

Evaluation of the Flintshire Community Key Fund (Shared Prosperity Fund: 2025-26 Project Continuation)

A report to Cadwyn Clwyd

February 2026

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Executive Summary

Introduction

York Consulting LLP was commissioned by Cadwyn Clwyd to evaluate the Flintshire Community Key Fund – a UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UK SPF): 2025-26 initiative. This initiative followed the UK SPF: 2023-25 round of funding and aimed to provide continuity in funding to meet high demand for support and financial resources among community groups.

The project received £463,393 from the UK SPF and was delivered by Cadwyn Clwyd and Flintshire Local Voluntary Council (FLVC) between April 2025 and February 2026.

The evaluation methodology included a review of key documents, analysis of management information, consultations with key stakeholders and grant managers, and a survey of grant recipients followed by in-depth interviews with a selection of grantees.

Project design

The Flintshire Community Key Fund provided capital and revenue funding to community groups and organisations in Flintshire looking to improve community amenities, sports facilities and green spaces, as well as supporting renewable energy generation, digital infrastructure and cultural activities. Key Fund grants of up to £35,000 were available, as well as pre-project development grants of up to £5,000 for feasibility studies and consultancy fees.

Effectiveness of project delivery

There is evidently a strong relationship between Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC, which supported project delivery. However, capacity issues outside of the latter organisation's control resulted in the Cadwyn Clwyd project officer taking on a greater share of the grant management work than initially intended. Despite this, grant management was efficient and streamlined, enabling completion of the project within the given timescales.

The promotion of the fund by Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC, facilitated by their strong networks in the local communities, was wide ranging and effective. This was evidenced by the high number of prospective applications discussed (71) and submitted (43 against a target of 10).

Whilst some grantees experienced difficulties with the application process, the support provided by project officers was clearly well received and effective, helping to mitigate some of the challenges faced.

The award process was systematic and effective. Supported projects aligned well with SPF aims and all were completed within the initial timeframe for delivery (by February 2026), indicating good judgement around the suitability of those projects awarded funding.

The support provided by grant officers during the delivery of projects was clearly valued by grantees, who praised their expertise, guidance and understanding. Flexibility around providing upfront payments was a key enabler to successful delivery of projects in several cases.

Outputs

The project exceeded its target outputs, with a total of 23 organisations receiving financial and non-financial support, 18 amenities created or improved and 24,456.9m² of green space improved. The projects supported by the Fund included improvements to buildings and/or outdoor spaces across various community and sport facilities, with a wide geographical spread around the county and varied types of organisations supported. The works carried out were wide ranging, including renewable energy installations, whole building renovations, safety and accessibility adaptations and the purchasing of new equipment.

Outcomes and impact

The outcome targets for the number of users of facilities and amenities exceeded the target by a large margin (1,725 against a target of 300).

Grantees identified increased opportunities for community organisations and members as a key outcome of the support. Interview feedback provided further detail, with impacts highlighted including reduced costs due to greater energy efficiency, improved accessibility of community spaces, and increased involvement from the community due to improved availability of services and activities. In rural areas, it was felt that the grant funding was vital in supporting community efforts to combat isolation. In several cases, grants enabled new revenue generating activities which will support the future sustainability and viability of community facilities.

There was a clear need for funding, evidenced by the high number of applications. Feedback from grant recipients and Flintshire County Council also demonstrates that the Key Fund achieved a high level of additionality, i.e., that a considerable proportion of the outcomes and impacts achieved would not have happened in the absence of the project and that the Fund addresses a gap in coverage across the county by meeting the needs of smaller organisations.

It is also evident that the Flintshire Community Key Fund has achieved key strategic aims at the UK, national and county level, such as those outlined in:

- The UK SPF: Communities and place investment priorities, including spreading opportunities and improving public services, restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging, and empowering local leaders and communities.
- The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, including working towards a Wales of cohesive communities, a resilient Wales and a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.
- The Flintshire County Council plan 2023 – 2028, including supporting communities in Flintshire to reduce their carbon footprint, the promotion, good management, and protection of green spaces to deliver multiple benefits to the environment, residents and visitors, and creating resilient communities where people feel connected and safe.

Conclusions and recommendations

Management of the Flintshire Community Key Fund has been highly effective. The model of wrap around support offered to grant recipients continues to add significant value and address a gap in funding support across the county. The Fund has enabled a range of outcomes and impacts, including supporting the sustainability and viability of community amenities in the future, that contribute to achieving strategic priorities at a county, national and UK level.

The evaluation findings have informed a range of project specific recommendations related to the application and claims process and the capacity of both organisations to manage higher value grants in the future.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF): 2025 - 26

Flintshire Community Key Fund

**£353,077
INVESTMENT**



in local community groups to support improvements to facilities and green spaces, installation of renewable energy and digital infrastructure and delivery of cultural activities

**23 COMMUNITY GROUPS
SUPPORTED**

**12 COMMUNITY CENTRES,
HUBS OR VILLAGE HALLS
IMPROVED**



"Without this help, our community project here would have continued to struggle, (...) the lack of improvements would have made it harder to reduce isolation and loneliness among the people who rely on our community centre and gardens."

**9 SPORTS OR RECREATION
FACILITIES ENHANCED**



"The availability of this grant scheme has enabled the club to achieve one of its long-term aspirations - to provide floodlighting for the bowling green."



**5 FEASIBILITY
STUDIES**

**24,456m²
OF GREEN SPACE
IMPROVED**



**6
BUILDINGS WITH
IMPROVED ENERGY
EFFICIENCY OR
RENEWABLE ENERGY
INSTALLATION**



"Our energy bill has gone down about 60%, which financially has helped the organisation a lot... it means we can keep the space going in a efficient way."



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1. Introduction and methodology

York Consulting LLP was commissioned by Cadwyn Clwyd to evaluate the Flintshire Community Key Fund – a project focused on strengthening the social fabric of communities through investment in community spaces and relationships.

The project received £463,393 from the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF): 2025-26. The £900 million UK SPF: 2025-26 programme sought to fund local investment, to kickstart economic growth and promote opportunities in all parts of the UK.

The Flintshire Community Key Fund aimed to provide capital and revenue funding to projects seeking to strengthen community infrastructure and deliver community-based projects focused on access to services and net zero ambitions. The project also provided grant officer support and guidance.

The objectives of the evaluation were to assess the delivery of the Flintshire Community Key Fund, review progress against its intended outcomes and gather evidence on the impact of the Fund.

Methodology

The evaluation methodology included a review of key documents, analysis of management information, a survey of grant recipients with in-depth follow-up consultations and further consultations with key stakeholders and grant managers.

Document review

A document review was undertaken to inform the evaluation fieldwork and reporting. The following documents were reviewed:

- Cadwyn Clwyd's SPF Project Continuation bid documentation.
- Promotional materials for the Key Fund, application forms and guidance documents.
- Data-collection mechanisms developed for the monitoring of outputs, outcomes and impact.
- Relevant strategy document, including UK SPF guidance¹, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act² and the Flintshire County Council plan 2023 – 2028³.

The insight drawn from the document review and inception meeting was instilled into the logic model for the Flintshire Community Key Fund.⁴

Management information analysis

The analysis of management information was carried out to understand the project's performance against targets. This involved reviewing:

- Grant award panel meeting minutes.
- Quarterly progress reports.
- Project claim forms and data.

¹ UK Shared Prosperity Fund 2025-26: Technical note

² Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials

³ Flintshire County Council Plan 2023 – 28

Fieldwork

Table 1.1 summarises the fieldwork completed during the evaluation of the Flintshire Community Key Fund between October 2025 and February 2026.

Table 1.1: Summary of completed fieldwork

Component	Fieldwork
Consultations with stakeholders	Consultations with project officers from Cadwyn Clwyd (1) and Flintshire County Council (1)
Survey of grant recipients	Distributed to 23 grant recipients. Received 20 responses (87% response rate at the time of reporting) with 13 agreeing to participate in a follow-up consultation.
Consultations with grant recipients	Completed 8 interviews with grantees

2. Project design

The Flintshire Community Key Fund provided grants of up to £35,000 to community groups in Flintshire. The project was delivered by Cadwyn Clwyd – a social enterprise which provides guidance and support to communities and enterprises in North East Wales and further afield. The project was delivered in partnership with the Flintshire Local Voluntary Council (FLVC) – an umbrella and support organisation for over 1,200 voluntary and community groups in Flintshire, which provides services to the third sector based on a Welsh Government Infrastructure Agreement. Delivered between April 2025 and February 2026, the project (in line with UK SPF goals) aimed to:

- Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in places where they are weakest.
- Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in places where this has been lost.
- Empower local leaders and communities, especially in places lacking local agency.
- Provide continuity in funding (following the UK SPF: 2023-25) to meet high demand for support and financial resources among community groups.

Two types of grant were available:

Key Fund grants (up to £35,000)

Groups could apply for capital and revenue funding to support community projects which:

- Provide community spaces for local civil society and community groups to use.
- Enable locally owned renewable energy generation and waste management.
- Create and improve community local green spaces, community gardens, watercourses, and embankments.
- Deliver and support community led local arts, heritage and creative activities.
- Deliver access to services via local sports facilities.
- Provide digital infrastructure within community owned assets and facilities.

Pre-project development grants (up to £5,000)

Groups could apply for pre-project development grants to undertake work such as feasibility studies and specialist consultancy, including support for asset transfers, new community buildings and architect and surveyor costs.

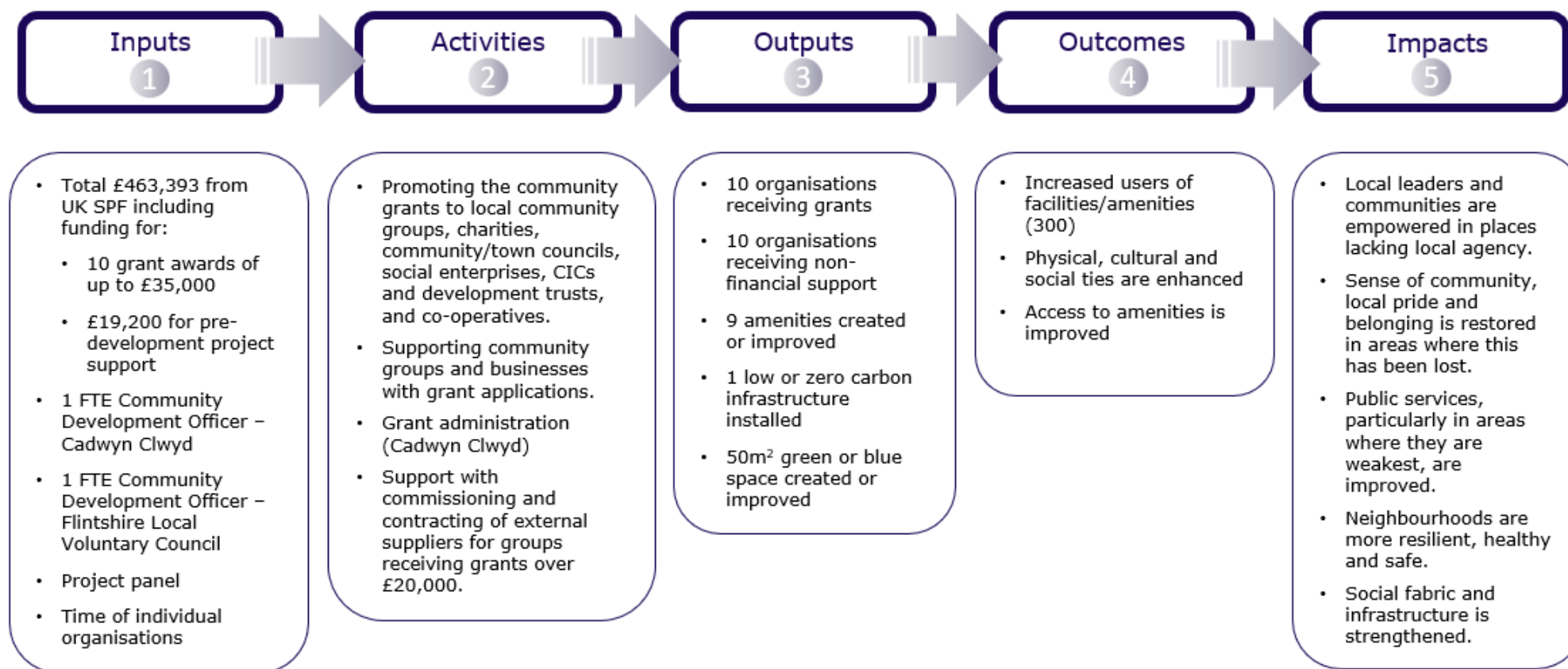
A range of organisations were eligible to apply, including voluntary and community groups, community councils and town councils, registered charities, social enterprises, Community Interest Companies (CIC), development trusts and co-operatives.

In addition to providing grant funding, the project offered a wrap-around support function, including officer support and guidance, to help community groups access the fund.

Logic model

The project logic model (Figure 2.1) was developed by York Consulting and informed by a review of project documentation and conversations with key stakeholders. It sets out the activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts of the project. The logic model was used to develop the evaluation questions which informed the design of evaluation research tools and analysis of project data.

Figure 2.1: Flintshire Community Key Fund Logic Model



Key progress indicators

The key progress indicators outlined in the SPF: 2025-26 Project Continuation bid are set out in the following tables. They include target outputs and outcomes, as well as project expenditure.

Table 2.1: Planned outputs

Output indicator	Target
Number of organisations receiving grants	10
Number of organisations receiving non-financial support	10
Number of amenities created or improved	9
Amount of green or blue space created or improved (m ²)	50

Source: Flintshire Community Key Fund SPF 2025-26 bid

Table 2.2: Planned outcomes

Outcome indicator	Target
Increased users of facilities/amenities	300

Source: Flintshire Community Key Fund SPF 2025-26 bid

Project budget

The project was awarded £463,393 in SPF 2025-26 funding. Table 2.3 outlines how the planned project budget was allocated.

Table 2.3: Flintshire Community Key Fund project budget

Cost	Amount
Key Fund grants	£353,077
Pre-project development support	£19,200
Project delivery staff - FLVC	£37,924
Project delivery staff – Cadwyn Clwyd	£22,700
Grant processing, financial admin, project management	£15,700
Office costs, rent, utilities, business rates	£7,158
Communication, PR, distribution	£3,000
External consultants end of project evaluation	£4,634
Total	£463,393

Source: Flintshire Community Key Fund SPF 2025-26 bid.

3. Effectiveness of project delivery

Grant management

Staffing

The Flintshire Community Key Fund project was delivered by a project officer from Cadwyn Clwyd, with support from a project officer at FLVC. These officers promoted the fund, supported applications from potential grantees and offered advice and guidance to grant recipients during delivery of their projects.

A grant panel, made up of representatives from Cadwyn Clwyd (2), FLVC (2) and Flintshire County Council (1) reviewed the submitted applications and made decisions on grant awards.

Grant management processes and paperwork were already established during the previous 2023-25 UK SPF project, which meant that (following some minor refinements to application forms and guidance), the team were ready to launch the project without delay as soon as approval was granted.

There is evidence of a strong relationship between Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC enabling good voluntary and community sector reach. However, capacity issues outside of the latter organisation's control resulted in the Cadwyn Clwyd project officer taking on a greater share of the grant management work than initially intended.

Project delivery was efficient and streamlined - particularly important given the tight timescales for project delivery (which the project was delivered within).

Promotion and engagement

Both Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC promoted the grant through their existing network, which included a mix of third sector and voluntary organisations or social enterprises. Of the 8 grant recipients who took part in an evaluation interview, 7 heard about the grant through the FLVC, however many mentioned they were familiar with Cadwyn Clwyd or that they have worked with them previously.

Promotion of the fund was wide ranging and effective, as evidenced by the high number of prospective applications discussed (71), leading to 43 completed applications received by the deadline (for an original target of 10 grant awards which was expanded to 23).

Both organisations clearly have strong relationships with local community groups, which was also highlighted by some grantees during the consultations, and this likely supported the high level of engagement with the fund.

Application process

Applications were open between May and June 2025. Taking on board feedback from the last evaluation about what grantees felt was an onerous application process, potential grantees were not required to complete an expression of interest form prior to making a full application.

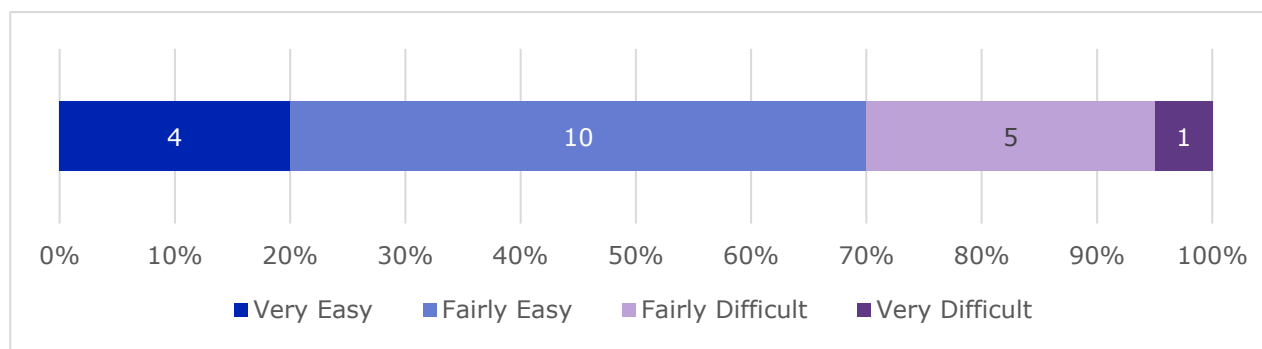
As demonstrated in Figure 3.1, most survey respondents rated the application process as very or fairly easy. However, during consultations, some grantees described challenges, including:

- The length of the application.
- Repetitive questions.

- Accessibility issues, such as unclear wording or layout, or the application only being accessible online.
- System design issues, such as difficulty attaching documents or being unable to move onto the next question without completing all the fields.

Many grantees made suggestions to improve the application process, noting that the form should be clearer and more accessible – particularly for people who are new to grant applications or have additional needs.

Figure 3.1: How would you rate the application process for this funding?



Source: Survey of grant recipients (n=20)

Despite the challenges, almost all survey respondents rated the support provided during the application process by Cadwyn Clwyd as very helpful (18/20), with 2 rating it as fairly helpful.

Interviewees highlighted that Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC project officers offered useful help and advice during the application process, alleviating some of the challenges raised. Examples of this included project officers meeting with organisations face-to-face to introduce the fund and answer questions, offering guidance about the planning of projects, and being readily available to answer any queries related to the application.

"Cadwyn Clywd staff were brilliant and helpful." – Grantee.

Whilst some grantees experienced difficulties with the application process, the **support provided by project officers was clearly well received and effective**, helping to mitigate some the challenges faced.

Award process

Applications were reviewed by the steering group, with decisions made at the grant panel meeting in June. Prior to the meeting, members of the panel scored each application by the following factors:

- Contribution to UK SPF: 2025-26 Project Continuation priorities.
- Level of community involvement evident in the application.
- Extent to which UK SPF: Project Continuation outputs and outcomes would be achieved.
- Value for money.

Projects were then discussed at the panel meeting, particularly those scoring at or below the threshold for approval.

Of the 43 applications, 20 were not approved. Common reasons for this included the panel viewing the project as overly ambitious within the timescales and/or giving low scores based on the criteria listed above.

The award process was systematic and effective. As is outlined later in this report, supported projects aligned well with SPF aims and all completed within the initial timeframe for delivery (by February 2026).

Project delivery support

Project officers continued to support grant recipients throughout delivery of their projects. Almost all survey respondents (19/20) rated the support they received during delivery of their project as being very helpful, with 1 respondent rating it as fairly helpful.

Almost all grantees who took part in an interview mentioned that they sought advice and guidance from Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC during the delivery of their projects, highlighting that responses were quick and supportive. The guidance offered by project officers was especially useful for those who did not have much prior experience of grant funded projects.

Most grantees said that honest communication with project officers regarding the barriers they were facing enabled successful delivery of the projects. For example, when struggling to cover costs of renovations, some grantees contacted Cadwyn Clwyd and shared their financial issues. Cadwyn Clwyd were able to provide upfront payments to enable them to cover initial costs and/or unexpected costs not outlined in the original plan.

"The advice, guidance and support of Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC Project Officers has been invaluable in ensuring the successful delivery of this project." – Grantee.

The **support provided by project officers during the delivery of projects was clearly valued** by grantees. Flexibility around providing upfront payments was a key enabler to successful delivery of projects in several cases.

Outputs

As shown in Table 3.1, the project exceeded its target outputs, with 23 organisations receiving grants and non-financial support against a target of 10. This was due to a larger number of small grants being awarded than the initial target anticipated.

Similarly, the target for amenities was exceeded, with a total of 18 amenities created or improved. As the number of projects supported was over double the initial target, it is unsurprising that this output target was also exceeded by a similar margin.

Through these funded projects the target for green or blue spaces created or improved was significantly exceeded (24,456.9m² against a target of 50m²). This was due to the nature of the projects supported (a bowling club, cricket club and two football pitches), which could not have been known at the application stage when the targets were developed.

Table 3.1: Progress against planned outputs

Output indicator	Target	Actual
Number of organisations receiving grants	10	23
Number of organisations receiving non-financial support	10	23
Number of amenities created or improved	9	18
Amount of green or blue space created or improved (m ²)	50	24,456

Source: Flintshire Key Fund - outputs & outcomes February 2026

Types of project funded

The Flintshire Community Key Fund has supported a wide array of organisations, from community councils, village hall committees, community centres, sports organisations and Community Interest Companies (CICs), reflecting the diversity of the VCS in Flintshire.

The project has supported improvements to a range of buildings and/or outdoor spaces, including:

- Sports or recreation facilities (9 projects)
- Community centres or hubs (7 projects)
- Church or village halls (5 projects)
- Other community facilities i.e., a social club and community theatre (2 projects).

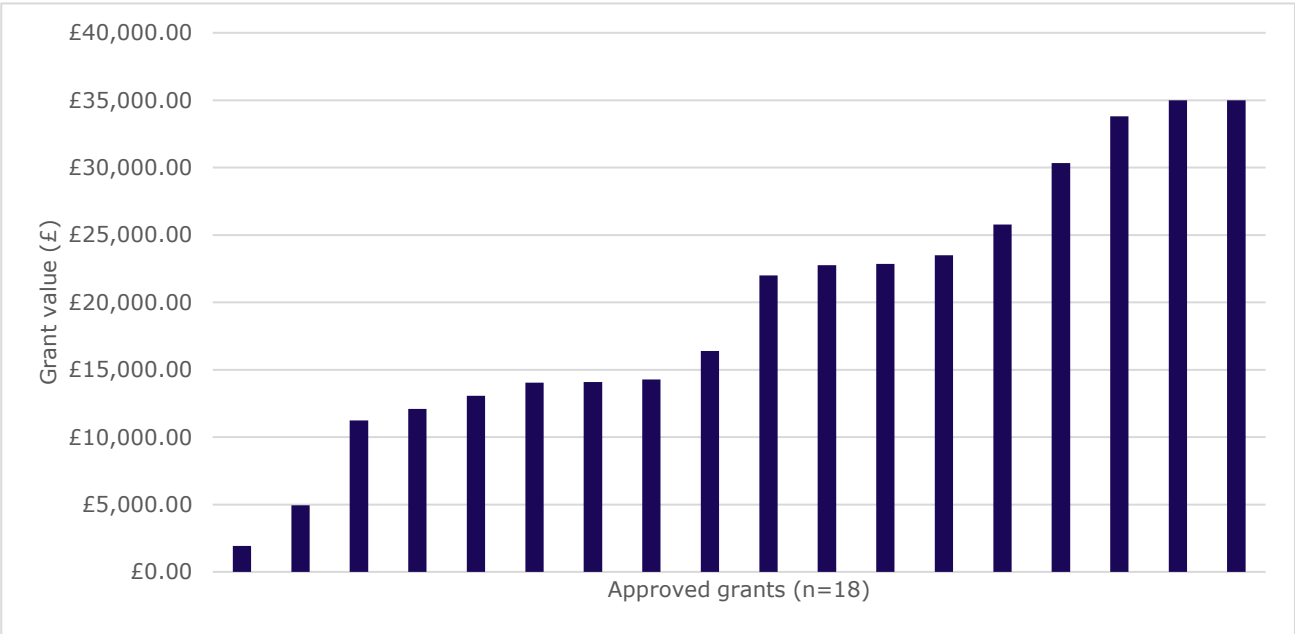
The funding was used to enhance these spaces in a variety of ways, including:

- **Renewable energy installation and energy efficiency** improvements, such as installing solar panel or segregated heating (4 projects)
- **Renovating and improving older buildings**, including improvements to windows and roofs, or installing kitchen and/or toilet facilities (8 projects)
- **Safety and accessibility adaptations**, such as improvements to lighting, fire safety arrangements and disabled access (5 projects)
- **Purchasing new sports equipment** (1 project)
- Other **improvements to outdoor spaces**, such as drainage and landscaping (4 projects).

Grant amounts

The total value of grants awarded was within the amount allocated for Key Fund grants (£353,076.58 against £353,077). Figure 3. outlines the distribution of grants awarded to each group by value. Most of the project grants valued above £10,000 (between £11,247 and £35,000), with two small grants valued below £5,000.

Figure 3.2: Distribution of projects by value

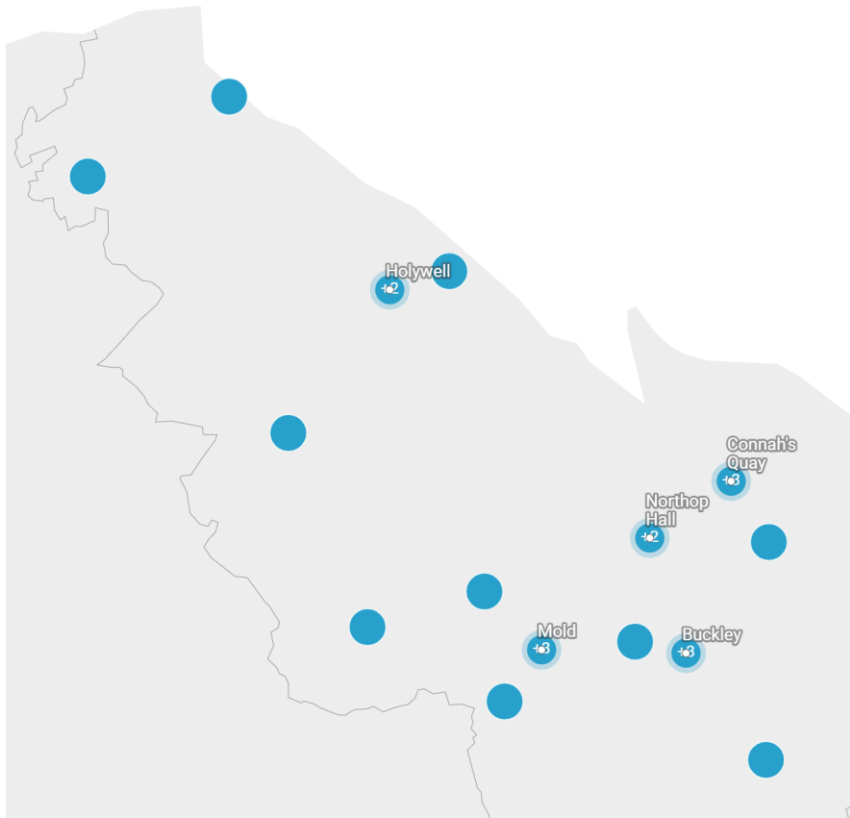


Source: Flintshire Community Key Fund – Quarterly progress report July to September 2025

Geographical distribution

Figure 3. shows how the funded projects were distributed across Flintshire, demonstrating that communities throughout the county have been supported. There is some clustering around the areas of Hollywell, Connah’s Quay, Northop Hall, Buckley and Mold, but this is to be expected given their greater population density.

Figure 3.3: Geographical distribution of projects



Source: YCL analysis of funded organisations, January 2026.

Challenges and enablers

The challenges described by Flintshire Community Key Fund stakeholders and beneficiaries included:

- **Timescales:** Some grant recipients felt that the short timescale for delivery added unnecessary pressure, especially when problems arose such as unplanned changes to renovations or issues with suppliers.
- **Supplier procurement, construction and organisational issues:** Some grantees highlighted issues related to sourcing the right supplier for the project, having to change suppliers after delivery began or dealing with complications which came up during work delivery (e.g., necessary renovations which were not in the application). A few also highlighted organisational challenges, such as disagreements within committees regarding suppliers, which slowed down delivery.
- **Cashflow challenges:** For some beneficiaries, sourcing the funds to deliver the work before claiming the grant was difficult. Additionally, some organisations mentioned that unexpected costs due to issues with building works brought financial strain. However, in many cases these challenges were mitigated by upfront payments provided by Cadwyn Clwyd.

Enablers described by Flintshire Community Key Fund stakeholders and beneficiaries included:

- **Wrap-around support:** Grant recipients valued the depth of support from project officers, both during the application process and delivery. The strong collaboration with Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC facilitated delivery, especially within tight timescales. Project officers offered useful advice and guidance, which was particularly important for organisations less familiar with procurement processes. Additionally, Cadwyn Clwyd provided upfront payments of up to £10,000 to some beneficiaries without saving reserves, to help kickstart delivery.
- **Strong communities:** Many grantees highlighted that the help of local communities was key to the success of the projects. Grant funding was supplemented in some cases by donations from parish councils and fundraisers such as local concerts and competitions, and many projects were enabled by the time put in by dedicated volunteers. In addition, local businesses were often procured to deliver the work and were described as understanding and flexible throughout the process.
- **Promotion:** The promotion of the fund was very effective, as evidenced by the 43 completed applications received (for an initial target of 10). Both Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC have strong networks within Flintshire communities, enabling extensive coverage of promotion of the fund and a high level of engagement from a range of different organisation types and geographical areas.

The case study example below indicates how the Fund has been able to transform a community asset with negative effects into a resource that supports positive community engagement.

Case study 1: Our Growing Space CIC – Community hut

This project focused on the renovation of a hut building, which had been abandoned and shut for over 15 years. The area was unsafe and an environmental disturbance to its neighbours. With the local library closing, the village lacked a space for activities so the Our Growing Space CIC committee decided to renovate the hut. They applied for the Flintshire Community Key Fund grant through their connection with FLVC. The grant provided them with a starting point to completely renovate the building, including its plumbing system, and improve the community landscape. The local community has now gained a café, outdoor play area, and various activity classes, such as arts and crafts – things that were not available in the village previously. The grantee highlighted that the renovation of the building would not have been possible, at such a fast rate, without the fund.

4. Outcomes & impact

Progress against outcome targets

As shown in Table 4.1, the project considerably exceeded its target outcomes, with 1,725 increased users of facilities/amenities against a target of 300. This success against planned outcomes was likely due to the larger number of projects supported than anticipated (23 against a target of 10), with more users able to access a greater number of new or improved facilities. The number of increased users reported by projects ranged from 18 to 280, with a median of 106.

Table 4.1: Progress against planned outcomes

Outcome indicator	Target	Actual
Increased users of facilities/amenities	300	1,961

Source: Flintshire Community Key Fund - SPF claim form February 2026

Impact of the funding

Grant recipients indicated that the funding has supported a range of positive impacts for their organisations and local communities. All those who answered the question about project benefits in the evaluation survey (15) said that opportunities for their organisation and its members had increased because of the grant. Most also identified the following impacts:

- Improved quality of experience for community members (11 respondents)
- Increased sense of community spirit (11 respondents)
- Expanded organisation membership/participation (10 respondents)
- Improved operation of their organisation (11 respondents)

The grantee interviews provided further detail on the main impacts achieved as a result of the funding, which included:

- **Bringing communities together and combatting isolation.** Grant funded projects have helped local communities to come together via new community events, such as community cafes and warm hubs, which have been especially valued by the older population in the colder months. Grantees commented that the availability of such local spaces is extremely important for rural villages in North Wales, as a way of combatting social isolation.
- **Enabling new activities, including those which generate revenue.** Grants have also provided organisations with new opportunities to hire out spaces, such as community centres and village halls, for private or charity events and a range of classes (e.g., Pilates and singing). These new opportunities not only provide spaces for community members of all ages to come together but also provide a source of income for the organisations, enabling them to become more self-sustaining ensuring continued viability.
- **Supporting the local economy.** Many grantees spoke of intentionally procuring local suppliers, to support the local economy and build networks for future projects.

***"In the village, if you don't drive, you're stuck, especially in winter. So this [improvements to the village hall] has really contributed to the local community and encouraged cohesion."* - Grantee**

Cross-cutting themes

There was evidence of projects having a positive impact on SPF cross-cutting themes: net zero, equal opportunities and Welsh language.

Progress towards net zero

Of the grant funded projects, six were focussed on improving energy efficiency, including the installation of double glazing, solar panels and a new heating system. This has not only supported progress towards net zero (through more efficient energy usage or switching to renewable energy use) but has also helped organisations reduce their energy costs and subsequently pass these savings on to groups that pay to use the space, making the events and classes hosted more accessible to the community.

Impact on equality of opportunities

Grantees reported that increased access to facilities, through improvements for disabled users and enhanced access to outdoor green spaces, will allow for greater community outreach and broaden the demographic of users.

In on project, building improvements have enabled the village hall to host local council members and other politicians, supporting better connections with local representatives and democratic participation.

Impact on Welsh language

Projects have provided opportunities to promote the Welsh language, with some grantees mentioning that they have hosted groups for younger members of the community to learn to read and write in Welsh or provided a space for Welsh speakers to come together during activities like warm hubs.

In addition, Cadwyn Clwyd actively promoted the Welsh language throughout delivery of the project, including producing bilingual promotional materials and communication about the fund and the project officer, as a first language Welsh speaker, supporting groups in their preferred language.

Case study 2: Community Clubhouse and Gardens – solar panel installation

This social enterprise is a vital hub for its community, offering activities like sports, crafts, and family groups. Due to rising energy costs, it urgently needed to cut expenses to continue offering free services. The solar panels installed using a grant from the Flintshire Community Key Fund have reduced their energy bill by 60%, enabling the organisation to operate more efficiently and continue providing invaluable services – from warm hubs and free meals to creative and physical activities, community-garden opportunities and their ongoing commitment to promoting the Welsh language.

"Without this help, our community project here would have continued to struggle, (...) the lack of improvements would have made it harder to reduce isolation and loneliness among the people who rely on our community centre and gardens." – Grantee.

Additionality

There was evidently a clear need for the funding, demonstrated by the high number of applications (43) to grants awarded (23).

Of the 16 grant recipients who provided feedback on what they would have done in the absence of the grant:

- Seven said the project would not have happened at all.
- Six indicated it would have happened at a slower pace or at a later date, with most stating this would be dependent on finding an alternative funding source.
- Three suggested their project would have happened at a much smaller scale.

In addition, LA stakeholders were confident that the Fund did not duplicate support provided through other available fundings streams. Not only that, but it was felt that close working between Cadwyn Clwyd, FLVC and FCC meant that applicants that did not meet the criteria for the Flintshire Community Key Fund could be directed to a more appropriate fund, ensuring their support needs could still be met.

Together, this feedback from grant recipients and LA stakeholders demonstrates that the Key Fund achieved a high level of additionality, i.e., that a considerable proportion of the outcomes and impacts achieved would not have happened in the absence of the project.

Case study 3: Aston Bowling Club

During the darker months of the bowling season, the club could not host training and matches in the evenings, excluding some members from participation. The Flintshire Community Key Fund grant enabled them to install floodlights, expanding the demographic of the club's members (such as those who work or attend school during the day) and providing new opportunities for the organisation. For example, the club will host 2 fundraising competitions, which has attracted individuals from different parts of Wales and England. Additionally, an internal survey of members showed a 100% positive perception of the project, demonstrating its successful impact on the local community.

"The availability of this grant scheme has enabled the club to achieve one of its long-term aspirations - to provide floodlighting for the bowling green." – Grantee.

Strategic fit

Feedback from Flintshire County Council highlighted that Cadwyn and FLVC were an "excellent strategic fit" to deliver the Flintshire Community Key Fund due to the organisations:

- Having strong links with the community and experienced project officers who understand what local groups need.
- Addressing a gap in coverage (across the SPF funds that Flintshire County Council manages) by meeting the needs of smaller organisations who may require greater support to access funding.

- Working collaboratively as part of the portfolio of funds that Flintshire County Council manages, through signposting applicants to other funds where necessary.

There is clear evidence (see Table 4.2) that the Flintshire Community Key Fund has achieved the aims of the UK SPF: Communities and place investment priority, and supported progress towards relevant strategic priorities of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and Flintshire County Council's 2023 – 2028 plan.

Table 2.2: Fund alignment with UK, Welsh and county strategic priorities

UK SPF aims: Communities and place	
Spread opportunities and improve public services , especially in those places where they are weakest.	• The Fund has enabled increased and sustained opportunities for bringing communities together, especially in rural areas of the county where such opportunities can be more limited.
Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging , especially in those places where they have been lost.	• Several grant recipients reported that their grant funded project has led to an increased sense of community spirit.
Empower local leaders and communities , especially in those places lacking local agency.	• The Fund has empowered volunteer-led groups (which made up almost all grant recipients) to enhance buildings, facilities and amenities for the benefit of the wider community. • The wrap-around support element has also built capacity within these volunteer-led groups to make applications for future funding. In addition, several grant recipients reported improved operation of their organisation as an outcome of the support.
National policy: Wellbeing of Future Generations Act	
A Wales of cohesive communities: <i>Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities</i>	• Improvements to buildings, facilities and amenities made through the Fund have enabled increased opportunities for communities to connect and people to engage in social, recreational (and in some cases, political) activities. • In some cases, grants have also improved the longer-term sustainability and viability of community groups and facilities, particularly where upgrades have enabled venue hire, selling of food to generate revenue, and/or increased usage and membership.

A resilient Wales: <i>A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment... and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).</i>	• Six grant funded projects focussed on improving energy efficiency, including the installation of double glazing, solar panels and a new heating system, therefore supporting climate change adaptation through contributing to achieving net zero by 2050.
A Wales of vibrant culture and Thriving Welsh Language: <i>A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.</i>	• The Fund has enabled increased and sustained opportunities for a wide range of cultural, social and physical activities, from sports such as bowls, cricket and rugby to singing groups, Welsh language events and community cafes. This includes activities aimed at specific groups, such as older people or families with young children.
County strategy: Flintshire County Council's 2023 – 2028 plan	
Supporting communities in Flintshire to reduce their carbon footprint. [Priority: Green society and environment]	• Six grant funded projects focussed on improving energy efficiency, including the installation of double glazing, solar panels and a new heating system, therefore supporting communities to reduce their carbon footprint.
The promotion, good management, and protection of green spaces to deliver multiple benefits to the environment, residents and visitors. [Priority: Green society and environment]	• Three projects used the grant funding to improve a combined 24,456m² of green space, with anticipated benefits being increased usage from a wider range of community members. • Other projects improved facilities to enable greater access to green spaces, such as adding washing facilities at Buckley fishing pool.

Resilient communities where people feel connected and safe. [Priority: Personal and community well-being]	• The Fund has enabled increased and sustained opportunities for bringing communities together, especially in rural areas of the county where such opportunities can be more limited. • In some cases, grants have also improved the longer-term sustainability and viability of community groups and facilities, particularly where upgrades have enabled venue hire, selling of food to generate revenue, and/or increased usage and membership.
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Added value

Evidence collected and reviewed for this evaluation has highlighted a range of key success factors that Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC have brought to delivery of the Flintshire Community Key Fund. These include:

- Strong connections to local community groups and a good understanding of their needs, enabling **targeted support** for a wide range of organisations across the county.
- A positive relationship with Flintshire County Council meaning **the Fund complements, rather than duplicates**, other available funding streams.
- Experienced, knowledgeable and trusted project officers, **facilitating organisations (particularly smaller/less experienced groups) to access the funding**.
- Organisational experience and infrastructure enabling **efficient delivery** of the fund within the given timescales.
- An award process that ensures **good strategic alignment** with UK SPF goals and other regional and national priorities.

Together, these factors indicate that Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC's delivery of the Flintshire Community Key Fund demonstrates strong added value.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Management of the Flintshire Community Key Fund has been highly effective, despite challenges around timescales and organisational capacity.

Whilst some grantees described challenges with grant application and administration processes, support from the project officers helped to mitigate these issues. It is also worth noting the efforts taken to streamline the process in response to previous evaluation recommendations, with the requirement to submit an expression of interest removed for this SPF project.

The model of wrap around support offered to grant recipients continues to add significant value and address a gap in funding support across the county for smaller and/or less experienced organisations. Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC's strong connections to local community groups and collaborative relationship with Flintshire County Council enables targeted support that avoids duplication with other funding streams, demonstrating that their delivery of the project offers strong added value.

The fund has enabled community groups to offer new opportunities for bringing people together and strengthening social ties, particularly in rural areas where combatting isolation is a priority. Building adaptations and improvements have also supported the sustainability and viability of community amenities, either through reducing energy costs, facilitating revenue generating activity or increasing membership, demonstrating the potential longer-term impact of the funding.

In enabling these impacts, the Flintshire Community Key Fund has supported strategic priorities at a regional, national and UK level, including the UK SPF aims and relevant priorities within the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the Flintshire County Council plan 2023 – 2028.

Recommendations

Based on the findings detailed in this report, we would recommend considering the following for any future grant management projects:

- Whether any further refinements could be made to the application and claims processes, in light of the feedback from grant recipients around wording, layout and system design issues. For example, exploring the potential for producing application and claims guidance in alternative formats, such as video explainers, with the aim of improving accessibility and understanding. These could be features of future funding bids to broaden engagement and help manage expectations.
- Given the high demand for the grant funding, effectiveness of delivery and specific need that the wrap around support model addresses locally, there is scope for Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC to manage grant funding of a larger volume in the future (notwithstanding the unique capacity issues FLVC faced during this project). Scaling up the financial support available within the existing delivery model has the potential to offer even greater added value.
- Given the relatively short timescales for delivery and that most grants were below £25,000, it appears that supporting a greater volume of smaller grants is more realistic in contexts where timescales are constrained.

- For future evaluations of projects where a large proportion of grant applicants are unsuccessful (e.g., around 50%) it could be useful to gather feedback from some of these applicants about their experience, particularly whether there were any benefits to engaging with the application and award process and/or possible sign posting to other grant schemes.
- Flintshire County Council should continue to maintain their partnership with Cadwyn Clwyd to retain the sector knowledge for distribution and management of grant funding in the future. The effective delivery during the 2025-26 period was made possible because of the relationships, experience and insight built up over recent years.