	Not very relevant/useful	0
Relevant/useful	1	Not at all relevant useful	0
Somewhat relevant/useful	0		

*Please describe how the grant has been relevant or useful for your organisation. What has changed for your organisation and/or community as a result of the grant?*

GRANT IMPACT

7 Activities supported under the joint URBAN II/CRT grants programme covered the Trust's funding priorities of: supporting *communities, learning communities, enterprising and working communities*. Below is a series of statements about the impact of your grant.

7A The funding has helped to build the capacity and confidence of your organisation.

Strongly Agree	11
Agree	4
Neither agree nor disagree	0

Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0

*Please provide examples of how you consider the grant has helped to strengthen your organisation. eg the effect of the grant on staff, or volunteers, or services, or committee members.*

7B The funding has brought benefits to your users/the community.

Strongly Agree	10
Agree	3
Neither agree nor disagree	0

Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0

*Please outline what difference the grant has made to the local community - the precise benefits and which users, members, or local residents, the grant has been able to help.*

7C The funding has had a positive impact that will continue longer-term.

Strongly Agree	9
Agree	3
Neither agree nor disagree	2

Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0

*Please describe the benefit the grant brings in terms of sustainability or legacy it offers - eg trained committee members, new volunteers, new services, bids to larger grants funds, new partnerships, etc.*

GRANT ADMINISTRATION & PROCESS

8 How easy/difficult did you find these aspects of the grant process?

8A Grant guidelines: accessing & understanding

Very easy	3
Easy	3
Relatively easy	5

Difficult	0
Very difficult	0

*Please provide reasons or examples for your response.*

8B Completing the application form

Very easy	3
Easy	3
Relatively easy	6

Difficult	0
Very difficult	0

*Please provide reasons or examples for your response.*

8C Finance: grant claim, receipt and financial monitoring

Very easy	2
Easy	4
Relatively easy	6

Difficult	1
Very difficult	0

*Please also describe any advantages or disadvantages associated with pre-match funding from the joint URBAN II/CRT grants programme.*

8D Monitoring of performance & reporting

Very easy	2
Easy	5
Relatively easy	3

Difficult	3
Very difficult	0

*Please provide reasons or examples for your response.*

9 Please comment on the value of a Development Worker to support groups applying to the Fund.

Excellent	7
Very Good	4
Good	3
Fair	0

Poor	0
Very poor	0
Don't know	0

*Please provide reasons or examples for your response.*

10 Please comment on the value of the Development Fund as additional support.

Excellent	7
Very Good	2
Good	2
Fair	0

Poor	0
Very poor	0
Don't know	1
Not appropriate	0

*Please provide reasons or examples for your response*

- 11 Please highlight any aspects of joint URBAN II/CRT grants programme that demonstrate good practice.
- 12 Are there any changes or improvements to this grants programme that you would recommend?
- 13 What lessons has your organisation learned from applying to and receiving a grant from this fund?
- 14 Please add any further comments you would like to make about the joint URBAN II/CRT grants programme eg its aims, benefits, grantmaking process, etc.

*Please save the completed document and return it by emailing to:  
[carol@carolmeredith.co.uk](mailto:carol@carolmeredith.co.uk) by Friday 30 May*

*Meanwhile, if you have any queries, please call Carol on either 01669 620457 or 07971 985226 from 15-18 and 27-30 May or call Ernest Dobson on 07910 421076 between 19-26 May. Alternatively, send an email query to [carol@carolmeredith.co.uk](mailto:carol@carolmeredith.co.uk) or [ernest@ernestdobson.co.uk](mailto:ernest@ernestdobson.co.uk)*