



Evaluation of the Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund

A report submitted to West Midlands Combined Authority

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Commonwealth Games
Legacy Fund



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Delivery Partners

With thanks to all involved in the delivery of the Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund:

All participating teams across the WMCA

Local Authority teams across the region - Birmingham City Council, City of Wolverhampton Council, Coventry City Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council.

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Evaluation Team

We would like to acknowledge the full research team across Ecorys, Fry Creative, Sported, University of Birmingham and Warwick Business School. Consulting: James Sennett, Jenny Molyneux, Hannah Woodbridge, Ravi Talwar, Rhiannon Cottrill, Jude Maher, Harriet Tucker, Sophie Hayes, Harry Norman (Ecorys), Richard Hawley, Fabio Thomas, Yasmin Damji (Fry), Sophie Tobin, Andrew Stead, Laura Henshaw (Sported), Shu Shu Chen, Qi Wang (University of Birmingham), and Mark Scott (Warwick Business School).



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Foreword from Mayor

When I was elected as Mayor, my mission was clear - to improve people's lives.

I wanted to provide better opportunities for those who felt left behind and unable to reach their full potential.

I'm proud of the progress made over the last 12 months and in particular, the decisive action we've taken to help people into work, putting in place programmes that invest in jobs, skills and training to tackle youth unemployment and create the opportunities people need to get a job that pays well.

The last year has also been about helping our businesses to prosper, by supporting innovation and creativity so that everyone benefits from a growing economy that also helps protect the environment.

A good job is one of the key components of a life fulfilled and strong, sustainable communities.

And the Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund has played its part in fixing these foundations so we can start to deliver real benefits for the people living and working in the West Midlands. Working with local authority and community partners, we've been able to do just that.

- Over £39 million has been invested in the West Midlands economy, supporting local businesses to grow and develop, to create and protect local jobs and to help people access jobs and grow their skills. £1.9m of this has been specifically focussed on the region's social economy, supporting our ambition to double its size.
- Over £12.5m in grants have been issued directly to community groups right across the region through the Inclusive Communities Grants Fund and the Community Environment Fund, supporting projects that matter to local communities and making a visible difference on the ground.
- £5m has been invested into United by 2022's Trailblazer projects, supporting young people, local communities and volunteers across the region to access new opportunities, develop skills and create lasting change.
- £4.1m has been invested in Culture and Heritage, providing funding for artistic and cultural projects and events, supporting creatives in the sector to grow and develop and build global cultural partnerships.
- 10 major sporting and community events have been funded, strengthening community spirit, contributing at least £10m of direct economic impact to the region, and we can look forward to the arrival of the European Athletics championships in 2026.
- We've supported the 2 Games legacy venues, Sandwell Aquatics Centre and Alexander Stadium to continue to deliver sports and physical activities to local people as well as preparing to host future major events.

This evaluation celebrates our shared success but also contains learning that we can all take forward to build a region where everyone can reach their full potential. I'd like to thank everyone who has paid a part in delivering the outcomes of the Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund. By continuing to work together we can make a big difference to people's lives, keep changing them for the better, and secure a brighter, more prosperous future for everyone.

Richard Parker

Mayor of the West Midlands



Executive Summary

Image Copyright: Simon Hadley

Executive summary

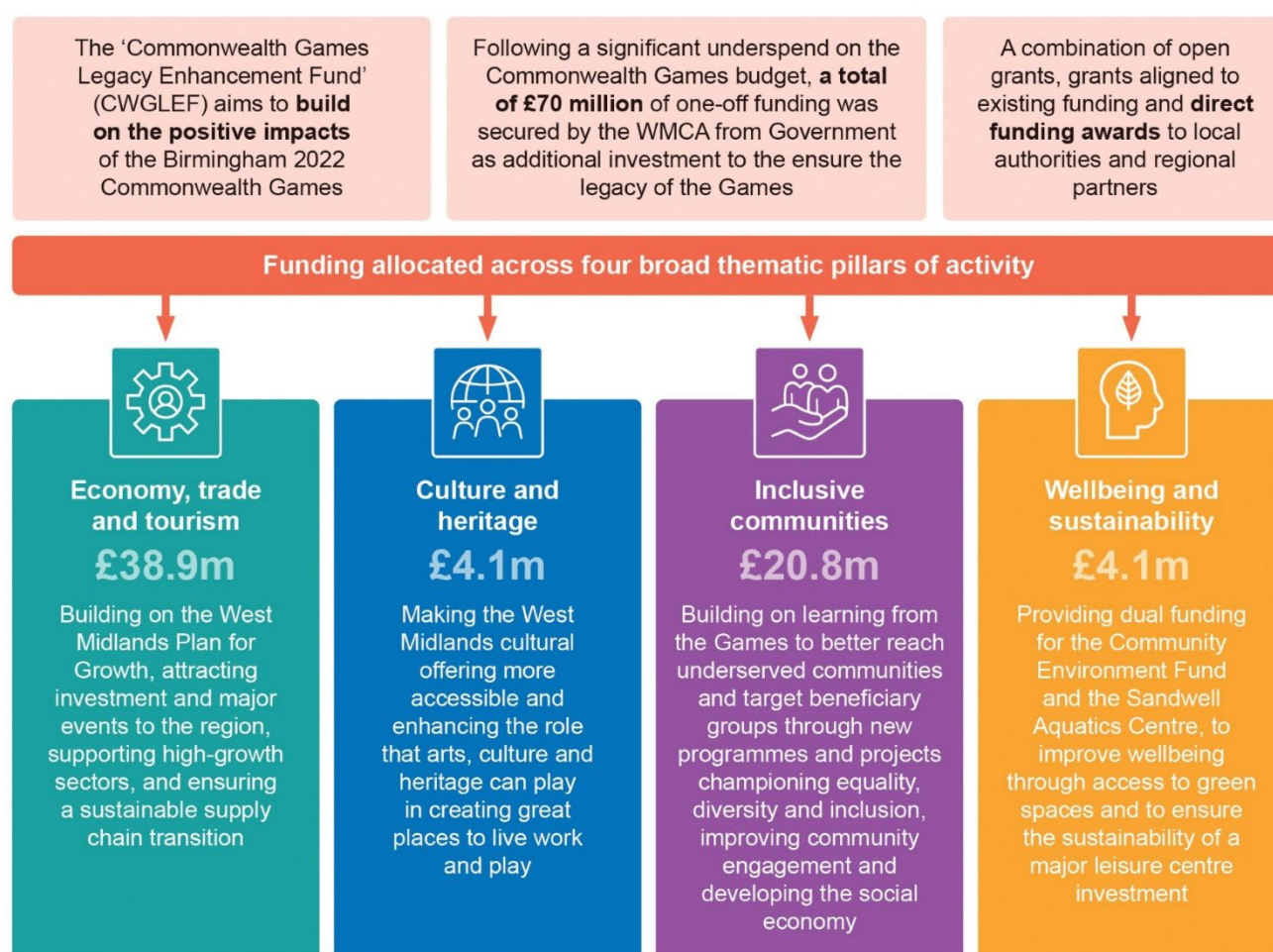
Ecorys, FRY Creative, Sported, University of Birmingham and University of Warwick were commissioned in March 2024 by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to undertake an evaluation of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund (CWGLEF) funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). This is the final report of the evaluation.

The overall aims of the evaluation were to:

- Evaluate the overall impact of CWGLEF, measuring the extent to which it has supported its intended activities and outcomes to bring about measurable impact and change.
- Share learning from the design and delivery of CWGLEF programmes and projects to support WMCA's future strategy development and investment decisions.

Following a significant underspend on the Commonwealth Games budget, a total of £70 million of one-off funding was secured by the WMCA from the government as additional investment to the build on the legacy of the Games. The funding made up the 'Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund' (CWGLEF). Funding from CWGLEF was allocated across four broad thematic pillars of activity.

This CWGLEF delivery structure and funding allocation across pillars is shown in the diagram below.



Evaluation methodology

The evaluation adopted a 'meta-evaluation' approach, drawing upon planned monitoring and evaluation activities for the Fund's specific programmes and projects, complemented by additional primary research to address specific gaps.

The evaluation approach comprised the following activities:



Scoping interviews and workshops undertaken with key programme leads and stakeholders.



Development of **comprehensive evaluation framework** containing theories of change and evaluation research questions to guide the priorities for the research and evaluation.



Further liaison with programme leads to **understand the scope of planned monitoring and evaluations**, timescales and gaps in the evidence. This was aided by a meta-evaluation management tool.



Development and implementation of a **primary research plan** consisting of in-depth case studies of programmes and projects and stakeholder interviews.



The use of a **meta-evaluation analysis tool** to facilitate the systematic assessment and weighting of evaluation evidence to inform the overall synthesis for each evaluation question.

A key limitation of the evaluation analysis stems from the timing of the report. DCMS required the evaluation to be completed within the timeframe of the funded programme, which ended in March 2025. However, for several programmes and projects, full evaluation data could not be included. The evaluation analysis is therefore weighted towards stakeholder and key informant perspectives to assess progress towards outcomes and impacts, rather than quantitative impact analysis.

Additional primary research generally did not address evidence gaps related to the timing of evaluations - specifically, where evaluation activities are scheduled to take place beyond the reporting window - to avoid duplicating future evaluation efforts. These timing-related gaps are acknowledged in the analysis.

The analysis relies to some extent on monitoring and evaluation data collected at the programme and project level that could not be influenced by the evaluation team.

For evaluations planned beyond the reporting period, we considered how additional primary research could provide early insights and support the development of longer-term evaluation strategies.

Evaluation findings

Economy, Trade and Tourism

The Global West Midlands (GWP) and Mobilising Plan for Growth (MPfG) projects were the key CWGLEF projects aiming to positively contribute to **business growth and job creation**. Without the CWGLEF funding, the projects would have progressed in a significantly reduced format, suggesting a high degree of fund additionality.

GWP has already exceeded its **inward investment** stretch targets by securing 133 investment projects and 9,400 associated jobs. Under MPfG, the High-Growth Accelerator Programme has successfully engaged its target of 50 companies, with Key Account Managers conducting investment plan workshops for 47 firms to develop their high-growth strategies. Additionally, Supply Chain Transition workshops,

supported by technical specialists, have strengthened supply chain networks. These results reflect strong progress and clear potential economic benefits across both projects.

By January 2025, **Major Events Fund** (MEF) events supported by the CWGLEF had generated an estimated £5.14m in economic benefits, excluding health, wellbeing, and social impacts. The SportAccord international sport business summit generated the largest economic impact to date and fostered strong relationships with international delegates. A post-event survey showed 75% of attendees felt positively about the region's capacity to host major sporting events. The supported events also reinforced diversity and inclusion, with initiatives such as Reggae Fever celebrating local Caribbean culture and providing learning for future cultural events.

The CWGLEF has also enabled the preparation for the **European Athletics Championships 2026** (EAC 26) including the redevelopment of Alexander Stadium to remain on track although it is too early to evaluate the specific impacts of this significant investment.

MEF events have attracted significant visitor numbers to the region, including from outside the West Midlands. By the end of January 2025, an estimated 150,000 visitors attended these events, comprising both local and external audiences. SportAccord generated the highest levels of online engagement and marketing impact, further raising the region's profile and encouraging future growth in visitor numbers.

The **Jobs, Skills and Wellbeing** (JS&W) support programmes have focused on individuals across the region classified as Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), offering pre-job search support. An analysis of the JS&W outputs shows significant progress in engaging those most in need across the region. As of January 2025, the number of young people supported through career interventions surpassed the target, reaching 3,566 against a goal of 3,391.

This support included confidence-building through community and recreational activities, CV assistance, and financial support to attend interviews, helping them access the job market. Some have gone onto paid employment following work placements. In addition to NEET individuals, it was noted that the support projects provided by JS&W also helped individuals that were ex-offenders find employment as well as the elderly returning to the labour market. People with disabilities have also been supported through the projects.

Inclusive Communities

The **Inclusive Communities Grants Programme** (ICGP) aimed to engage with the communities underserved by the Games and extend the Games' legacy. A total of £11.8 million was awarded to not-for-profit organisations working across the West Midlands. The programme was overseen by WMCA and delivered by Heart of England Community Foundation with other stakeholders and organisations supporting with the design and delivery.

There has been strong progress towards achieving ICGP's anticipated outcomes. The programme has funded **innovative projects which have reached over half a million people** from a range of underserved groups. Grantees and stakeholders report positive outcomes for beneficiaries, including increased mental wellbeing, improved participation in physical activity, and increased employability skills. There is also evidence the programme has contributed to the long-term sustainability of grantee organisations.

Extending the timings of any future grants programme is the key lesson from the ICGP, this will enable design and delivery to feel less rushed and for evaluation activities to fully assess outcomes and impact. Other learnings included: better management of oversubscribed funds, an improved support offer to applicants and grantees, and for grantees better understanding of the skills, resources, and capacity needed to deliver their projects.

CWGLEF **supported the continuation of five Commonwealth Games legacy Trailblazers projects**. These included: Critical Mass (an inclusive dance programme for young people with disabilities), Gen22 (a youth volunteering programme for those furthest from the labour market), Volunteering (a continuation of volunteering opportunities for Games volunteers), Bring the Power (a schools-based programme around the themes of the Games), and Social Value (a project to develop social value in the region). These projects were chosen due to their popularity, success during the games, and their uniqueness.

The following figures reflect the delivery of Trailblazers' projects up until November 2024:

- ▶ 2,367 Trailblazers sessions have taken place: 360 Critical Mass sessions, 877 Gen22 sessions, 79 Volunteering sessions, 1,001 Bring the Power sessions, and 50 Social Value sessions.
- ▶ 43,088 attendees at Trailblazers projects, across 279 locations.

Early evidence suggests that young people who have participated in the projects have gained confidence, feel less isolated, and enabled to feel able to go back into education or start an apprenticeship or traineeship. Volunteering has seen positive outcomes for volunteers who have reported feeling increased civic pride, strengthened connection to the Games, and reduced isolation through volunteering friendships and social connections.

The **Social Economy** programme made good progress in meeting its engagement targets, particularly by addressing a gap in support for social economy organisations which had not been included in previous funded programmes. The programme overachieved against its targets for participant demographics. An initial analysis of a sample of 88 of 115 social economy businesses supported by CWGLEF shows a 48% increase in trading income (almost twice the target), 175 new jobs (close to target) and an increase in skills and confidence of c33% which is ahead of (25%) target.

The nine social economy clusters were quickly convened and the flexibility of the funding approach which gave clusters a good degree of autonomy in developing their priorities was appreciated. Engaging small organisations within certain clusters proved challenging due to their limited capacity - many had only one or two staff members - resulting in low initial meeting attendance. To tackle this, the project team took a proactive approach, visiting organisations to understand their needs and integrating these into collective plans.

Culture and Heritage

The Culture and Heritage pillar successfully **created relevant experiences for diverse communities**, fostering increased engagement with culture and heritage in the West Midlands. Through strategic funding and a double-devolved model to local authorities, collaborative workshops and community events effectively enhanced **social cohesion** and created a sense of belonging.

Participants discovered local heritage and expressed enthusiasm for future cultural participation, while targeted investments in cultural infrastructure deepened community connections. The initiative demonstrated the power of community-focused, participatory approaches to cultural development, laying groundwork for sustained regional cultural engagement and community cohesion.

Programmes and projects under the Culture and Heritage pillar have demonstrated significant impact by enabling strategic development and alignment with regional priorities. The pillar provided robust participation opportunities for individuals, organisations, and communities while simultaneously fostering partnerships and collaboration across different sectors.

By increasing **skills and capacity** especially for freelancers, the fund has played a critical role in supporting the longer-term sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors in the West Midlands.

Despite facing implementation challenges, including complex tendering processes and compressed timeframes, the CWGLEF has significantly strengthened the culture and heritage sectors by **enabling a more strategic, collaborative approach to cultural development** that is already leaving a lasting legacy beyond the Commonwealth Games.

The Culture and Heritage pillar fostered **international collaboration** and enhanced the West Midlands' reputation but needs further development to maximise global impact. The International Fund supported diverse projects, showcasing the region's cultural sector and securing new partnerships. However, measuring long-term impact and attracting investment remain key challenges. The region must implement stronger metrics, formalise partnerships, and strategically position itself for future international investment to fully capitalise on its cultural legacy and strengthen its global presence.

The development of the culture and heritage frameworks was an iterative process that resulted in two key outcomes: the Culture and Creative Industries Framework and the Heritage Framework, with supporting plans including the Cultural Infrastructure Plan, the Creative Sector Skills Plan and Creative Health scoping. These frameworks aimed to leverage culture, heritage, and creative industries for regional development, fostering collaboration and integrating these considerations into strategic decision-making across various sectors.

The Culture and Heritage pillar has fundamentally **repositioned culture and heritage as a core strategic asset** within the WMCA. Initially designed for grant programmes, it evolved to drive both immediate delivery and long-term policy shifts, fostering cross-departmental collaboration and integrating cultural considerations into broader strategies.

Wellbeing and sustainability

Funding from CWGLEF aimed to meet a deficit in funding for energy costs at the **Sandwell Aquatic Centre** (SAC), which was a key CWG legacy project. This ensured SAC remained open to the public as planned and that no funding needed to be diverted from other leisure facilities within Sandwell Leisure Trust's remit. This allowed all facilities to remain open and safeguarded accessible physical activity opportunities for residents.

The **Community Environment Fund** (CEF) built on lessons learnt from its predecessor, the Community Green Grants (CGG), in its delivery of the fund. One of the key success factors was having dedicated time from the Fund Manager to support community organisations with their applications and in the face of challenges to their delivery. The CEF made 27 funding awards (6 large awards and 21 smaller ones), which was in line with the fund's intentions.

The CEF projects intended to create jobs, volunteer roles and training opportunities for individuals, as well as upskill staff and volunteers involved in project delivery. They hoped to create a **greater environmental awareness amongst community groups** by encouraging knowledge sharing and empowering peer learning and environmental 'champions'. There is emerging evidence of promising practice which suggests that a number of projects are on track to achieve these aims.

The CEF projects **aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of communities** in a range of ways, from targeted support for particular groups of individuals, to supporting communities to access and engage with the green spaces around them. Many projects intended to make improvements to the local environment. Whilst environmental outcomes tended to take longer to achieve, there is good early evidence of projects working towards short-term outcomes by making physical improvements to green spaces and recycling potential waste products.

Cross-cutting analysis

The four-pillar structure supported a coherent and focused approach to the **governance and delivery** of the fund. It was recognised, however, that with more time, funding could have been allocated more strategically, with better cross-pillar linkages and through a clearer, more systematic consultation process.

Overall, **value for money** was considered by ensuring projects were funded that had a clear need and potential for impact. The grant programmes supported organisations that could demonstrate their ability to deliver positive outcomes for their communities. Effective programme management processes enabled WMCA to maintain a proactive approach to ongoing monitoring and risk assessment, helping to ensure that projects stayed on track to deliver their expected outputs and outcomes.

On the question of **alignment with wider regional strategic priorities**, the CWGLEF has made significant contributions to five of the West Midlands Inclusive Growth Framework's eight "fundamentals". A high-level analysis shows that a significant proportion of the CWGLEF's funding and outcomes align with the framework's inclusive economy and health fundamentals. There have also been smaller but meaningful impacts in the areas of climate and environment, power and participation and equality.

In terms of its **strategic added value**, the CWGLEF generally had limited influence on strategic regional policy or programme development, however stakeholders felt that this was never the intention. Instead, CWGLEF was designed to complement existing strategies and address specific funding gaps. The CWGLEF has nevertheless helped to engender more constructive partnerships and a more flexible, responsive approach to local needs. The evidence base created by CWGLEF has also strengthened future funding prospects. While some programmes, such as those focused on jobs and skills, will persist to meet ongoing needs, others may evolve or conclude based on relevance.

The CWGLEF has continued the momentum created by the Commonwealth Games legacy's broader ambitions, by supporting inward investment, tourism, skills development and creation of civic pride. The implementation of the Major Events Fund has sparked an important strategic conversation about the region's approach to major events and WMGC's role in supporting them.

The delivery of **grant programmes**, such as the Inclusive Communities Grant Programme and the Community Environment Fund, provided stakeholders with valuable insights for future schemes. While timing emerged as a key consideration, other lessons included strategies for targeted grant allocation, the use of eligibility criteria to manage demand, and approaches to capacity building.

Interviewees noted that initial programme design limited **cross-sector collaboration**, but the Fund has enabled the Combined Authority to refine its approach, supporting synergies across different areas such as culture and economic development.



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01

Introduction

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and objectives

Ecorys, FRY Creative, Sported, University of Birmingham and University of Warwick were commissioned in March 2024 by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to undertake an evaluation of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund (CWGLEF). This is the final report of the evaluation.

The overall aims of the evaluation are to:

- ▶ Evaluate the overall impact of CWGLEF, measuring the extent to which it has supported its intended activities and outcomes to bring about measurable impact and change.
- ▶ Share learning from the design and delivery of CWGLEF programmes and projects to support WMCA's future strategy development and investment decisions.

1.2 Introduction to the Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund

The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Legacy Plan¹ outlined five mission pillars designed to guide Legacy programmes, ensuring they maximise the Games' impact and lasting benefits. The activities mapped out in the Legacy Plan intended to enhance the national and international profile of the West Midlands region and maximise the social, economic, and cultural benefits of the Games. The Legacy Plan included extending the benefits of the Games and its legacy to reach more underserved, underrepresented and diverse communities² in the West Midlands, particularly those that may not have been directly engaged with the Games.³

Following a significant underspend on the Commonwealth Games budget, a total of £70 million of one-off funding was secured by the WMCA from the government as additional investment to the build on the legacy of the Games. The funding made up the 'Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund' (CWGLEF). Funding from CWGLEF was allocated across four broad thematic pillars of activity:

- ▶ Economy, trade and tourism
- ▶ Culture and heritage
- ▶ Inclusive communities
- ▶ Wellbeing and sustainability

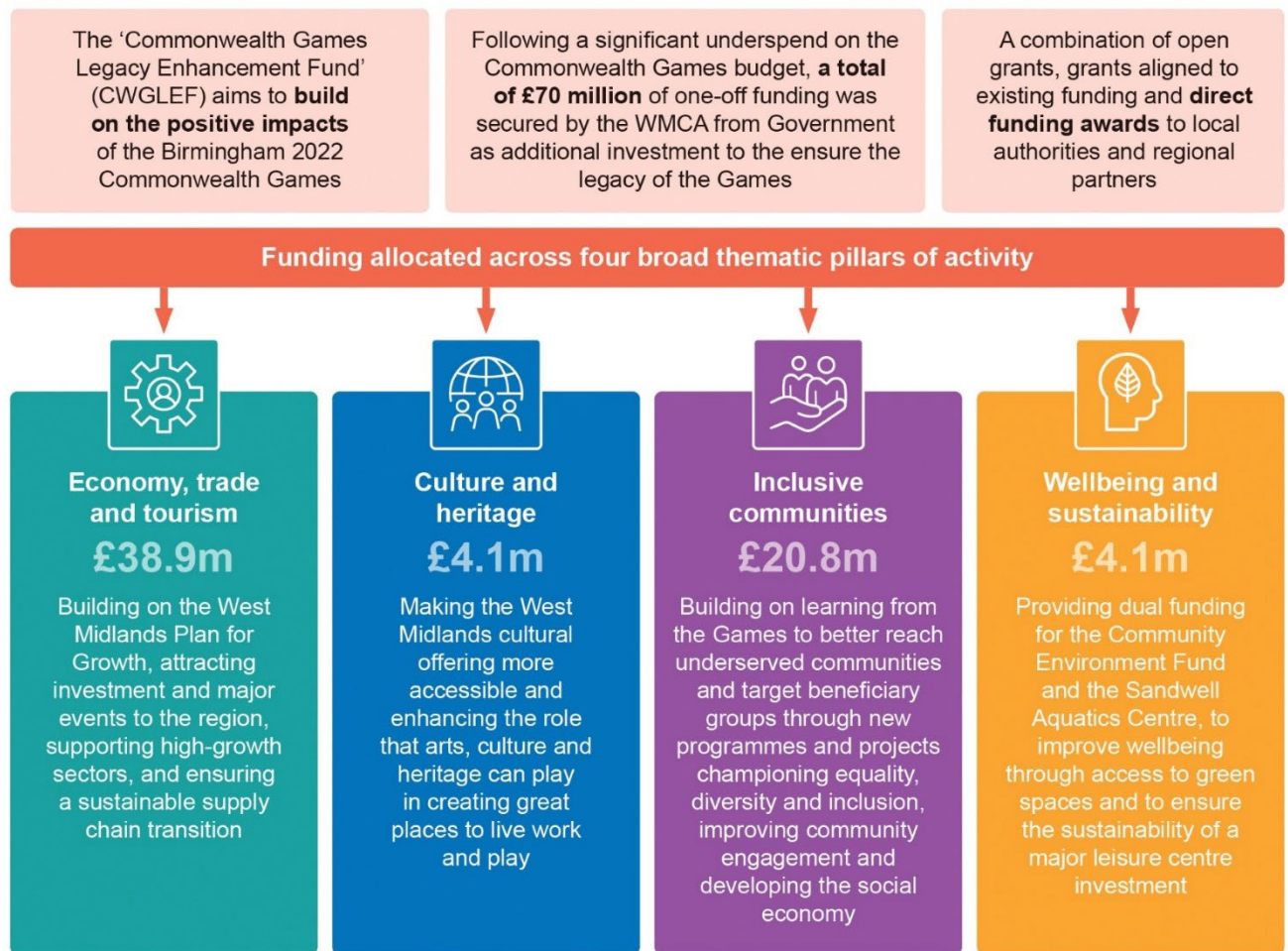
The structure of the CWGLEF is depicted in Figure 1-1.

¹ Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Legacy Plan, March 2021

² The terminology used to describe the target groups of CWGLEF programmes and projects varies based on the approach and focus.

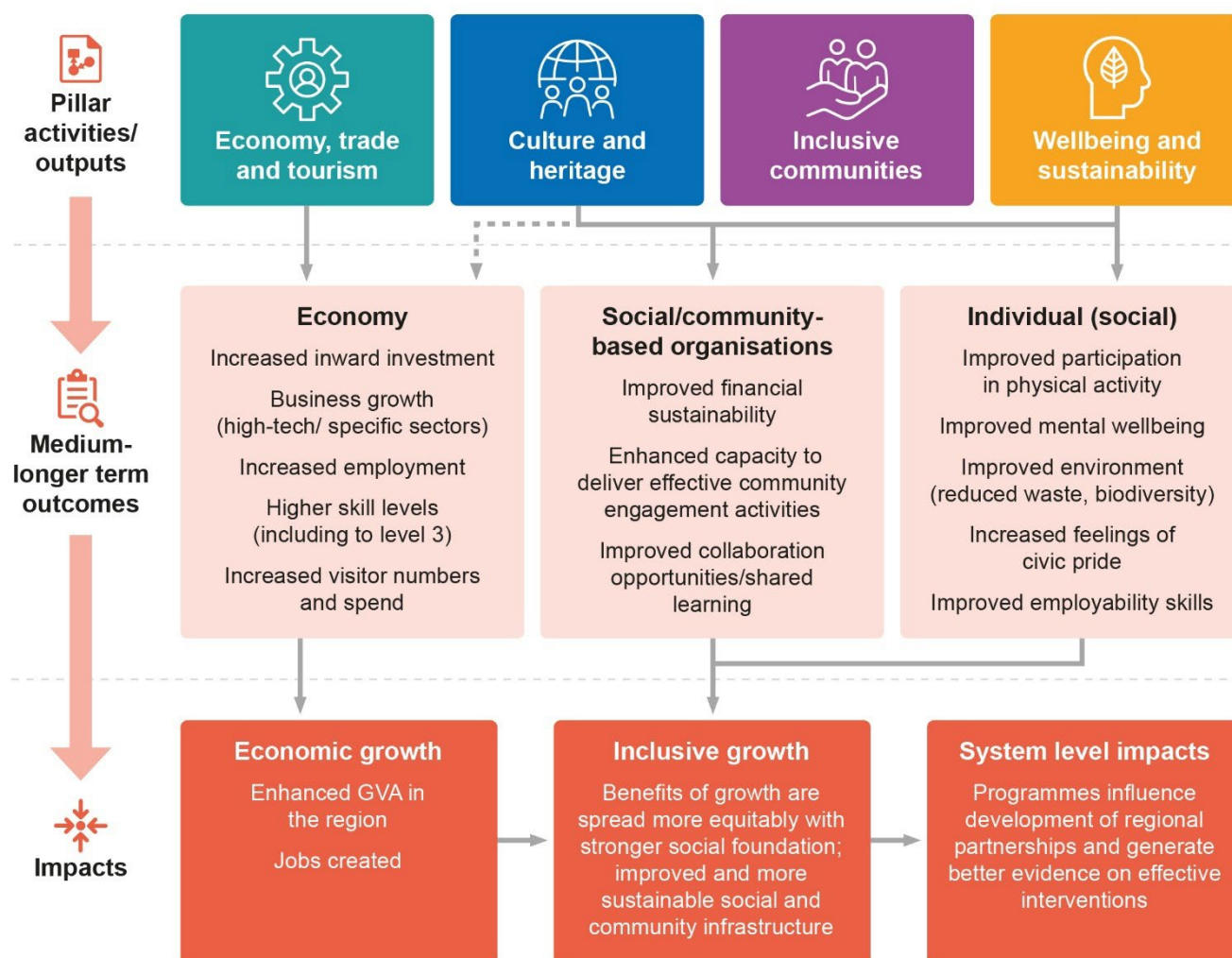
³ DCMS (2024) Evaluation of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, One Year Post-Games Evaluation Report

Figure 1-1: Fund structure



A high-level Theory of Change for the CWGLEF is depicted in Figure 1-2.

Figure 1-2: Overall Theory of Change



1.3 Methodology

The evaluation adopted a 'meta-evaluation' approach⁴, drawing upon planned monitoring and evaluation activities for the Fund's specific programmes and projects, complemented by additional primary research to address specific gaps. It should be noted therefore that the analysis relies to some extent on monitoring and evaluation data collected at the programme and project level that could not be influenced by the evaluation team.

The evaluation methodology consisted of the following activities:

- ▶ Scoping interviews and workshops undertaken with key programme leads and stakeholders.
- ▶ Development of comprehensive evaluation framework containing theories of change and evaluation research questions to guide the priorities for the research and evaluation – the evaluation questions are listed in Annex One.

⁴ The Government's Magenta Book, which provides comprehensive guidance on evaluation does not provide specific guidance on how to conduct a meta evaluation. However, a meta evaluation is generally recognised as an evaluation that synthesises findings from multiple evaluations to address a common set of evaluation questions.

- ▶ Further liaison with programme leads to understand the scope of planned monitoring and evaluations, timescales and gaps in the evidence. This was aided by a meta-evaluation management tool.
- ▶ Development and implementation of a primary research plan consisting of in-depth case studies of programmes and projects and stakeholder interviews.
- ▶ The use of a meta-evaluation analysis tool to facilitate the systematic assessment and weighting of evaluation evidence to inform the overall synthesis for each evaluation question.

A key limitation of the evaluation analysis stems from the timing of the report. The evaluation was required to be completed within the timeframe of the funded programme, which ended in March 2025. However, for several programmes and projects, full evaluation data will not be available until after this period. The evaluation analysis is therefore weighted towards stakeholder perspectives to assess progress towards outcomes and impacts, rather than quantitative impact analysis.

The primary research generally did not address evidence gaps related to the timing of evaluations - specifically, where activities are scheduled to take place beyond the reporting window - to avoid duplicating future evaluation efforts. These timing-related gaps are acknowledged in the analysis.

For evaluations planned beyond our reporting period, we considered how additional primary research could provide early insights and support the development of longer-term evaluation strategies.

Further details on the methodology and research tasks undertaken are provided in Annex Two.

1.4 Report structure

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- ▶ Sections 2-5 bring together analysis of the outcomes, impacts and lessons learned for each pillar.
- ▶ Section 6 addresses the evaluation's cross-cutting themes that are not specific to the analysis at the pillar level.
- ▶ Section 7 provides some final conclusions in relation to the key evaluation questions.



02

Economy, Trade and Tourism

2.0 Economy, Trade and Tourism



Summary

- ▶ Based on available monitoring data on progress against targets for inward investment projects and case study evidence, there are promising signs that the Global West Midlands programme will lead to **significant economic impacts for the region** and its localities.
- ▶ Individual evaluations of **Major Events Fund** projects provide evidence of tangible economic impacts, with aggregated analysis of individual evaluations showing overall **immediate economic benefits of £5.1m**, with the potential for this figure to grow significantly.
- ▶ Without CWGLEF funding it is unlikely that the 2026 European Athletics Championships would have been awarded to Birmingham. **Significant benefits are expected both from the redevelopment of the Birmingham Alexander Stadium and the staging of the Championship** through enhanced visitor numbers.
- ▶ Jobs and skills projects delivered locally have supported those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) groups to **build confidence** through community and recreational activities, CV assistance, and financial support to attend interviews, helping them access the job market.
- ▶ Paid work placements have impacted individuals **transitioning from unstable situations to employment**.

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2.1 Fund context

The Economy, Trade and Tourism (ET&T) Pillar aimed to drive sustainable economic growth and aspiration in the region, creating opportunities through skills and employment support, inward investment, business growth and tourism. The ET&T pillar received the largest share of the CWGLEF at £43.4m, which equates to over 60% of the total CWGLEF funding.

Five projects and programmes were funded through the ET&T pillar:

- ▶ **European Athletics Championships 2026 (EAC26)**: An additional phase of enhancement work on Alexander Stadium in preparation for EAC26 and funding support for the Games' delivery vehicle is expected to generate short-term employment impacts for the local area and aligns with the region's ambition to establish itself as a premier destination for major sporting, cultural, and business events.
- ▶ **Jobs, Skills, Wellbeing and Sustainability Programme (JS&W)**: To enable more residents to access training and employment opportunities including youth claimants (16-24) in disadvantaged wards through targeted activity. In the medium term, this should help to improve the skills and

qualifications of the local workforce, contributing in the longer-term to improved employability and regional productivity.

- **Global West Midlands Programme (GWP):** By building upon the Commonwealth Games Business and Tourism Programme (BATP), the GWP is expected to continue to build awareness of the WMCA region as an investment destination for high growth industries and provide continued support to the development of the region's inward investment pipeline. It supports a programme of international promotion in key markets to increase the region's profile and reputation, resulting in the further growth of the current pipeline. The programme's targeted marketing campaigns are also expected to attract additional visitors to the region and increase visitor spend.
- **Major Events Fund (MEF):** By attracting major events to the region, the MEF should continue to enhance the region's international presence while sustaining and increasing domestic and international visitors following the legacy of the Commonwealth Games.
- **Mobilising the Plan for Growth (MPfG):** Follow-on activities from the Commonwealth Games, through the MPfG, are supporting indigenous businesses to upskill and become more competitive. This is expected to support the development of business clusters and attract foreign direct investment, complementing other pillar programmes.

Further detail on the specific funded activities is provided in the table below.

Table 2-1: Economy, Trade and Tourism programmes, projects and activities

Project	Funding allocations and description	Funding
European Athletics Championship 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► CWGLEF is jointly funding the EAC26 and provides the largest proportion of the total funding requirement. Other public funders are Birmingham City Council (BCC), Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), UK Sport (UKS). ► Funding is being used in two ways i) to support planned legacy work and running costs at Alexander Stadium enabling Birmingham City Council (BCC) to make funding available in 2026 for the delivery of the European Athletics Championships ii) supporting Athletics Ventures, the delivery vehicle for the EAC 2026 with initial costs up until 31st March 2025. 	£14.3m
Jobs and Skills and Wellbeing and Sustainability funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Funding to support employment, skills & health (predominantly mental health) projects, especially focused on disadvantaged groups across WMCA. ► £4.85m is allocated just for the Jobs and Skills funding portion only. ► This funding was double devolved to the seven Local Authority (LA) Partners over the 2-year period on an equal basis (£801k each, inc. of wellbeing and sustainability funding). All LA's have a 30-70 split per financial year. ► £0.9m is provided for wellbeing and sustainability specifically in the context of jobs and skills. 	£5.75m
Global West Midlands Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► £13.4m for the delivery of the GWP by the West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC) £0.7m funding provided directly to the LA's. 	£14.1m

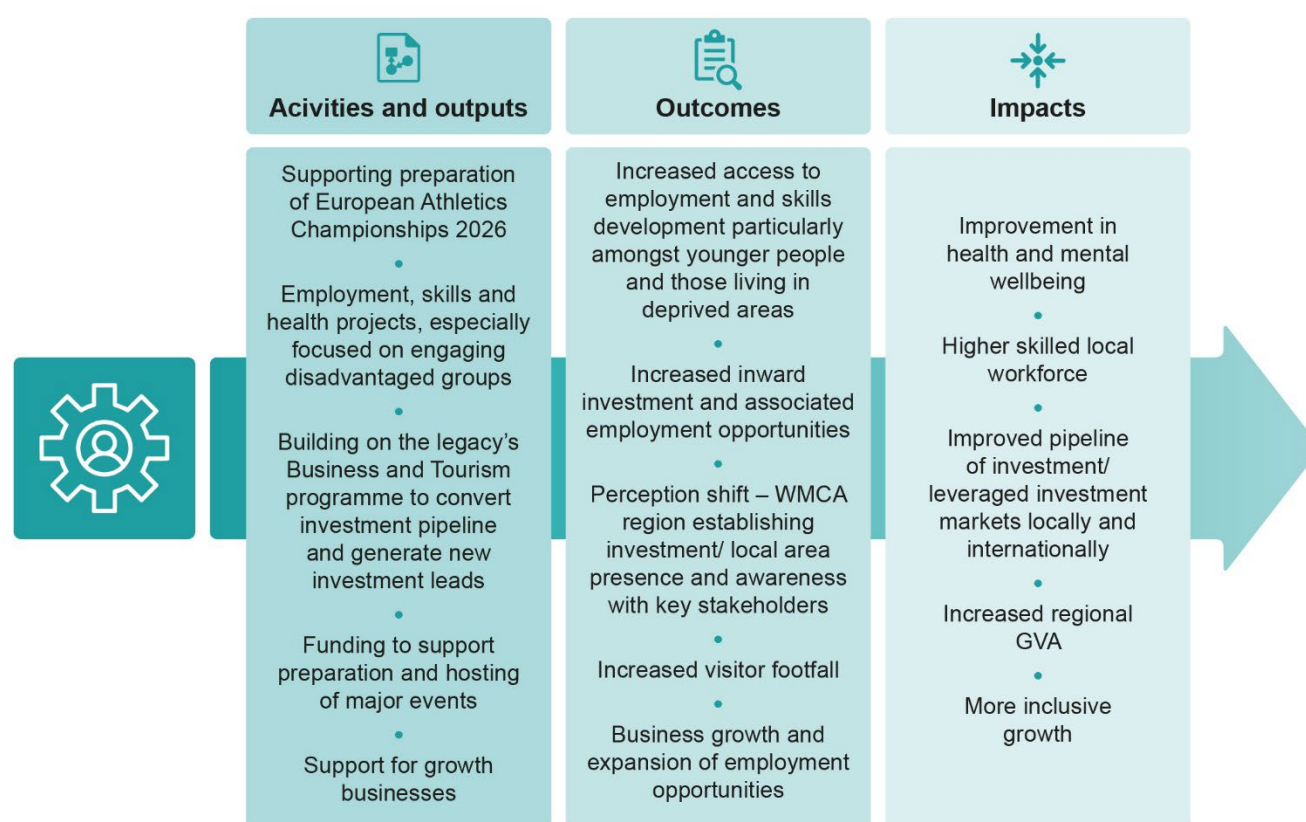
Project	Funding allocations and description	Funding
Major Events Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Funding to host and stage up to nine major events, in addition to SportAccord. ▶ It was anticipated that each event will require at least £250,000 of financial support to meet hosting costs; events under this threshold will be referred to the Community Grants Fund. These nine events are over and above the 23 business conferences and sporting events that will be attracted through the WMGC's GWP. 	£6m
Mobilising the Plan for Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ £1.7m allocated for the High-Growth Accelerator programme (HGAP) which includes support such as: workshops, coaching, networking, mentoring, marketing. ▶ £1m funding for the Supply Chain Transition (SCT) programme ▶ £0.42m funding for the Future Growth programme having a focus on regional cluster development. 	£3.25m

Note: Figures do not include all of the pillar's administration costs.

The **European Athletics Championship 2026** is being delivered by Athletic Ventures LLP (UK-JV) with the support of Birmingham City Council as the host city and its principal partners UK Athletics (UKA) and UK Sport (UKS). WMCA's contracts with Birmingham City Council (BCC) who will oversee the expenditure on the stadium redevelopment and the management of their UK Joint Venture contract. For the **Jobs, Skills and Wellbeing element** local authority Skills Officers group and partner forums are in place for fund governance. The West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC) are responsible for the delivery of the **Global West Midlands Programme**. The WMGC is also the programme manager for the **Major Events Fund** Programme, combining specialist advice on project prioritisation with direct support to a Major Events Advisory Group. WMCA provided the programme management team for the **Mobilising Plan for Growth** programme. WMCA managed the contracts of providers appointed to deliver the schemes, as well as reviewing risks, issues, and benefits.

2.2 Theory of change

Figure 2-1: Economy, Trade and Tourism pillar Theory of change



2.3 Evaluation findings

This section reviews the current evidence from evaluations completed to date, monitoring data, additional case studies, video testimonials and claims and assurance reports to provide an early assessment of outputs and outcomes against the themes of the CWGLEF from the Economy, Trade and Tourism projects.

At the time of writing, projects were at various delivery stages. Across most of the projects, outputs were on track to be achieved by the end of 2024/25. Some projects had also reported on the achievement of some early outcomes. It is important to note that the analysis at this time must therefore primarily focus on the achievement of outputs and anticipated outcomes and cannot offer a more comprehensive assessment of actual outcomes achieved and longer-term impacts.

For some projects, CWGLEF funding was combined with other sources, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), to achieve their goals. As the UKSPF investment priorities aligned closely with CWGLEF objectives, outcomes and impacts should be considered with an understanding of this joint funding and the partial attribution of CWGLEF.

2.3.1 Business Growth and job creation

The Global West Midlands (GWP) and Mobilising Plan for Growth (MPfG) projects were the key CWGLEF projects aiming to positively contribute to business growth and job creation. Without the CWGLEF funding, projects may have progressed in a significantly reduced

format, suggesting a high degree of fund additionality. GWP has already exceeded its inward investment stretch targets by securing 133 investment projects and 9,400 associated jobs. Under MPfG, the High-Growth Accelerator Programme has successfully engaged its target of 50 companies, with Key Account Managers conducting investment plan workshops for 47 firms to develop their high-growth strategies. Additionally, Supply Chain Transition workshops, supported by technical specialists, have strengthened supply chain networks. These results reflect strong progress and clear potential economic benefits across both projects.

The Global West Midlands (GWP) and Mobilising Plan for Growth (MPfG) projects targeted business growth specifically. The GWP is a strategic initiative aimed at driving international trade, inward investment, and tourism aiming to also build upon the legacy of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. The MPfG aimed to jump-start the WMCA's "Plan for Growth" by delivering three specific support sub-projects for businesses registered or operating in the seven local authorities within the WMCA area. These were focused on growing the indigenous businesses that were either identified as having a high-growth potential – High-Growth Accelerator programme (HGAP), developing comparatively advantageous supply chains – SCT, or a need for future clusters support.

Across both business growth projects (GWP and MPfG) early **output and outcomes data suggest that targets have been broadly achieved**. The GWP was required to introduce "stretch" KPI targets (higher than the initial target numbers) given how quickly the project achieved the original targets for outputs such as "Investor/ Developer/ Landowner engagement", or "Business conference bids". GWP have exceeded their original and stretch targets of 82 and 117 respectively, achieving **133 inward investment wins**. These outputs have also led to some early outcomes captured by WMGC particularly "Investment jobs landed" which has exceeded the stretch target of 8,000 at 9,400⁵ as of end-Jan 2025.

Capital investment has been the only KPI where progress has been challenging, with no capital projects secured by the end of January 2025, against a stretch target of three. Regional disparities in the quality of real estate investment sites and the stakeholder structure — where projects rely on local authorities, often the ultimate landowners of development sites — were cited as factors hindering progress on real estate investments.

At this stage of the HGAP, early insights into potential outcomes can be drawn from the outputs achieved so far. According to the December 2024 contract report⁶, while two of the 50 original Cohort-1 firms dropped out, they were quickly replaced — reflecting both strong demand and the scheme's ability to fill vacancies from a waiting list of interested businesses. Of the 50 firms, 47 have approved **Investment Plans**, confirming they have completed the 3-hour KAM 'Discovery' workshop, with investment strategies finalised and endorsed by the delivery partner. The remaining three plans were scheduled for completion in early January. Key areas of support identified by businesses include sales and marketing, securing new clients and markets, and boosting productivity across operations and sales.

The primary expected outcome of the HGAP project is long-term, sustainable business growth. However, project stakeholders noted that short-term engagement is less impactful compared to sustained support over longer periods. There was a recognition that high-growth business development typically unfolds over several years, whereas the HGAP is currently funded for only nine months.

The Supply Chain Transition (SCT) project has similar expected outcomes, but the focus is on the work secured within local West Midland supply chains. Workshops have been delivered with a technical specialist visit Original Equipment Manager (OEM) which helped to develop the networks in the supply

⁵ See GWP case study for details around the KPIs on outputs and outcomes compared to original and stretch targets.

⁶ WMCA HGAP December Contract Management Report – This was provided as the latest available data on the HGAP (as of end Dec 2024) detailing progress of the HGAP scheme.

chains. The expectation is that through the relationships developed across the supply chain, productive efficiencies can be gained for future growth at scale. The region can develop a comparative advantage in those markets.

Longer-term outcomes and impacts of the GWP will accrue overtime and at varying speeds as the GWP project builds on previously identified inward investment, as well as new lead generation.

The strong expected GVA (circa. £100 million)⁷ benefits of the GWP programme highlight the confidence WMGC leaders have at this stage in the economic benefits being generated by its combined focus on investment and tourism. Furthermore, without the CWGLEF, the GWP would not have existed. Other funding pots were insufficient in comparison to the funding secured through the CWGLEF.

“From the Commonwealth Games we have created a huge pipeline of businesses and without that funding we would not be in position to follow up with these businesses and actually convert them and bring them over to the West Midlands” – Senior leader from WMGC.

Robust estimates of the impact of the support should be considered as part of a full assessment of the programme’s economic impacts. It is worth noting however that business beneficiaries suggest that **the GWP support has helped them in different ways and to varying degrees**. Some organisations indicated they would have still chosen to locate within the West Midlands without support, albeit at a much later time, if they had not engaged with the programme. In contrast, one beneficiary highlighted that the quality of GWP support was the decisive factor in choosing to locate in the UK over other countries.

Overall, there are strong indications that CWGLEF has supported business growth and investment, though **the full scale of business outcomes and impacts remains unclear at this stage** without a full evaluation of the programme. The limited timeframe for delivery partners to engage with businesses may have constrained the immediate economic benefits. However, as project activities will continue to be supported through alternative funding sources, it is likely that longer-term regional economic and social impacts will be supported into the future.

From the EAC26 and Major Events Fund (MEF) project perspectives (detailed below), **additional job creation** has occurred through the redevelopment of Alexander Stadium which requires additional construction contracts. Further job creation is expected to occur in the longer-term through the hosting of the event. Across the MEF events, over 600 additional staff appointments were made to administer and deliver these events across the LAs. MEF has also contributed to over 800 additional volunteering opportunities.⁸

2.3.2 Major events

By January 2025, MEF events supported by the CWGLEF had generated an estimated £5.14m in economic benefits, excluding health, wellbeing, and social impacts. SportAccord generated the largest economic impact to date and fostered strong relationships with international delegates. A post-event survey showed 75% of attendees felt positively about the region’s capacity to host major sporting events. Events also reinforced diversity and inclusion, with initiatives like Reggae Fever celebrating local Caribbean culture and providing learning for future cultural events. The preparation for the European Athletics Championships

⁷ Expectation taken from an interview with a senior leader from WMGC

⁸ See Table 2-2 for details on volunteering numbers across the MEF events. his number is likely to be larger where the number of volunteers were unknown or estimated.

2026 (EAC 26) including the redevelopment of Alexander Stadium remains on track although it is too early to evaluate the specific impacts of this significant investment.

Evidence on the progress of the European Athletics Championships 2026 (EAC 26) investments has to date relied on regular progress updates as part of assurance reports to WMCA. There is currently no evaluation evidence, and it was considered too early to undertake any additional evaluation work for this report as the specific impacts of the stadium redevelopment and staging of the championships will be realised over the longer-term beyond the timescale for this evaluation. There is an assumption that such enhancements will improve the real estate value of the surrounding area, making it more attractive to tourists and investors, however such impacts would need to be analysed at a later date.

In terms of current EAC26 delivery, risks have been regularly monitored and as of the Q3 FY 24/25 Assurance Report⁹, project milestones are on track and are due to be completed by March 2025. The key elements of the redevelopment project include:

- ▶ Delivery of lighting solutions
- ▶ Delivery of 3G pitch as part of stadium legacy commitment to increase community benefits through open access and participation opportunities
- ▶ Delivery of new public gym facility as part of stadium legacy commitment to increase community benefit and access to stadium facilities, and to support longer term sustainability of the stadium
- ▶ Provision of a secure fence line for the stadium to replace existing provision.
- ▶ Reinstatement of the Stadium Park facilities and play area as part of wider legacy commitments to create an open and accessible community facility.

Birmingham City Council's financial situation has meant that it is no longer the lead organisation responsible for delivering the obligation in the Event Organiser Agreement co-signed with UK Athletics and European Athletics. These obligations together with the unlimited underwrite provision (and associated financial risk of unsecured income) have been novated to Athletic Ventures, a Joint Venture comprised of UK Athletics, London Marathon Company and Great Run Company. Birmingham City Council has a funding agreement in place with Athletic Ventures who has formed the organising committee and will be responsible for the delivery of the Championships. BCC will still provide the AXS through a hire agreement which provided the stadium re cost as Value in Kind and support with facilitating city operational matters. Athletic Ventures will also be responsible for delivering against the legacy commitments made in the hosting bid and BCC again will provide support through officer time. These community / legacy elements would have originally been provided by the £3m grassroots sport investment from the CWGLEF.

A budget from Athletics Ventures is available and costs supported through the CWGLEF include organising committee salaries, set up costs for the joint venture, rights and assurance fees, overlay etc.

The separate MEF programme aimed to support a pipeline of events for the West Midlands, building on the reputation gained from the region's hosting of the Commonwealth Games in 2022. The MEF aimed to deliver nine events across the West Midlands. At the time of writing some events had only just been launched (e.g. Wolverhampton's Kabaddi World Cup 2025 (17th to 23rd March)) so the summaries of key findings from evaluation reports do not cover all events funded through the MEF. The CWGLEF has been the only direct funding for most of the MEF events.

Events supported through the MEF spanned **business conferences, cultural celebrations, sporting events, and festivals** and included a mix of regional and local events. Stakeholders highlighted the

⁹ WMCA Assurance report for FY24/25 Q3 for CWGLEF projects.

importance of empowering local authorities to adopt a more ambitious approach to event planning, resulting in a diverse range of significant local events receiving support from the fund. However, there was some uncertainty about whether the emphasis on local and regular events aligned with broader strategic priorities. As a result, the varied nature of these events is likely to have mixed impacts on attracting a pipeline of major events to the region.

The key impacts are summarised below, based on a review of event evaluations:

- ▶ **SportAccord:**¹⁰ Without CWGLEF funding, SportAccord summit would not have been possible. The summit was estimated to **have a direct economic impact of £2.71 million** in Birmingham and the West Midlands. This figure includes delegate spending and revenues generated by SportAccord and its host city partners. The event generated over 5,000 bed nights in the region, with an average stay of 3.9 nights. Delegates were satisfied with the overall experience, including the venues, networking opportunities, and the content of the event. 75% of surveyed attendees felt positively about the region hosting major sports events. Delegates were also impressed by the walkability of the city and the quality of the venues. These statistics highlight the success of the SportAccord project in generating a future pipeline of international relationships and hosting sporting events. (Further detail on the outcomes and impacts of the SportAccord event is provided in Case Study 4).
- ▶ **ESL ONE EU 2024 - DOTA II:**^{11, 12, 13} This event brought together specific participants on the back of the ESports pilot run through the Commonwealth Games. Broadly this event had a **positive overall visitor satisfaction** with future events seeking to involve local schools and colleges. It must be caveated that the event required additional support of the Solihull Council and WMGC for the event to be delivered. CWGLEF provided a partial funding support for delivery. There are limited insights at this stage of the evaluation though it was the most watched regular ESL One event in history with 12 million (preliminary) hours watched. Post-event feedback highlighted some dissatisfaction with food quality, pricing and logistics.
- ▶ **The European Judo Union (EJU) Junior Cup:**¹⁴ Various outcomes were expected with hosting this event from: “Increased feeling of civic pride, improved employability skills of the local workforce, increased volunteering hours and employment and increased social cohesion within communities.” A large proportion of spectators and officials were from outside Walsall and West Midlands resulting in a positive visitor economic impact. **£0.23m of direct economic benefits** were estimated to have accrued to the West Midlands. However, hosting the EJU Junior Cup at the Walsall Sports Centre in June 2024 enabled Walsall to showcase their sporting event facilities on an international stage. This could help build a pipeline of future Judo tournaments to the area as the regional hub. **Diversity and inclusion** were also prominent throughout various aspects of the event from volunteers to spectators to participants.
- ▶ **The Black Country Festival:**^{15, 16} The festival helped promote **diversity and inclusion** as well as provide a series of activities to attract a wide-ranging population across Dudley and the West

¹⁰ Evidence for this event was synthesised from: Quantum Consultancy. (2024, September 9). Quantum event evaluation report: SportAccord World Sport & Business Summit 2024. Retrieved from https://www.sportaccord.sport/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/SA2024-Event-Evaluation-Report-Final-HQ_compressed.pdf.

¹¹ Evidence for this event was synthesised from: ESL Faceit Group. (2024, April 30). ESL One Birmingham 2024 Attendee Feedback. Retrieved from WMGC.

¹² Evidence for this event was synthesised from: WMGC (2024, May 22). MEF – SMBC final evaluation DOTA 2. Retrieved from WMGC.

¹³ Video evidence was also reviewed to extract participant, event organiser and attendee's views on their experiences of the event. Full video can be viewed on the ESL main website. Retrieved from WMGC.

¹⁴ Evidence for this event was synthesised from: The European Judo Union (EJU) Junior Cup. (2024, August 30). MEF - local authority reporting and final evaluation - European Judo - July-Sept 2024. Retrieved from WMGC.

¹⁵ Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. (2024, December 12). FINAL MEF December 2024 - local authority reporting and final evaluation - The Black Country Festival. Retrieved from WMGC.

¹⁶ Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. (2025, January 2). CWG MEF-Return BC Festival OCT-DECEMBER 2024. Retrieved from WMGC.

Midlands. It helped to generate an **increased sense of community** which will likely have transferable outcomes and impacts across other pillars such as inclusive communities.

- ▶ **Reggae Fever:**^{17, 18} This two-day event helped to positively promote the Caribbean culture across Coventry. Despite the relatively low economic impact generated at just over £0.5m, the additional benefit of the event was to raise awareness of one of the diverse cultures within the region and reaching a broad audience of diversity groups. Some volunteers noted that the event helped to provide opportunities to be involved in future events. Despite the relatively low economic impacts, it could help encourage similar events in the future to celebrate diverse cultures.
- ▶ **Godiva Festival:**¹⁹ This three-day music festival had generally **positive customer experiences** as noted in the evaluation report. In general, the event seemed to boost sales for local businesses (i.e., coffee shops nearby and at train stations). Visitors were also interviewed and noted that they participated in other activities during their time in Coventry. 88%²⁰ of attendees in the sample of 1207 described a positive experience of the event. **The total economic impact was estimated at over £1.7m²¹ (direct £1.33m and indirect £0.33m). The wider long-lasting impact of the event is less clear with no insights drawn on future regional event hosting.**
- ▶ **Birmingham Weekender 2024:**²² This four-day festival transformed the city into a “hub of creativity and connection”, with over 1,000 performances, 185,000 engagements and 26,300 attendees. The direct economic impact was small however surveys and focus groups with attendees, staff and volunteers indicate that the event enhanced perceptions of Birmingham and fostered social connection. Accessibility was reported as good, and attendees welcomed the variety of activities which took place. The inclusion of free events was particularly noted and contributed to making the event welcoming for all and further enhancing accessibility. Nearly half of respondents had never attended a Birmingham Hippodrome event, suggesting the Weekender attracted a lot of first-time attendees to this venue. There was also an increase in overnight stays in paid accommodation, however most attendees were local or from nearby areas as most survey participants travelled less than 10 miles to get to the event. In terms of what could be improved, some attendees pointed out that the schedules were difficult to navigate which led to missed performances. Some would have liked the event to be on for a longer period of time, and the weather impacted some performances and ‘dampened the mood’. The Weekender brought together diverse audiences and artists, and partners noted the importance of continuing this type of event.
- ▶ **Urban Sport:**^{23, 24} This international three-day event drew attention to Wolverhampton with four continents participating in these urban sports. The event received **high satisfaction scores with 94%²⁵** of spectators interviewed rating the event as good or excellent. 39%²⁶ of spectators came from outside of Wolverhampton and the event helped a local skate park attract participation in skateboarding with the potential for follow-up events to be held in Wolverhampton. **Younger people were particularly interested in the event and has links with the JS&W supporting the confidence building** of these individuals.

¹⁷ The Audience Agency. (2025, January). Coventry Caribbean Reggae Fever CIC - 2024 Festival evaluation report. Retrieved from WMGC.

¹⁸ Coventry City Council. (2025, January 7). CWG MEF-Return Reggae Fever Q3 spend. Retrieved from WMGC.

¹⁹ Bluegrass. (2024, September 27). Godiva Festival 2024 Evaluation Report. Retrieved from WMGC.

²⁰ GODIVA Evaluation Report post event collected data from attendees through a survey on satisfaction. 1207 total sample for the survey. This was provided by WMGC.

²¹ Bluegrass. (2024, September 27). Godiva Festival 2024 Evaluation Report. Retrieved from WMGC.

²² Evidence summarised from FRY Creative (December 2024) Birmingham Hippodrome Birmingham Weekender Evaluation Report - Impact

²³ Evidence for this event was synthesised from: Hurricane Creative (2024, September). FISE Xperience Research. Retrieved from WMGC.

²⁴ Evidence for this event was synthesised from: Hurricane Creative. (2024, September). Commonwealth Games Legacy Major Events Fund Urban Sports Evaluation Framework v2. Retrieved from WMGC.

²⁵ Evaluation report survey for Urban Sports provided by WMGC.

²⁶ Ibid.

- **Esport Festival (formerly SuperDome):** At the time of reviewing the MI data, this event had not taken place – no evidence to provide further insights. This event is **forecast to produce a relatively larger economic benefit of £10m²⁷ for the region.**
- **Kabaddi World Cup:** At the time of reviewing the MI data, this event had not taken place and therefore, there is no evidence available on its outcomes and impacts.

Overall, the evidence suggests that most events generated positive, albeit modest, economic benefits. Notably, some events - particularly SportAccord - have fostered initial connections with international delegates. This momentum could create a strong pipeline of future events, helping the region solidify its reputation as a thriving sporting and cultural hub. It is **still too early to comment on the full extent of this impact** but the insights from events delivered may have supported developing a sporting event pipeline.

2.3.3 Visitor economy

MEF events have attracted significant visitor numbers to the region, including from outside the West Midlands. This indicates increased national and international interest, likely contributing to the region's economic growth. By the end of January 2025, an estimated 150,000 visitors attended these events, comprising both local and external audiences. SportAccord generated the highest levels of online engagement and marketing impact, further raising the region's profile and encouraging future growth in visitor numbers.

Outcomes improving the visitor economy are focused primarily on the MEF. Activities that have been undertaken by this project has the prime objective of building a future pipeline of sporting events within the West Midlands and boosting the visitor economy.

Across the MEF events that have taken place to date the number of spectators attending the events and the social media presence are summarised in Table 2-2 below:

Table 2-2: MEF events attendees, social media and staffing²⁸

MEF event	Number of spectators/ footfalls	Number of social media views/ engagement	Employment/ Volunteers
SportAccord	The Summit brought together 1,580 registered delegates, plus 277 invited guests.	Media content related to SportAccord 2024 achieved a global cumulative reach of 1.47 billion. SportAccord social media posts received 1.47 million impressions. Broadcast coverage was featured in 107 territories, with a potential digital reach of more than 2 billion users.	The event was supported by 113 volunteers from the local charity, United by 2022. There were also 44 exhibitors at the event.
ESL ONE EU 2024 - DOTA II	18,200 spectators	12 million (preliminary) hours watched making it the most	74 jobs supported.

²⁷ Evidence for this event was synthesised from: Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (2025, January). CWG MEF-Return_Rocket League British ESports. Retrieved from WMGC.

²⁸ Figures have been provided by separate evaluations therefore different methodologies for counting attendance and engagement may have been used.

MEF event	Number of spectators/ footfalls	Number of social media views/ engagement	Employment/ Volunteers
		watched regular ESL One event in history	
The European Judo Union (EJU) Junior Cup	186 spectators – majority outside of Walsall and the West Midlands (611 unique attendees inc. staff, participants, coaches etc.)	89,431 social media engagements (77,431 – Facebook and 12,000 – Instagram) 188,911 digital broadcast views	16 staff Total of 64 volunteers (18 of which were event day volunteers)
The Black Country Festival	65,284 attendees	Over 1.5m social media followers	200 team officials at Dudley Grand Prix 30 event assistants 100 security officers 200 volunteers
Reggae Fever	Estimated over 22,000 attendees (7,800 of these attendees visited the main site over the two-day event, with 10,000 spectators across the procession routes)	Project engaged 850,000 people	152 staff 460 volunteers recruited from local community through partnerships with arts and cultural organisations.
Godiva Festival	34,097 attendees	N/A	N/A
Urban Sport	6,889 total attendees	14,702 views on website 1.4 million social media followers of event/event owner (all social media accounts) 290,000+ impressions 3,911 interactions 148 stories and posts	38 support staff
Birmingham Weekender	26,377 total attendees	23,360 people participated in activities within the festival	35 freelancers contracted 35 production suppliers contracted with 255 individual staff involved

Sources: Quantum event evaluation report: SportAccord World Sport & Business Summit 2024, MEF – SMBC final evaluation DOTA 2, MEF - local authority reporting and final evaluation - European Judo - July-Sept 2024, Evaluation Report - EJU Junior Cup, FINAL MEF December 2024 - local authority reporting and final evaluation - The Black Country Festival, CWG MEF-Return BC Festival OCT-DECEMBER 2024, Coventry Caribbean Reggae Fever CIC - 2024 Festival evaluation report, CWG MEF-Return Reggae Fever Q3 spend, Godiva Festival 2024 Evaluation Report, Commonwealth Games Legacy Major Events Fund Urban Sports Evaluation Framework v2.

Based on the latest estimates and figures gathered from the reports and monitoring data, the total number of visitors to the events that had occurred at the time of writing was almost 150,000²⁹. This was a mixture of local and non-local spectators. In terms of the social media presence, there is significant uptake across the UK and internationally.

²⁹ Summation of the limited numbers described in Table 2 above which was provided by the WMGC.

SportAccord seems to have generated the greatest engagement online and through marketing campaigns – building awareness of the region for future visitation. The rationale for hosting SportAccord in Birmingham and the West Midlands was multifaceted, primarily driven by the desire to build upon the success of the Commonwealth Games and establish the region as a premier destination for major international events.³⁰ The event was seen as a unique opportunity to bring together key decision-makers in the global sports industry, major delegates from the International Olympic Committee and various international sports federations, fostering relationships and attracting future events.³¹

For SportAccord specifically, the objectives included showcasing the region's history, culture, and hospitality, while also enhancing the region's reputation and forging crucial relationships with sporting federations and further expanding a pipeline of future sporting events.³²

The CWGLEF has supported the delivery of these events and helped to boost the visitor economy over FY23/24 and FY24/25. The variation in the types of events delivered adds uncertainty to building a long-lasting pipeline to the area but there are signals that future events are expected, boosting the number of visitors to the West Midlands.

2.3.4 Opportunities for underserved people/ communities

The Jobs, Skills and Wellbeing (JS&W) support programmes have focused on individuals across the region classified as Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), offering pre-job search support. This includes confidence-building through community and recreational activities, CV assistance, and financial support to attend interviews, helping them access the job market. Some have gone onto paid employment following work placements. In addition to NEET individuals, it was noted that the support projects provided by JS&W also helped individuals that were ex-offenders find employment as well as the elderly returning to the labour market. People with disabilities have also been supported through the projects. The HGAP provided support to a number of businesses equitably across specific demographic target groups, gender and individuals with disabilities.

Job creation and skills development has been the primary focus of sub-projects funded through the Jobs, Skills and Wellbeing (JS&W) programme. This is a double devolved programme whereby each of the seven local authorities have funded activities bespoke to their local authority (LA). These activities were also targeted at a ward level depending on the need identified by the LA. The JS&W support was introduced alongside other funding streams and at a point where some European funding supporting youth employability was being phased out. The sub-projects delivered under the JS&W targeted specific regions/ wards and individuals that were classed as those Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET).

An analysis of the JS&W outputs shows significant progress in engaging those most in need across the region. As of January 2025, the **number of young people supported through career interventions surpassed the target**, reaching 3,566 against a goal of 3,391³³. While mentoring interventions were lower than anticipated, the LA-led programmes primarily focused on pre-job search support.

A review of the outcomes data highlights the need for pre-employment and job search support. Metrics highlighting the types of people engaged in the support projects are close to target overall.³⁴ As of end

³⁰ Birmingham City Council. (May 2024). SportAccord 2024 Host City Lessons Learned.

³¹ Quantum Consultancy. (2024, September 9). Quantum event evaluation report: SportAccord World Sport & Business Summit 2024. Retrieved from https://www.sportaccord.sport/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/SA2024-Event-Evaluation-Report-Final-HQ_compressed.pdf

³² Ibid

³³ These output figures have been provided by the JS&W WMCA delivery team. A full set of statistics is included in the JS&W case study output. The count was of: The number of young people supported through careers interventions.

³⁴ Ibid.

January 2025, 2,085 people had engaged in job searching as a result of the support provided which was at 91%³⁵ of the target. Although further outcomes are expected to emerge beyond the evaluation period, this is a positive sign that progress is on track.

Some **placements have already led to employment opportunities**, which has been a real positive for the programme. The expected benefits that can be accrued to individuals receiving employment is financial income generation, but also improvements in wellbeing, career development and avoided costs of job seeking.

“I don't think we'd necessarily thought that the placements would necessarily lead to jobs, but in some cases that has happened, so there's some unexpected outcomes that have come through.” – Senior leader at WMCA

In terms of targets set in relation to mental health and wellbeing for the JS&W programme, the initial results show a positive trend for participants across all measures of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) four wellbeing questions. There were 314 participants in the sample, and each wellbeing question noted an **average 1+ point change in wellbeing scores** comparing the start and end of intervention³⁶.

From the JS&W case study, which focused on the Accelerate! sub-project delivered by Sandwell Council, it was noted that the **support intervention evolved after learning more about the individuals accessing support**. Some of the LAs chose to pursue ward level sub-projects, rather than having an LA wide focus on youth unemployment, given their prior knowledge of specific areas across the LA most in need of youth employment support. For these individuals, jobs support would be very early stage such as supporting with bus fares or grooming (haircuts, etc.) prior to interviews. Alternatively, a bursary fund could have allowed younger people to purchase a suit for an interview, childcare cost cover whilst interviewing, etc. However, LAs chose against bursary funding which could have been used to fund these types of services.

The Sandwell case study highlighted **a changing landscape of people that they are supporting**. These are people that are economically inactive and have not experienced working in the workplace. Some people have little to no knowledge about career aspirations, whereas others are migrants that have come to the UK with English as a second language acting as a barrier to entry to the labour market. The market is also experiencing a higher volume of older people either continuing or re-entering the labour market, increasing the competition per job post. These factors have highlighted the need for additional funding in areas that were previously unsupported but now face increasing demand for support.

Activities to support basic job searching interventions were proposed as the starting point to tackle help youth unemployment across the region. The CWGLEF has enabled an important first step in supporting economically inactive individuals by helping them build confidence, learn basic interview skills, and access financial assistance for job interviews — including covering travel costs, purchasing interview attire, and grooming expenses. These challenges have been brought to light across the region, paving the way for follow-up support and informing future funding bids.

The Accelerate! sub-project introduced simple early-stage interventions to help build confidence amongst the youth such as organising socialising events, where individuals could build friendships.

“... they've done rock climbing, all sorts of different things just to try and give the young people their social skills that they just don't have” – Senior leader at WMCA.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See JS&W case study for details on mental health and wellbeing scores.

A beneficiary of the Accelerate sub-project mentioned the social events and sessions included team building exercises and puzzles, outdoor activities at various locations across the LA. They also provide intuitive sessions that help build day to day life skills such as in finance.

“... team building, they're great working with people, puzzle solving, understanding. They did one recently, which was to help understand finance, which was amazing because I have never been taught that.” – Beneficiary of Accelerate!

The evidence from the JS&W stakeholder interviews indicates that without the support of the CWGLEF, Sandwell Council would not have been able to reach out to as many deprived wards. This signals a partial additionality of the project, specifically for Sandwell as a beneficiary LA of the CWGLEF.

The baseline for participants in terms of job preparedness was considerably lower than other related programmes. The JS&W programme highlighted the additional positive benefit in helping such groups go from low confidence to job searching, and through this the potential to move into secure paid employment in some cases.

Sandwell Council also noted that from their suite of skills support, **a benefit from the scheme is that they have managed to sign up a significant number of people with disabilities**. Similarly, across the HGAP business support, the delivery partner noted an important output from the number of businesses engaging was the **diversity of organisations** engaged from a **demographic (LA wide)/ leadership backgrounds, genders and those with disabilities**. The December 2024 report highlights the equitable spread across the region, with no one Metropolitan LA dominating in terms of business location. Birmingham has the largest representation at 11³⁷ firms with Sandwell and Dudley showing the smallest representation at 5³⁸ firms each. The markets these businesses are engaged with also shows a good level of variety with professional and financial services (9 firms), creative industries (5 firms) and health tech (3 firms) – top 3 sectors³⁹.

Overall, there is evidence showing that a proportion of the CWGLEF funding under the Economy, Trade and Tourism pillar has supported underserved communities, predominantly through the JS&W support initiatives. It is likely that these outcomes and subsequent impacts are to be experienced post funding given the time needed for these outcomes, such as accessing the jobs market, to lead to increased employment and wellbeing. Very early signs have been seen with some individuals participating in the JS&W LA support programmes securing employment post-paid work placements.

2.3.5 Process lessons

The evaluation research has highlighted some specific process lessons from the delivery of the ETT pillar's programmes and projects.

A common reported challenge across the projects funded through the ETT pillar was the **tight timeline** for both design and delivery. **Procurement processes** often took longer than anticipated, in some cases causing delays of three to four months. This issue was particularly pronounced in the JS&W project, where the double-devolved structure meant that each local authority required a separate contract, further complicating and prolonging the setup phase. Delays at the procurement stage had a knock-on effect, compressing the timeframe available for implementation and making it more difficult to mobilise the necessary resources and to invest sufficient time in relationship-building.

³⁷ December 2024 monitoring report provided by the delivery partner to the WMCA for the HGAP sub-project.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

“What should have been a twelve-month programme now actually is maybe nine months.” – Senior member from HGAP delivery partner

“We generally prefer longer term engagements and commitments with companies because we can just make more of an impact the longer we can spend with them.” – Senior member from SCT delivery partner

Projects including Global West Midlands (GWP) and Jobs, Skills and Wellbeing (JS&W), having previously engaged in similar funded activities (Commonwealth Games Business and Tourism Programme (BATP) and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), respectively), were better equipped to meet the tight timelines. The West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC) and WMCA drew on their experience designing similar initiatives, **applying those insights to accelerate project development**. For GWP, this meant building on BATP's inward investment leads, ensuring clear objectives and a well-defined business case aligned with CWGLEF goals. Established relationships and experienced teams - many of whom had worked on BATP - enabled a faster, more efficient process compared to other projects. Similarly, though to a lesser extent, the JS&W team had previous experience bidding for job programmes through the UKSPF, equipping them to submit a strong application for CWGLEF funding. However, unlike GWP, the JS&W projects and sub-projects targeted varied employment support goals, requiring additional scoping and knowledge development.

Overall, the **governance structures effectively supported projects** in designing and implementing their support measures. Each project operated under slightly different governance arrangements. The JS&W project, being double devolved and delivered by local authorities (LAs), benefitted from the LAs' deeper understanding of local employment and skills needs, allowing sub-projects to be tailored at the ward level. For GWP and Major Events Fund (MEF), WMGC served as the strategic delivery partner, leveraging its experience from BATP and established relationships with prospective investors.

“... [The GWP was] built on lots of the work that we've done previously, so things like international missions or global growth programme... so there were lots of learnings that we'd taken [from the BATP].” – Senior leader at WMGC

The strategic delivery partners for the Mobilising Plan for Growth (MPfG) programme had longstanding relationships with WMCA and businesses across the region. The partners had worked closely alongside WMCA on several other projects in the past, providing an element of “operational efficiency”. This was seen as especially beneficial given the challenging timelines for delivery.

Eligibility criteria were also required for some of the projects. It was noted that **flexibility in the targeting criteria helped the Mobilising Plan for Growth (MPfG) project to be more inclusive** for all businesses located across all the WMCA LAs. Some initially proposed criteria that were set for target companies were ultimately seen as too restrictive. For example, one criterion was for companies to have “year on year growth of 20%”. These criteria may have suited businesses located in more economically prosperous areas, such as Birmingham, but not well in others.

Across the Supply Chain Transition programme, delivery partners commented that **clarity was needed over the boundaries of the defined supply chain scope**. At an early stage of the project's roll out, two delivery partners thought they were delivering for the same supply chain, given the cross-over between their industry expertise: electric light vehicles and micromobility.

The High-Growth Accelerator programme (HGAP)'s structure worked particularly well in directing funding to the right organisations. This was attributed to the delivery partner's strong existing relationships with Key Account Managers (KAMs), who are individuals with strong business backgrounds such as business leaders, owners, funders, and investors.

"[KAMs] understand business and they understand businesses across the key industries of the [WMCA]." – HGAP Delivery Partner

Internal communication issues were noted during the initial implementation of the MEF events, where there was a lack of clear communication and coordination between the various stakeholders. This made it difficult for some stakeholders to understand how to get involved and benefit from the suite of events being delivered. Despite initial challenges, the various stakeholders improved their working relationships together as a team. They adopted "a 'can-do' attitude, resolving issues and finding compromises". – WMGC senior staff member

Overall, communication between the WMCA and the delivery partner for the HGAP was generally effective. However, at the project's outset, there was a miscommunication regarding the responsibility for providing the list of 50 high-growth businesses to engage with. As a result, the delivery partner had to conduct due diligence on over 400 companies at a stage when they had anticipated receiving a finalised list and beginning outreach. Despite this, the WMCA was noted to be "very receptive" to the delivery partner's feedback and collaborated effectively to shape the programme, ensuring it engaged and supported the most relevant businesses.

Across the JS&W sub-project, Accelerate, communication between WMCA delivery team and the LAs was viewed as effective. There was regular communication between the teams, particularly at the start of the programme in the set-up phase.

"We had regular meetings with [WMCA] when the programme first launched and we had initial set up meetings, all of the expectations in terms of monitoring the data capture that they were looking for." – Programmes Manager at Sandwell Council

Delivery partners on the Supply Chain Transition (SCT) project demonstrated strong collaboration and communication. Despite working for different companies and across distinct supply chains - with some overlap - they held weekly meetings to share progress updates and insights. This helped ensure a consistent and aligned delivery approach.

The **external marketing and communications** of most sub-projects started slowly (except JS&W and GWP – where projects built on existing schemes, as noted), linked to the reduced timescales for delivery and the lack of clarity around the delivery objectives. Given the need to work at pace, as time went on, stakeholders collectively improved in increasing the awareness of the sub projects, using multiple channels such as professional networks, local media, sporting channels, social media platforms such as LinkedIn, pre-established networks, online forums, etc. A selection of these methods was used depending on the appropriateness for each sub-project beneficiary being targeted.

For example, the JS&W sub-projects focus on youth unemployment made an argument for using social media as a primary source to promote the scheme. A self-referral pathway was also designed for individuals to register their interest in receiving support for jobs and skills support to access the labour market. Alternative approaches to building awareness have come through the Careers Enterprise Council (CEC) where many of the projects across the LAs use this service to promote the programmes they are delivering.

Projects focused on business beneficiaries used alternative marketing routes to reach the target organisations. A business beneficiary in the R&D automotive sector recalled being introduced to the programme through the Department for International Trade (DIT) (now the Department for Business and Trade (DBT)). They had contacts with the DIT team at the Turkish embassy who pointed them towards the GWP. These professional and governmental networks helped to promote the sub-projects internationally.

Increasing the reach for WMCA major events required an alternative approach. A campaign called "*Heart of Sport*" was launched to tell the story of the West Midlands and highlight its suitability for hosting major sporting events. This campaign emphasised the region's connectivity, quality venues, passion for sport, and experience in hosting events. The WMGC and BCC also used the MEF event opportunities to host visits from travel buyers and tourism agencies, creating itineraries with cultural activities and visits to local attractions. The communication plan was considered "*reasonable*" given the limited timeframe. However, organisers acknowledged that they could have done a much better job with more time and resources.

For the HGAP project, outreach and establishing engagement with target organisations faced challenges early on. There was a lack of clarity around where the responsibility of generating leads should lie for the HGAP. Similarly, clarity was needed over the boundaries of the defined supply chain scope. However, as the programmes progressed, outreach picked up as the programmes brand awareness developed through the various networks and social media campaigns to increase the awareness.

Delivery partners noted **difficulties in generating business leads** given the poor level of uptake through the LA's/ business growth lead list. "... *that just hasn't worked as a route through, so we've had to do our own lead generation.*" Delivery partners needed to go down the referral route to generate interest in the programme, in some cases needing to **cold call organisations** to increase uptake.



03

Inclusive Communities

3.0 Inclusive Communities



Summary

- ▶ The Inclusive Community Grant Programme (ICGP) reached **over half a million people** from a range of underserved groups.
- ▶ The ICGP evaluation shows the impacts of projects on **enhancing mental health** through strengthened social connections.
- ▶ The ICGP supported beneficiaries across a range of communities to take part in **arts and culture**, and sport and **physical activity sessions** of various kinds.
- ▶ Young people who have participated in the Trailblazers programme have **gained confidence**, feel less isolated, and have gone back into education or start an apprenticeship or traineeship.
- ▶ There is early anecdotal evidence that the Social Economy programme supported many organisations to **increase their trading income**.
- ▶ The social economy cluster development process has encouraged collaboration, mapped the local social economy, and **strengthened networks**.



Copyright: United by 2022 Charity (top left);
Father Hudson's Society (bottom left);
Wellington Boxing Academy (right)

3.1 Fund context

The Inclusive Communities pillar built on the legacy of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games by using learnings from the Games to better reach underserved communities and target beneficiary groups through new programmes and projects. Target beneficiaries included but were not limited to those from ethnic minority backgrounds, people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and individuals facing socio-economic barriers. In aligning to this broader vision, the pillar's key aims included:

- ▶ Championing equality, diversity and inclusion
- ▶ Addressing race inequality
- ▶ Improving community engagement
- ▶ Developing approaches for social innovation

The Pillar is made up three constituent programmes with complementary activities aimed at supporting the aims highlighted above. These programmes include:

- ▶ Inclusive Communities Grants Programme (ICGP) contributed to the overarching aims of this pillar by empowering communities to design, propose, and implement solutions to real problems felt in their own places and spaces, continuing the legacy of Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games to address physical activity and sport, mental health and wellbeing and arts, culture, and creativity.

- ▶ The Trailblazers programme contributed to the aims of this pillar by supporting five projects selected for their ability to address long standing matters of inequality across regional communities.
- ▶ The Social Economy programme focuses on investment in business support programmes and local clusters to improve organisations capacity to engage with major investment and address local need, linking social enterprises and trading VCOs with wider opportunities and markets.

A further key delivery strand of the Inclusive Communities pillar is the development of an Inclusive Communities Approach, which would for the first time articulate shared regional priorities for inclusive communities in terms of social mobility, social infrastructure, social capital, and social inclusion.

The ICGP awarded grant funding to community organisations across the West Midlands with the aim of empowering communities to design, propose, and implement solutions to problems in their own places and spaces. The grant funded activities continued the legacy of Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games by focusing on three thematic areas: physical activity and sport, mental health and wellbeing and arts, culture, and creativity. Heart of England Community Foundation (HoECF) were the appointed grant administrator of the ICGP and have overseen the application, awarding, and monitoring of grants. Grants were awarded between January and May 2024, with grantees needing to conclude the spend by end of December 2024. In total, £11.8million worth of grants were awarded to 388 different projects.

Trailblazers comprised of five projects: Critical Mass, Gen22, Volunteering, Bring the Power, and Social Value. These projects had been in operation since the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, and their continuation was a direct legacy connection to the Games. Trailblazers were included in the Inclusive Communities pillar as these projects aimed to address long standing matters of inequality across regional communities.

The CWGLEF enabled WMCA to make its first significant investment into the **social economy**. The Commonwealth Games Legacy Plan's social value priority had aimed to engage social enterprises and community organisations in the event's supply chain⁴⁰. The Legacy Plan's goal was to leave a lasting impact on communities, particularly in areas of high inequality with potential for socio-economic activity.

A key objective of CWGLEF was to improve the capacity of social economy businesses to engage with major investments and wider opportunities. Drawing from the experience of the Games and the deeper understanding it provided of the social economy's potential to advance the region's social value objectives, the Social Economy programme of the CWGLEF comprised two key elements:

- ▶ Specialist Business Support (peer learning) programmes providing organisations with the opportunity to improve their business skills and confidence to grow, secure investment and public sector contracts. There will also be post programme support to ensure any remaining barriers to growth are addressed and survival rates improved.
- ▶ The Place Based Development Clusters. Nine areas were selected in partnership with the seven local authorities and Power to Change, who provided additional funding. A lead organisation in each locality received a development grant of £50k to facilitate a collaborative consortium group consisting of the local community, social economy organisations, and stakeholders with the aim of creating a development plan that addresses local need and links social enterprises and trading Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) with wider opportunities and markets locally and across the region.

⁴⁰ Birmingham 2022 Legacy Plan, March 2021

The Social Economy programme aligned with the Inclusive Communities pillar theme by aiming to strengthen the social economy and its support infrastructure in some of the region's most disadvantaged areas.

The **Inclusive Communities Strategy** is the smallest programme as part of the Inclusive Communities pillar. At time of reporting, it is an ongoing piece of work, aiming to build on the lessons from the legacy programmes to articulate shared regional priorities for inclusive communities in terms of social mobility, social infrastructure, social capital, and social inclusion. As this programme is relatively small and ongoing at time of reporting, the overarching evaluation does not cover the Inclusive Communities Strategy in further detail.

Table 3-1: Inclusive Communities programmes, projects and activities

Programme or Project	Activities	Funding
Inclusive Communities Grants Programme	► Grant funding awarded to not-for-profit organisations delivering activities in the West Midlands.	£13.5m
Trailblazers	► Five specific projects were funded under Trailblazers: Critical Mass (an inclusive dance programme), Gen22 (a programme aimed those aged 16-24 furthest from the labour market), Volunteering (which maintained volunteering opportunities for the Games volunteers), Bring the Power (a schools-based programme), and Social Value (which developed social value in the region).	£5m
Social Economy	<p>► Specialist Business Support The programme is aiming to support 120 organisations to gain skills and confidence and will provide a further 40 organisations with contract and investment readiness support targeted to organisations with the capacity to engage with major investment. There will also be post programme support to ensure any remaining barriers to growth are addressed and survival rates improved.</p> <p>► The Place Based Development Clusters. A lead organisation in each locality will receive a development grant of £50k to facilitate a collaborative consortium group.</p>	£2m
Inclusive Communities Strategy	► The Strategy aimed to build on the lessons from the legacy programmes to articulate shared regional priorities for inclusive communities in terms of social mobility, social infrastructure, social capital, and social inclusion	£0.3m

Note: Figures do not include all of the pillar's administration costs.

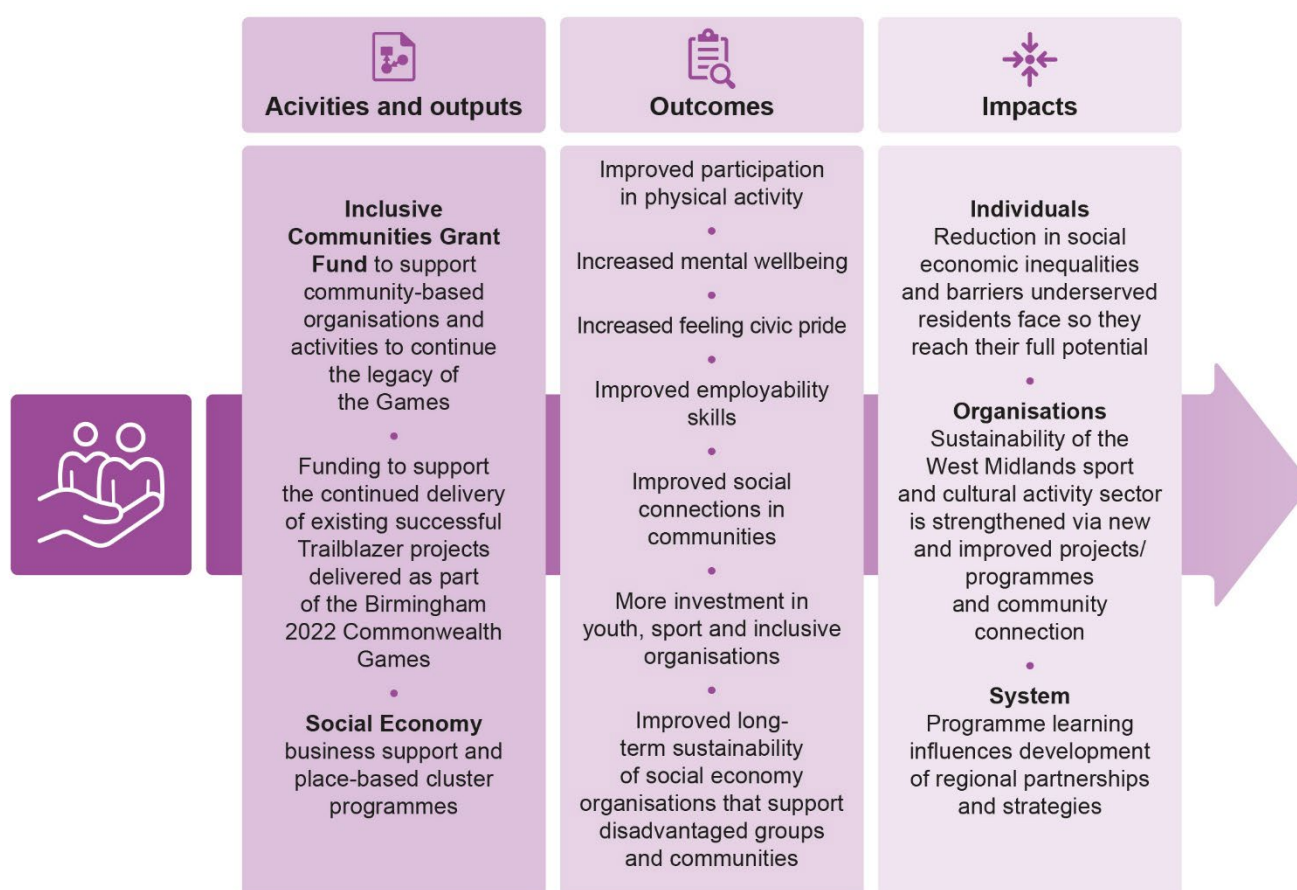
ICGP grant applicants were required to submit detailed applications that included relevant information about their organisation, target beneficiaries and communities they work with, as well as their plans for the using the funding. Forever Consulting has been appointed by HoECF to advise on M&E requirements for grantees.

United by 2022 (UB22), the official Games Legacy Charity oversaw all five Trailblazer projects between March 2023 and March 2025. The UB22 organisation is made up of officers managing day-to-day operations and is governed by a Board of Trustees made up of nine trustees drawn from different areas of expertise. UB22 has reported on financial spend and key activity on a half-yearly basis in line with the WMCA reporting template.

Falling within the overarching governance of CWGLEF, the Social Economy Programme was overseen by Core project team members from the WMCA delivery portfolio. There was also ongoing sector engagement on programme delivery through the Social Economy Advisory Board.

3.2 Theory of change

Figure 3-1: Inclusive Communities Pillar Theory of change



3.3 Evaluation findings

Given that for many of the Inclusive Communities programmes delivery is either ongoing or only recently concluded at time of reporting, the evaluation evidence focuses on emerging evidence on outcomes and process lessons. Output and outcome data is explored where possible, although to varying degrees across the three programmes, depending on what data is available at time of reporting.

The ICGP has been the subject of a standalone deeper-dive evaluation by Ecorys alongside this overarching evaluation. The deeper dive evaluation has consisted of a range of desk-based and primary research activities including: analysis of grant application data; a survey with unsuccessful grant applicants; case studies and interviews with grant funded projects; and interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders involved in delivering the ICGP (WMCA, HoECF, United by 2022, Grant Panellists, and the Funding Steering Group).

The programme itself required grantees to conclude their expenditure by the end of December 2024 and submit their end of grant monitoring information by the end of January 2025. The data shared by HoECF in early February 2025 showed there were still 75 grantees (equivalent to 19%) yet to submit

their final end of grant monitoring information. This end of grant monitoring information is the main source of data covering grantee experiences of spending the grant, outputs and outcomes of their funded project, and the final expenditure figures. Additionally, as many of the projects only finished delivery in December 2024, the full impacts of delivery were yet to be fully realised and reported.

At time of reporting, Trailblazers projects are still being concluded, and the final evaluation report is being produced. Given the simultaneous evaluation activity, the primary research for this evaluation focused on interviews with stakeholders at United by 2022 who were overseeing delivery. Whilst there is good understanding of the Trailblazer projects and how the programme transitioned from the Games to present delivery, there are limited findings on the outcomes and impacts of the programme at time of reporting. The interim report which is the source for some of the data is from May 2024, and so only represents a partial picture of Trailblazers. However, the outputs are from the evaluation dashboard do cover the entire programme. Lastly, this section lacks the perceptions and voices of those who participated in Trailblazer projects, which means we can only reflect from an overarching delivery perspective. Beneficiaries and participants have been interviewed for the Trailblazers evaluation final report.

Similarly, for the Social Economy Programme, the final validated outcomes data will not be available until the end of March 2025 and therefore cannot be included in this report's analysis. As a result, the evaluation has been informed by a small sample of interviews with programme stakeholders and delivery partners.

3.3.1 Inclusive Communities Grant Fund Programme

3.3.1.1 Inclusive Communities Grants Programme Overview

The Inclusive Communities grants programme (ICGP) aimed to engage with the communities underserved by the Games and extend the Games' legacy. A total of £11.8 million was awarded to not-for-profit organisations working across the West Midlands. The programme was overseen by WMCA and delivered by HoECF, with other stakeholders and organisations supporting with the design and delivery.

The Inclusive Communities grants programme (ICGP) was a £13.5million programme which sought to continue the legacy of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, and to engage with the communities underserved by the Games. The ICGP was designed and developed in 2023 by WMCA and a Funding Steering Group, which comprised of local stakeholders and funding distributors who advised on the programme's design. HoECF was appointed as the grant administrator by WMCA, with the responsibility for managing the grant application and award process, as well as overseeing and monitoring grantee expenditure. United by 2022 worked alongside HoECF at the application stage to offer support and guidance to applicant organisations.

The ICGP comprised of an £11.8 million funding pot⁴¹ which was awarded to not-for-profit organisations (such as charities, community interest companies, social enterprises, sports clubs, and local authorities) delivering activities in one of the following areas: Birmingham, Cannock Chase, Coventry, Dudley, Redditch, Sandwell, Shropshire, Solihull, Tamworth, Telford and Wrekin, Walsall, Warwickshire, and Wolverhampton.

⁴¹ The remaining funding was used to cover administrative, management and evaluation costs associated with the ICGP.

The non-for-profit organisations applied for funding to run projects related to the following themes: Physical activity and sport, Mental health and wellbeing, and/or Arts, culture and creativity, and there were four types of grants available:

- ▶ Small Grants - £500 to £15,000
- ▶ Medium Grants - £15,001 to £75,000
- ▶ Large Grants - £75,001 to £300,000
- ▶ Small Works, Refurbishment, Renovation - £500 to £100,000

Funding allocations were developed using three criteria: population, deprivation, and whether it was a constituent or non-constituent area of the West Midlands Combined Authority. Grant Panels made up of local stakeholders and funding distributors were responsible for deciding which organisations should be awarded.

Communities also felt that projects forever had to be new, so we wanted to give an opportunity for projects to be things that actually people know are delivering really well and they could do carry on [with]. WMCA Stakeholder

The ICGP was significantly oversubscribed, with 1,358 applications received equating to over £71million of funding. Given the oversubscription, the application phase concluded early after three months of being open (November 2023 – February 2024), and the award phase took considerably longer than anticipated, lasting 7 months between November 2023 – June 2024. Grantees were required to spend their funding by the end of 2024.

Of the 1,358 applications received, 388 were awarded funding (equivalent to 29%) and a full breakdown of the 388 projects is presented in the table below.

There was great awareness raising of the fund which may have created the demand. Perhaps limit number of applications through an EOI stage first... so expectations are managed. Unsuccessful ICGP applicant

These projects worked with a range of underserved groups including Black, Asian and people from minority ethnic backgrounds, People with mental health issues, and older people.

Table 3-2: Breakdown of awarded projects

		Number	%
Total		388	100%
Grant type	Small Grants	197	51%
	Medium Grants	141	36%
	Large Grants	14	4%
	Small Works Grants	36	9%
Location of activity	Birmingham (Only)	73	19%
	Cannock Chase (Only)	10	3%
	Coventry (Only)	25	6%
	Dudley (Only)	30	8%
	Redditch (Only)	10	3%

		Number	%
	Sandwell (Only)	24	6%
	Shropshire (Only)	17	4%
	Solihull (Only)	18	5%
	Tamworth (Only)	10	3%
	Telford and Wrekin (Only)	17	4%
	Walsall (Only)	20	5%
	Warwickshire (Only)	37	10%
	Wolverhampton (Only)	24	6%
	Combination of LAs	72	19%
Primary beneficiary group (at least 5% of grantees)	Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups	44	11%
	Children and Young People	97	25%
	Families/Parents/Lone parents	22	6%
	Local residents	64	16%
	Older People	26	7%
	People with mental health issues	26	7%
	People with multiple disabilities	24	6%
IGCF Theme (applicants could select more than one theme)	Physical activity and sport	210	54%
	Mental health and wellbeing	337	87%
	Arts, culture and creativity	155	40%

The programme supported a wide range of projects and activities, covering the following themes:

- Physical activity and sport: replacement and upgraded sports equipment, exercise classes, and training and funding for qualifications for sports club volunteers.
- Arts, culture and creativity: festivals, dance workshops, investment in theatre groups, music projects for vulnerable young people, and training for practitioners so they can better support people with additional needs.
- Mental health and wellbeing: programmes to tackle men's mental health and support for people with addiction issues, support for community kitchens and food parcels, befriending services for refugees, asylum seekers, and young carers, and events and social activities to foster a sense of belonging and community.
- Small works examples: Refurbishment of facilities, including kitchens, toilets, and sports halls, and installation of new doorways, electric heaters, and intruder alarms.

3.3.1.2 ICGP outcomes

There has been strong progress towards achieving the anticipated outcomes from the Inclusive Communities Grants Programme (ICGP). The ICGP has funded innovative projects which have reached over half a million people from a range of underserved and underrepresented groups. Grantees and stakeholders report positive outcomes for beneficiaries, including increased mental wellbeing, improved participation in physical activity, and increased employability skills. There is also

evidence the programme has contributed to the long-term sustainability of grantee organisations. However, due to programme timings, it is too soon to assess the impacts of the ICGP.

Anticipated outcomes have been largely achieved for the ICGP. The funding of community projects through the programme has seen innovative ideas taken forward, such as beekeeping sessions for veterans or a community photography project in inner-city Birmingham, which otherwise may not have received funding from more traditional grant programmes.

Grantees reflected how they liked the openness and flexibility of the ICGP as it enabled them to take risks and try something different. These projects **have reached over 630,000 people⁴² from a range of underserved and underrepresented groups**. Some of the beneficiary groups of projects included people from Black, Asian, and Minority ethnic backgrounds, refugees and asylum seekers, people with mental health needs, ex-offenders, and those who are long-term unemployed. Despite this, stakeholders had mixed reflections on whether the objective of reaching underserved communities had been achieved. Grant Panellists felt more could have been done to engage with micro-organisations and those community groups who lack capabilities and capacity to produce and submit funding applications.

[We've] not put any barriers up to anybody, irrespective of their age, their abilities, their ethnicity their religious beliefs, anything. Grantee

The ICGP did contribute to increased demand for and participation in grantee projects and activities. Grantees were able to **extend their service offer** either by opening up to new groups or by simply increasing their capacity. For example, a Rugby Union club was funded to set up and run three new teams, including an under-13s girls' team and a ladies' team, and another project renovated their kitchen facilities which has enabled them to provide cooked meals to more attendees. Some grantees also reported how the widespread publicity of the ICGP boosted the profile of their organisation which has led to increased demand for their services.

One of the brilliant things about the funding is finally we managed to find something that allowed us to work with schools, a lot of funding streams don't allow that... this is just the start of it. Even when the project finishes, we'll carry on and the bikes will still be there for these groups. Grantee

The ICGP has funded:

- ▶ 1,841 New volunteers
- ▶ 35,956 Additional volunteer hours (exc. small grant recipients⁴³)
- ▶ 681 New staff roles (full-time equivalent) (exc. small grant recipients)
- ▶ 76,418 Additional staff hours (exc. small grant recipients)
- ▶ 1,444 Qualifications gained (exc. small grant recipients)

Beneficiaries participating in training programmes reported feeling more confident and capable, helping them to overcome some of the barriers they face to employment.

Outcomes related to wider collaboration networks and future funding have also shown strong progress. Grantees have used the ICGP to invest in their services and improve long-term sustainability, such as fixing maintenance issues and upskilling volunteers. Grantees have also reflected on their experience of the ICGP, taking learning around the capacity and capabilities required to apply for funding and deliver projects like this, which they will use in the future.

⁴² Based on end of grant monitoring data, which at time of reporting, 310 out of 388 grantees had submitted. These figures are self-reported by grantees and have not been verified.

⁴³ Differences in the end of grant monitoring forms meant these questions were not asked of small grantees.

At time of reporting, 64% of grantees (equivalent to 161 grantees) had applied for further funding. Of that 64%, 86% (equivalent to 139 grantees) had been successful with at least some of these applications, including 28% (equivalent to 45 grantees) who had been successful with all of them. The most common sources for further funding included: the Arts Council, National Lottery Funding, Sport England, National Government, local authorities and other local councils, and a range of foundations.

Due to programme delivery only finishing in December 2024, it is too early to assess the impacts of the ICGP. In summary, the ICGP has made substantial contributions across various areas, enhancing physical activity, mental wellbeing, civic pride, employability skills, social connections, investment in youth and inclusive organisations, and the sustainability of social economy organisations. These impacts have collectively helped reduce socio-economic inequalities and support underserved communities in reaching their full potential.

Overall, the evaluation considered impact across anticipated outcomes in relation to physical activity, wellbeing and cultural engagement. Key findings are summarised below:

- **Physical Activity:** The evaluation points to a clear causal relationship between the grant fund and improved participation in physical activity. This was a direct focus of a proportion of funded projects, and the evaluation evidence indicated that beneficiaries across a range of communities took part in sport and physical activities of various kinds as a result of grant funding. This was mainly either due to grants supporting the running of activities or through supporting the provision of appropriate facilities, thereby facilitating participation. For example, one project used the funding to provide swimming classes for children, while another improved football pitch facilities, widening access to a greater number of players from underserved communities. The projects also broadened access to physical activities by reducing the cost or other barriers for participants.
- **Wellbeing:** As one of three ICGP grant themes, both grantees and stakeholders anticipated mental wellbeing would be improved through ICGP funded projects. This has largely been realised, with grantees reporting increased mental wellbeing for their project beneficiaries. For example, one project was able to expand their service offer to veterans with new activities such as beekeeping and archery, which led to reduced levels of stress and anxiety. Closely related to increased mental wellbeing are outcomes associated with reduced social isolation and loneliness. Additionally, those responsible for overseeing projects within grantee organisations reported improvements in their mental wellbeing too.

In considering the **extent to which more underserved communities have felt the legacy of the Games**, the evaluation highlighted that the ICGP was an appropriate approach for championing equality, diversity, and inclusion and improving community engagement by virtue of the range and nature of projects supported with grants. The programme funded small and grassroots organisations that do not typically apply for grant funding or organisations doing more innovative and unusual work. This helped develop approaches for social innovation and ensured that the benefits of the Games' legacy were felt by more underserved communities.

The ICGP has enabled grantees to **invest in their projects, services, and facilities to improve long-term sustainability**. For example, some grantees used the funding to install solar panels, which has enabled them to reduce energy costs and improve financial sustainability. Another grantee organisation trained volunteers to take on some responsibilities of paid staff, making it easier for the organisation to manage resources and capacity in the future. Additionally, those in receipt of small works grants have fixed issues like leaky roofs or poor lighting, which will reduce their maintenance costs in the future.

Grantees also reflected that their experience of the ICGP has enabled them to think more about **long-term strategy and sustainability**. They highlighted how the ICGP funding has boosted the profile of their organisations, due to the widespread publicity of the Fund. This in turn has led to them forming

new partnerships and collaborations with other local organisations, as well as seeing an increased level of interest from prospective project beneficiaries. It is hoped that this momentum and publicity will enable grantees to attract more investment in the future.

At the time of reporting, 64% of grantees (equivalent to 161 grantees) had applied for **further funding**. This proportion was consistent across the four different types of ICGP grant, with no grant type more likely to have applied for further funding than the others¹. Of that 64%, 86% (equivalent to 139 grantees) had been successful with at least some of these applications, including 28% (equivalent to 45 grantees) who had been successful with all of them. The most common sources for further funding included: the Arts Council, National Lottery Funding, Sport England, National Government, local authorities and other local councils, and a range of foundations.

In terms of the ICGP funded projects specifically, grantees were generally positive they would continue beyond the life of the grant. This is largely because the grantees used the funding as a 'one-off' additional piece of funding to supplement what they were already delivering. Those who were unsure if their project would continue beyond the ICGP were dependent on securing additional funding, which they had been yet to achieve, or in some instances their organisation has been unable to recruit and retain volunteers to run the project in the future.

3.3.1.3 ICGP process lessons

Extending the timings of any grants programme is the key lesson from the ICGP, this will enable design and delivery to feel less rushed and for evaluation activities to fully assess outcomes and impact. Other learnings included: better management of oversubscribed funds, an improved support offer to applicants and grantees, and for grantees better understanding of the skills, resources, and capacity needed to deliver their projects.

The key learning shared by stakeholders was to lengthen the timings of any similar programmes. Stakeholders involved in ICGP reflected that the timeframe was too short and so the set-up, delivery and evaluation of ICGP felt rushed. Equally, there was no capacity or flexibility to handle any delays, which was problematic given the oversubscription of the ICGP and the extended grant awards process. Grantees and unsuccessful ICGP applicants felt similarly about the programme length.

The best way to get the most impact from this investment...we probably would have done this project over 18 months to two years. Member of Fund Steering Group

Another key learning related to the oversubscription of the ICGP and the feeling this could have been better managed; either by reducing demand at the outset (for example through tighter eligibility criteria) or by targeting funding where it is most needed (such as geographical areas or underserved groups). Additionally, applicants to the ICGP suggested that if similar challenges were encountered on other funds, clearer communications around delays would be useful.

Applicants would also have liked an improved support offer. They were favourable about what was offered by United by 2022 at the application stage, but they would have liked additional support beyond this. This included greater support with the applications (including simpler applications for smaller organisations), support with grant expenditure (such as training on project management or through best practice networking with other grantees), and support around next steps for unsuccessful applicants following the unsuccessful outcome of their application.

Grantees also shared learnings for themselves, often related to the time, capacity, and skills needed to complete grant applications and deliver grant-funded projects. HoECF as the grant administrator shared they had learnt a lot about the capacity and resources needed to manage a grant programme of this size.

3.3.2 Trailblazers

3.3.2.1 Trailblazers overview

Trailblazers has been delivered since the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, however for CWGLEF the programme was reduced from 12 projects to 5. United by 2022 as the charity responsible for continuing the legacy of the Games was chosen to select the projects and deliver them in this phase. The programme ultimately aims to reach communities underserved by the Games.

Trailblazers was a programme of 12 projects which began during the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. The projects were 'moulded' around the Games' pillars and provided different services and activities to a range of beneficiaries. The projects were run by different organisations including United by 2022, Sport England, WMCA and Birmingham City Council. Each project had its own aims dependent on its activities and beneficiaries, for example: developing community engagement, developing young people's skills, or maintaining the inclusivity of the Games. The overarching aim of Trailblazers, which also was the commonality across the projects was to reach communities underserved by the Games and make a change at a community level. Given it aimed to reach those underserved by the Games, Trailblazers was always designed to be a legacy programme, with some projects continuing after the Games.

United by 2022 led the process to choose the legacy projects. This comprised of three key factors:

- ▶ reviewing the evaluation findings from the Games to identify the projects with emerging impacts.
- ▶ identifying which projects had yet to achieve what they aimed to do.
- ▶ conducting a community consultation to understand what communities wanted following the Games. This involved United by 2022 reaching out to people from the art, culture, and heritage sectors, charities, community groups, politicians, and representatives from LAs, including those who had been sceptical about the Games and its legacy. The consultation was a mixture of interviews and written feedback, including circulating ideas based upon the twelve existing projects and testing what people thought of them. The consultation also asked if any of these projects could be done elsewhere (i.e. duplication), with the aim of funding unique projects.

Following this process, five projects were identified for continuation. The projects were seen as a natural fit for the CWGLEF given it involved the continuation of projects designed and delivered during the Games. Equally, its aim of reaching underserved communities meant it aligned with the Inclusive Communities pillar.

These five were kind of like the strongest thing that communities felt would leave a tangible benefit, that would be long lasting, that would be more than just sports tickets. You didn't need to have...a lot of money or be from an affluent community to be able to engage with these things. United by 2022 Stakeholder

United by 2022 was given the responsibility of running the Trailblazers programme, as it was perceived that a regional organisation needed to oversee legacy programmes from the Games, as the Games had taken place across the West Midlands. United by 2022 was also a good fit for this role as it had been founded by the key stakeholders involved in the Games, including Birmingham City Council, WMCA, and the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee. Stakeholders at United by 2022 were positive about their working relationship with WMCA, who oversaw the CWGLEF, stating how there were high levels of trust and understanding on both sides.

The only challenge with delivery was around timings. For United by 2022 itself, before the CWGLEF funding had been confirmed, charities reserves were used to cover staff costs related to Trailblazers. This was because United by 2022 were keen not to lose staff who had previously been involved in the programme and who would have valuable knowledge and experience; something they found to be an important asset given the limited timelines. Moreover, where recruitment was needed, this was often a challenge, as the short recruitment window and short-term contracts on offer deterred individuals from applying. This meant in some instances individuals who required training or additional support were recruited, as United by 2022 were unable to find other suitable candidates.

Similar challenges were faced with some of the local, community-based delivery organisations involved in Trailblazers, as they were not always experienced with contracting. This required United by 2022 to dedicate time and resources to supporting these organisations to be ready to deliver, all within the limited 12-month timeframe.

Furthermore, stakeholders at United by 2022 felt Trailblazers needed longer than a year post-Games to fully deliver on the anticipated outcomes and impacts, given they are not projects with 'quick wins'.

Despite the challenges related to timings, United by 2022 stakeholders explained how the high demand for and engagement with Trailblazer projects continued post-Games limiting the need for any additional engagement and awareness.

3.3.2.2 Trailblazer projects overview

The five Trailblazers projects include: Critical Mass (an inclusive dance programme for young people with disabilities), Gen22 (a youth volunteering programme for those furthest from the labour market), Volunteering (a continuation of volunteering opportunities for Games volunteers), Bring the Power (a schools-based programme around the themes of the Games), and Social Value (a project to develop social value in the region). These projects were chosen due to their popularity, success during the games, and their uniqueness.

Critical Mass was an inclusive dance programme for young people aged 16-30 with disabilities. It aimed to bring young people with disabilities together and encourage them to be more physically active. It was selected for continuation due to its popularity with communities (evidenced in the community consultation) and it being a prominent example of inclusive, as Critical Mass dancers featured in the opening ceremony of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

People said you can't let Critical Mass go because that's like a real like beacon of massive inclusive change in the events industry, putting disabled people in the mixed dance company on the stage for the opening ceremony. The world saw that that's game changing. You can't let some of those emerging outcomes go. United by 2022 Stakeholder

Critical Mass saw the establishment of new inclusive dance groups in Walsall, Dudley and Coventry. These groups worked with a range of groups including young people aged 5-18 who identify as D/deaf, hard or hearing, and non-disabled young people with deaf siblings or parents; young people aged 5+ who identify as neurodiverse, disabled, and non-disabled with complex needs; and children aged 5-9 with additional learning requirements. Additionally, as part of Critical Mass, FABRIC Dance supported the arts sector in the West Midlands to continue offering regular inclusive dance activities for young people by improving learning and understanding around inclusion and the perception of disability and pathways into the dance sector. FABRIC also supported dancers and creatives with disabilities to be employed in professional dance companies or structures.

Gen22 was a youth volunteering programme targeted at young people aged 16-24 who face challenges in engaging with the mainstream offers of employment and volunteering. The young people involved in

the programme have experienced a range of barriers to mainstream employment or volunteering, reflecting wider issues of youth unemployment in the West Midlands. Such barriers for those furthest away from the labour market include a lack of confidence, poor mental health, having received free school meals, having special educational needs and or disabilities, and/or having a family member or friend who is or has been in prison⁴⁴. Community organisations worked with such groups of young people to offer volunteering opportunities which would develop their skills and confidence to ultimately enter the labour market.

A key enabler of this programme, identified by United by 2022 stakeholders, was the partnership with local community organisations. United by 2022 stakeholders explained how national, well-known youth organisations, like the King's Trust or National Citizen Service, could have been selected to deliver Gen22. However, they specifically chose local organisations as they wanted to ensure the delivery organisations understood the needs and challenges of young people in the West Midlands. It was also felt these organisations are better placed to signpost young people to further support and resources, through their understanding of local community networks and infrastructure. Additionally, it was key for young people to trust and build relationships with the organisations delivering the programme, and so by having local organisations there was more presence locally and less risk of them moving away from communities when the programme has ended, which could be the case with national organisations.

Young people completed a 30-hour volunteering assignment, connected to the themes of Creative, Cultural & Digital and/or Physical Activity & Wellbeing. In addition to the main programme, there were two other strands:

- ▶ Gen22 (the same name as the wider programme) worked with same local community organisations as the central programme to support young people with SEND and ensure they have equal access to employment services, facilities, and opportunities. United by 2022 partnered with Sense, The National Deafblind and Rubella Association to develop the support package for young people and the local community organisations. This included an accessible Skills360 online learning platform, where young people could enrol in 16 Employability Skills courses and earn badges by completing modules on leadership, CV writing, and safeguarding.
- ▶ Ideas Made Real offered young people the opportunity to turn a social action project of theirs into reality. Successful applicants received a grant of up to £8,000 and support from United by 2022 and another supporting organisation.

Volunteering maintained the volunteers from the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and facilitated further volunteering opportunities. Learnings from the London 2012 Olympic Games informed the continuation of this project, as the 2012 Olympics did not maintain its volunteering resource, and so the momentum and legacy of the volunteering programme was lost. The Spirit of 2012⁴⁵ advised United by 2022 to explore how to continue the volunteering offer. Additionally, a survey with the 14,000 volunteers from the Birmingham Commonwealth 2022 Games found overwhelming support to continue the volunteering programme, with a specific request to continue volunteering opportunities at events, rather than more traditional volunteering opportunities like Charity Shops.

Volunteers have supported at a range of sports and cultural events in the West Midlands including Sport Accord, Swim England West Midlands, the World Trampoline Championships, Birmingham Festival 23, the Community Games, and EID in King's Heath. Additionally, volunteers had access to an online portal which offered training to upskill them and boost confidence. United by 2022 stakeholders found one of the key enablers for maintaining and engaging volunteers has been the inclusivity of the programme.

⁴⁴ FRY Creative (July 2024). United by 2022 Interim Evaluation Report

⁴⁵ Spirit of 2012 was established as an independent Trust by the National Lottery Community Fund in 2013 to build on the legacy of the London 2012 Games.

Volunteering has intentionally looked the needs and requirements of volunteers to ensure the programme takes account of these in a way traditional volunteering opportunities might not. For example, individuals who cannot do a standing role, or a person who requires gluten-free food, or someone who uses Makaton to communicate.

Bring the Power was a schools and community-based youth programme, which included a workshop and a visit from Perry the Bull, the mascot of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. During the Games it saw incredible levels of interest from schools, with around 35 schools unable to participate in the original timeframe and funding period. This unmet demand made it an obvious choice for continuation beyond the Games. However, the themes of Bring the Power evolved to better reflect the legacy of the Games, rather than covering introductory topics such as what is the Commonwealth, what are the shared values between member states and why there is a Commonwealth Games. United by 2022 worked with a youth panel to understand what the focus of Bring the Power should be beyond the Games and two main themes emerged:

- ▶ Women and girls' participation in sport, especially those aged 14-20 and from certain ethnic groups.
- ▶ The increase in individuals disclosing neurodiversity and/or mental health needs, and the barriers these individuals face in participating in physical activity.

Given these new themes, the Bring the Power programme evolved to focus on how teachers and schools can offer more inclusive physical activities.

Social Value is a project where United By 2022 developed a robust Social Value implementation and measurement framework that aligned with the goals set out by the Public Services (Social Value) Act of 2012 and the needs of the West Midlands. This framework can be used to measure the value an organisation contributes to society, beyond a reported profit. The Social Value project encouraged and supported organisations across the West Midlands to make social value part of the way they do business; by bringing together the private and third sector and securing investment for grassroots sport, local arts organisations and community projects, which ultimately delivered more social value in the region. This was done through a mix of skilled volunteers who worked with organisations on behalf of United by 2022, and a series of capacity building webinars and in-person events, delivered by specialist industry experts.

3.3.2.3 Outputs from Trailblazers

Outputs from the Trailblazers projects have been high and have exceeded the programme targets.

United by 2022 stakeholders were positive about the progress made by Trailblazers and said it had exceeded programme expectations. The following figures reflect the delivery of Trailblazers' projects up until November 2024.

- ▶ 2,367 Trailblazers sessions have taken place: 360 Critical Mass sessions, 877 Gen22 sessions, 79 Volunteering sessions, 1,001 Bring the Power sessions, and 50 Social Value sessions.
- ▶ 43,088 attendees⁴⁶ at Trailblazers projects, across 279 locations⁴⁷.
 - ▷ 4,150 Critical Mass attendees (369 unique participants) across 27 locations.

⁴⁶ Attendees is the language used by the Trailblazers evaluation conducted by FRY Creative. It is defined as those who attended a Trailblazers session. This means individuals may be counted more than once if they attended more than one session. Unique participants is the figure that shows the number individuals who participated, without double-counting, this is only available for some of the projects.

⁴⁷ Locations is the language used by the Trailblazers evaluation conducted by FRY Creative. It is defined as the number of unique locations at which sessions took place.

- ▷ 6,592 Gen22 attendees (577 unique participants) across 109 locations.
- ▷ 3,117 Volunteering attendees across 58 locations.
- ▷ 28,612 Bring the Power attendees (including 1,949 unique participants) across 99 locations.
- ▷ 617 Social Value attendees across 13 locations.

3.3.2.4 Outcomes and impacts of Trailblazers

Outcomes and impacts are yet to be fully measured, but stakeholders expect they will be achieved. Early evidence from Gen22 and Volunteering have shown signs of promise. Young people who have participated in the programme have gained confidence, feel less isolated, and has enabled them to feel able to go back into education or start an apprenticeship or traineeship. Volunteering has seen positive outcomes for volunteers who have reported feeling increased civic pride, strengthened connection to the Games, and reduced isolation through volunteering friendships and social connections.

Given the ongoing delivery of Trailblazers at the time of reporting, and the final evaluation report for Trailblazers is still being produced, the reported outcomes and impacts of Trailblazers is limited at this stage. Therefore, reported outcomes and impacts are limited to Gen22 and Volunteering.

United by 2022 stakeholders felt Gen22 has had a lot of social value for the region, by offering volunteering opportunities. They reflected how young people who have participated in the programme have gained confidence, feel less isolated, and has enabled them to feel able to go back into education or start an apprenticeship or traineeship. They gave the example of a young person who started on the programme, 'blasted' through their 30 hours of volunteering and went onto complete over 120 hours, before becoming a Youth Leader in the local community organisation. This young person has gone on to enter employment and is looking to start their own charity or CIC to encourage civic engagement and social action. At time of reporting, Gen22 is being independently evaluated by Coventry University, this evaluation is showing that Gen22 is achieving anticipated outcomes and impacts and has indicated the programme may be ready for rollout elsewhere in the UK⁴⁸.

Volunteering has seen positive outcomes for volunteers who have reported feeling increased civic pride, strengthened connection to the Games, and reduced isolation through volunteering friendships and social connections. The Volunteering post-event survey⁴⁹ (n=78) found:

- ▶ Over 90% of volunteers agreed that through their engagement with volunteering they have been able to interact with others from different backgrounds.
- ▶ Over 80% of volunteers agreed they have developed existing skills as a result of their volunteering experience.
- ▶ Over 60% of volunteers agreed they have gained new skills as a result of their volunteering experience.

A lot of them [volunteers] are friends now, they meet up outside of their volunteering, they've gone off and explored new volunteering [opportunities] together ... it gives them a sense of belonging. United by 2022 Stakeholder

⁴⁸ At time of reporting, the Gen22 evaluation is not yet published. These early findings were shared by United by 2022 stakeholders during interviews.

⁴⁹ FRY Creative (July 2024). United by 2022 Interim Evaluation Report

There are people who would be lonely if they weren't doing this, and they're massive ambassadors for the place. So, they're very willing to meet people at train stations and walk them...up to the ICC [International Convention Centre] and chat merrily about how fantastic Birmingham is. And I think that this is a very unique outcome of the Games. United by 2022 Stakeholder

Overall, United by 2022 stakeholders anticipated further outcomes and impacts from Trailblazers, given the success of projects during the Games.

3.3.2.5 Future of Trailblazers

Trailblazers will continue in a smaller capacity, with some projects finishing delivery. The expectation is for projects to be owned by communities and for United by 2022 to no longer be the 'owner'.

As with the reduction of Trailblazers projects from 12 to five following the Games, United by 2022 are looking to reduce the number of Trailblazers projects down to three following the CWGLEF. To do this they are reviewing what funding is available and assessing how projects can be delivered on a smaller scale, whilst maintaining members of the core programme team (as retaining legacy knowledge and experience has been a strength of the programme to date). Given there is still demand for Trailblazers, United by 2022 have wanted communities to take on projects themselves, particularly where they have expertise. This was part of the design in this phase, for example FABRIC's involvement in Critical Mass as a dance school, although United by 2022 would like to extend this further. Therefore, Critical Mass will no longer be run by United by 2022, as they would prefer the dance or disability sectors to take the project on. Bring the Power, the programme is expected to finish with the end of CWGLEF funding, as the programme has always been closely linked to the Games and the children who would participate in the programme are too young to recall the Games.

Volunteering is expected to continue as there is still demand from volunteers and a series of future events in the region that could benefit from local volunteers. However, to manage Volunteering the digital portal needs to be updated and a small team of staff is required to manage the programme, including the inclusive and accessible element.

Gen22 in this phase (previous phase was during the Games) was designed as a pilot evaluation (being conducted by Coventry University), with the hope to replicate the project in other parts of the UK. Early indications from the evaluation suggest the project is ready for national rollout, and United by 2022 are working in partnership with Sport England to achieve this. Currently, there is £300,000 worth of investment guaranteed for Gen22 which will enable the project to continue for three years, with approximately 100 young people participating per year. The hope is also to gain funding from private sector organisations to extend the project.

Overall, United by 2022 stakeholders acknowledged there is still demand from communities and underserved groups for the Trailblazers programme. Communities reiterate that the issues designed to be addressed by Trailblazers are still present and further work is needed to fully address these issues; and so they are keen to know what is coming next.

[Communities are] feeling like they've just got into step, they've just bought in, found their niche and their mojo. United by 2022 Stakeholder

3.3.3 Social Economy

3.3.3.1 Process

The business support commissioning process - structured into six distinct lots - accommodated delivery organisations of various sizes and specialisms, allowing a strong collaborative approach. The programme made good progress in meeting its engagement targets, particularly by addressing a gap in support for social economy organisations which had not been included in previous funded programmes. The programme overachieved against its targets for participant demographics. An initial analysis of a sample of 88 of 115 businesses supported shows a 48% increase in trading income (almost twice the target), 175 new jobs (close to target) and an increase in skills and confidence of c33% which is ahead of (25%) target. The nine clusters were quickly convened and flexibility of the funding approach which gave clusters a good degree of autonomy in developing their priorities was appreciated. Engaging small organisations within certain clusters proved challenging due to their limited capacity—many had only one or two staff members—resulting in low initial meeting attendance. To tackle this, the project team took a proactive approach, visiting organisations to understand their needs and integrating these into collective plans.

Interviewees were generally positive regarding the delivery and commissioning approach used for the business support element. By structuring the business support provision into distinct lots, the approach effectively accommodated organisations of varying sizes and specialisms. This framework also encouraged typically competing providers to collaborate, fostering a more “flexible and inclusive” delivery model that addressed different stages of business growth and development. Interviewees were particularly positive about how this approach promoted **cooperation among business support organisations** that had previously competed.

Overall, the Business Support element of the programme made **very good progress in meeting its key targets for engagement**. The interviews suggested that there was a significant demand for support from social economy organisations, particularly charities, which were not previously supported by funded programmes. The funding allowed the delivery organisations to engage with the social economy sector which had not been possible under the constraints of previous funded business support programmes. The programme aimed to address this gap and provide necessary support for these organisations.

The programme overachieved against its targets for participant demographics⁵⁰:

- ▶ **Diverse or ethnic minority communities** - 54% engaged against a target of 40%
- ▶ **Disability** - 8% against a target of 5%

There were delays in recruitment for the business programme, however, as this was supposed to start in September 2023 but only commenced at the end of 2023. This delay was attributed mainly to the time needed for contractual issues to be resolved. Interviewees highlighted the tight timeframes as a significant challenge in delivering the programme. Ideally, there would have been more time for **recruitment and engagement events** and sessions spaced out more to allow more time for planning. The tightened timescales and late/varied start dates lost the opportunity to fully brief all participants collectively on the nature and importance and use of data collection to gain consistency in measurement approaches.

The recruitment and onboarding process involved interviews to ensure participants were the right fit for the programme. This was essential to ensure participants joined for the right reasons and to foster a

⁵⁰ Based on latest available monitoring data which may change before the programme finishes.

valuable learning experience. The tight timeframes made it challenging to recruit participants and gather necessary data. It was felt that the short recruitment window made it more difficult to ensure successful outcomes. This included finalising the programme structure, objectives, and schedules, which took time and added to the challenges posed by tight timeframes.

One interviewee emphasised the importance of **stakeholder engagement** and support in the recruitment process. Collaborating with growth hubs, chambers, and other business support organisations helped them reach potential participants and share information about the programme.

The clusters element of the project allowed a **'place-based' focus** on some of the most deprived areas in the West Midlands, for example Handsworth. The purpose was to address challenges such as filling gaps in infrastructure and supporting struggling or disappearing infrastructure organisations. The goal was to create a more sustainable social economy in these areas.

The initial implementation of the clusters element was swift, with all nine clusters promptly convening to discuss their approach upon selection. Cluster lead organisations appreciated the **flexibility** and approach provided by the funding. Interviewees referred to the guidance on how clusters should operate and template for investment plans as helpful while not being overly prescriptive.

Some organisations focused primarily on developing their own enterprise elements, investing most of their resources into growth rather than wider community engagement. Around half of the cluster leads fell into this category - they are seen as strong, place-based organisations with social enterprise aspects, but they had limited experience in providing support to businesses and are still learning in that area. A well-experienced individual in capacity building in the social economy sector was appointed as a consultant by three clusters that were less experienced, which improved their consistency.

Other clusters such as the Handsworth cluster focused more on developing specific themes and already had UKSPF funding, along with other sources of funding and premises. Their level of engagement has been much deeper, attracting more groups - likely because many of these groups had previously participated in other programmes.

Some cluster leads were also able to link into the broader support package on offer through the programme including the Accelerate element. While some cluster leads have engaged with these initiatives, one interviewee noted that not all have participated, leading to missed opportunities for strategic alignment and collaboration, with limited sharing of progress and strategies across organisations.

One interviewee highlighted the **challenges faced in engaging small organisations** with a particular cluster. They mentioned the difficulty in getting organisations to participate in meetings. Many small organisations in the cluster had limited capacity, with only one or two staff members. This constraint made it difficult for them to engage consistently in the project. The interview reported that in this case, initially, only about 25% of the sector attended meetings, and many organisations lacked the capacity to participate regularly.

To address engagement issues, the project team had to proactively reach out to organisations, visiting them to understand their individual needs and incorporating these into a collective needs process. One of the clusters initially held online meetings but quickly realised they were less effective for engagement and knowledge sharing. The interviewee observed that in-person meetings were more effective in building relationships and fostering collaboration among social economy organisations.

3.3.3.2 Outcomes

The business support element provided practical assistance to social enterprises and boosted their confidence. It raised public awareness of the social economy sector and strengthened its ecosystem, with hopes of inspiring more social entrepreneurs. There is early evidence that the programme supported many organisations to increase their trading income. A key outcome of the place-based clusters element is the development of investment plans aimed at securing diverse funding sources to support long-term sustainability, though these plans are still in progress. Beyond the plans, the cluster development process has encouraged collaboration, mapped the local social economy, and strengthened networks, uncovering previously unknown organisations. Notable collaborative projects have emerged. While local authorities played a vital role, engagement varied, with efforts now focused on re-engaging them to ensure sustained support and investment for the sector.

There is early evidence that the business support programme has supported many organisations to increase their trading income and create new jobs. An initial analysis of a sample of 88 of the 115 businesses supported on Lots 1 to 4, shows a 48% increase in trading income (almost twice the target), 175 new jobs (close to target) and an increase in skills and confidence of c33% which is ahead of (25%) target.

A wider benefit of the business support element was demonstrating to social enterprises that there is a supportive community available to them. It was thought that this helped **build confidence** and foster a sense of belonging among participants. Broader strategic benefits of the project, also included increased visibility and public awareness of the social economy sector, highlighting the important work being done by social entrepreneurs. The project has strengthened the ecosystem and was confident that this would encourage more people to become social entrepreneurs. The main tangible outcome from the place-based Clusters element of the programme is for each cluster to **produce an investment plan**. The plans will focus on securing diverse funding sources, including debt finance, grants, and equity, to support both capital improvements and operational costs. They will aim to ensure the sustainability of clusters by addressing premises upgrades, staffing, and ongoing expenses. Ultimately, the plans will aim to establish a long-term strategy, enabling clusters to grow and support their communities beyond the initial funding period. At the time of this report, investment plans are still in development and therefore their quality and impacts cannot be evaluated in this analysis. However, it was felt that the plans will be crucial in maintaining momentum and highlighting the need for continued investment to prevent the project have a short-term focus.

There is evidence based on the interviews that the cluster development process has generated additional benefits alongside the development of the plan. These include mapping and understanding of the social economy sector locally, fostering collaboration, and strengthening relationships between stakeholders. The mapping process has also led to the discovery of previously unknown organisations and **strengthened local networks** through joint planning efforts. Interviews suggested that the initiative has created significant energy and activity, with participants keen to share their experiences. With guidance and facilitation from the WMCA programme team, the clusters collaborated, sharing good practice, knowledge, and experience.

The interviews highlighted examples of how the cluster project has led to specific collaborative ventures. In Coventry, a project has launched where previously unconnected organisations have collaborated to create a bicycle recycling scheme. This initiative addresses the lack of affordable transport by refurbishing and supplying around 25 bikes per week. It has significantly scaled up efforts to improve mobility in the area, and similar collaborative projects are emerging across the region.

Local authority involvement was widely regarded as essential to the successful development of the clusters. However, some stakeholders felt that greater engagement from local authorities was needed in certain local areas. While some, such as those in the Black Country, played a more active role, others

were less involved. Although the initial goal was to integrate local authorities throughout the process, some contributed to early decisions before stepping back. Efforts are now underway to re-engage them, emphasising both the need for financial contributions and the importance of local support infrastructure for the sector.



04

Culture and Heritage

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4.0 Culture and Heritage



Summary

- The Culture and Heritage programmes and projects **strategically repositioned** culture and heritage as core components of the WMCA's priorities, influencing both immediate action and longer-term policy decisions.
- The pillar **fostered social cohesion and a sense of belonging** within communities by facilitating culturally relevant experiences through initiatives that prioritised community engagement and participation.
- The pillar **increased skills and capacity across individuals, organisations, and civic organisations**, supporting the long-term sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors.
- Three **key strategic frameworks** were successfully developed and further enabled the creation of essential cultural strategies at the Local Authority level, that collectively provide strategic direction for future investment in cultural development in the West Midlands.
- The Culture and Heritage pillar **fostered cross-sector collaboration**, integrating culture into broader WMCA strategies such as integrated settlement, local government, and health and well-being, thereby solidifying its role as a key building block in regional development.

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4.1 Fund Context

The Culture and Heritage pillar was designed to enhance the accessibility of the West Midlands' cultural offerings and amplify the role that arts, culture, and heritage play in creating vibrant and desirable places to live, work, and enjoy. With a CWGLEF investment of £4.1m, the pillar's stated overall aims were to develop regional strategic frameworks for culture and heritage and to directly invest in culture and heritage interventions via a series of revenue-based interventions across the four pillar missions: cultural engagement and community cohesion; place-based regeneration and civic pride; culture sector resilience and skills; and international collaboration, each with a special focus on diversity, equality and inclusion.

The CWGLEF Culture and Heritage pillar had five overall objectives:

- ▶ **Development of strategic frameworks for culture & heritage:** Key frameworks for heritage, culture, and creative industries were established to focus regional priorities and attract further investment. In addition, a regional cultural infrastructure plan and project pipeline are in the final stages of being developed along with a strategic regional skills plan. Regional priorities for creative health were also identified, with input from key stakeholders.

- **Increasing cultural engagement, community cohesion, and social value:** To expand access to relevant, co-created cultural opportunities, grants were devolved to Local Authorities for creative commissions, prioritising co-creation and opportunities for diverse communities and smaller cultural organisations. Regional audience research was conducted through the West Midlands Cultural Research Report 2.0, and talent development opportunities were provided for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds through the Creative Futures Campaign.
- **Increasing civic pride and supporting culture-led regeneration:** Grants were devolved to Local Authorities for place-based initiatives to revitalise high streets, particularly in areas with high deprivation and limited cultural participation. Additional grants supported feasibility studies and work focused on community cultural infrastructure and heritage, bolstering the region's capacity to secure future capital investment. These initiatives were undertaken collaboratively with local communities, enabling flexible responses tailored to specific needs.
- **Increasing the resilience of the West Midlands cultural sector and creative freelancers:** A range of interventions focused on regional skills development and business support. This included specialised skills initiatives, business development grants, and the ACTIVATE Programme, which offered workshops, mentoring, and other resources. Additionally, the Future Boards Accelerator programme supported diverse leadership development, and a WMCA Culture & Creative Ecologies Symposium⁵¹ brought together cultural professionals to raise the sector's profile.
- **Ensuring the West Midlands cultural sector was globally connected and to develop new business opportunities:** In partnership with the British Council, a new small grants programme enabled artists, creatives, and organisations to attend international events and sustain international partnerships established through previous events like the Commonwealth Games cultural programme. Additionally, a series of events were supported with small grants to boost the region's regional profile and develop national and international connections.

The distribution of funding to specific programmes and projects in the Culture and Heritage pillar is set out in Table 4-1 below.

Table 4-1: Culture and Heritage pillar programmes and projects⁵²

Programme or project	Activities ⁵³	Funding distributed
Regional strategic frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Regional Culture and Creative Industries Framework (£51,008) ► Regional Heritage Framework (£35,00) ► Cultural Infrastructure Plan (£20,000) ► Regional Skills Plan (£19,475) ► Creative UK Data License* (£18,000) 	£143,483
Place Profiler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► West Midlands Cultural Research Report 2.0 	£40,000 + £30,000 Culture Central match funding

⁵¹ The originally envisaged international cultural conference did not happen.

⁵² AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁵³ WMCA CWGLEF Culture - Current Projects (October 2024)

Programme or project	Activities ⁵³	Funding distributed
Creative Health Workstream ⁵⁴	Theory of Change MoU with M10 Regional Authorities	£23,518
Creative Futures Campaign	▶ 11 charities funded through the 'Arts for Impact' campaign, delivered in partnership with Big Give.	£85,000
Creative Commissions	▶ 7 Local Authority Creative Commission grants	£2,122,442
Place-based activity	▶ 7 Local Authority Placemaking grants	
Activate Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ACTIVATE Programme (£179,336) workshops, mentoring, facilitated cohort meetings, wellbeing support and masterclasses ▶ ACTIVATE Grants (£499,841) ▶ ACTIVATE Internships (£195,053) ▶ Future Boards Accelerator (£73,620) ▶ Venue Technician Theatre Bootcamp x 2 (£74,000)) ▶ VR Technician Bootcamp (£14,831) ▶ Heritage Building Retrofit Course (£6,637) ▶ Wolverhampton Youth Board Pilot (£18,100) ▶ Culture and Creative Podcast* (£18,100) 	£1,071,416
International Fund (In partnership with British Council)	▶ WMCA International Fund delivered as British Council-supported Creative Legacy Grants and West Midlands Future Growth Grants)	£134,731 (£70,731 CWGLEF funding + £64,000 British Council funding)
International Cultural Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ WMCA Culture & Creative Ecologies Symposium (£53,561) ▶ Supersonic Festival International Mixer* (£6,000) ▶ More than a Moment Festival Evaluation* (£5,000) ▶ Night Time Economy Summit 2025 – Cultural Offer* (£7,000) ▶ Music Venue Trust Fan-led Live Music Venue Survey Contribution* (£3,000) ▶ The Space Digital Culture Talks 2* (£7,000) ▶ Kabbadi World Cup Documentary* (£4,000) 	£85,655

*These projects were all additional to those originally planned.

Note: Figures do not include all of the pillar's administration costs.

⁵⁴ Formerly Creative Health Programme

The WMCA directly managed the majority of the projects, with some exceptions. The double-devolved projects (Creative Commissions and Place-based activity, including Capital Feasibility Studies) were managed by the seven regional Local Authorities. Several projects were delivered with external partners including the Regional Strategic Frameworks and the Creative Futures Campaign (Big Give). Elements of the ACTIVATE Programme and investment in lieu of the International Cultural Conference were also delivered by various partners.

4.2 Theory of change

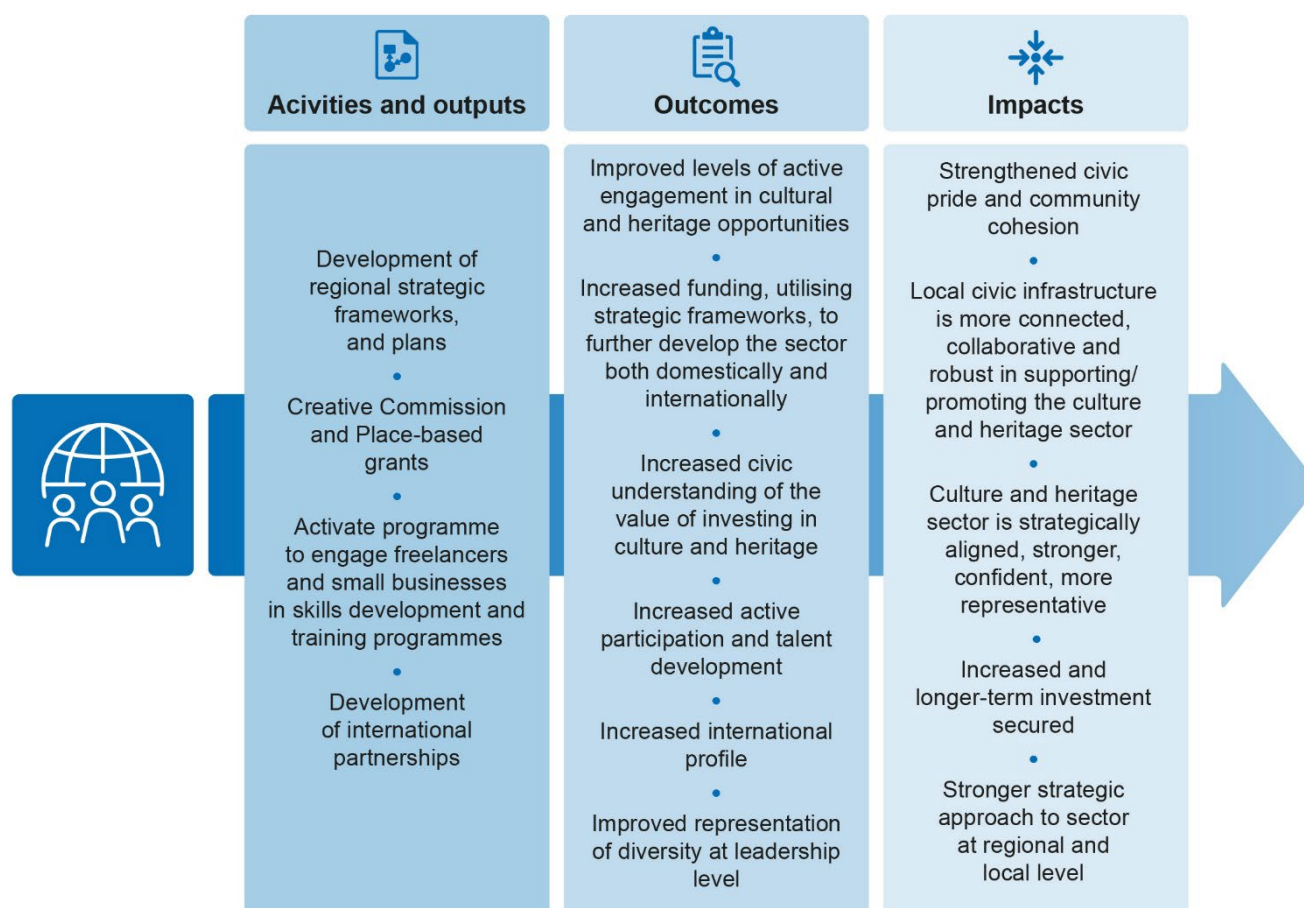


Figure 4-1: Culture and Heritage pillar Theory of change⁵⁵

4.3 Evaluation findings

The Culture and Heritage pillar included a programme-level evaluation in addition to this meta evaluation to ensure learning was captured at various levels of the programme. The programme-level evaluation primarily focused on quantitative assessment, examining the achievement of objectives, outputs produced, and value for money, while understanding the programme's delivery processes, including promotion, management, governance, and stakeholder engagement. Additionally, the programme-level evaluation sought to identify critical success factors and areas for improvement, and to draw out lessons learned for future programmes.

⁵⁵ This Culture and Heritage pillar Theory of Change was developed for the purposes of this Evaluation. Both this Theory of Change, and the Theory of Change developed by AMION who authored the CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report (March 2025) were informed by a Theory of Change developed by WMCA Culture & Heritage team as part of their CWGLEF business case.

Recognising the opportunity for richer qualitative insights, this evaluation planned to complement the programme-level evaluation work by gathering in-depth perspectives from local authorities, regional frameworks, and WMCA stakeholders, enhancing the evaluation's breadth and depth.

4.3.1 Impact on social cohesion

The Culture and Heritage pillar successfully created relevant experiences for diverse communities, fostering increased engagement with culture and heritage in the West Midlands. Through strategic funding and a double-devolved model to local authorities, collaborative workshops and community events effectively enhanced social cohesion and created a sense of belonging. Participants discovered local heritage and expressed enthusiasm for future cultural participation, while targeted investments in cultural infrastructure deepened community connections. The initiative demonstrated the power of community-focused, participatory approaches to cultural development, laying the groundwork for sustained regional cultural engagement and community cohesion.

To achieve its goals of fostering social cohesion and experiences to the benefit of West Midlands' diverse citizens, the Culture and Heritage pillar strategically allocated over 50% of its funding, through a double devolved model, to seven constituent Local Authorities.⁵⁶ This investment was channelled through two primary interventions: Creative Commissions and Place-based Activity, both delivered via a single Local Authority Double Devolved Grant (LADD) of £307,000 to each Authority. This dual approach ensured a balance between initiatives designed to increase cultural participation and enhance skills in the creative sector by supporting community-led events, public art projects, and workshops, and investments enhancing cultural infrastructure, increasing community connection, and strengthening a sense of place, achieved through feasibility studies for cultural hubs, cultural strategies for Local Authorities/cultural compacts, improvements to green spaces, and community-led design projects for inclusive public spaces.

The CWGLEF catalysed a **transformative cultural renaissance** across the West Midlands, characterised by innovative approaches to community engagement, cultural infrastructure, and creative empowerment. Across the region, local authorities implemented a diverse range of initiatives that shared compelling strategic similarities while maintaining unique local identities. Creative Commissions and Placemaking initiatives emerged as key vehicles for cultural development, focusing on three primary objectives: community participation, cultural infrastructure enhancement, and local identity strengthening.

Authorities conducted feasibility studies for cultural hubs, often focusing on repurposing historic buildings or creating entirely new cultural quarters. Green spaces were reimagined, and community-led design processes ensured public spaces became more inclusive and reflective of local character. Youth-focused programmes played a particularly innovative role, with arts festivals and skills development initiatives creating pathways for emerging creative talent.

Authentic creative work through communities takes time, and, based on the evidence available, these initiatives demonstrated remarkable depth despite compressed timelines. This observation is supported by primary qualitative research conducted for this evaluation.

For example, increased cultural participation was evident through:

⁵⁶ The seven local authorities to which funding was given were Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, and Wolverhampton.

- ▶ attendees at LADD-funded festivals and events were more ethnically diverse than the wider West Midlands population and represented a relatively diverse range of age categories;⁵⁷
- ▶ LADD funded events attracted a higher proportion of people with a health problem or disability that impacts them daily compared to the general WMCA population;⁵⁸
- ▶ 43% of event LADD-funded event attendees stated that they had not participated in any other cultural or heritage events in the past 12 months;⁵⁹
- ▶ 92% of participants reported that they are more likely to attend cultural events in the area.⁶⁰

These outcomes went beyond mere event participation. Collaborative workshops built creative skills while improving social cohesion. Participants formed lasting friendships and reported increased belonging in inclusive, supportive environments. As one participant reflected, “I feel more integrated into the multiculturalism of Coventry”.

Each local authority approached these goals with distinct strategies. Birmingham distinguished itself through strategic placemaking investments, place-based strategies and diverse arts programming. Walsall and Sandwell expanded cultural offerings and developed critical partnerships, celebrating the heritage of their places. Solihull's Fresh Air Theatre programme stood out as an exemplar of innovative community engagement, exceeding initial expectations.

Dudley, Coventry, and Wolverhampton shared a notable focus on directing resources to **historically underserved areas**, demonstrating a commitment to ‘cultural democratisation’. These efforts were not merely about creating events but about building sustainable cultural ecosystems that could support local artists, stimulate community participation, and foster a deeper sense of regional pride. After participating in LADD events, 81% of surveyed participants reported holding a more positive perception of the West Midlands as a place to visit, and 72% of respondents reported viewing the region more positively as a place to live.⁶¹

The most remarkable aspect of these initiatives was their **adaptability**. Despite varying local contexts, compressed timelines, and diverse community needs, each authority successfully translated funding into meaningful cultural outcomes. The programmes went beyond immediate artistic activities, laying groundwork for long-term cultural development and community connection. This echoes the short-term impacts observed in other West Midlands initiatives, like those in Brierley Hill,⁶² where locally focused, participatory cultural and heritage events significantly increased the relevance of these opportunities and the community's intention to engage further with their local history and culture.

By prioritising collaboration, skills development, and inclusive design, there is compelling evidence based on the interviews, that the CWGLEF provided a catalyst for regional cultural renaissance. The resulting landscape is one of increased cultural participation, enhanced creative infrastructure, and a more vibrant, interconnected regional identity.

4.3.2 Impact on the Culture and Heritage sector

The CWGLEF has demonstrated significant impact by enabling strategic development and alignment with regional priorities. It provided robust participation opportunities for individuals, organisations, and

⁵⁷ 31.6% of attendees were from diverse backgrounds, compared to 20.5% in the overall regional population. AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁵⁸ 29.4% of attendees reported that their activities were ‘Limited a little’ or ‘Limited a lot’. AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁵⁹ AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁶⁰ AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁶¹ AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁶² Case Study 5: Revitalising Brierley Hill - A Community-Led Cultural Renaissance with a Sustainable Vision

communities while simultaneously fostering partnerships and collaboration across different sectors. By increasing skills and capacity, especially for freelancers, the fund has played a critical role in supporting the longer-term sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors in the West Midlands. Despite facing implementation challenges, including complex tendering processes and compressed timeframes, the CWGLEF has significantly strengthened the culture and heritage sectors by enabling a more strategic, collaborative approach to cultural development that is already leaving a legacy beyond the Commonwealth Games.

The Culture and Heritage pillar has focused on strengthening the cultural sector and establishing a framework for future investment. This has primarily been achieved through several key initiatives:

- ▶ **ACTIVATE programme:** A significant investment in specialised skills initiatives including bespoke workshops, mentoring, and other support for freelance cultural professionals in the West Midlands. It also included leadership development programmes like the Future Boards Accelerator. The programme was thoughtfully designed to support the long-term sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors, with a strategic focus on developing the sector's future workforce. The fund has been particularly effective for freelancers, with 89.5% of participants reporting development of new skills and 88.9% increasing business confidence.
- ▶ **Knowledge sharing:** Initiatives like the Culture & Creative Ecologies Symposium fostered sector resilience through knowledge exchange and collaboration.
- ▶ **Direct investment:** Funding was provided through diverse channels, including international grants, skills development programmes, and place-based projects. Programmes like the International Fund and the Creative Futures Campaign supported various cultural initiatives.
- ▶ **Strategic Framework Development:** Investment into research and strategy development in Culture & Creative Industries, in Heritage, in Cultural Infrastructure and Cultural Sector Skills.

This multi-faceted approach aimed to enhance skills, bolster the resilience of the cultural sector, and establish strategic frameworks for future investment in the West Midlands.

The CWGLEF drove substantial **strategic development** by creating comprehensive frameworks. The Regional Cultural and Creative Industries Framework has provided a vital roadmap for the WMCA, clarifying its role in supporting the cultural and creative industry sector, demystifying the WMCA's responsibilities for stakeholders and creating valuable connections between culture and other sectors including transport and housing. The Local Authority Double Devolved Grants supported the development of cultural strategies in several local authority areas including Solihull, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Sandwell, and Coventry, though despite comprehensive collaboration with the Cultural Officers Group to ensure alignment, some stakeholders felt more could have been done to facilitate cross-authority learning and alignment with regional strategy development.

Similarly, the dedicated Heritage Framework has brought culture and heritage into sharper focus within regional planning, emphasising their importance in placemaking, town centre regeneration, and wellbeing initiatives, establishing a heritage task force that serves as both an expert advisory body and a mechanism for sector convening. Emerging emphasis on health and well-being has highlighted the interrelationship between heritage, place, and community wellness.

The CWGLEF enabled WMCA to explore the new policy area that facilitated Creative Health Regional priorities for creative health were also identified by, bringing together cultural and health sector experts to explore creative approaches addressing dual policy agendas. Initially of modest scope, it broadened to understanding the WMCA's role and mapping the existing creative health landscape. It successfully convened expert groups and laid the groundwork for future creative health work, including the

development of a policy and potential pilot programmes.⁶³ This work, along with a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Mayoral Creative Health network⁶⁴, has amplified the West Midlands' national impact.

The ACTIVATE programme stands as a cornerstone of CWGLEF's **participation** initiatives, offering numerous workshops across seven thematic strands covering financial management, branding, funding, and leadership. This comprehensive training programme was designed to improve sector resilience, particularly for freelancers in the post-COVID environment, and provided participants with practical skills in areas ranging from financial planning and contract negotiation to digital media marketing.

The programme's holistic approach included mentoring, internships, and wellbeing support, with innovative aspects such as funding to cover delegate time and ancillary costs, enhancing accessibility. Targeting early-career creative practitioners, the programme addressed key obstacles by emphasising skills development, financial planning, and intellectual property, fostering collaboration and networking among participants, informed by industry input to ensure relevance. While the ACTIVATE programme successfully addressed 89.5% of the identified barriers related to developing new skills,⁶⁵ many individuals found that the training addressed barriers they had not initially recognised, indicating that the training had broader benefits than initially anticipated.⁶⁶

While the programme demonstrated clear value according to stakeholders interviewed, its **compressed timeframe** (three to four months) limited its potential impact, with recommendations for an extended six-month period to allow for better skills absorption and relationship building. This compressed timeframe was partly due to the need for alignment with other initiatives and to enable effective design while delays also arose from subsequent procurement and legal processes within the Combined Authority. Some stakeholders felt that the rigid procurement briefs hindered creative flexibility from within the sector, and the need to ensure broad funding accessibility. However, the ACTIVATE programme did contribute to a deeper understanding of sector needs, which will be beneficial in the future.

The CWGLEF also supported Local Authority plans to similarly invest in cultural infrastructure and capacity building. For example, Birmingham City Council's Creative Producers programme, was developed based on feedback from Birmingham 2022 Festival's Creative City grants programme, demonstrating a responsive approach to funding opportunities. This programme aimed to foster deeper connections between artists and larger organisations, but, according to one stakeholder, the programme faced challenges with attendance due to the limited capacity of participants to fully engage with other concerns raised about capacity within the sector and resource constraints impacting the programme's effectiveness. Overall, LADD training programmes, like ACTIVATE, addressed previously unidentified barriers and, with 81.3% of participants reporting a positive outcome, effectively developed new skills.⁶⁷

The Culture and Creative Ecologies Symposium in October 2024⁶⁸ also demonstrated WMCA's commitment to strengthening the culture and heritage sectors by fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among diverse stakeholders. While it aimed to highlight local leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and diversity, equity, and inclusion, data on the symposium's effectiveness in achieving these goals was not available for inclusion in this evaluation.

⁶³ The WMCA-established Creative Health Task and Finish Group includes representatives from Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance; NHS Trusts, National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH); Local Authorities (Public Health and Culture Officers); WMCA officers from relevant policy areas (Health, Wellbeing and Prevention, Inclusive Communities, Culture and Heritage). The Creative Health Programme stakeholders include the National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH) and the Creative Health Working Group.

⁶⁴ The Mayoral Creative Health Network M10 is a cross-party network established by mayoral authorities to support and embed creative health work across England.

⁶⁵ AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁶⁶ AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁶⁷ AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁶⁸ Scheduled as part of WMCA's Creativity Week and in lieu of the originally planned International Cultural Conference.

The CWGLEF fostered significant regional partnerships, notably strengthening collaboration between the WMCA and local authorities through the Local Authority Double Devolved grants. This approach utilised existing expertise and networks, creating a more joined-up approach to cultural development across the region.

The International fund's partnership with the British Council provided creative legacy grants to support international collaborations, successfully leveraging existing connections and catalysing further international engagement within the West Midlands cultural sector. 95% of surveyed participants in the WMCA international Fund reported that participation in the programme improved their organisation's profile on an international scale, with all surveyed participants reporting that the programme has made them more likely to work with international partners on creative projects in the future.⁶⁹ Across individuals, organisations, and civic bodies, the CWGLEF has **increased collaboration, skills, and capacity**. The Creative Sector Skills Plan generated valuable research into the creative industries' skills needs and supply chain and developed a clear roadmap for future investment. The ACTIVATE programme insights informed future strategies and initiatives.

For **culture & heritage sector organisations**, the CWGLEF provided grants and support enabling the development and delivery of projects benefiting both sector growth and local communities. Knowledge exchange programmes facilitated learning and development for cultural organisations and strengthened understanding of sector needs.

Notably, the ACTIVATE and LADD training programmes demonstrated substantial impact, with 95% of survey respondents more likely to attend future business support or training events. 76% of ACTIVATE survey respondents reported an improved regional professional profile, while 88% shared that they were more likely to collaborate on future creative projects as a result of their involvement. LADD grant recipients, particularly freelancers, showed similarly positive trends: 88% were more likely to collaborate on future projects, and 75% reported that the programme aided them in forming new creative partnerships with other creative and cultural freelancers.⁷⁰

At the **civic level**, support for placemaking initiatives and cultural strategies increased collaboration between the WMCA and local authorities, strengthening their capacity for cultural development. The double devolution funding model empowered local authorities by providing them with resources to distribute to cultural organisations, enhancing their capacity to support the sector.

4.3.3 Generation of Global Interest

The Culture and Heritage pillar fostered international collaboration and enhanced the West Midlands' reputation but needs further development to maximise global impact. The WMCA International Fund supported diverse projects, showcasing the region's cultural sector and securing new partnerships. However, measuring long-term impact and attracting investment remain key challenges. The region must implement stronger metrics, formalise partnerships, and strategically position itself for future international investment to fully capitalise on its cultural legacy and strengthen its global presence.

With ambitious plans to generate global interest, enhance the West Midlands reputation abroad and generate new international cultural partnerships and investment, the Culture and Heritage pillar had initially planned an international conference to raise global interest, but it ultimately shifted to a regional focus due to evolving political context, resource constraints, and a desire for greater local impact. This

⁶⁹ AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁷⁰ AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

shift allowed the Combined Authority to better align with new strategic priorities, better leverage existing resources and partnerships, and deliver more immediate and measurable benefits to local stakeholders.

Despite this change, the pillar maintained its **commitment to international collaboration** by partnering with the British Council to launch the WMCA International Fund. This fund enabled regional creatives to attend international events and sustain partnerships established through programmes like the Commonwealth Games, showcasing the West Midlands' cultural sector on a global stage and fostering valuable international connections.

In the aftermath of the Birmingham 2022 Festival - which achieved significant international collaboration and cultural exchange, including 29 projects across 42 countries, with many of the 374 new partnerships set to continue leaving a lasting impact on international partnerships and cultural understanding - any legacy investment would appropriately have sought to prolong or extend existing partnerships.

The WMCA International Fund, delivered by WMCA as West Midlands Future Growth Grants and British Council-supported Creative Legacy Grants, was designed both to support existing partnerships and to foster new ones, helping organisations test and grow their collaborations, while showcasing the diversity and engagement of the West Midlands. Overall, the WMCA International Fund funded 21 projects.⁷¹

The **Future Growth Grants** funded 11 diverse projects spanning global destinations including Jamaica, China, Netherlands, USA, Canada, Philippines, Bangladesh, UAE, Ghana, and Finland. These initiatives include CJ Lloyd Webley's work with Jamaican creatives to develop "Nanny's Home" exploring Windrush generation relationships; Selina Thompson's exploration of family dynamics in China through marginalised perspectives; and Gazebo Theatre's development of collaborative relationships in Seattle. Other projects focused on LGBTQ+ community engagement in the Philippines, climate change documentation in Bangladesh, photography collaborations in UAE, para dance sport participation in the USA, artistic community development in Ghana, post-colonial themes in Canada, island life exploration in Finland and music festival development and curation in Slovenia.

The **Creative Legacy Grants** supported nine international collaborations across Kenya, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Ethiopia, South Africa, Indonesia, Botswana, India, Rwanda, Kosovo, Ghana, Malawi, Zambia, and Jamaica. These include Master Peace Academy's work with Kenyan jewellery makers, Notnow Collective's exploration of grief in post-conflict contexts, House of Emanuel's cultural delegation to Ethiopia focusing on street art and sustainability, and TECTUM Theatre's collaboration with South African musicians. Additional projects involve socially engaged art workshops in Indonesia, artist residency development in Botswana supporting underrepresented artists, partnership building with India's Serendipity Arts Festival, exploration of inherited grief through international performance, and cultural dance knowledge exchange across multiple African nations and Jamaica.⁷²

Together, these grants aimed to facilitate meaningful international artistic collaborations that address important social themes while building sustainable cultural partnerships between the West Midlands and diverse global communities. From the British Council's point of view, "the diversity of the different projects, the different kinds of groups within the community that they were all working with... there was a really broad spread and a really strong element of socially engaged practice across all of the projects, so those things were already positive for us."

Broadly the primary intended short-term outcome, to enhance the ability of the Culture and Heritage sector to connect and grow internationally, was achieved through these grants. It has yet to be seen whether the longer-term outcomes of increasing the global touring of West Midlands' cultural exports

⁷¹ The International Fund exceeded the target number of grants to be distributed for international partnerships and cultural exports. AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁷² WMCA (2024), International Fund. <https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/culture-and-digital/culture-creative-industries/current-projects/cwglef/international-fund/>, accessed 11 September 2024.

and elevating the international profile of the region, as the time limitation of this evaluation have not allowed for that to happen.

The originally envisaged 2-day International Culture Conference, despite still being planned for as late as Summer 2024, was repositioned as a 1-day Culture & Creative Ecologies Symposium in October as part of 2024 Creativity Week. This shift to a regional focus was driven by a need to align with evolving political priorities and resource constraints, leverage existing local partnerships, and deliver more immediate, measurable benefits to local communities. The symposium aimed to highlight local leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and diversity, equity, and inclusion within the cultural sector. Participants noted that the symposium “brought a variety of perspectives together and also created a space to exchange knowledge” and that it “covered lots of ground across a wide area of representation”.⁷³

To compensate for a shift away from the international conference, and to embrace a renewed strategic focus on regional and national connection, WMCA invested in existing networks instead. A series of small funding interventions aimed to boost the region's regional profile and develop national and international connections, went to events including the 2025 Nighttime Economy Summit, an international mixer for Supersonic Festival in September 2024, The Space Digital Culture Talks, the More than a Moment Festival, an International Fund Mixer for grant recipients, and a documentary looking at the experience of women's teams for the Kabbadi World Cup.

The CWGLEF Culture and Heritage pillar has made some strides in enhancing the West Midlands' international presence, but further strategic development is needed to fully capitalise on these gains.

The International Fund has fostered **global interest** by engaging artists on overseas projects, promoting cultural exchange, and recognising the power of culture to forge international connections through shared experiences. This understanding has informed efforts to position culture as a diplomatic tool, with several stakeholders expressing hope that “the Combined Authority can support international cultural relations.” Furthermore, there is a recognition of the need to participate in global conversations at international forums, like Davos, which the Chair of the WMCA's Cultural Leadership Board attended highlighting the importance of cultural engagement on a global stage. The funding has enabled organisations to “continue to develop projects and partnerships” internationally, reinforcing the sector's existing international connections and presence.

The International Fund's approach has helped humanise the region's identity and promote cultural exchange, making connections with international artists and communities through shared experiences and artistic expression.

The programme has achieved notable outcomes in attracting new international partnerships. A key early achievement was the establishment of a partnership with the British Council, an outcome of strategic alignment centred on international engagement and the Commonwealth Games legacy. British Council's approach, which focused on “enabling... existing partnerships, rather than fully supporting a partnership from scratch,” has proven effective in building sustainable relationships and fostering knowledge sharing.

International fund recipients indicated that the programme helped them meet with delegates from all over the world, connect with other producers and festival organisers, establish strong presences across multiple cultural contexts, and form strong connections with international collaborators. The vast majority (95%) of respondents from the International Fund felt the programme improved their organisation's

⁷³ AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

profile internationally, and respondents unanimously stated that they are now more likely to work with international partners on creative projects in the future.⁷⁴

While the programme has made considerable progress, **challenges** remain, including the need for sustained funding for international activity, and the difficulty in effectively measuring international impact. However, significant opportunities exist to leverage established frameworks and partnerships, strategically position the region for international investment, and build lasting capacity through a shift towards strategic investment in cultural infrastructure.

To maximise impact, the programmes should develop metrics to effectively measure changes in international perception, formalise successful partnerships into sustainable collaborations, create strategic investment pathways that leverage the enhanced regional reputation, and continue utilising cultural activities as platforms for international engagement. By addressing these areas, the Combined Authority can further solidify the West Midlands' position as a globally recognised cultural hub and attract increased international investment.

4.3.4 Culture & Heritage Frameworks

The development of the culture and heritage frameworks was an iterative process that resulted in two key outcomes: the Culture and Creative Industries Framework and the Heritage Framework, with supporting plans including the Cultural Infrastructure Plan, the Creative Sector Skills Plan and Creative Health scoping. These frameworks aimed to leverage culture, heritage, and creative industries for regional development, fostering collaboration and integrating these considerations into strategic decision-making across various sectors. Moving forward, the WMCA should continue to invest in expertise, foster collaboration, embrace its leadership role, and champion the value of culture and creativity, ensuring that all programmes and initiatives are accessible and inclusive.

The development of the culture and heritage frameworks was a **complex, iterative process** characterised by co-design, a structured approach, data-driven decision-making, adaptability, and integration with broader strategic priorities. The process was marked by inclusive stakeholder engagement, with numerous interviews, and workshops conducted to gather input and shape the framework. The Culture and Creative Industries Framework was led by WMCA, with Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy and seconded expertise from Arts Council England; the Heritage Framework was delivered internally with seconded expertise from Historic England and, support from Bradshaw Advisory; the Cultural Infrastructure Plan was supported by Colliers and the Creative Sector Skills Plan was supported by BOP Consulting.⁷⁵ As one consultant explained, the goal was to "triangulate the Combined Authority's existing objectives, Commonwealth Games legacy outcomes, and political commitments" to ensure research insights were embedded into the frameworks to support future arguments for cultural investment.

The process emphasised data collection and case studies to build an evidence base for future investment and policy decisions. Adaptability was essential throughout the process, as unexpected events like an early election and procurement delays forced adjustments to timelines and approaches. This flexibility allowed for more thoughtful design and deeper integration of the framework into local and national policy contexts.

The frameworks were intentionally integrated with broader strategic priorities, connecting culture and heritage with key sectors like local growth, housing, skills, health, and place-making. This positioned

⁷⁴ AMION (March 2025), CWGLEF Cultural Pillar Evaluation Report.

⁷⁵ Both the Culture and Creative Industries Framework and the Heritage Framework were shared with the WMCA Policy, Strategy and Integration Panel in February 2025. The Sector Skills Plan and the Cultural Infrastructure Plan are likely to be completed beyond the scope of this Evaluation.

culture and heritage as foundational for broader regional development. Key learnings included the importance of co-design, flexibility, the pillar model, evidence-based decision-making, and integration with broader strategic priorities.

The Regional **Culture and Creative Industries Framework** evolved from a cultural framework into a comprehensive framework bridging traditional culture with commercially driven creative industries. Designed to support both grassroots creative practitioners and more established creative entrepreneurs, it recognised the need to merge cultural practice with the demands of the creative industries as a nationally recognised economic growth sector for the WMCA region. This involved addressing the "producer gap" – the shortage of professionals who can manage and monetise creative projects – and advocating for more flexible, outcome-oriented measures to support freelance and self-employed creatives. The ACTIVATE Programme served as an example of early intervention, blending expert training with practical outcomes like grants and mentoring to prepare creative talent for market success. By positioning culture and creative industries as central to the region's economic development, the framework aimed to elevate cultural value within public policy, improve stakeholder engagement, and attract further investment. It also supported cross-departmental collaboration to foster a broader, sustainable creative ecosystem.

The **Regional Heritage Framework** was developed to clarify and establish the Combined Authority's role in leveraging heritage to drive regeneration and support strategic objectives, including housing, skills, economic development, and place-making. This development was based on the understanding that the historic environment is all around and, managed properly, can enable and contribute to a variety of WMCA activities, evolving from the realisation that "cultural heritage" extends beyond museums to encompass underutilised assets like vacant town-centre buildings and brownfield sites. Key insights and learnings from its development include the importance of stakeholder engagement, with iterative internal interviews and collaboration with partners like Historic England and the Arts Council. The framework also needed to be adaptive, responding to shifting government budgets and political changes, recognising that heritage is "at risk" if treated merely as static cultural assets. Crucially, the framework highlighted the need to integrate heritage considerations into broader priorities like "integrated settlement" and town-centre regeneration strategies, aligning heritage with practical, place-based outcomes.

The **Regional Cultural Infrastructure Plan** concentrated on physical assets—buildings, vacant properties, and heritage infrastructure - to unlock the region's creative and cultural potential with a focus on creative workspaces. It aimed to identify, map, and leverage underutilised or vacant heritage properties for economic and social regeneration through cultural use. Early cultural infrastructure mapping of creative workspaces, including a comprehensive inventory of assets, was essential, revealing challenges like short-term leasing versus the need for sustainable, long-term creative uses. Collaboration and external benchmarking with organisations like the Greater London Authority and the Creative Land Trust provided valuable insights into alternative models such as "meanwhile use" strategies and adaptive reuse. The plan needed to be flexible and adaptable in response to political and funding uncertainties. In the longer term, this approach sought to position cultural infrastructure as a potential catalyst for local economic growth and a lever that could support broader regeneration objectives linked to housing, transport, and community development.

Key **learnings** from the process included the importance of co-design in fostering ownership, the necessity of flexibility in adapting to changing circumstances, and the effectiveness of the pillar model in organising complexity. The process also underscored the critical role of evidence and data in justifying cultural investment, and how integration with broader strategic priorities enhanced the influence of culture and heritage within the Combined Authority's overall strategy. In conclusion, the framework development process was a collaborative, data-driven, and adaptable endeavour that successfully positioned culture and heritage as central to the Combined Authority's broader objectives.

4.3.5 Evolution of the Culture and Heritage Pillar

Overall, the Culture and Heritage pillar evolved into a more cohesive, flexible, and cross-sectoral framework, integrating culture with broader Combined Authority priorities, undergoing iterative redesign, and expanding its role to influence the authority's future vision. This transformation reflected a learning-by-doing approach, demonstrating remarkable adaptability in navigating the complex landscape of cultural legacy development. This evolution led to expanded capacity and expertise within the WMCA, influencing internal priorities and increasing investment in cultural infrastructure. Through iterative consultations, it broadened its scope to bridge culture with heritage, skills, and even health and transport, and incorporated the rise in the prominence of Creative Industries. Despite challenges like cumbersome internal processes and tight timelines, the pillar successfully established a dedicated cultural function and built an evidence base.

The Culture and Heritage pillar underwent some transformation, evolving from a rapidly conceived, multi-component scheme into a **more integrated, flexible, and cross-sectoral framework**. Initially designed for direct delivery, the pillar was conceived with the WMCA team planning to manage and administer most programme aspects, including grant distribution. Driven by the pressures of the Commonwealth Games legacy, the pillar was hastily but thoughtfully constructed with a fragmented and ambitious design, leading to challenges in focus and execution. However, experiences such as the international grants programme, while proving invaluable to internal growth and learning, revealed significant governance and support structure challenges, prompting a strategic shift towards a mixed delivery model by tendering subsequent grant funds to external providers.

This initial design provided a groundbreaking opportunity to establish a dedicated cultural function, pilot a range of interventions, and build an evidence base within the Combined Authority, despite starting with limited existing cultural policy. The programme design, while appropriate for the immediate aftermath of the Commonwealth Games period, increasingly recognised the need to support the sector's longer-term sustainability beyond the immediate Games legacy.

Through iterative consultations with stakeholders, including the Cultural Leadership Board and local authorities, the pillar was refined, leading to greater integration and a broader scope. The team recognised the importance of creating more coherent synergies across different combined authority pillars to maximise fund impact. This consultative process allowed the Combined Authority to bridge culture with heritage, creative industries, skills, and even health and transport sectors. The rising re-prioritisation of Creative Industries within the organisation—evident in both the regional frameworks and the regional conference—further shaped this transformation, allowing for a more regionally focused approach.

The programme significantly **expanded the WMCA's capacity and expertise**, developing capabilities in grant management, cultural policy development, and stakeholder engagement. As the programme progressed, the Combined Authority strategically repositioned Culture and Heritage, leveraging it not just for project delivery, but also as a tool to influence internal priorities. This shift elevated the profile of culture within the organisation, with one stakeholder emphasising that having a dedicated culture and heritage programme demonstrated its importance within the Combined Authority's portfolio.

Particularly notable was the **heightened awareness of culture and heritage's value**, which led to greater investment in cultural infrastructure and a stronger commitment to supporting long-term sector growth. The pillar expanded beyond its initial focus, merging with creative industries and aligning with skills development initiatives. This expansion, exemplified by the ACTIVATE Programme, reflected a recognition that creative practice requires not only artistic production but also entrepreneurial, financial, and technical support. As one stakeholder explained, the focus shifted to "earlier in the creative practitioner journey," providing support for those seeking to professionalise their practice.

This evolution also involved **enhanced cross-sectoral collaboration and integration**. Responding to internal reviews and evolving government policies - including changes stemming from elections and new devolution deals - the processes adapted to connect culture and heritage with other key areas like health, transport, housing, and economic development. Despite challenges in integration, successful collaborations emerged, particularly with teams like Inclusive Communities and Economy, demonstrating a growing understanding of sectoral interconnectedness.

The journey was not without its challenges. Cumbersome procurement processes, tight timelines, and the need to balance immediate delivery with long-term strategic outcomes forced agility and adaptation.

4.3.6 Opportunities, Challenges and Lessons Learnt

The Culture and Heritage pillar demonstrated a nuanced implementation marked by both significant achievements and notable challenges. While innovative collaboration strategies and a holistic approach successfully elevated cultural heritage recognition and integration, the initiative was simultaneously constrained by complex administrative processes, political uncertainties, and tight timelines. Procurement systems proved ill-suited to managing small grants, creating substantial administrative burdens that impeded efficient delivery. Despite these obstacles, the programme revealed potential for transformative regional development, with stakeholders emphasising the critical importance of translating strategic frameworks into tangible community benefits. The experience highlighted the need for more streamlined processes, earlier cross-functional collaboration, and a persistent focus on ensuring that cultural initiatives genuinely impact local communities.

The delivery of the CWGLEF Culture and Heritage pillar was shaped by a complex interplay of opportunities, internal challenges, and external factors that both enhanced and sometimes hindered intended outcomes.

The programmes benefited significantly from innovative approaches to collaboration and delivery. Specialised secondments from Arts Council England and Historic England fostered valuable cross-departmental and cross-sector relationships that enriched implementation. A key opportunity was the "pillar" approach. This approach, which one stakeholder emphasised, significantly increased the regional recognition of cultural heritage and effectively integrated diverse aspects including culture, heritage, creative industries, skills, and economic development into a coherent strategy. This shifted perceptions and positioned culture as foundational for regeneration. However, significant challenges hindered effective implementation. **Administrative processes emerged as a persistent obstacle**, with many describing the "ACTIVATE" tender process as overly complex and time-consuming, with one sharing "the tender was very long... and there were too many hoops to jump through," while another was "unsure what the process was." A pervasive theme was the rigidity and slow pace of public sector processes. The Combined Authority's procurement and contracting systems were ill-suited to the rapid deployment required for numerous small grants, creating disproportionate administrative burdens, particularly for freelancers. As one interviewee remarked, "the system is built for bulk contracting rather than hundreds of tiny, fast payments...and that administrative workload skewed the work significantly". Time constraints further impacted delivery quality, with one team member noting the programme was "under incredible time pressure from day 1," with the timeline proving difficult to manage and limiting meaningful engagement.

External factors also created additional complexities. **Political and policy uncertainty**, including government changes and elections, shifted regional priorities and introduced uncertainty in the external environment in which the WMCA and the Culture and Heritage pillar were operating in. General turbulence created by political change both nationally and regionally resulted in senior leaders adapting the Culture and Creative Industries Framework and the Heritage Framework timelines to take into account the uncertainty created by long-term structural change in the operating context. However, these

political changes sometimes created unexpected opportunities for deeper consultation, one consultant explained, “the earlier than anticipated election gave us a chance to speak more, to have meaningful consultations that later allowed the client to embed a more strategic value proposition”.

Furthermore, changing national and regional priorities and allocation of government funding, post various elections, had an impact onto the culture sector’s thinking more broadly and the various WMCA frameworks and plans as funding beyond the CWGLEF period remained uncertain.

Looking forward, several aspects could be enhanced to improve future delivery. **Streamlining procurement and contracting processes** would significantly improve implementation efficiency. Earlier and more robust cross-functional collaboration would have mitigated many of the delays. One contributor admitted, “had we been able to engage a dedicated team sooner to navigate the procurement and contracting complexities, our internal processes would have been more streamlined, and we might have delivered a longer, more comprehensive programme”.

Finally, strengthening the connection between strategic frameworks and tangible community outcomes would enhance impact. As one stakeholder emphasised, “all this really matters if it reaches and makes a material difference to the people living in the region – if the strategic design does not translate into actual community benefit, then it loses its value”. By addressing these improvement areas while building on the collaborative foundation established through the CWGLEF Culture and Heritage pillar, future cultural initiatives can achieve more efficient delivery and stronger outcomes for the West Midlands region.

4.3.7 Impact on WMCA

The Culture and Heritage pillar has fundamentally repositioned culture and heritage as a core strategic asset within the WMCA. Initially designed for grant programmes, it evolved to drive both immediate delivery and long-term policy shifts, fostering cross-departmental collaboration and integrating cultural considerations into broader strategies. It also provided a robust evidence base, enhancing decision-making and strengthening the WMCA's external reputation. Despite challenges, the pillar ultimately reshaped the WMCA's strategic outlook, embedding culture in public policy and informing future planning with evidence and collaboration.

The CWGLEF Culture and Heritage pillar has had a transformative impact on WMCA’s priorities, planning, and practice. Over the past 18 months, various stakeholders within the Combined Authority have witnessed a gradual but fundamental repositioning of culture and heritage from an ad hoc function into a core strategic asset. Initially conceived as a mechanism to quickly allocate legacy funds from the Commonwealth Games, the pillar was designed to deliver discrete grant programmes and projects under a “pillar-model” framework. Over time, however, it evolved into a catalyst that not only drove immediate delivery but also reshaped internal processes and long-term policy debates.

The **creation of a dedicated Culture and Heritage pillar** has been instrumental in the Combined Authority acknowledging that culture is not just an add-on but a foundational component of its work. This has led to increased recognition of culture and heritage as integral to WMCA's broader development agenda, a shift from prior to the CWGLEF programme where these considerations were scattered and under-represented. This change is both symbolic and practical, as one WMCA stakeholder stated:

“The fact that we now have a significant group of brilliant people running a culture and heritage programme who are visible is fundamentally important. It makes clear that cultural heritage is vital to the region’s identity.”

Another stakeholder emphasised this thinking and stated that even the existence of the team delivering culture and heritage had, in effect “forced the Combined Authority to acknowledge its strategic importance at a regional level”. With this newfound legitimacy, WMCA is now incorporating cultural indicators into its planning, notably in areas like inclusive communities, the creative industries, and integrated settlement planning.

The pillar model has **fostered collaboration across departmental silos**, compelling the WMCA to incorporate cultural considerations into its broader economic, health, skills and place-making strategies, fostering increased cross-departmental and place-based collaborations. As one interviewee observed, “it has enabled the Combined Authority to position culture as a key building block, influencing work in areas such as integrated settlement, local growth strategies, and even health and well-being”. While the pillar’s structure wasn’t initially designed to promote cross-pillar work, the natural connections among WMCA staff, particularly those dedicated to culture, heritage, and economic development, facilitated the breakdown of previously isolated work areas. This collaborative spirit has resulted in the integration of cultural learning with other strategic priorities, such as the development of a heritage framework and a cultural infrastructure plan that link heritage assets with town centre regeneration and local housing strategies.

In planning and practice, the Culture and Heritage pillar has delivered **immediate funding opportunities and a strong evidence base**, compelling WMCA to gather data, identify gaps, and articulate a clear value proposition for culture. As one interviewee emphasised, “The work we’ve done has built the evidence that culture drives the economy and supports social well-being—this evidence is now critical when we negotiate with central government”. By tracking the outcomes of interventions like local authority grants and the ‘ACTIVATE’ initiative, WMCA has **enhanced its capacity for evidence-based decision making**. Furthermore, the evolving nature of CWGLEF work, through programmes like ‘ACTIVATE’ grants, creative health interventions, and ongoing Cultural Leadership Board discussions, has pushed WMCA to continuously refine its planning processes. However, reflections on the monitoring and evaluation process itself highlight areas for improvement. Short delivery timeframes consistently hindered the ability to assess medium-term to long-term impact, and changes in reporting requirements mid-project created challenges for grantees.

The implementation of the Culture and Heritage pillar has yielded practical outcomes for WMCA, including distributed grant programmes like local authority double-devolved grants and structured initiatives such as the ‘ACTIVATE’ programme, which supports creative skills development; these are expected to inform future public spending and integrated settlement approaches.

"This pillar has demonstrated a proof of concept. It has provided us with an evidence base and better insights into how to link cultural initiatives with economic and community development – a key factor in our future funding bids." Stakeholder

Furthermore, the pillar has **impacted WMCA's internal processes** by investing in specialist roles and new frameworks that have significantly increased cultural leadership capacity, evolving the CA's approach to procurement, contract management, and grant awarding. The strategy has not only required the CA to establish new teams and appoint subject-matter experts but also to **engage in iterative dialogues** with local authorities, cultural practitioners, and partners like Arts Council England and Historic England, generating a high level of “heritage fluency” across the combined authority, ensuring that culture and heritage considerations are woven through formal strategic documents and operational plans.

The Culture and Heritage pillar has also **bolstered the Combined Authority's external reputation**, proving crucial for attracting funding and partnerships. As one reflection noted, “By having culture and heritage at the heart of our agenda, WMCA is now better positioned to speak to investors, government

departments, and international partners – effectively asking for more resources on a foundation of demonstrated impact. The pillar has also bridged wider strategic ambitions, catalysing investments in creative health, skills development, and international exchanges. The integration of programmes like ‘ACTIVATE’ has strengthened WMCA’s argument for sustained investment. As one interviewee reflected, “This pillar has given us the confidence to engage in future global conversations about cultural diplomacy and creative clusters in the West Midlands”. These successes demonstrate the pillar’s multiplying effect on planned projects and its influence on the regional agenda beyond isolated funding.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges emerged along the way. Initially, the pillar’s design was criticised for potentially encouraging siloed thinking among beneficiaries. Critics argued that even though end-users did not perceive the administrative boundaries, the compartmentalised funding streams might have led to limited cross-sector collaboration. However, in practice, many of these potential challenges were mitigated through the natural predisposition of WMCA staff to collaborate and share insights.

Delays in procurement and contract administration were also a recurrent theme, highlighting the complexity of administering a multi-funder legacy project within rigid public sector processes. Nonetheless, these administrative challenges contributed learning experiences that have now been embedded into WMCA’s evolving operational model. Additionally, challenges with late evaluation materials and the volume of required data suggest a need for greater support, suitability and flexibility in evaluation approaches.

In conclusion, the CWGLEF Culture and Heritage pillar has significantly reshaped WMCA’s strategic outlook, elevating culture to a core component of regional development, integrating cross-sectoral practices, and providing a crucial evidence base to strengthen WMCA’s negotiations. The overall impact has embedded a deeper understanding of culture in public policy, informing future planning with robust evidence and collaboration. The pillar had a transformative effect by raising cultural profiles, fostering collaboration, providing an evidence-based framework, and integrating cultural concerns into regeneration. The result is an evidence-backed approach informing future decisions. As one interviewee emphasised, “This pillar isn’t just about delivering grants; it’s about changing the way WMCA thinks and works – a shift that will have enduring impact on policy, practice and ultimately on the lives of citizens in the West Midlands.”



05

Wellbeing and Sustainability

5.0 Wellbeing and Sustainability



Summary

- ▶ Funding for the Sandwell Aquatic Centre ensured **the facility remained open to the public** as planned to support the centre's physical activity and employment programmes.
- ▶ There is good early evidence that Community Environment Fund (CEF) projects are making **physical improvements to green spaces** and **recycling potential waste products**.
- ▶ The projects offered targeted support to help specific groups access and **connect with local green spaces**, with emerging evidence indicating **positive effects on mental health**.
- ▶ The CEF projects have also created **jobs, volunteer roles and training opportunities** for individuals, as well as upskilled staff and volunteers involved in project delivery.



Copyright: WMCA (top left); Seven Rivers Trust (bottom left); WMCA (right)

5.1 Fund context

The Wellbeing and Sustainability pillar is divided into two projects which respectively address wellbeing and sustainability as the distinct elements of this pillar. Funding was allocated to the Sandwell Aquatic Centre (SAC) and the Community Environment Fund (CEF). The SAC grant addresses the Wellbeing element of the pillar, and the Community Environment Fund addresses the Sustainability element.

The **SAC** funding was primarily aimed at avoiding the potential negative consequences of the closure of leisure facilities within the region. In doing so, it had three key objectives:

- ▶ Ensuring leisure facilities in the Borough remained open, including the SAC, a world-class regional leisure facility located in Sandwell, to support the legacy of inclusion and growth created by the 2022 Commonwealth Games (CWG).
- ▶ Giving all residents the option to use accessible local, high-quality facilities (supporting the objectives of Sandwell's Health Inequalities Programme).
- ▶ Support the Sandwell Vision 2030, particularly Ambition 2: "Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for", through enhanced local leisure facility provision.

The **CEF** aimed to improve people's lives in the West Midlands by creating a better environment, with funded projects aligned to the CWG sustainability aims and with the WMCA Environment Team's delivery programme.

The CEF built on the pre-existing WMCA Community Green Grants (CGG) programme (2022-24) which aimed to increase local wellbeing through improving access to green spaces. Through the delivery of

this fund, WMCA recognised the demand for local projects which fitted outside the scope of the CGG (e.g. other types of initiatives which will reduce carbon emissions and improve the environment). The CEF therefore enabled WMCA to continue funding environment projects whilst expanding its scope to include the following outcomes: natural environment; circular economy; climate adaptation; access to green space; environment awareness. These priorities were put forward as part of the business case and were informed by WMCA's experience of running the CGG and demand for projects and initiatives from the local community.

Funding was available to a range of organisation types across the West Midlands, including charities, CCGs, cooperatives, and social enterprises. The fund aimed to target those suffering the greatest disadvantage (based on areas of IMD) and reach a diverse range of individuals. Applications needed to outline how funded activities will benefit people, nature and the environment and explain how the project presents value for money.

The distribution of funding in the Wellbeing and Sustainability pillar is set out in the table below.

Table 5-1: Wellbeing and Sustainability programmes, projects and activities

Programme or project	Activities	Funding
Sandwell Aquatics Centre (SAC)	► CWGLEF funding will bridge the gap between what utilities were originally budgeted to cost and what they will actually cost.	£1.4 m
Community Environment Fund (CEF)	► Direct grants to a variety of community environment initiatives targeted at those areas suffering the greatest disadvantage and at reaching a diverse range of individuals.	£1.2m

Note: Figures do not include all of the pillar's administration costs.

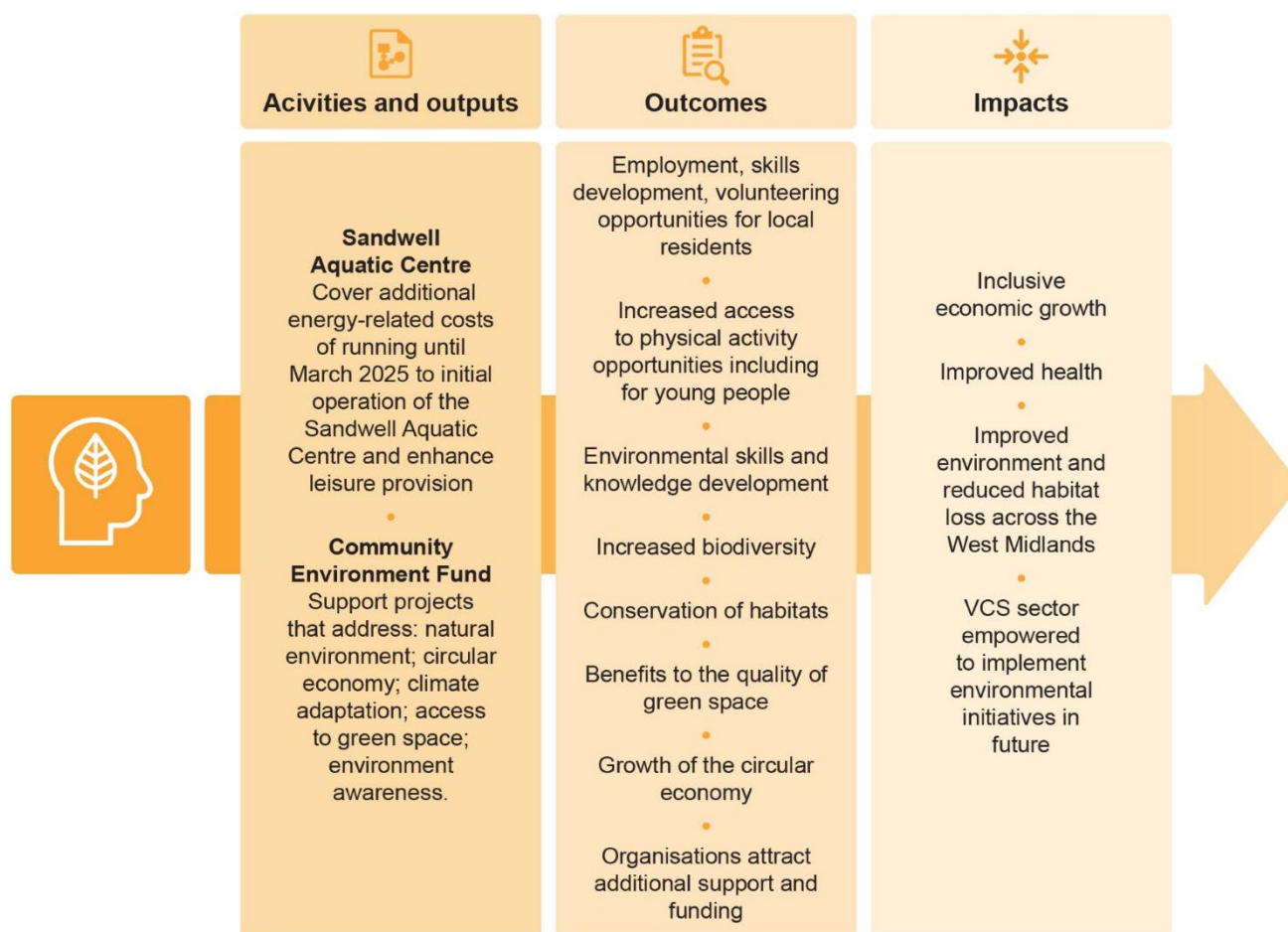
Management of SAC was outsourced to Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) who operate the centre (alongside most facilities in the area). Sandwell Council buys the energy on their behalf and distributes the CWGLEF grant to them in arrears based on reported energy use. Energy consumption (gas and electricity) for all sites including SAC have been routinely monitored and formally reported on a monthly basis by SLT to Sandwell Council. This process compared utility consumption to industry standards to ensure that consumption was within the industry benchmarks for comparable facilities. Reporting included financial reconciliation and evidence of outcomes. Sandwell Council send this reporting onto WMCA who have oversight of the overall management.

Overall responsibility for the CEF's grant management sat with WMCA, who spent part of the funding on a Fund Manager and Grants Officer to oversee the management and administration of the fund. Heart of England Community Foundation were contracted to manage the initial grant application phase with the Fund Manager overseeing the bid assessment and grant management, including providing WMCA updates on spend and resolve related issues.

The Fund Manager also worked to raise awareness of the Fund and attracted support for additional funding, for example by working with external partners and local authorities. So far this has included working with the WMCA comms team, attending external events and working with their own networks to raise awareness (e.g. via The National Lottery Community Fund).

5.2 Theory of change

Figure 5-1: Wellbeing and Sustainability Theory of change



5.3 Evaluation findings

Given the primary aim of funding to Sandwell Aquatics Centre was to meet a deficit in funding for energy costs at the centre and remove the risks of closure of local leisure provision, additional primary research was not in scope for this element of the funding and therefore the monitoring reports reflect the full scope of available data for this overarching evaluation.

The following subsections present the emerging findings in relation to the CEF research questions. Projects were expected to spend their grant awards by the end of March 2025, following which they will be asked to report on their progress against a series of indicators specific to the CEF theme their project fits within (natural environment; circular economy; climate adaptation; access to green space; environment awareness). At the time of reporting, WMCA were in the process of collecting this evidence ahead of conducting their own independently commissioned evaluation of the CEF (in Spring 2025).

The primary research for this evaluation therefore primarily focused on process lessons at a fund level. The analysis largely relies on analysis of the planned activities outlined by organisations in their grant applications, and where possible, cross-references these with updates reported by WMCA based on interim updates they have received from grantees. However, as final monitoring and evaluation data available is not yet available, it was not possible to conduct a systematic and comprehensive analysis of whether the planned activities, outputs and outcomes were conducted as planned.

5.3.1 Sandwell Aquatic Centre

Funding from CWGLEF and Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) aimed to meet a deficit in funding for energy costs at SAC. Other funding and resources contributed (such as wider funding from the Council to operate the leisure centres in the area). Collectively, these supported SAC and its legacy objectives in a number of ways:

- ▶ Ensured SAC remained open to the public as planned and that no funding will have to be diverted from other leisure facilities within SLT's remit, allowing all to remain open. This allowed local residents to retain access to leisure facilities within walking or cycling distance – which is important as a relatively high proportion of local residents do not have access to a car. In turn, this should improve access to opportunities for physical activity (including for children and young people via swim schools and school hire) which in turn leads to improved health outcomes.
- ▶ Provided jobs at SAC, including at entry level, which will boost employment opportunities for local residents especially those looking to get into the leisure industry. This will be supported by apprenticeships and training which will lead to an increased number of people with vocational qualifications in sustainable employment and increased levels of training. In the long-term, this will boost employment and skills, ensuring inclusive economic growth.
- ▶ Offer opportunities for the world-class regional leisure facility to host large-scale events. This provided opportunities for volunteering in the area, enabling locals to develop a range of employment-related skills. It will also bring visitor economy to the area and generate additional income amongst local businesses.

These objectives generally correspond to the medium-long term outcomes around improved participation in physical activity and improved employability skills in the programme-level ToC, and economic improvement related to increased employment, skills and visitor numbers.

Sandwell Leisure Trust provided regular monitoring data to WMCA as part of the grant management process which reflected the shorter-term outcomes of the project. The latest monitoring data includes data from October 2023-December 2024 and progress is reflected against the outcomes illustrated in Table 5-2 below.

Table 5-2: Sandwell Aquatic Centre data on short-term outcomes

Short-term outcome	Target	Progress to date (Dec '24)
Economy, jobs & skills		
Provide accessible jobs for those looking to get into the leisure industry	42 jobs created at SAC for those looking to get into the leisure industry	52 jobs created (55% posts are Sandwell residents)
Provide apprenticeship roles and maintain dedicated training budget & opportunities for vocational qualifications	1 apprenticeship role for local resident	5 apprenticeship roles created involving numerous training, qualifications and certificates
Increased number and breadth of large-scale events hosted at SAC	20 regional/inter/national events held at SAC	48 local, regional and national events held at SAC
Physical activity		

Sandwell residents retain access to leisure facilities within walking or cycling distance	73,292 Sandwell residents retain access to leisure facilities 600,000 Visits to Sandwell Aquatics Centre from WM residents	58,432 Sandwell residents retain access to leisure facilities. <i>Note: gym was closed for two weeks during Q4, but the Q3 total was 73,656 (above target).</i> 952,449 Visits to Sandwell Aquatics Centre from WM residents
Increased number of schools using the facility	46 schools booked at SAC	47 schools booked in for school swimming
Increased number of CYP enrolled on swim schools at SAC	2,200 Number enrolled on swim school at SAC	2,776 enrolled in swim school (and 235 enrolled on the Learn to Dive programme)

Source: WMCA

5.3.2 Community Environment Fund

5.3.2.1 Process lessons

The CEF built on lessons learnt from its predecessor, the Community Green Grants (CGG), in its delivery of the fund. One of the key success factors was having dedicated time from the Fund Manager to support community organisations with their applications and in the face of challenges to their delivery. Whilst most projects are on track to deliver against the fund's aims, many have changed the scope or timings of delivery, with the weather being one of the main challenges they faced. WMCA are now focused on creating a peer network involving the grantees which they hope will build their capacity and sustain the impact of the fund.

Each of the thematic areas within the CEF are reflected within WMCA's environment programme and supported by an accompanying strategy. WMCA stakeholders therefore emphasised how the fund provided an important means of involving the community in addressing the environment team's strategic aims. They considered the CEF as a timely opportunity to build on the work of its predecessor fund, the CGG, taking into account the learnings from that fund.

"I think what this enabled us to do was to build on the momentum... But also allowed us to reflect on the scope of our existing programme [Community green grants] and build it out." Stakeholder

The main ways the environment team built on the learnings from the CGG were to expand the scope by introducing three other themes (climate adaptation, environmental awareness and circular economy) and by revising the application process to introduce an expression of interest (EOI) phase. This was hoped to reduce the possibility of applications which did not meet the fund's criteria, which was an issue reported for the CGG. The EOIs were shared with the CEF Fund Manager and Grants Officer who decided whether to request a full application. This allowed them to sense check that prospective applications met the requirements and offered an early opportunity to support community groups to focus their applications where needed. For example, there were fewer applications relating to the climate adaptation theme which the funders tried to address during the application process by providing additional support to applicants post-EOI stage. Stakeholders reflected that, whilst it was a more involved process, it ultimately saved time for both community groups and assessors by ensuring applications better met the fund's expectations.

"This way they were more confident that when the application came in, it aligned to the fund and the objectives and it spoke to the fund and that then when they assessed it and it went to panel, it had more of a chance of being awarded." Stakeholder

Having an assessment panel was also considered to be an effective stage of the application process. Stakeholders commented on how the Panel contained a good range of representatives, including from the funder, grant administrator, public and private sector, who presented an appropriate level of challenge to the applications.

“They [the Panel] were very good at checking the assumptions that [fund officer] had made about applications and forced us to ask some more questions when needed about some the qualities of the applications. So it was a good council that we had there.” Stakeholder

In the end, the fund received 125 EOIs, 54 full applications, and made 27 funding awards (6 large awards and 21 smaller ones), which was in line with the fund’s intentions. Stakeholders were pleased with the level of interest in the fund which they attributed to a proactive campaign of awareness raising via a series of online and in-person events. The grant administrators also promoted the CEF as part of their information sessions on other funds, including Inclusive Communities, and issued targeted communications in the areas of Birmingham where application rates were lower. They did reflect that, whilst it was helpful to promote the CEF jointly in this way, the CEF may have been slightly overshadowed by the Inclusive Communities grant which was much larger, and so applicants may have felt their chances of success were higher.

Stakeholders reported that applications came from a range of community groups, including those who were less experienced at submitting this type of grant application. WMCA described how they perhaps took more risk than usual to fund innovative projects or smaller community groups, and as a result ensured that overall, grantees would target a variety of audiences through their project initiatives. Still, they noted that many of the applicants already had an environment focus or interest, and with more time they could have worked to raise awareness of how the funding could fit with community groups who may not have the environment as their main focus, but for whom building in environmental awareness into project design and delivery could make a substantial collective difference. In practice, as all of the CWGLEF funding pillars were launched in parallel, organisations without an environmental focus may have been more likely to apply for funds such as Inclusive Communities whose aims more clearly resonated with them. However, stakeholders reflected that as some of the CEF projects took a lot of work to get up and running, having a smaller pool of applicants afforded them time to support those smaller or less experienced community groups.

Building on their active involvement in the EOI and application stages, the Fund Manager and Grants Officer also led on the grant management and monitoring in a change from the usual approach which involves these processes being managed by the commissioned grant administrator. They explained how they actively kept in touch with the funded organisations to ensure they stayed on track to deliver project activities as planned. For example, they visited all the funded projects during the grant period and checked in on their progress regularly via email and telephone. WMCA considered this hands-on approach to grant management as critical in supporting projects to progress, especially in the face of challenges to planned delivery, and to hold them accountable to delivery. They reported how it proved more challenging to ensure some of the smaller community groups stayed on track with planned delivery, as these organisations were facing multiple other challenges, including changes in staff within the organisation.

This **proactive approach to monitoring** also provided WMCA with an opportunity to check projects understood the monitoring requirements and were on track to report against these at the end of their funding period. Generally, WMCA were satisfied that most projects were on track to spend their allocated funding by the end of March 2025 and to meet the fund’s objectives. However, some have faced delays or had to make adjustments to their original plans to stay on track. This is reflected in the monitoring data which indicated that only around eight projects were on track to deliver as they originally planned,

with seven reporting changes to scope of planned activity, another seven requesting a change or redistribution in their budget, and three reporting delays to delivery.

Delays were reportedly more common with larger grantees, some of whom requested extensions, compared to smaller grantees who are perhaps better able to pivot their plans. Common barriers to project delivery reported by funded organisations included being unable to engage individuals within the community to the extent they planned and poor weather conditions (for example wind and rain damaging the site or equipment). The weather also limited timeframes for delivery, as delays in launching meant that the main delivery window for some projects was over winter which was not an optimum time for many projects, for example whose activities included sowing seeds or working with school children in an outdoor environment. This delay to launching the fund was reflected in the stakeholder interviews, who were frustrated by the pace of setting up the overall fund:

“We were a bit frustrated with that because if we would have got the project funding available earlier, we would now be in a position to talk in more detail about what level of impact and probably giving communities a bit more time to deliver.” Stakeholder

Whilst the overall fund was perhaps launched later than some stakeholders hoped, the grants were awarded earlier than originally scheduled within the timescales (in summer 2024 as opposed to autumn 2024). The Fund Manager reflected on the benefits of having a longer lead-in time which has allowed them to work closely with projects, many of which are being run by community groups who need the extra support. This has helped WMCA identify and address potential issues at an early stage and focus on the fund’s delivery, and anecdotal feedback from the grantees suggests they appreciated how supportive, accommodating, and communicative the WMCA team has been. Stakeholders strongly felt that this approach of taking the time to work with the groups and support delivery is perhaps different to previous programmes, and one they would recommend to other funders in future.

“Maybe in the future people need to plan for that phase of work and not just think, we’ve got the funding, we’ll get out the door. But that working with the groups and helping them through issues and making sure you’re going to get something good at the end of it. And thinking about sustainability of their actions and your interventions with them.” Stakeholder

Awarding the grants earlier in the process has also allowed WMCA to link up projects whose work overlaps, and the Fund Manager provided some examples of projects who are now working together outside of the CEF. One of their key focuses has been on creating a peer network involving all of the grantees in the hope this will support the ambitions of the fund to be sustainable into the future. WMCA hoped the network will provide an important opportunity for **peer-to-peer learning** and help sustain the activities funded by CEF, for example by offering grantees the opportunity to work together and share news about other funding opportunities. They thought this would be particularly beneficial for smaller community groups to learn from larger, more established organisations. Stakeholders viewed this facilitation of peer networks as the main strategic added value of the fund, which, though not part of their original plans, builds on what they have learnt about how critical community involvement is in delivering on WMCA’s broader environmental and net zero ambitions.

“We’re doing our best to try and follow up to support the community as a whole across the region as we move forward with that, because we see communities and Community delivery as a really integral part of environment programme work across the region.” Stakeholder

So far, WMCA has run an in-person networking event and some online workshops. These sessions have come out of the existing CEF budget and WMCA will need to find continuation funding to sustain the network, and legacy impact of the CEF, in the future after the CEF team disbands in March 2025.

5.3.2.2 Job opportunities and skills development

Funded projects intended to create jobs, volunteer roles and training opportunities for individuals, as well as upskill staff and volunteers involved in project delivery. They hoped to create a greater environmental awareness amongst community groups by encouraging knowledge sharing and empowering peer learning and environmental 'champions'. There is emerging evidence of promising practice which suggests that a number of projects are on track to achieve these aims.

Based on the initiatives outlined in projects' applications, there was a clear link as to how planned activities would support the achievement of the outcomes in the CEF Theory of Change. For individuals, these mostly related to the short-term outcome of **supporting people in communities to develop new skills as part of implementing new projects and in doing so increasing their knowledge of the environment**. This was often approached through workshops or sessions which focused on teaching participants new skills and knowledge, such as relating to food growing, bike repair, and upcycling, and increasing knowledge of sustainability and climate adaptation.

There was also some evidence of projects working towards longer-term outcomes for individuals around **developing new skills and creating job opportunities for residents** with a number of projects intending to create volunteer roles and work experience opportunities for individuals involved in delivery of the project, such as by attracting volunteers to plant trees or tend to allotments. One project has contracted local suppliers (inc. a landscaper), one has hired sessional staff, whilst another was able to use the funding to enable a volunteer to move on to a paid part-time position. There was also a focus on training & upskilling existing staff and volunteers, for example, through offering training on carbon literacy and skills to repair and upcycle domestic products or clothing.

One example of promising practice regarding upskilling volunteers was reported by Birmingham Botanical Gardens in their interim update to WMCA. One of their project aims was to develop an accessible tree volunteering programme and engage with the public to upskill volunteers. So far they have upskilled 10 members of staff in tree auditing, and have run 25 volunteer sessions on tree auditing with existing volunteers. This includes three new tree surveying volunteers who have audited all trees on site and recorded the data.

Projects also intended to address community-level outcomes related to job creation and skills development. This centred around skills development, addressing the short-term outcome of **community groups being empowered to implement environmental activities**. For example, a number of projects aimed to encourage environmental stewardship amongst community members by increasing their environmental awareness, empowering them to maintain green and blue spaces in future (such as through implementing citizen science projects like recording data on trees and rivers) and teaching sustainability skills (such as how to repair items and reuse items). A minority planned to embed this community ownership by encouraging climate 'champions' and peer mentors within existing community groups.

It was hoped that knowledge sharing opportunities would support this; for example, some projects provided teachers, schools and universities with materials to teach their students about topics related to environmental awareness and action, whilst others planned to run workshops with community members on themes such as climate resilience. Some projects had a specific focus on empowering minority groups (e.g. Asian women, Pakistani/ Bangladeshi communities, disabled people and those with SEND) by running tailored knowledge sharing workshops and events.

An example of promising practice included a project run by community organisation Saathi House who aim to raise environmental awareness and change behaviours amongst Asian women living in Aston. As part of this, they are on track to support 90 local women (who have attended sessions run by Saathi House) to become local environmental champions. They have provided them with leaflets printed in

Urdu to support these women to influence and inform other residents regarding their responsibilities towards the local environment and outlining actions they can take to support this, for example in their own homes.

5.3.2.3 Health and wellbeing benefits

The CEF projects aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of communities in a range of ways, from targeted support for particular groups of individuals, to supporting communities to access and engage with the green spaces around them.

The initiatives planned by the funded projects intended to support the health and wellbeing related outcomes outlined in the CEF Theory of Change. For individuals, this focused on **increasing access to green space** in the short-term, which in the longer-term was intended to **improve the health and wellbeing of local residents accessing these green spaces**. Interestingly, the few projects who planned to directly target residents' health were focused on their mental wellbeing. One example of promising practice was reported by Birmingham Settlement, who are using their funding to develop a 3-acre site at Edgbaston Reservoir into a community green therapeutic space. They are on track with delivery ambitions to engage 100 individuals, 50 of whom receiving 1:1 support, with the hope of boosting participants' confidence and self-esteem and improving their mental health by enhancing mood and emotional resilience.

Projects also observed improvements to the wellbeing of their volunteers who enjoyed being in nature and interacting with each other, with existing volunteers encouraged by the uplift in volunteers and activity facilitated by the funding. One project engaged volunteers from a range of neurodiverse backgrounds and commented on how their involvement had a calming influence on their behaviour and helped them interact with others in the community more than they would have otherwise done.

There was also some indication of projects working towards the longer-term impact of **improving quality of life for residents living in their community**. This was more apparent amongst projects targeting certain groups through practical support, for example by growing food and redistributing resources (such as furniture for vulnerable groups) which they hoped would help bring immediate benefits to the quality of life of some individuals.

More often, projects aimed to improve health and wellbeing outcomes at a community-level through **better provision of green space within local communities**. This long-term outcome was targeted by several projects whose plans included increasing pedestrian access to local gardens and canal waterways, including factoring in accessibility and, in a couple of cases, making spaces wheelchair friendly.

This was hoped to contribute to **better satisfaction of local communities where projects have been delivered**. Often, projects planned to kickstart this by running community events and promoting opportunities for residents to use the space, often with a particular focus on children and families. For example, some projects promoted their local green spaces by conducting visits to schools and youth groups and running family activities on site during weekends and school holidays.

One example of a project which is encouraging communities to enjoy local green spaces is being run by Growth Path Services and intended to increase community use of a local park through a programme of planting and events. It also provided training opportunities for young people (NEETS). So far, they have engaged over 75 community members including children via local nurseries and Girl Guides groups. They have also run three community bulb planting events along a stretch of footpath within the park and run a guided community bird walk. As intended, the project has established a 'Friends of

Brookvale' group who will organise further community events and work together to maintain environmental improvements at the park in future.

5.3.2.4 Improving the local environment

The vast majority of projects intended to make improvements to the local environment. Whilst environmental outcomes tended to take longer to achieve, there is good early evidence of projects working towards short-term outcomes by making physical improvements to green spaces and recycling potential waste products.

Central to the focus of many project activities is making improvements to the local environment, both directly (through making physical changes) and indirectly (through educating and empowering individuals and communities to care for the environment, as discussed above). As environmental improvements tend to be realised over a longer period, most of the planned activities focus on shorter-term environmental outcomes.

Most often, this involved **making physical improvements to green spaces**, such as by improving woodland, soil health, monitoring and planting trees, hedgerows and plants (including climate resilient cultivation habits), and restoring grassland. In the longer-term, these activities planned to **generate new habitats** and **benefit the quality of green space**. They also are intended to **increase biodiversity**, which is also a longer-term outcome more specifically targeted by some project activities that focus on creating and improving wildlife habitats (such as ponds, rivers and canals) and populations (such as pollinators). One project helped to conserve the endangered native crayfish in the region.

Another focus of some projects, particularly those addressing the circular economy theme, was on upcycling unwanted products and saving them from landfill. Examples of initiatives addressing this outcome area include running workshops on how to mend and repair household items, and textile recycling, including donating unwanted items to asylum seekers, all of which will save products from going to landfill.

One example of a project working towards environmental outcomes is People for People who are using their grant to clear waste from and improve access to three allotment plots and create a nature focused community garden space offering regular activities to encourage participation from diverse communities. As part of this, they have made improvements to the space by planting trees, hedgerow and native plants, generated new habitats by adding a wildlife pond and wildflower beds, and are on track with their ambition to reduce waste and save around 6,000l of water per year through installing a rainwater collection system.

The background image shows a community event on a grassy field with trees in the background. A large, colorful bull mascot with a multi-colored hexagonal pattern on its head and a white shirt with "UNITED BY 2022" on the back is walking away from the camera. To the right, a white trailer with a red awning has a sign that says "WELCOME TO TODAY'S EVENT". A person is visible inside the trailer. Several children and adults are standing on the grass. A boy in a blue patterned shirt is running towards the right. A girl in a pink shirt is also visible. A sign on the trailer also says "BLACK COUNTRY".

06

Cross-cutting analysis

6.0 Cross-cutting Analysis

This section addresses specific evaluation themes that cut across the pillar level evaluation questions. These include broader governance and strategic questions relating to the design and implementation of the Fund. It also addresses specific lessons to take forward into future programme design.

6.1 Programme design

The four-pillar structure fostered a coherent and focused approach. It was recognised, however, that with more time funding could have been allocated more strategically, with better cross-pillar linkages and through a clearer, more systematic consultation process.

The CWGLEF's pillar structure aimed to align the outcomes of the original Commonwealth Games Legacy Plan with the strategic objectives of the WMCA, aiming to create a unified and strategic approach. It balanced the need to build on the legacy focus while enabling the WMCA to take forward new initiatives. Stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation generally agreed that organising the Fund around four pillars and moving away from the more complex pillar structure of the original Legacy Plan allowed a more coherent and focused approach.

Some stakeholders reflected that the funding could have been allocated more strategically, however, with more attention focused on the linkages across pillars and guided by a more systematic process of consultation. It was felt that there was insufficient commitment in the early planning stages to linking strategic outcomes to the pillars. One interviewee, for example, suggested that initial funding discussions lacked strategic direction, with "organisations simply requesting money without considering impact" and with a tendency to build on existing commitments rather to develop new programmes and projects. Another suggested that using a Theory of Change (or similar) approach from the outset to develop priorities may have helped to create a more strategic programme design. The design process was heavily constrained by tight deadlines, however, limiting the ability to plan more strategically. A more rigorous connection between programme activities and strategic outcomes emerged when business cases had to demonstrate clear alignment with those outcomes.

With a longer timeline or as one interviewee put it, "the option to invest" rather than "spend" the funding, a different approach could have been taken. There was also a belief that if the same amount of funding were available now, and given the learning from the CWGLEF's design phase, it is likely that a different and potentially "a more strategic approach" would be taken. However, given the political and time pressures, the solution implemented was regarded by stakeholders as the best possible under the circumstances.

Given the time constraints, the CWGLEF tended to **align with or build on existing programmes** rather than an overall vision or strategy. The funding allocation supplemented the region's key economy and skills initiatives, integrating with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). In culture and heritage, it significantly expanded what was previously a limited investment, allowing for "a fully developed programme". The need to build upon the Legacy Plan made it clear that community engagement had to be a major focus, and the CWGLEF was able to build on that commitment through the Inclusive Community pillar. Health objectives were subsumed into the Inclusive Communities grants programme and a number of other programmes. As the analysis below shows, health outcomes remained a strong and consistent focus across the programme pillars. The Community Environment Fund also helped establish a more tangible environmental programme. One stakeholder suggested that the projects supported by CWGLEF have made the region's environment ambitions less "abstract" as the practical

initiatives have been seen to have made “a real difference”. It is believed that this has strengthened the programme’s credibility and reinforced the Combined Authority’s role in natural capital investment.

6.2 Strategy alignment

The CWGLEF has made significant contributions to five of the West Midlands Inclusive Growth Framework’s eight “fundamentals”. A high-level analysis shows that a significant proportion of the CWGLEF’s funding and outcomes align with the framework’s inclusive economy and health fundamentals. There have also been smaller but meaningful impacts in the areas of climate and environment, power and participation and equality. The Economy, Trade, and Tourism pillar aligned strongly with the inclusive economy, fundamental supporting business expansion to boost the region’s GVA and enhancing labour market access for underserved groups.

There was a strongly held view amongst interviewees that the shared learning process supported by CWGLEF would likely lead to a more integrated and strategic approach if the fund were designed today. Ultimately, the pillar approach balanced the need to build on the legacy with the opportunity to support broader strategic objectives which included experimenting with new approaches.

An alternative strategic approach would be to align the CWGLEF more closely with the regional ambition for inclusive growth outlined in the WMCA Inclusive Growth Framework.⁷⁶ The Framework proposes that the West Midlands economy is only fit-for-purpose if it meets the needs and aspirations of people whilst being regenerative of the environment. The framework is structured around eight fundamentals, as depicted in Figure 6-1.

⁷⁶ <https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/inclusive-growth/>

Figure 6-1: Inclusive Growth Framework doughnut



To address the question of how far the CWGLEF contributed to the regional ambition for inclusive growth (as defined by WMCA Inclusive Growth framework), a high-level assessment of the CWGLEF's contribution against each of the Inclusive Growth Framework outcomes and metrics was completed in consultation with WMCA.

The findings from the evaluation were considered against an Inclusive Growth Scoring Framework. The following ratings were applied to assess the contribution of CWGLEF:

- ▶ **Strong contribution** (green, rating 8-10) – significant proportion of funding with strong links between CWGLEF outcomes and potential outcomes and IG progress metrics
- ▶ **Medium contribution** (amber, rating 4-7) – smaller proportion of funding with some links between CWGLEF outcomes and potential outcomes and IG progress metrics
- ▶ **Low contribution** (red, rating 1-3) – small amount or no funding and weak links between CWGLEF outcomes and potential outcomes and IG progress metrics

This high-level assessment indicates that the CWGLEF has made strong and medium contributions to five of the eight IGF fundamentals.

Table 6-1: CWGLEF alignment with Inclusive Growth Framework Fundamentals

Fundamental	Summary	Outcome	Assessment (1-10)	Evidence
Climate and environment	Our climate and environment are facing immense pressures due to climate change and overuse of the planet's natural resources. We must change our social and economic ecosystems to ensure we work within the planet's limits and make adaptations which increase our ability to cope with the risks, uncertainties, and threats associated with climate change.	Carbon emissions decoupled from economic growth and reduced to net zero by 2041.	Medium - 4	<p>A small proportion of funding focused on specific environmental objectives through the £1m Community Environment Fund (CEF).</p> <p>There was a strong connection between CEF funded projects and the specific goal to promote and enhance efforts to protect, restore and enhance the region's natural environment. Most projects supported by CEF intended to make improvements to the local environment. There is good early evidence of projects making physical improvements to green spaces and recycling potential waste products.</p>
Inclusive economy	The economy is flourishing and sustainable, and everyone benefits from it. This contrasts with an economy where a small group of people benefit first, and where wealth is then redistributed later or trickled down.	People experience an increase in their household incomes and a better standard of living.	Strong - 9	<p>A significant proportion of CWGLEF funding has supported inclusive economy themes.</p> <p>The Economy, Trade, and Tourism pillar aligned strongly with the inclusive economy outcomes, supporting business expansion to boost the region's GVA and enhancing labour market access for underserved groups.</p> <p>Based on available monitoring data on progress against targets, there are promising signs that the programme will lead to significant economic impacts for the region and its localities through inward investment, major events and business support programmes.</p> <p>The Jobs, Skills and Wellbeing programme has demonstrated good potential to improve employability amongst 16-24 year olds in the WMCA area and has had some success in supporting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds into employment.</p>

Fundamental	Summary	Outcome	Assessment (1-10)	Evidence
Power and participation	Power and participation are about people having a voice in influencing the things that matter to them. People who have power over their own personal circumstances can shape the places that they live and spend time in. Those who feel that they actively participate and shape the places in which they live and work, will feel a greater sense of belonging	People can fully participate in influencing and exercising agency in the things that matter to them.	Medium - 6	<p>Power and participation was not a specific focus of the fund however projects and programmes within the Culture and Heritage and Inclusive Communities pillars (and a significant proportion of funding overall) had a strong focus on ensuring residents feel that they have a voice in influencing their local areas.</p> <p>The use of 'double devolved' and 'triple devolved' grants under the Culture and Heritage pillar empowered local authorities and communities to develop and implement project ideas in consultation with local people. The use of a 'double devolved' mechanism in the Jobs, Skills and Wellbeing programme also allowed LAs to prioritise support approaches based on the needs of their local population.</p>
Affordable and safe places	Affordable and safe places is about everyone living in decent homes that they can afford, in neighbourhoods where they feel secure, and having a sense of belonging in the place that they live	Ensuring that everyone in the West Midlands has affordable, safe and secure housing which meets their needs and aspirations. To do this, we must design out homelessness, create good quality homes and address housing decency and living standards across the different housing sectors.	Low -3	<p>None of the pillars and their programmes and projects had an explicit focus on either housing or community safety.</p> <p>A small number of Inclusive Community Grant projects were focused on addressing anti-social behaviour, crime (including hate crime), and violence to improve community safety.</p> <p>The evaluation found a less tangible and clear link between the funded activities and increased feelings of civic pride – partly due to the smaller number of projects working directly in this space. There were some examples of indirect impacts on civic pride through Inclusive Communities Grant Fund projects and Culture and Heritage double-devolved activities.</p>
Connected communities	Connected communities mean how easily people can interact with the world around them. This includes physical and digital connectivity. Physical connectivity helps people to reach places to live, work, have	People live in connected communities which enable everyone to interact with the world around them, both physically and digitally	Low - 1	None of the pillars and their programmes and projects have a specific focus on connected communities themes.

Fundamental	Summary	Outcome	Assessment (1-10)	Evidence
	fun and meet up. Digital connectivity and inclusion help people to learn and get connected, for instance, through using a device and data.			
Education and learning	Education and learning opportunities are important for everyone at any age, to enable them to flourish and reach their potential. From giving children and young people the best start in life, to providing opportunities for working aged and older adults to gain new skills, retrain for a new job or just pursue their own interests for leisure. All types of learning are important for an inclusive society.	Improved levels of skills for all to flourish and realise their potential	Medium - 5	<p>The Jobs, Skills and Wellbeing programme provided tailored provision to address the needs of specific groups and improve their confidence in accessing the job market.</p> <p>The Trailblazers Bring the Power, Gen22 and Ideas Made Real programmes all contributed to supporting young people's learning.</p> <p>The Inclusive Communities grant fund supported training for beneficiaries to improve their ability to access wider employment opportunities.</p>
Health and wellbeing	People living longer, healthier, and happier lives, regardless of their social circumstances, which has often placed a limit on their prospects for a healthy life.	Avoidable differences in health outcomes are reduced so that everyone can live longer, healthier, and happier lives	Strong - 8	<p>Health and wellbeing objectives were incorporated into a number of the CWGLEF programmes and projects. Taken together, there is strong potential for the fund to support health and wellbeing outcomes.</p> <p>The Community Environment Fund projects aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of communities in a range of ways, from targeted support for particular groups of individuals, to supporting communities to access and engage with green spaces.</p> <p>The Inclusive Communities Grant Programme had a strong focus on projects to improve health including projects to encourage physical activity participation and improve mental health. Evidence points to a clear causal relationship between the grant fund and improved participation in physical</p>

Fundamental	Summary	Outcome	Assessment (1-10)	Evidence
				<p>activity. This was a direct focus of a proportion of funded projects and the evaluation evidence indicated that beneficiaries across a range of communities took part in sport and physical activities of various kinds as result of grant funding.</p> <p>The Inclusive Communities Grant Programme evaluation emphasised the impacts of projects on enhancing mental health through strengthened social connections. Regarding the mental health and wellbeing targets set for the Jobs, Skills, and Wellbeing programme, initial results indicate a positive trend among participants.</p> <p>In terms of targets set in relation to mental health and wellbeing for the Jobs Skills and Wellbeing programme, the initial results show a positive trend for participants.</p>
Equality	Equality means that people have the opportunity to thrive and flourish regardless of their protected characteristics and backgrounds.	Reduced employment inequalities so that people have the opportunity to thrive and flourish regardless of their protected characteristics and backgrounds	Medium - 4	<p>There was a limited focus on addressing specific equality issues in the labour market.</p> <p>The Inclusive Communities Grant Programme and Trailblazers programme prioritised the active participation of specific equality groups across a range of activities. These projects strengthened community connections and have guided participants toward positive pathways.</p> <p>More broadly, there was a strong focus on ensuring that the benefits of the Legacy were spread across the region.</p>

6.3 Governance

Overall, value for money was considered by ensuring projects were funded that had a clear need and potential for impact. The grant programmes supported organisations that could demonstrate their ability to deliver positive outcomes for their communities. Effective programme management processes enabled WMCA to maintain a proactive approach to ongoing monitoring and risk assessment, helping to ensure that projects stayed on track to deliver their expected outputs and outcomes.

There was a consensus that the **governance of the programme was effectively structured** through the steering group, staff team, and appropriate decision-making processes. Business case development and board papers played a key role in gradually refining the approach. To support programme management, the WMCA Board approved the initial pillar funding, and the Investment Board approved individual business cases. SRO leads handled the specific implementation of programmes under the pillar structure working closely with partners and delivery bodies. The Programme Management team reported directly to DCMS and shared that programme reporting with the WMCA Business Planning and performance team.

As part of the devolution deal between the WMCA and Central Government ratified in October of 2023, a ‘single settlement’ deal enables the region to prioritise, target and decide how funding is spent in key policy areas. Instead of receiving funding through a complex set of funding pots with different timelines and overlapping accountabilities, the single settlement means government will instead allocate a single pot of funding giving local leaders more control to deliver projects aligned to local needs.⁷⁷

The rapid processing of £70 million through the CWGLEF forced a shift in mindset, demonstrating the need for a “more mature Combined Authority” capable of delivering a wider range of programmes. There is a general sense that this wider remit has helped to **pave the way for the single settlement**, influencing WMCA’s evolution and its readiness for broader responsibilities.

Running a large-scale programme at speed exposed inefficiencies in the funding decision process, which, while challenging, has prompted system and process improvements. There was a widely held view that the programme has also provided learning for **the organisation’s support services** – including governance, legal, and procurement, - which previously operated with a narrower focus.

Stakeholders highlighted how experience with the CWGLEF helped to improve the Combined Authority’s **programme management approach**, particularly in managing government grants with fewer restrictions. This learning has led to a more structured approach, ensuring funding is tied to clear outcomes and supporting the notion that funding decisions should be supported by clear strategic intent.

The CWGLEF has been seen as a “dry run” for the integrated settlement and has provided “concrete evidence for necessary improvements”, rather than relying on anecdotal concerns. With the upcoming settlement funding in mind, in particular, it has helped identify where the organisation needs to become leaner and more efficient. One interviewee suggested that the CWGLEF **funding approval process could have been improved by adopting a more flexible and streamlined approach**, such as using delegated decision-making for smaller funding amounts, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model for all applications.

⁷⁷ WMCA Ratifies Devolution Deal, WMCA, Accessed May 2024

6.4 Strategic added value

The CWGLEF had limited influence on strategic regional policy or programme development, however stakeholders felt that this was never the intention. Instead, CWGLEF was designed to complement existing strategies and address specific funding gaps. The CWGLEF has nevertheless helped to engender more constructive partnerships and a more flexible, responsive approach to local needs. The evidence base created by CWGLEF has also strengthened future funding prospects. The Commonwealth Games' broader ambitions, including skills development and civic pride, remain significant, with continued efforts to address skill gaps. Interviewees noted that initial programme design limited cross-sector collaboration, but the Fund has enabled the Combined Authority to refine its approach, fostering synergies across different areas. As it expands into new domains like community engagement, culture, and major events, fresh opportunities have emerged to shape strategies and highlight economic impacts.

This section addresses strategic added value by considering the CWGLEF's influence on strategic policy, access to funding and ways of working.

The programme has generally had limited influence on strategic regional policy or programme development, however stakeholders felt that this was never the intention. Instead, CWGLEF was designed to complement existing strategies and address specific funding gaps - particularly in the case of the ETT pillar to complement the UK SPF. There was a consensus that CWGLEF has added value and support to ongoing initiatives. It also helped to “cement” certain strategies and approaches such as the region's Plan for Growth strategy, which was in its infancy during the Commonwealth Games period.

Alignment with WMCA outcomes through the business plan process has been beneficial, enabling the delivery of “impactful” initiatives and supporting learning on how to achieve strategic outcomes over time. While not everything will be built upon, some elements provide a foundation for future development.

The more tangible strategic added value of CWGLEF lies in supporting the **development of previously non-existent strategies and approaches**. In this respect the key strategic benefits of the CWGLEF have included regional cultural and heritage frameworks and the development of an inclusive communities approach. It is said the Inclusive Communities grant fund in particular has provided valuable information about communities across the region, which can inform future policy and strategy development.

The CWGLEF has enabled WMCA to engage in “**meaningful conversations**”. This involvement has allowed for learning, opening up discussions on the role of regional funding, the role of the Combined Authority in the VCS sector, and broader strategic questions. It has also strengthened engagement with businesses, such as growing aerospace clusters and supply chains, while facilitating exploration of emerging areas like AI. The ability to invest even modest resources has made it possible to shape these agendas rather than merely discussing them in isolation.

In terms of the ETT pillar, the implementation of the Major Events Fund has sparked an important strategic conversation about the region's approach to **major events** and WMGC's role in supporting them. CWGLEF has prompted new thinking about major events, a space the Combined Authority had not traditionally been involved in. Some indeed argued that CWGLEF has helped to achieve a lasting legacy by shaping the specific agenda around major events.

Demonstrating regional collaboration on such events could help develop a more strategic approach in the future. It is felt that due to funding constraints Local Authorities may be much less likely to bid for major events individually, but with events such as Invictus now secured, the focus now is on collaborating to maximise these opportunities. However, a broader question remains about the region's long-term approach and the extent to which the attraction of Major Events to the region is prioritised.

A key impact has been **shaping the approach to the integrated settlement**, where funding is outcome-focused rather than output-driven. Similar to the CWGLEF, as noted above, under the integrated settlement, the Combined Authority will be responsible for designing and delivering programmes, while the government takes an overarching role. The CWGLEF has served as a “trial run”, with a similar process of allocating and structuring funds. This experience has provided valuable internal learning on how the CWGLEF manages such funding models and how it will approach the integrated settlement. Instead of rigid, competitive funding processes, stakeholders noted a more collaborative method to the provision of funding support by for example, engaging local authorities and communities directly and asking how they want to use available resources, rather than making them compete for funding through bureaucratic processes.

Some initiatives have attracted **additional funding**, for example, an extra £3 million was secured from the Government for the Inclusive Communities programme. However, areas like Jobs and Skills have been reliant on UK SPF, with CWGLEF funding replacing gaps left by the loss of ERDF funding. Due to shifts in broader funding structures, programmes are having to adapt rather than necessarily attracting new funding. In some cases, past work has positioned the Combined Authority to access future opportunities, particularly in culture. Additionally, some funding has been leveraged through match-funding arrangements, but this is not a long-term funding solution.

A key success of CWGLEF is that it has allowed teams to expand their planned strategies. The next step is determining what comes next. In some cases, like environmental projects, an unintended but beneficial outcome has been the ability to **showcase funded initiatives**, leading to conversations about natural capital and potential funding from private philanthropy. While it has not yet directly resulted in large new funding injections, having an evidence base has made securing future support easier. The CWGLEF investment has effectively created a “foundation of evidence that accelerates progress in key areas”. It is recognised that some programmes, such as those supporting jobs and skills, will continue because there will always be a need to meet specific outcomes based on people’s needs. The Commonwealth Games had broader ambitions, such as improving jobs and skills and fostering civic pride. These objectives remain relevant, and the work, such as addressing skill gaps and supporting people into work, will continue. While some programmes will carry on where appropriate, others may evolve or end if they no longer align with current needs.

Interviewees highlighted how different pillar priorities and associated programmes and projects were designed independently, limiting cross-pillar and sector collaboration. While recognising the time pressures that shaped the original design, they note that the Fund has allowed the Combined Authority to evolve, **gaining a more sophisticated understanding of how to create synergies across different areas**. Where the Combined Authority is considering its approach to new area—such as community engagement, culture and major events - it has created fresh opportunities to shape thinking and highlight particular synergies, for example the economic impact of initiatives like major events. There is a common view that this has enabled a more strategic approach.

One interviewee suggested that the success of collaboration has come more from having the right people in the right roles, who are naturally collaborative and open to sharing knowledge. It is the belief that this success is more due to the natural collaborative nature of the individuals involved, rather than a structured, intentional design of the organisation or fund itself enabling this collaboration. The Fund has benefited WMCA in some areas, however, by **fostering broader connections and encouraging more integrated thinking**. The establishment of a culture team, for example, has influenced how the Combined Authority approaches to place-based economic growth, moving beyond traditional silos like transport, housing, and regeneration. However, within certain programme areas, there is still a tendency to operate in isolation rather than as interconnected parts of a larger whole.



07

Key Conclusions

7.0 Final Conclusions

This section brings the evaluation analysis together to provide some key conclusions on the outcomes and impacts of CWGLEF, lessons from its design and delivery and wider policy issues raised by the evaluation research. The conclusions are developed in relation to each of the headline evaluation questions.

To what extent has the CWGLEF created economic impacts across the West Midlands through support for business growth, employment, skills, trade, investment, and tourism?

For many of the larger programmes and projects that have a specific focus on creating economic impacts such as Global West Midlands (GWP), it's still too early for a full assessment of impacts and robust evaluation data is limited. Based on available GWP monitoring data on progress against targets for inward investment projects and case study evidence, however, there are promising signs that the programme will lead to significant economic impacts for the region and its localities.

Individual evaluations of Major Events Fund projects demonstrate clear economic impacts. Combined analysis of these evaluations reveals immediate economic benefits totalling £5.1 million to date, with the potential for this figure to grow significantly from a pipeline of future events.

The CWGLEF has enabled significant financial support to the 2026 European Athletics Championships which was seen as a key legacy event from the Commonwealth Games and has ensured that the event is retained in the region for 2026. While it is too early to provide an economic impact assessment of the stadium redevelopment works, significant benefits are expected both from the construction projects and the staging of the Championship through enhanced visitor numbers.

To what extent has the CWGLEF supported increased opportunities for physical activity and improved mental wellbeing, and reduced physical inactivity, particularly within underserved communities?

Evaluation evidence highlights the various ways the CWGLEF has positively influenced mental wellbeing. The Inclusive Communities Grant programme, awarding £11.8 million to 388 projects and reaching over half a million people, served as the main vehicle for promoting mental and physical wellbeing.

The Inclusive Communities Grant Programme evaluation emphasised the impacts of projects on enhancing mental health through strengthened social connections. Regarding the mental health and wellbeing targets set for the Jobs, Skills, and Wellbeing programme, initial results indicate a positive trend among participants.

Evaluation evidence indicates that the Inclusive Communities Grant programme supported beneficiaries across a range of communities to take part in sport and physical activities of various kinds as result of grant funding. Projects focused on replacement and upgraded sports equipment, exercise classes and programmes for underserved groups and training and funding for qualifications for sports club volunteers. Funding to support the continued operation of the Sandwell Leisure Centre should expand opportunities for the local community to engage in physical activity. The Trailblazers programme also has a strong focus on engaging disabled, and non-disabled with complex needs in physical activity sessions though detailed outcomes evidence is not yet available.

To what extent has the CWGLEF supported inclusive practice, and enhanced community, creative and cultural participation, including for underserved communities?

The Inclusive Communities Grant Programme and Trailblazers programme prioritised the active participation of specific equality groups across a range of activities. These projects strengthened community connections and aimed to guide participants toward positive pathways.

The Culture and Heritage pillar fostered social cohesion and a sense of belonging within communities by facilitating culturally relevant experiences through initiatives that prioritised community engagement and participation. The pillar increased skills and capacity across individuals, organisations, and civic organisations, supporting the long-term sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors.

To what extent has the CWGLEF contributed to the regional ambition for inclusive growth (as defined by WMCA Inclusive Growth framework) and other social value measures?

The CWGLEF has made significant contributions to five of the West Midlands Inclusive Growth Framework's eight "fundamentals". A high-level analysis shows that a significant proportion of the CWGLEF's funding and outcomes align with the framework's inclusive economy and health fundamentals. There have also been smaller but meaningful impacts in the areas of climate and environment, power and participation and equality.

The Economy, Trade, and Tourism pillar aligned strongly with the inclusive economy, fundamental supporting business expansion to boost the region's GVA and enhancing labour market access for underserved groups. Jobs and skills initiatives like the six-month paid work placements helped individuals move from unstable situations into employment.

While some outcomes supporting the region's inclusive growth agenda are already evident, others have laid the foundation for longer-term systemic change.

To what extent has value for money been considered in programme and project design and delivery across the CWGLEF?

Overall, value for money was considered by ensuring projects were funded that had a clear need and potential for impact. The grant programmes supported organisations that could demonstrate their ability to deliver positive outcomes for their communities.

Effective programme management processes enabled WMCA to maintain a proactive approach to ongoing monitoring and risk assessment, helping to ensure that projects stayed on track to deliver their expected outputs and outcomes.

Greater value for money could likely have been achieved through a stronger focus on synergies across pillar and programme activities. While value for money could have been more rigorously considered in the fund's overarching strategic approach, it was applied more thoroughly in the development of business cases for specific programmes and projects.

What can we learn from the approach adopted for the CWGLEF and its effect on regional stakeholder / wider community relationships, and in terms of implications for similar future grants and interventions?

The CWGLEF has engendered a notable shift in WMCA's approach, especially in areas like culture, jobs, and skills. Instead of rigid, competitive funding processes, stakeholders noted a more collaborative method to the provision of funding support by for example, engaging local authorities and communities directly and asking how they want to use available resources, rather than making them compete for funding through bureaucratic processes. This has helped foster more constructive partnerships and a more flexible, responsive approach to local needs.

The delivery of grant programmes, such as the Inclusive Communities Grant Programme and the Community Environment Fund, provided stakeholders with valuable insights for future schemes. While

timing emerged as a key consideration, other lessons included strategies for targeted grant allocation, the use of eligibility criteria to manage demand, and approaches to capacity building.

Annex 1: Evaluation questions

Headline evaluation research questions

To what extent has the CWGLEF created economic impacts across the West Midlands through support for business growth, employment, skills, trade, investment, and tourism?

To what extent has the CWGLEF supported increased opportunities for physical activity and improved mental wellbeing, and reduced physical inactivity, particularly within underserved communities?

To what extent has the CWGLEF supported inclusive practice, and enhanced community, creative and cultural participation, including for underserved communities?

To what extent has the CWGLEF contributed to the regional ambition for inclusive growth (as defined by WMCA Inclusive Growth framework) and other social value measures?

To what extent has value for money been considered in programme and project design and delivery across the CWGLEF?

What can we learn from the approach adopted for the CWGLEF and its effect on regional stakeholder / wider community relationships, and in terms of implications for similar future grants and interventions?

Pillar level evaluation research questions

Economy, Trade and Tourism

To what extent has the CWGLEF supported job creation and skills development within the region?

To what extent has the CWGLEF supported business growth including through support for inward investment and existing businesses to the region?

To what extent has the CWGLEF helped to attract major events to the region?

To what extent has the CWLEF helped to attract visitors to the region?

To what extent has the Economy, Trade and Tourism pillar supported increased opportunities for underserved people / communities?

How has the Economy, Trade and Tourism pillar, and the processes used to deliver it, evolved over the life of the programme?

What opportunities, issues and external factors, positively and negatively impacted the delivery of the programmes? Were there any aspects that could have worked better and how?

Inclusive Communities

To what extent has the Inclusive Communities pillar supported increased opportunities for physical activity and improved mental wellbeing, and reduced physical inactivity, particularly within underserved communities?

To what extent has the support enhanced creative and cultural participation, including for underserved communities?

In what ways, and to what extent, has the CWGLEF strengthened community-based sport, culture and other organisations, including through increasing collaboration, skills and capacity across individuals, organisations, and civic organisations?

To what extent has the Social Economy programme supported the development of the social economy sector in terms of increased skills and employment?

How has the Inclusive Communities pillar, and the processes used to deliver it, evolved over the life of the programme?

What opportunities, issues and external factors, positively and negatively impacted the delivery of the programmes? Were there any aspects that could have worked better and how?

What has been WMCA's learning around the delivery of the Inclusive Communities pillar? How can this be applied to future similar programmes?

Culture and Heritage

To what extent has the CWGLEF culture and heritage pillar created relevant experiences for a range of citizens, brought people together and increased social cohesion?

In what ways, and to what extent, has the CWGLEF strengthened the culture and heritage sectors, including through strategic development, participation opportunities, regional partnerships and increasing collaboration, skills and capacity across individuals, organisations, and civic organisations?

To what extent has CWGLEF culture and heritage pillar generated global interest, enhanced the West Midlands reputation abroad, and supported efforts to attract new international partnerships and investment?

What were the processes/approaches used to develop the culture and heritage frameworks, plan and approach?

How has the Culture and Heritage pillar, and the processes used to deliver it, evolved over the life of the programme?

What opportunities, issues and external factors, positively and negatively impacted the delivery of the programmes? Were there any aspects that could have worked better and how?

To what extent has the CWGLEF Culture and Heritage pillar impacted on WMCA's priorities, planning and practice?

Wellbeing and Sustainability

Wellbeing (Sandwell Aquatic Centre)

To what extent has the CWGLEF's support to the SAC enabled increased opportunities for physical activity participation?

To what extent has the support to the SAC supported the local economy through safeguarding and creating jobs and encouraging increased spending in the local area?

Sustainability (Community Environment Fund)

To what extent has the CWGLEF supported new skills and job opportunities for local residents?

To what extent has the CWGLEF created health and wellbeing benefits for local residents?

- ▶ Has it improved their access to good quality green spaces?
- ▶ Has it led to an increased awareness and understanding of the environment?

To what extent has the CWGLEF improved the local environment?

- ▶ Has it led to increased biodiversity and the generation of new habitats?
- ▶ Has it helped contribute towards net zero targets in the region?

How has the Wellbeing and Sustainability pillar, and the processes used to deliver it, evolved over the life of the programme?

What opportunities, issues and external factors, positively and negatively impacted the delivery of the CEF? Were there any aspects that could have worked better and how?

Annex 2: Additional detail on method

Introduction

In line with the meta-evaluation approach, resources were available to undertake some additional evaluation research to complement programmes' and projects' existing monitoring and evaluation plans. The preferred options were identified through discussions with WMCA and responded to anticipated gaps in monitoring and evaluation plans as of September 2024.

Allocation of primary research resources

For the pillar-specific research, resources were weighted towards the Economy, Trade and Tourism and Culture and Heritage pillars given the overall programme budget breakdown and complexity of activities under those pillars. This weighting was also based on consideration of planned M&E work and gaps (see pillar sections below).

General considerations

The development of the preferred options for the primary research was based on the following considerations:

- ▶ The need to reflect specific priorities identified through the initial evaluation workshops and ongoing consultations with programme and project leads.
- ▶ The need to address specific gaps in the evidence based on the mapping of monitoring and evaluation plans and with reference to the evaluation research questions. The primary research did not seek to address gaps related to the timing of evaluations, particularly those scheduled for a later date beyond our reporting period, to avoid duplicating future evaluation efforts. These are highlighted as gaps in the final analysis and reporting that would be addressed through future work.
- ▶ Where evaluations were planned beyond our reporting period, we considered how additional research could help to provide useful early evidence and learning for programmes and in supporting the development of longer-term evaluation approaches.
- ▶ Reference to the general options set out in the evaluation framework, which were categorised as follows: theory-based case studies; stakeholder consultation; and bespoke evaluation pieces.

The following sections describe the preferred options for the primary research.

Cross-cutting evaluation research

Cross-cutting themes (i.e. themes that cut across the pillars) were explored through the review and synthesis of programme and project evaluations. Evidence from the planned monitoring and evaluation work was synthesised around the key headline cross-cutting evaluation questions, as set out in the evaluation framework.

At the level of the overall programme, stakeholder consultations with the WMCA programme management team and SROs were undertaken to address the following cross-cutting process themes:

- ▶ Programme level governance structures
- ▶ Programme level investment and funding processes
- ▶ Alignment with West Midlands strategic priorities

- ▶ Synergies across projects and programmes
- ▶ Lessons for single settlement investment approaches

More detailed sub-themes and questions were developed in specific interview topic guides.

In order to answer the headline evaluation questions as fully as possible, a number of cross-cutting themes emerged as priorities for the primary research. These included the impact of jobs and skills development and volunteering opportunities in deprived areas and the impact of the major events legacy.

These were considered in developing priorities for the primary research at the pillar level and examined through the lens of specific project and programme approaches and in particular by considering how the activities linked to and synergised with other elements of the programme. The cross-cutting themes were examined through specific case studies and consultations focusing on process issues and lessons from delivery.

Pillars – specific considerations and preferred options

Economy, Trade and Tourism (ETT)

Summary of gaps

The mapping of M&E activity suggested that planning for evaluations for the five main programme and project areas under the ETT pillar were at various stages of development. No specific plans were identified for the following programmes and projects:

- ▶ Evidence on the impacts of the **European Athletics Championships 2026 (EAC 26)** investments were unlikely to be available beyond regular progress and monitoring data (i.e. capital investment projects completed and outcomes such as number of jobs created to support the development of Alexander Stadium). It was considered too early to undertake any detailed evaluation work as the specific impacts of the stadium redevelopment and staging of the championships will be realised over the longer-term beyond the timescale for this evaluation.
- ▶ **Mobilising the Plan for Growth** – The scope of planned evaluations is unclear at this stage and any evaluation activity will take place beyond March 2025. The current monitoring activity will provide limited evidence to answer the relevant evaluation research questions.

For two of the significant programme investments, detailed evaluations are planned however results would not be available within the timescale for this overarching evaluation:

- ▶ **Job, Skills and Wellbeing** will be conducting full impact evaluations of the programmes under this project and are in the early planning stages. These were likely to be commissioned towards the end of 2024. The evaluations were therefore beyond the timescales of the overarching evaluation.
- ▶ **Global West Midlands (GWM) Programme** – Full impact evaluations of the GWM programmes were in the early planning stages and would not be available for this evaluation.

For the **Major Events Fund** project, which has links to the GWM Programme, evaluations are planned for all nine events. The only event evaluation which will go beyond the timescales of this evaluation is the Kabaddi event which will have an evaluation post March 2025.

Research options

Based on the above, **four case studies** were completed which included online **in-depth interviews** with key delivery stakeholders and beneficiaries such as businesses who received training/ support and young adults receiving training etc.

Four case studies were completed across the project areas; JS&W – Accelerate, GWP – BATP pipeline development and new inward investment, MEF – SportAccord and MPfG – HGAP & SCT.

- ▶ The JS&W – Accelerate case study interviews focussed on WMCA as the responsible authority for the delivery of the programme and monitoring of Local Authority (LA) initiatives. Led by Sandwell Council, the Accelerate! Programme is the sub-project which was identified by the WMCA as one of furthest along in terms of delivery and would provide a good overview of the types of support programmes that are being delivered through JS&W.
- ▶ The MEF – SportAccord case study interviews were with stakeholders of the project. This was the first event to be delivered under MEF. An evaluation was undertaken after the event however further interviews were undertaken for this evaluation to complement the initial impact assessment findings.
- ▶ The GWP case study interviews focussed on WMGC as the responsible authority for the delivery of the programme and monitoring of local authority initiatives. A few business beneficiaries were also interviewed from various business sectors. The businesses selected engaged the programme earlier, making them more likely to have been influenced by CWGLEF than other funding sources.
- ▶ The MPfG case study focussed on the two primary business support programmes (HGAP & SCT). Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, delivery partners and business beneficiaries (where relevant) for the HGAP and SCT programme given they are furthest along (albeit still at an early stage).

All case study interviews were conducted during December 2024 to January 2025 and reflections on the CWGLEF are as of that period. A total of 28 interviewees participated in the limited number of stakeholder (22 interviewees) and beneficiary (6 interviewees) interviews. There was a mix of individual and group interviews conducted based on feasibility and resource.

Inclusive Communities

Summary of gaps

The mapping of planned M&E activities did not identify any significant gaps in the evidence base. The Inclusive Communities Grant Fund deeper-dive evaluation and the detailed evaluation of the Trailblazers programme both have a good alignment with the evaluation research questions and evidence requirements. Final analysis and reports (including the interim evaluation report for the Trailblazers programme) were completed within the timeframe of this evaluation. The only programme with clearly identified gaps was Social Economy, as no evaluation activity was expected before March 2025.

Research options

Given the limited evaluation activity of the Social Economy work package, a series of consultations was completed with a sample taken from the nine cluster lead organisations and four business support programme leads. The interviews aimed to gain a qualitative perspective on the progress of the programme activities to date including any success stories and/or barriers encountered.

We conducted a further stakeholder interview with the lead overseeing the Social Economy work package to answer the research questions related to the process evaluation.

We also conducted additional stakeholder interviews with those overseeing the Trailblazers work package at United by 2022. The commissioned evaluation team has already undertaken extensive engagement work with the key stakeholder groups, including delivery staff, volunteers, and network/consultancy attendees (those who advised the design and delivery of the programme). To minimise burden on these individuals and to ensure there isn't duplication of efforts, we completed a small number of interviews with key individuals who could specifically reflect on Trailblazers in relation to the opportunities, issues and external factors, positively and negatively that impacted the delivery of the programme (helping to answer research question 19) and the programme's links and synergies with other activities under the wider Inclusive Communities pillar.

Culture and Heritage

Summary of gaps

The mapping of planned programme-level activities identified several significant gaps in the evidence base. The planned programme-level evaluation for the Culture and Heritage (C&H) pillar prioritised quantitative assessment, examining the achievement of objectives, outputs produced, and value for money, while understanding the programme's delivery processes, including promotion, management, governance, and stakeholder engagement, and therefore provided opportunities via this evaluation to evidence learnings and impact beyond a surface-level engagement with C&H activities. Additionally, several activities concluded after a date where their outcomes can be meaningfully incorporated into the overarching evaluation (e.g. the Place Profiler is due for completion in late March 2025).

The other significant gap identified was understanding how the Regional Frameworks were developed and to better understand why WMCA chose to prioritise strategy development, skills development, place-making and infrastructure support, over and above event-led funding. Another aspect not covered in programme-level evaluation plans was whether and how the Regional Frameworks aligned to the various Local Authority cultural strategies also being developed.

The programme-level M&E plans contributed very little in any way to answering the research question *To what extent has the CWGLEF Culture and Heritage pillar impacted on WMCA's priorities, planning and practice?* as there were no initial plans to understand what impact the focus of C&H pillar on strategy development and infrastructure support and training will have had on future Culture & Heritage plans.

Research options

The preferred options as agreed in November 2024 were:

- ▶ **Regional Strategic Frameworks** – a series of qualitative interviews with relevant stakeholders involved in the creation of the Regional Cultural strategy, the Regional Heritage strategy, the Cultural infrastructure plan and the Cultural Sector skills plan. These comprised interviews with project leads and focussed on lessons learned, outcomes, delivery experiences.
- ▶ **LADD Kils** - Key Informant Interviews with each of the seven Local Authorities focussed on overview of outcomes, delivery experiences, suggestions and lessons learned. The interviews were with Local Authority Culture and Heritage leads as well as other key stakeholders identified in discussion with WMCA. These addressed gaps in programme-level M&E plans to the research question *What opportunities, issues and external factors, positively and negatively impacted the delivery of the programmes? Were there any aspects that could have worked better and how?*
- ▶ **WMCA Kils** – Key Informant Interviews with relevant and key WMCA staff. These interviews primarily focussed on C&H pillar delivery staff but also included cross-department staff responsible for decision making and strategic decisions beyond the CWGLEF timeframe. The Qualitative interviews focused on reflections of overseeing the CWGLEF C&H pillar, suggestions and lessons

learned, holistic view of the role of C&H within WMCA, and future C&H plans for the region and WMCA.

- ▶ **Regional Strategic Frameworks vs Local Authority Strategies** – a focussed piece of primary research that considered how aligned the various Local Authority/cultural compact cultural strategies are, as funded through LADD Place-based activity, to the wider strategic cultural strategies being developed simultaneously. This research drew on both the proposed Regional Strategic Frameworks research and the proposed LADD KIIs above and aimed to contribute a better understanding to the research question *In what ways, and to what extent, has the CWGLEF strengthened the culture & heritage sectors, including through strategic development, participation opportunities, regional partnerships and increasing collaboration, skills and capacity across individuals, organisations, and civic organisations?*.
- ▶ **Creative Commission case study** – to explore the impact of ‘Made in Cov’ Creative Programme (running from August to December 2024). ‘Made in Cov’ comprised four area-based commissions focussed on three prioritised geographic clusters of one or more Middle Layer Super Output Areas. Primary research focused on targeted Key informant interviews, both before and after public output, with each commission recipient organisation and their relevant artists, producers, and community leaders. This research was supported by site visits to each commission. This activity is funded through the LADD Creative Commissions.
- ▶ **Place-based activity case study** – to explore the impact of CWGLEF funding on the ongoing place-making work of the Brierley Hill Consortium (based within Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council) to deliver a cultural offer in accordance with their already established Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) model. Primary research focused on targeted Key informant interviews with key members of the Brierley Hill Consortium, as well as with individual artists / project leads for selected projects and with relevant members of the community who have been involved. This research was supported by site visits where the timeline allowed. This activity is funded through the LADD grants and, while primarily sitting in Place-based Activity, also sits within Creative Commissions.

All key informant interviews, including case study interviews, were conducted between November 2024 to January 2025 with only one interview taking place in February 2025. Collected reflections on project activity and the CWGLEF are as of that period. Overall, 72 interviewees participated in 43 stakeholder interviews. There was a mix of individual and group interviews conducted based on feasibility and resource.

Wellbeing and Sustainability pillar

Summary of gaps

The monitoring data requirements for **Sandwell Aquatics Centre** addressed the research questions for the pillar by providing information on engagement with the leisure centre (and therefore physical activity rates) and employment opportunities. There is little that the primary research could add to the data already available given the small and discrete nature of the funding in covering the deficit in energy costs at the leisure centre.

For the **Community Environment Fund (CEF)**, application forms provided some indication of how the CEF will support new skills and job opportunities for local residents, create health and wellbeing benefits and improve the local environment. This was supplemented by data collected by the CEF project manager who will visit grantees to check what data they are collecting and how they are progressing towards those outcomes. This information was collated into an interim report, available for use in our evaluation. However, it is likely that many outcomes will take time to realise, and it will be too soon to assess the extent to which the CEF has contributed to these outcomes. An external evaluation to

formally assess progress towards outputs and short-term outcomes is planned by WMCA but will not take place in time to incorporate into our evaluation.

Current plans do not address process lessons from the development and implementation of the CEF. It was useful to understand how the Fund and the processes used to deliver it evolved over the life of the programme and since the Community Green Grants (CGG) programme which this fund has built on.

Research options

The agreed options were:

- ▶ An in-depth interview (lasting 60-90 minutes) with the Community Environment Fund programme manager and grant officer to allow reflections on the process lessons from programme delivery so far and to provide anecdotal evidence on progress towards outcomes reported by funded projects during recent visits. Interviews also addressed broader or unintended outcomes of the fund, such as how the CEF has worked with and influenced wider community relationships.
- ▶ Attendance at networking sessions to examine particular lessons around communications and grant management processes.