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Evaluation of the Gwynedd Town Centres SPF Programme



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Funded by
UK Government

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Date of document: Draft 20/02/2025

Version: Final

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1. Introduction

The Gwynedd Town Centre Scheme is a £1.91m scheme aiming to support the revitalisation of town centres across Gwynedd, linking to the Communities and Place investment priority of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The scheme funded activities relating to public art and environmental improvements, street furniture, enhanced signage, enhanced community safety, pop-up shops, marketing and campaigns, and a number of feasibility studies to support potential projects that could enliven town centres.

The programme responds to the significant challenges facing town centres and high streets struggling to attract footfall in Gwynedd, leading to empty premises, worsening town centre fabric and ultimately making centres less vibrant and reducing pride in place. These trends stem from a range of factors, including longer term trends of the growth of online and out-of-town retail, but also more recent challenges including cost of living increases and the longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on consumer behaviours.

Wavehill was appointed to undertake an evaluation of the programme covering progress against targets, process review and analysis of impacts generated by the investments. This report is the final evaluation of the programme.

1.1 Evaluation Aims and Questions

The evaluation sets out to test the relevance and appropriateness of programme design, performance against targets, effectiveness of management and programme impacts. A series of more detailed evaluation questions are set out for the study in the table below.

Table 1-1: Evaluation Questions

| Topic | Evaluation Question |
|---|---|
| Relevance and Appropriateness of Programme Design | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Did the programme respond to clear socio-economic challenges facing the area?• Were the programme and individual projects well designed to address those challenges?• How were decisions made about programme design?• Did the programme or individual projects change design over the course of delivery? If so, why, and did that affect their ability to respond to the programme aims?• Did any aspects of the delivery context change over the course of delivery? If so, how did that affect programme relevance and appropriateness? |
| Performance Against Targets | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did the programme perform against its spend targets?• What progress did the project make towards the achievement of its output and outcome indicators?• What factors explain variations, including under- or over-performance against contracted targets? |

| Topic | Evaluation Question |
|----------------------|--|
| Programme Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How were the individual projects delivered? • How effective was the delivery approach for each project? • What worked well or less well in project delivery? • What were the decision-making processes structures for the programme? • How effectively did these structures and mechanisms work? • How are delivery, spend and impact achievements measured, monitored and evaluated? |
| Programme Impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What outcomes and impacts has, or will the programme deliver? • To what extent has the programme delivered against its original objectives? • What wider added value has the programme generated? • What, if any, unexpected or unintended outcomes or impacts have occurred? |

1.2 Evaluation Approach

The evaluation has involved the following key tasks:

- Review of background documents for the programme, including the original business case and key delivery documents.
- Analysis of programme management information, including spend and output data.
- Surveying 11 project leads to gather insights on their experience of delivery and impacts of the investments (representing over two thirds of the 16 lead individuals delivering projects funded through this programme).
- Surveying 12 other key stakeholders, including representatives from town and county councils and other delivery partners, to capture their perspectives on programme delivery and impacts.
- Undertaking three more detailed case studies with funded projects to get more detailed insights around early impacts generated by these investments.

2. Programme Description

This section sets out an overview of the Gwynedd Town Centres programme, covering a summary of the original need and rationale for the project, aims and objectives, inputs, activities delivered, output and outcome performance indicators, and the ultimate outcomes the project is seeking to achieve.

2.1 Need and Rationale for the Programme

The key need and rationale underpinning the project's design included the following:

- **Town centres and high streets struggling to attract footfall in Gwynedd.** The challenges facing high streets and town centres in Gwynedd mirror those across the UK, with out of-town and internet shopping, as well as the impacts of cost-of-living increases and the longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on consumer behaviours, all contributing to more challenging conditions, and leading to reduced footfall.
- **Quality of town centre spaces declining, further adding to challenges.** In many cases the reductions in footfall mean reductions in investments in public realm and increases in empty premises. Ultimately this can lead to reduced quality environments and reduced pride in place.
- **Town Centre Regeneration is one of the priorities of the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-28.** Sitting beneath this is a Gwynedd Regeneration Framework and 13 Area Plans, which identify individual priorities for each area. Across all plans is a common need for investment to regenerate town centres, which provides a key driver for this programme.
- **Need to find new uses in town centres and high streets.** This investment is needed to help transform and re-purpose new uses for town centres and high streets, to increase footfall, vibrancy and pride in place again. The aim of the programme investment (alongside wider activities) is to upgrade infrastructure and fabric and encourage prospective investors and users to bring new activities, which could include education, health, the arts, attractions, recreation, events, employment or living space. Cyngor Gwynedd recognise that any investments resulting from these improvements will lead to bringing empty buildings back into use, creating jobs and bring vibrancy back to town centres.
- **Investments will bring wider benefits contributing to Cyngor Gwynedd priorities.** As well as the regeneration benefits, the plans will be delivered on a cross-departmental basis, such that they also add value to other priorities within the Council Plan, such as the Clean and Tidy Communities theme and the Promoting our Culture Plan and the Sustainable Visitor Economy.

2.2 Programme Aims

The key aims of the programme are to:

- Enhancing the quality of the public realms in Gwynedd town centres and high streets
- Increase perceptions of safety in these spaces
- Support the development of new uses and users of town centre and high street spaces
- Attracting greater footfall and spend in these spaces.

2.3 Inputs

The Gwynedd Town Centre Scheme is a £1.91m scheme, funded primarily through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (£1.86m) alongside £45,654 match funding from the Welsh Government Transforming Towns Programme. Overall management and delivery of the programme was led by Cyngor Gwynedd.

2.4 Activities Delivered

The programme overall originally comprised a package of 18 projects to be supported. Over time some of these projects were identified as unable to go ahead, with funds reallocated to other viable projects that were brought forward. The projects and status, as well as the original and latest funding allocations are summarised in the table below.

Table 2-1: Summary of Activities Delivered

| Project Name | Original Value (£k) | Latest Value (£k) | Description and Status |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--|
| Original Projects | | | |
| 1. Prynu'n Lleol | 45.0 | 39.8 | A county campaign to encourage residents of Gwynedd and beyond to spend in the local area through specific online campaigns and using social media. The foundation of this work is already in place by Cyngor Gwynedd. Status: Complete |
| 2. Bangor Signage Scheme | 25.6 | 27.2 | Development, production and installation of 'finger post' signs in Bangor City Centre in accordance with the Bangor Signage Strategy Status: Complete |
| 3. Community Safety Plan | 456.3 | 456.3 | Installing Closed Circuit Television in Bangor City Centre, Caernarfon town centre and Pwllheli town centre together with ensuring improvements to the lighting poles will enable the equipment to be installed in order to improve the safety of these towns Status: Live |

| Project Name | Original Value (£k) | Latest Value (£k) | Description and Status |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|--|
| Original Projects | | | |
| 4. Bangor Health and Wellbeing Centre Economic Impact Study | 15.0 | 26.0 | Commissioning a Health and Wellbeing Centre Economic Impact Study for the Menai Centre site in Bangor. Status: Complete |
| 5. Pen Llyn Area Feasibility Study, Caernarfon | 70.0 | - | In the wake of the development and opening of the Caernarfon Bypass, a commissioning and study which looks at the feasibility and options for the Pen Llyn area, Caernarfon and that focuses specifically on the viaduct and the car park Status: Not taken Forward |
| 6. Cei Llechi Feasibility Study | 60.0 | 47.0 | Commissioning and study which looks at the feasibility and options for the Cei Llechi area, Caernarfon Status: Live |
| 7. Pendeitch Feasibility Study | 20.0 | - | Commissioning and study looking at feasibility and options for the Pendeitch Gallery Building Caernarfon. Status: Not taken Forward |
| 8. North Quay | 175.0 | 284.6 | Environmental and visual improvements to the link between Pwllheli town centre and Glan Don along North Quay Status: Live |
| 9. Tŷ Siamas | 19.4 | 19.4 | Upgrading the Tŷ Siamas building, Dolgellau in accordance with the application submitted to the SPF Regeneration Fund Status: Complete |
| 10. Llewyrch o'r Llechi 2 | 525.0 | 525.0 | A scheme which includes art commissions, signage schemes and small infrastructure in the town centre of Tywyn, Porthmadog and Penygroes to add value to the work that will be done in the town centre of Llanberis, Bethesda and Blaenau Ffestiniog as a result of investment Bro Prosperity Fund Status: Live |
| 11. Maes Cricieth Plan | 33.6 | 60.0 | Environmental improvements to Maes Cricieth Status: Complete |
| 12. County Bins and Benches Upgrading Scheme | 66.0 | 67.0 | Upgrading the provisions of bins and benches across the main towns of the County offering innovative provision in some places Status: Complete |
| 13. Vinyl Plan | 50.0 | 18.0 | Develop and implement a plan to install vinyl in vacant properties in Gwynedd town centres Status: Complete |
| 14. Pop - Up Shop Plan | 50.0 | - | Develop and implement a plan to establish a pop-up shop plan in Bangor city center in conjunction with the University / Coleg Llandrillo Menai Status: Not taken Forward |

| Project Name | Original Value (£k) | Latest Value (£k) | Description and Status |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---|
| Original Projects | | | |
| 15. Eisteddfod Area Vinyl Plan | 8.0 | 8.0 | Develop and implement a plan to install vinyl in vacant properties in the town centers of the Llŷn and Eifionydd Eisteddfod area Status: Complete |
| 16. Art Scheme | 100.0 | 80.0 | Develop and implement an art scheme in the town centre of Gwynedd Status: Live |
| 17. Research Study | 3.0 | 3.0 | Commissioning and study which looks at the baseline and data for the town centres of Gwynedd Status: Complete |
| 18. Project Manager Costs | 75.0 | 62.5 | Appoint a Project Manager to coordinate the work. Status: Live |
| Additional Projects | | | |
| 19. Caernarfon signage | - | 15.0 | Commissioning a pedestrian signage strategy for Caernarfon Town Status: Complete |
| 20. Porthmadog Centre | - | 10.0 | Commission an architect to develop new designs and costing for the Centre, which could increase the use of the centre if designs could be implemented in the future. Status: Complete |
| 21. Bro Tegid Centre | - | 64.5 | Upgrading Bro Tegid Centre building, Bala in accordance with the application submitted to the SPF Regeneration Fund Status: Complete |
| 22. Caernarfon and Bangor Bollards | - | 1.2 | Upgrade some of the road safety bollard in Caernarfon and Bangor Status: Complete |
| 23. Bangor Biblical Wall | - | 20.0 | Upgrade the wall surrounding the Bangor Biblical Garden in Bangor Status: Complete |
| 24. Llanberis infrastructure | - | 30.0 | Improve infrastructure for events in Llanberis Status: Live |
| Total | 1,797 | 1,865 | |

Note: Against the budget of £1.91m, this leaves a remaining £0.05m still to be allocated.

2.5 Output and Outcome Indicators

The project set out four output indicators and three outcome indicators as set out in the table below.

| Intervention Category | Indicator | Target |
|--|--|--------|
| Outputs | | |
| W1: Improvements to Town Centres and the High Street | Number of projects completed successfully | 22 |
| | Number of amenities/conveniences created or improved | 2 |
| | Number of feasibility studies developed as part of support | 4 |
| W8: Funding to develop and promote wider campaigns and experiences which entice people to visit the area | Number of people reached | 10,000 |
| Outcomes | | |
| W1: Improvements to Town Centres and the High Street | Better perception of amenities/conveniences | 200 |
| | Better perception of safety | 300 |
| W8: Funding to develop and promote wider campaigns and experiences which entice people to visit the area | Increase number of visitors | 10,000 |

2.6 Intended Impacts

Key impact indicators that the programme will eventually seek to impact positively on include the following:

- Enhance the quality of place in town centres and high streets
- Reduce numbers of vacant premises in town centres and high streets
- Reduced crime and anti-social behaviour in town centres and high streets
- Increased feeling of safety in town centres and high streets
- Increased footfall in town centres and high streets
- Enhance community pride in place in town centres and high streets
- Increased local spend in town centres and high streets
- New private and public investments made in town centres and high streets.

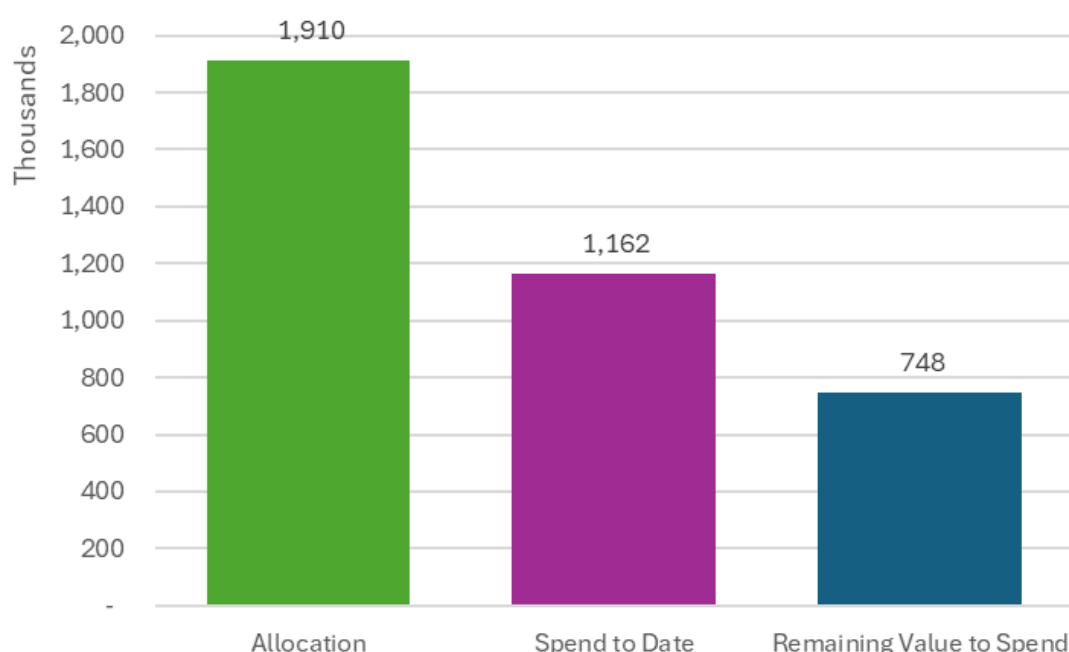
3. Programme Performance

This section outlines the expenditure and output / outcome performance targets and what has been achieved at the time of this evaluation at an overall programme and individual project level. This takes data up to January 2025.

3.1 Performance against Spend Targets

The charts below outline overall programme performance up to January 2025. This shows that against a current programme value of £1.91m, a total of 61% of expenditure (£1.16m) has been utilised to date. The remaining £0.75m is expected to be utilised over the remaining delivery period through to the end of February 2025.

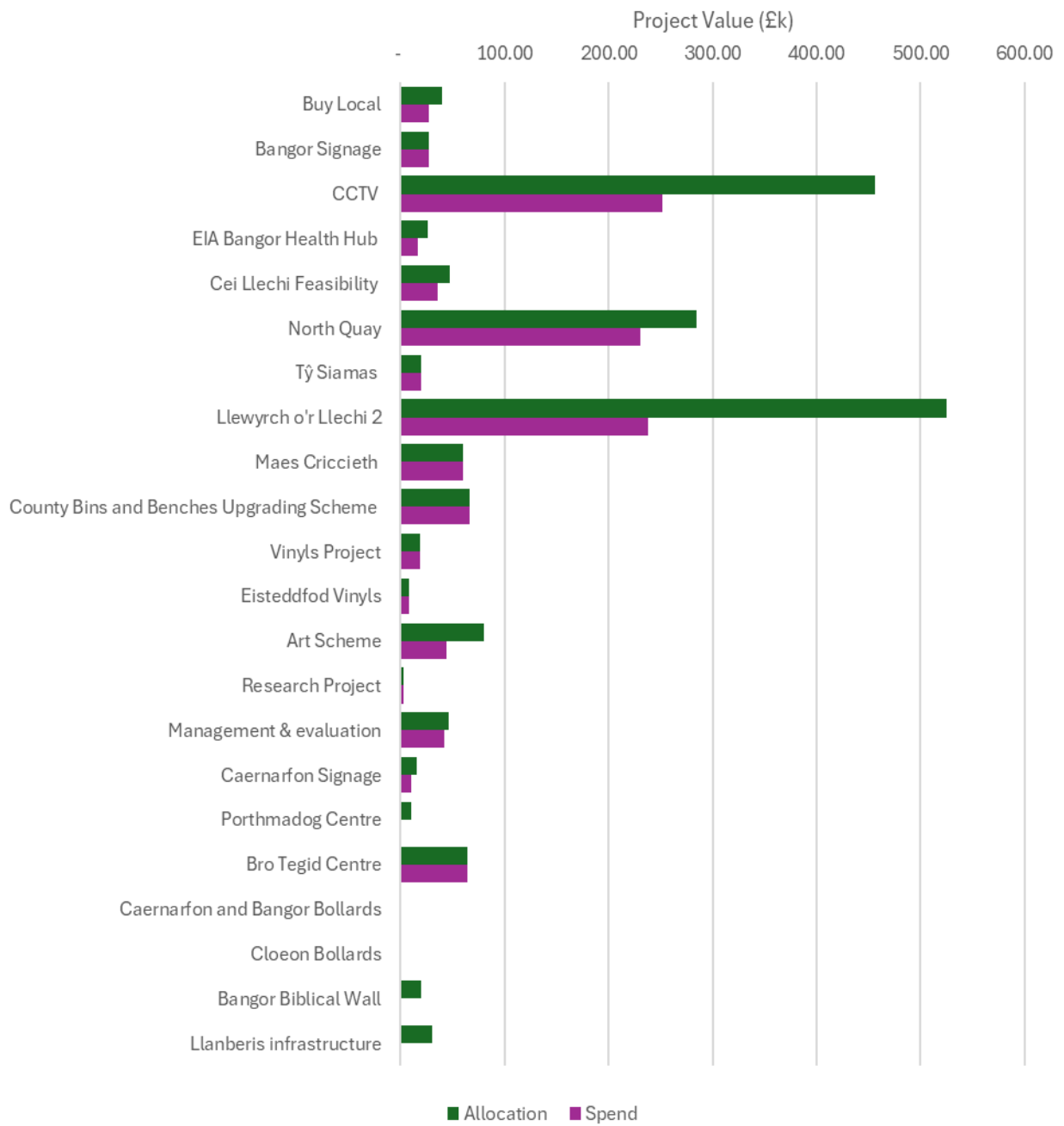
Figure 3-1: Overview of Programme Spend against Targets



The subsequent chart below breaks this down at an individual project level (note projects that were discontinued are not shown on this chart). This highlights that many of the new projects (towards the bottom of the chart) are not yet showing as having incurred any expenditure, these are mostly relatively small-scale projects and thus completing that expenditure in the remaining timescales appears feasible.

The two largest projects where there is still significant outstanding expenditure are the CCTV and Llewyrch o’r Llechi 2 projects. For both projects there is still over 200k still to be utilised on these projects by the end of February 2025. Nevertheless, in discussions with Cyngor Gwynedd, we understand that it is still fully expected that these and other projects will fully utilise funding by the end of the delivery period.

Figure 3-2: Overview of Project Level Spend to date against Targets



3.2 Performance against Output & Outcome Targets

The programme established a relatively tight set of outputs and outcome targets for the programme. An overview of these targets and progress against them is provided in the table below.

Table 3-1: Summary of Progress against Output and Outcome Targets

| Indicator | Target | Actual To Date | Expected by Programme End | Description |
|--|--------|----------------|---------------------------|--|
| Outputs | | | | |
| Number of projects completed successfully | 22 | 14 | 27 | The programme remains on track to achieve this |
| Number of amenities/conveniences created or improved | 2 | 4 | 5 | Tŷ Siamas, Maes Criccieth, Canolfan Bro Tegid and the Crazy Golf (Part of the Llewyrch o'r Llechi 2 scheme) have met the output indicator, and the Cei'r Gogledd projects is on track to be finished. |
| Number of feasibility studies developed as part of support | 4 | 7 | 11 | The projects supporting Bangor Health and Wellbeing Centre Economic Impact Study, 2x Cei Llechi Feasibility Study, Concept designs for Cei'r Gogledd Pwllheli, Caernarfon Signage Strategy, Designs for Porthmadog Centre, Research Report and the Signage Strategy for Penygroes, Porthmadog and Towyn (as part of the Llewyrch i'r Llechi 2 scheme) are considered to have contributed to this indicator. Two other projects: Pen Llyn Area Feasibility Study and Pendeitch Feasibility Study were originally planned but were not taken forward |
| Number of people reached | 10,000 | 100,300 | | This relates to numbers of people reached by campaigns and marketing especially in relation to the Prynu'n Lleol project. It should be noted however that the indicator definition is 'Number of people directly impacted by the UKSPF intervention', which is not a very clearly defined indicator in the instance of a marketing campaign. |

| Indicator | Target | Actual To Date | Expected by Programme End | Description |
|---|--------|----------------|---------------------------|---|
| Outcomes | | | | |
| Better perception of amenities/conveniences | 200 | 725 | | For this indicator, Cyngor Gwynedd has retrospectively sought to gather feedback on perceptions of projects and their impacts on town centres in Penrhyndeudraeth, Bangor, Caernarfon and Bala, where 725 people noted that the Vinyls, Bangor Signage and Bala Mural had provided an increased perception of the towns' amenities. The survey questions were distributed through the local authority website and social media. Note: these findings do not fully meet the indicator description which suggests those individuals needed to report that the amenities were good / very good as well as improved, which the survey did not collect information on. Furthermore, a significant proportion of respondents also indicated there had not been improvements in amenities. |
| Better perception of safety | 300 | unknown | | This indicator related to changes in peoples feeling of safety, however was not captured. |
| Increase number of visitors | 10,000 | unknown | | This indicator related to numbers of additional visitors attracted linked to campaigns and marketing, however no baseline or actual visitor numbers have been collected as part of the programme. |

While capturing output and outcome targets for this type of intervention can be challenging (particular for outcomes where there can be a lag between projects completing and the outcomes being realised), there are some important lessons to take from this programme with respect to these indicators:

- **Clarity on what the programme will deliver** – ideally the output and outcome indicators should be selected based on the most important things the programme will deliver. Although not everything can be quantified in a target, the targets should give a clear sense of what the programme has achieved. The existing indicators could for example have been supplemented with an indicator around number of town centres or high streets with enhanced public realm, which would capture a key output of what the funding has delivered.

- **Setting indicators where it is clear what is being measured** - the outcome indicators around better perceptions are an example where the meaning of the indicator could have been made clearer in relation to this project.
- **Planning for how the required data will be captured** – in the case of better perception of safety and increased number of visitors, the programme had not set out at the outset how these would be measured, and so these figures were not tracked over time, meaning data on these indicators has not been available for the evaluation.
- **Planning in advance to capture baseline evidence before the project activities begin, where needed** – linked to the points above, in the case of several indicators, as well as defining how indicators will be measured and putting in place monitoring approaches throughout delivery, some of the indicators require baseline data, in order that changes can be analysed pre and post intervention, which was not done for this programme.

4. Programme Management and Delivery

This section of the report sets out a summary of key aspects of management and delivery including overview of project and programme design, delivery of individual projects and what worked well or less well, programme management and monitoring.

The analysis draws on desk-based review by the evaluation team, alongside engagement with individual project leads and wider stakeholders, including town councils, property owners involved in funded projects and delivery partners for the projects.

4.1 Programme and Project Design

On the whole the suite of funded projects has strongly aligned with the original identified rationale and need for the programme. The rationale, as set out in Section 2, outlined aims to address declining footfall, spend, vibrancy and pride in town centres and high streets through new events/activities, enhanced public realm and safer space, and new premises investment.

The nature of supported projects strongly aligned with those aims, for example:

- **More attractive and safer public spaces** – such as the Bangor CCTV investment, Pwllheli North Quay environmental and visual enhancement project and Llewyrch o'r Llechi 2 funding art commissions and signage in Tywyn, Porthmadog and Penygroes.
- **Actions aimed at attracting and enabling new investment** – such as feasibility studies for the Bangor city centre Health and Wellbeing Centre, and Cei Llechi – analysing investment possibilities for an area of Caernarfon.
- **Attracting new visitors and spend** – such as the Prynu'n Lleol buy local marketing campaign.

Out of the eleven project leads surveyed for the evaluation, all indicated that the projects had delivered what had been originally planned: seven indicating this was the case 'to a great extent' and four stating this was the case 'to some extent', reflecting that some aspects of the original plans might have altered partially.

Across the suite of funded projects there were some changes to activities, including adjusted budgets on some projects, some projects which could not be taken forward, and others that were brought forward to utilise underspend created by those withdrawn. The status of each project is outlined in Section 3. Given the range of projects funded, a degree of adjustment would be expected over the course of delivery, and the review of replacement projects indicates the programme continued to fund projects which were well aligned to the needs and rationale for the programme.

4.2 Delivery of Projects

Feedback from project delivery leads and other stakeholders involved in project delivery reveal a range of common factors that were important to effective project delivery for town centre regeneration projects – in some cases these reflect factors that were broadly positive for this programme, and in other cases reflect areas where approaches could have been strengthened.

- **Delivery timescales were challenging for several projects.** More than half of project leads surveyed noted that delivery timescales were a challenge for their projects, particularly noting early delays in approval. Across different projects, delivery leads highlighted that timescales needed to factor in community and stakeholder consultations, developing partner agreements, recruitment and procurement processes, as well as design and delivery of projects. While projects were on the whole able to find ways to achieve delivery within timescales, this sometimes meant bringing in additional resources or reducing some aspects of consultation / engagement.
- **Community engagement and local stakeholder consultations were very important.** Most project leads highlighted the importance of community and key local stakeholder engagement in design and delivery of projects of this nature. As noted above, where this was reduced because of time pressures, this was not ideal for optimising project delivery.
- **Engaging certain stakeholders could be challenging.** While many projects highlighted great value secured through engaging local communities and stakeholders in project design and delivery, for some projects, additional challenges of engaging certain stakeholders was a challenge to effective delivery. This was particularly relevant for projects seeking to work with private building owners, where they were not always possible to reach or engage. In some cases failure to contact these individuals curtailed activities that could be delivered on the project, for example with the Vinyls project.
- **Incorporating technical expertise was important for several projects.** While not necessary for every project, for many of the projects the involvement of externally procured organisations bringing particular expertise relevant to the project was particularly important, and could add significant value to design as well as delivery, if brought in at a sufficiently early stage.
- **Cost inflation was a challenge for some projects.** Three of the project leads particularly noted that increases in costs from initial funding bid to approval and delivery stages affected their projects. Where this was the case, adjustments had to be made to project deliverables or seeking additional funding to address the shortfall.

- **Planning for long term sustainability was recognised as highly important.** All projects were required to have clear exit strategies, typically involving maintenance agreements signed by a lead organisation. This will be critical to ensuring longer term benefits can be generated by the funded projects.

4.3 Programme Management

On the whole, the feedback on management of the programme by Cyngor Gwynedd was very positive, from both project delivery leads and wider stakeholders engaged with the programme.

As part of the early phases of delivery, project applicants were required to submit applications forms for the funding, which went through a scrutiny and approvals process – assessing quality of the proposals and fit to local needs, before funding was awarded to the successful projects.

There were some concerns raised by stakeholders regarding this process, with some noting that they felt the length of application forms and amount of information was too great, and others highlighting that the time taken between submitting applications and receiving approvals was too long. A number did acknowledge however that delays in the early stages were largely related to delays in initial funding approval, linked back to decisions at national Government level.

Beyond this early stage however, stakeholders were broadly very positive about Cyngor Gwynedd's role in managing the programme, with seven out of the 11 project delivery leads specifically noting strong communications on an ongoing basis from Cyngor Gwynedd about the programme, and some also noting feeling that the support from the programme management team was strong.

4.4 Programme Monitoring

As part of the programme requirements for the funding, Cyngor Gwynedd were required to provide update reports on the programme back to the main fund team, and so in turn required monitoring updates from individual projects. In feedback from project delivery leads, a small number of respondents highlighted a feeling that the requirements for monitoring and reporting were too great and were taking time away from delivery. As a requirement from funders though, there may be limitations in the potential to reduce that administrative requirement.

More broadly on capturing key output and outcome indicators for the programme, there was a limited set of measurables, and the programme delivery team did not put approaches in place to ensure measurement of these indicators at an early stage, meaning data for several of these indicators is not available. Further details on this are set out in Section 3.

5. Programme Impacts

This section sets out a summary of evidence of impacts delivered by the programme to date. The nature of town centre regeneration projects is often that the types of impacts they can generate may not occur immediately after, and so in many cases, it is only intermediate outcomes and more qualitative and anecdotal impacts that can be captured at this stage.

The analysis draws on insights from project delivery leads and wider delivery stakeholders, as well as evidence from deeper dive case studies involving further interviews with project partners for four of the key funded projects.

In the sections below we have split the analysis of impacts into three main sections – the first covering early impacts experienced, the second focused on evidence for longer term impacts, and the third covering wider impacts achieved by the programme. The four case studies are then set out at the end of this section.

5.1 Evidence of Early Impacts

Evidence gathered from the supported projects has highlighted the following early impacts witnessed:

- **More attractive town centres.** Several of the funded projects supported enhanced attractiveness of town centres and high streets, through investments such as public realm improvements, enhanced signage and new murals. Four out of the 11 project delivery leads surveyed particularly noted this as a key early impact of schemes.
- **Increased feeling of safety.** This was noted most significantly in the case of the new CCTV installed in Bangor city centre, where the delivery lead noted that anecdotal feedback from businesses and the public had been positive about enhanced feelings of safety.
- **Enhanced digital accessibility.** Mainly associated with one project that involved introducing new benches to the town centre which incorporated wifi connectivity, bringing enhanced digital accessibility within the town centre.
- **Increased footfall.** Connected to all of the above, as well as through projects that encouraged new activities in town centres, such as the investment to support Crazy Golf in Porthmadog, a key ultimate aim is to support footfall growth and increased vibrancy in town centres and high streets. In many areas the impact of town centre enhancements can take time to translate to increased visits and footfall, and where there are footfall counters, there has not always been sufficient time passed to capture changes with these. However, at this stage there is anecdotal evidence of this beginning to be seen, for example in Bangor City Centre, where project delivery leads have reported beginning to see an upturn in footfall and new business activity over the last year, linked both to projects supported under this programme, but also in combination with wider investments, linked to the area regeneration plan.

- **Enhanced community pride and wellbeing.** Again, linked to the enhanced attractiveness and vibrancy of the centre, an ultimate outcome of the programmes was to support enhanced pride and wellbeing for local people connected with their town centres and high streets. Again, at this stage, there is anecdotal evidence that the interventions are translating through to this feeling, for example project stakeholders involved with mural schemes cited examples of town centre users stopping to engage with the delivery team and comment on the attractiveness of the new art work and express feelings of pride in these enhancements.

5.2 Evidence of Longer-Term Impacts

A significant observation made by a number of consultees was the recognition that the scale of interventions under this programme were relatively small, compared against the substantial challenge of declining town centres and high streets, which is a major challenge across all of Wales and the wider UK and affected by much larger economic and cultural factors. There is therefore a risk that a series of small and potentially disparate projects could fail to make a significant difference given the scale of challenge facing town centres and high streets.

There are a number of factors however which indicate the potential for the interventions under this programme to contribute to longer term and more substantial impacts, including the following.

- **Substantial infrastructure investments.** Some of the interventions made represent substantial longer-term investments that can make a notable difference to quality of town centres and high streets. The investments in CCTV in Bangor city centre (£456k), and the enhancements to North Quay in Pwllheli (£285k) represent important examples of these.
- **Feasibility studies that can enable larger investments.** The challenge of finding new and innovative ways to enliven high streets and town centres can be challenging, and take time, as well as detailed research and planning, to develop sustainable facilities and service offerings. Where this funding has been used to move forward potentially important new facilities, such as the feasibility analysis around the Bangor Health and Wellbeing Centre, this has significant potential to have a substantial impact, should that facility eventually move forward, partly enabled by the work supported by this programme.
- **Contribution to larger regeneration strategies.** Cyngor Gwynedd has invested significantly in work to develop strategic regeneration plans for areas across the county which highlight priority activities for investment that can complement one another and add greatest value in addressing and reversing decline in town centres and high streets. Where funded interventions are closely tied to those plans, they are likely to have greatest strategic impacts. The Bangor signage case study below is an example where the signage itself may be unlikely to significantly reverse negative footfall trends, but alongside a range of other interventions in the city centre, project

leads have identified that some of those trends around footfall and business activities are starting to reverse and grow again.

- **Developing connections between local authorities and town centre building owners.** Given the importance of finding uses for vacant building in town centres and high streets to enhance vibrancy and reduce perceptions of decline, some stakeholders noted the importance of small-scale schemes such as the Vinyls projects in creating new connections between property owners and local authorities or other partners. While having a smaller direct effect, the benefit of initiating or enhancing those relationships could have a more significant longer-term effect.
- **Activating communities and engaging them more in town centre development.** Similarly to the point above, the engagement of community groups in supporting town centre vibrancy can have a highly significant effect, so even relatively modest funding that better engages and stimulates activity of community groups in developing and delivering projects, events and activities that enliven and enhance the environment of a town centre or high street, can lead to more significant longer-term benefits.

5.3 Wider Benefits of the Programme

Beyond the core delivery impacts, the evaluation highlighted a range of wider benefits generated through the funded projects, including the following.

- **Development of Community Group Engagement and Project Work.** A number of project stakeholders noted that the projects have encouraged more people in the community to get involved, supported enhanced community cohesion and created potential for more of those from the community to engage with future projects.
- **Engagement and Enhanced Wellbeing of Volunteers.** A number of projects involved volunteer inputs, creating the potential for individuals to learn new skills, meet new people and gain satisfaction from working on local projects. Work on some of the town centre murals was an example where volunteers were involved in painting the mural, including young people and adults with disabilities, and through feedback to the delivery teams indicated that painting the mural contributed positively to their well-being.

5.4 Impact Case Studies

Case Study: Bangor Signage

Project Overview:

The £27,000 project involved development, production and installation of 24 'finger post' signs in Bangor City Centre in accordance with the Bangor Signage Strategy which was developed as part of the Bangor Masterplan.

Delivery:

- **Appointing Contractor** - After some early tendering challenges, an experienced company was successfully appointed to manufacture and install the finger posts at agreed locations in the city centre. One lesson was that a company with more experience with Welsh place names could have been beneficial.
- **Stakeholder Collaboration** between Cyngor Gwynedd and Bangor City Council was strong, with good communication and clarity on respective responsibilities. Bringing the relevant stakeholders together early was seen as an important positive aspect of the approach.
- **In the short term** the enhanced signage boosted the attractiveness of the city centre, helping people to navigate the city and encouraging people to walk around the city more - with sign posts stating the travel time on foot, improving awareness of accessibility on foot.
- **In the medium term** this connects well with wider activity around a tourism strategy for the city, being developed with North Wales Tourism, and will boost visitor economy activity by providing important wayfinding for visitors.
- **In the longer term**, the project team recognise that this needs to be part of a wider strategy to enhance the centre, to attract more visitors and increase vibrancy. This project complements wider work such as development of a new city map, funds for building improvements and a deep clean of the high street. Each has contributed to making the city centre more attractive, and there are early signs of an uplift in footfall and new businesses starting up.

Case Study: Bangor Mural

Project Overview:

The project commissioned artist Jess Bala to work with the community and paint a mural at the end of the Gable wall of the Annedd Ni building. The Anheddhau's activity centre, Annedd Ni, is a not for profit, charitable organisation which empowers adults with support needs.

Delivery:

- **Appointing the Artist:** Following expressed interest of a mural in Bangor's town centre by Bangor City Council, the community were consulted about the style and content of the mural. The mural brief was then drafted to be commissioned through Creative Gwynedd. This involved a scoring panel with representatives from Cyngor Gwynedd, Bangor City Council, and the Annedd Ni building owners which subsequently chose the artist, Jess Bala. Good communication between the Councils and relevant stakeholders mean project coordination was smooth.
- **Community Consultation:** A series of workshops were organised between the community, the Anheddau charity and Jess Bala to get a better understanding of what community members wanted the mural to be like. This was a strong element of the project as it ensured that local people were involved practically within the project and a collaborative approach to delivery was taken. However, tight timescales for planning workshops meant that attendance was relatively limited. With more time the project would have liked to have engaged more widely to consult on the project idea.

Impacts:

- **In the short term** the mural improved the appearance of the town, raised sense of pride in the community and raised awareness of the culture and history of the area.
- **In the medium term** the mural has sparked an interest in community art, therefore if there is more funding, there is likely to be more demand for more community art projects such as other murals in the town.
- **In the long term** the mural has the potential to attract more visitors into the town through the promotion of the area's cultural and historical attractions including the slate heritage and the Cathedral.

Case Study: Crazy Golf

Project Overview:

Due to the Golff Giamocs site being very run down and in need of renovation, the project involved regeneration of the Golff Giamocs site to enhance the site and add interest to the park so that it could be utilised properly by the residents and visitors of Porthmadog.

Delivery:

- **Communication between staff at Cyngor Gwynedd and delivery partners** was effective which meant that the site renovation brief was understood clearly and as a result, the tendering process went smoothly, with everything being costed correctly. This also meant that the budget was met, and everything was completed on time.
- **Ability to add extra elements to the project:** Due to there being no extra costs or delays to the project, the delivery team were able to add extra elements to complement the project. These included a website for the golf site as well as information boards and banners explaining the history of Porthmadog and its role in the slate industry.

Impacts:

- **In the short term** it has improved Porthmadog's town centre visually, given residents and visitors an additional activity to do and raised awareness about the culture and heritage of the area through the information boards and banners around the golf site.
- **In the medium term** the enhanced visual appeal of the Porthmadog's community infrastructure and increased cultural and historical awareness of the town can enhance community pride.
- **In the long-term** stakeholders recognise that there may be a change in the perception of Porthmadog among residents and visitors, potentially supporting an increase in visitor numbers to the town.

6. Conclusions & Lessons

This section draws together the key findings from the evaluation, focused around the four main evaluation question topics: relevance and appropriateness of programme design, performance against targets, programme management and delivery, and programme impacts. A series of lessons to take from the evaluation that can be useful for future interventions is set out at the end.

6.1 Conclusions

Relevance and Appropriateness of Programme Design

Town centres and high streets in Gwynedd, as across Wales and the rest of the UK, are facing major challenges of falling footfall, declining town centre environments and reduced vibrancy and pride in places. Regeneration of these town centres is one of the priorities of the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan, and underneath that, of the Gwynedd Regeneration Framework and 13 Area Plans. The need for investment to deliver these plans underpins the rationale for this UKSPF-funded programme.

The evaluation has found that the projects funded under this programme have strong alignment with the identified need and rationale, most notably supporting interventions to create more attractive and safer public spaces, attracting and enabling new investment, and attracting new visitors and spend.

Overall, the programme has remained highly relevant and appropriate to the identified needs. Changes to the suite of funded projects has only arisen where costings of certain projects have changed, or certain projects have been identified as unfeasible, therefore creating available budget for alternative schemes to come forward.

Performance Against Targets

The scheme has a total budget of £1.91m of which £1.86m (97%) was from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. **By mid-January 2025 (the timing of this evaluation report), 61% of that funding (£1.16m) had been spent**, with £0.75m remaining to be spent. While this leaves a significant value left to spend in the remaining delivery through to the end of February 2025, **the client anticipates that the programme will meet this total spend value in that remaining period.**

The main output targets for the programme are relatively straightforward and relate to the numbers of projects completed. **The target for overall number of projects completed (22) is expected to be reached by the end of February 2025**, also the sub-target around number of feasibility studies (target of 4) has been exceeded to date (7) and predicted to reach 11 by the end of the programme.

The outcome targets proved to be more challenging to measure, and two of the three did not have baselines set before interventions began, meaning accurate measures for these outcomes will not be possible. The evaluation report outlines lessons to take from this around ensuring greater clarity around what the programme will deliver and ensuring this translates to appropriate output and outcome measures. This requires being clear on how indicators will be measured and how required data will be captured, and capturing baseline evidence before the project activities begin, where needed.

Programme Management and Delivery

The evaluation drew out a broad range of positive factors as well as a range of challenges encountered in delivering the funded interventions. The most significant factor, identified by over half of project delivery leads was the **challenge of tight delivery timescales**, particularly when taking account of the need for community and stakeholder consultations, developing partner agreements, recruitment and procurement processes, as well as design and delivery of projects.

Key aspects that were noted as effective and important to success included the **value and importance of effective community and local stakeholder engagement and involvement** in schemes, which most projects appeared to deliver strongly, **involvement of technical experts** where that was needed, and effectively **building in clear exit strategies for projects to ensure the sustainability of impacts**, for example through maintenance agreements to ensure upkeep of new facilities or amenities.

For some projects there were **additional challenges in engaging certain stakeholders**, such as property owners who could not be easily contracted, and **in some cases timescales curtailed the amount of community and stakeholder consultation** that delivery partners felt would have been optimal. For some projects **cost inflation** between when project plans were drafted and when projects began delivery created additional issues.

Overall, **delivery partners and wider stakeholders were positive about the programme management by Cyngor Gwynedd**. Although some expressed frustration with delays on funding approval and around the amount of administration involved in progress reporting, the overall application process was felt to be clear and the majority of project delivery leads noted that communication from the Council had been strong throughout delivery.

Programme Impacts

Evidence gathered from the supported projects highlighted a range of early impacts relating to enhanced **attractiveness of town centres and high streets, increased feeling of safety, enhanced town centre digital accessibility** (relating to one project), early evidence of **increased footfall** linked to interventions (alongside other activities), and **enhanced feelings of community pride and wellbeing**. In most cases these have been more qualitative or anecdotal evidence of emerging impacts, but nevertheless provide indications that interventions are delivering the types of outcomes anticipated.

A number of consultees noted that in order **to contribute to more significant longer-term impacts that address the scale of the challenge facing town centres and high streets, a number of factors needed to be built in to project design**. The evaluation particularly highlights the importance of projects:

- **Contributing to larger regeneration strategies** for an area, with clear connection to wider investments and contributing to larger scale plans.
- **Contributing more substantial investment to strategically important infrastructure** that addresses local challenges.
- **Developing and helping to advance plans for larger scale investment**, such as feasibility studies for new investments that could have larger scale and strategic benefits.
- **Adding wider value through smaller projects** for example by **establishing or enhancing connections with town centre property owners**, or by helping to **activate and empower community groups** to have greater involvement in projects, events and activities that stimulate town centre vibrancy.

Beyond the impacts for places, a number of the projects also highlighted **wider benefits** generated by the programme for those involved in delivery, including the **development of community groups** involved in local projects, and the **wellbeing benefits experienced by volunteers** involved in project delivery, such as supporting painting of the murals.

6.2 Lessons Learnt

Drawing on the findings from the evaluation, a number of key lessons emerge which could help to further enhance town centre regeneration projects funded under future programmes. These have been set out below under three main lessons

1. Ensuring timescales are sufficient to enable effective delivery.

The experience of the multiple and sometimes iterative phases involved in effectively co-designing, consulting on, gaining permissions and approvals, recruiting, procuring for, and finally delivering projects can require substantial timescales, which many projects identified was a particular challenge (exacerbated by early delays in UKSPF funding being approved from UK Government).

For future schemes it will be beneficial to ensure that projects set out detailed timescale plans in their bids to be assessed as part of the approval process. It may also be useful to provide funding guidance that outlines those potential phases of delivery outlined above, with commentary on how much time could be needed for each activity, where possible. This would help provide useful prompts for prospective delivery bodies, to help them fully consider whether the delivery timescales available are sufficient to effectively deliver their scheme and help with their own planning.

2. Ensuring strategic fit and strategic impact are carefully factored into project design.

The evaluation has highlighted a range of factors that can contribute to ensuring that all projects, even relatively small investments can contribute to strategic impacts, and it would be worthwhile factoring these in to future assessments about what should be funded. In particular it could be useful to factor in some of the following aspects to application forms and assessment criteria for projects under similar future programmes:

- **Strategic fit with Area Regeneration Plans** – with greater priority for projects that deliver strongly against agreed strategic investment aims for that place.
- **Potential for attracting or enabling larger scale investment** – although not necessarily straightforward to assess, if there is good evidence that funding a research or feasibility study could enable large scale private / public investment in town centres, then this could have very significant strategic impacts for relatively low investment costs.
- **Added value through building key stakeholder relationships** – in areas where there have been challenges with engaging key town centre stakeholders such as the business community or specific property owners, schemes which help to engage and build relationships with those stakeholders could have significant strategic benefits beyond the outputs generated by the intervention itself.
- **Added value through activating and empowering community groups** – where there is a need for greater community capacity and engagement in enlivening town centres, activities that support and empower local groups could similarly have greater strategic benefits that go beyond just the outputs from the funded project itself.

In selecting projects to be funded, it could add significant value to future programmes to incorporate approaches to assess these factors, to help ensure that the optimal set of projects are taken forward for delivery.

3. Further develop indicators for monitoring success.

The evaluation has highlighted that capturing outcomes and impacts of town centre regeneration projects can be challenging within the available timescales for monitoring. Nevertheless, more could have been done to enhance the quality of monitoring data for this programme, which provides lessons for future schemes. In particular for future programmes it would be valuable to set out a clear monitoring plan from the outset and clear guidance on this for individual projects. This should include:

- **Clarity on what the programme will deliver and ensuring the output and outcome indicators are selected based on the most important things** the programme will deliver. Although not everything can be quantified in a target, the targets should give a clear sense of what the programme has achieved.

- **Setting indicators where it is clear what is being measured** – with a clear description of exactly what the indicator is capturing, and how this information will be collected.
- **Capturing baseline data for outcome indicators where this is needed** – for example if key indicators relate to footfall levels or perceptions of specific stakeholders about attractiveness, vibrancy or safety of the town centre, then baselines for these indicators need to be captured before funded interventions occur as well as after they are completed, to be able to capture any changes in these measures.

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