




local network fund
for children and young people

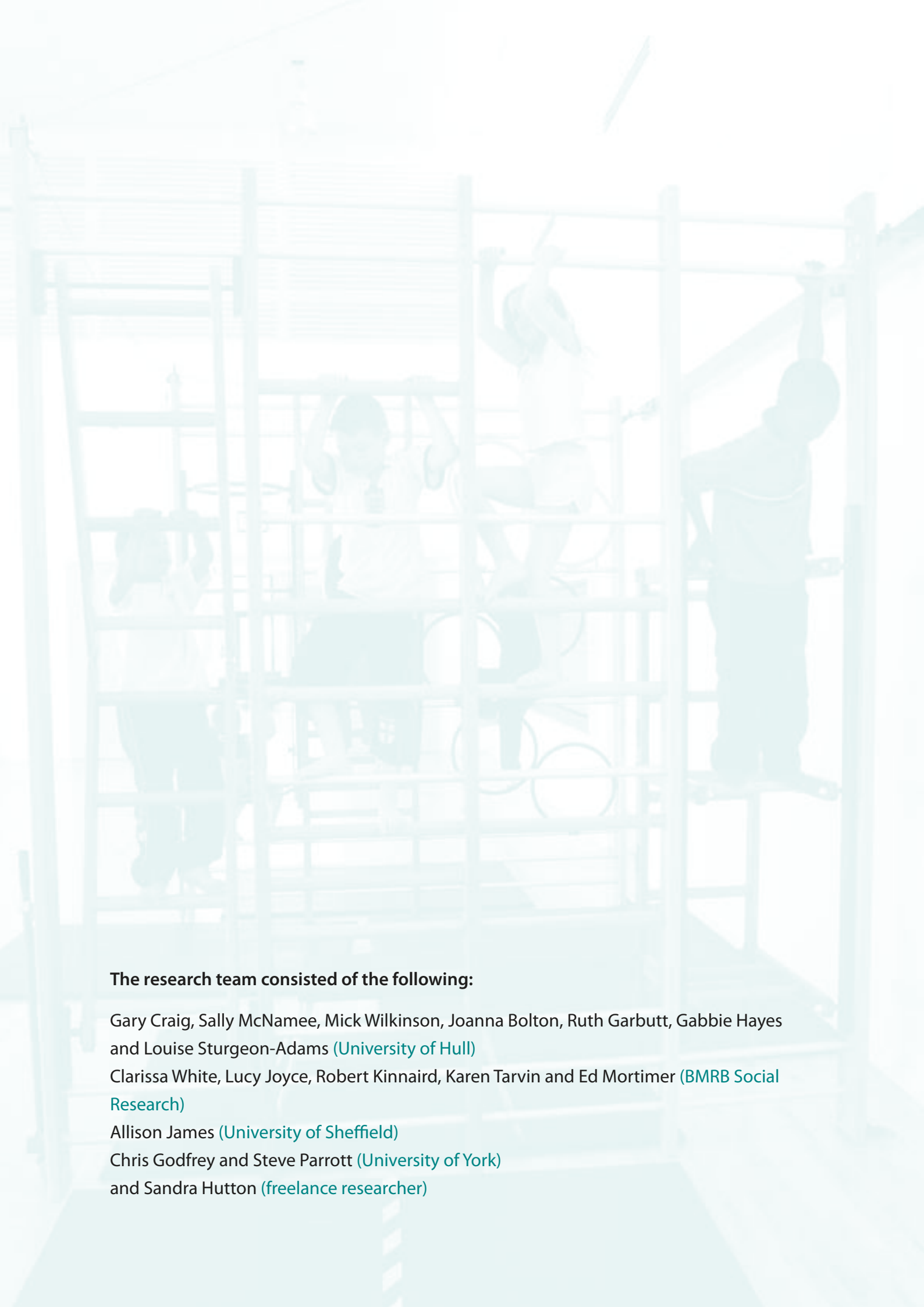
Was the money used well?



National Evaluation of the Local Network Fund
Conclusions and policy proposals

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Research report 685



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Executive summary

This is the third of three parallel reports outlining the findings of the national evaluation of the Local Network Fund. This report provides an overview and synthesis of the findings of the evaluation as a whole through asking the question Was the money used well? The effectiveness of the LNF is discussed in terms of its organisational structure, its ability to achieve the goals set for it, and its economic effectiveness. Suggestions for the future of the LNF are offered, in the context of the emergence of children's trusts. The other reports (Report No 1), Getting the money, reflects on the process of applying for funds from the LNF; and Report No 2, Using the money, explores the impacts the grants made on local groups, communities, the children and young people themselves and those working with them. These reports are all available on the DfES website as well as in hard copy.

Key findings

Although resources are clearly beginning to reach the target groups as a whole, there remain some groups, such as black and ethnic minority groups, those with special needs and those in rural areas, who have yet to benefit as much as they might do. Better and more creative targeting of these groups through different and more effective forms of outreach would enable these groups to be reached. Perceptions about child poverty have shifted since the early years of the LNF as it is now being recognised as multi-faceted and acknowledged as more than simply income poverty.

Whilst the grants awarded address all four themes of the LNF, the themes of 'children's voice' and 'economic disadvantage' remain underrepresented in the grant applications. However, tackling economic disadvantage and encouraging children's participation and voice are generally regarded as long-term objectives and because of this, the normal one-year funding regime may be a limitation. Despite this, it is clear that many children and young people have become empowered and engaged through the LNF and that the capacity of some groups to address local problems has increased. In this sense the LNF can be said to have made a difference to some individuals and in some areas in a way that represents a degree of sustainable development. Raising awareness about child protection within local groups and neighbourhoods has, however, been an unequivocal success of the LNF and this is one of the very strong gains it could carry into children's trusts.

In terms of the organisational structure, the local administrators, grant panels, outreach and support providers and LNF Call Centre have been successful services for the LNF and are seen as flexible and responsive to local needs. The Fund's autonomy from local authorities is valued.

The economic effectiveness of the LNF

The economic evaluation explored the cost-effectiveness of the grant-giving structure of the LNF and whether its organisational form was cost-effective in meeting its key objectives. Using modelling techniques with a variety of data relating to the administration costs of the central LNF, the Call Centre and local areas, the administrative costs were found to be reasonable. However, due to the lack of available data in some key areas, the estimated cost ratios may not be entirely reliable. We were also unable to identify appropriate grant-making comparators against which to assess the LNF's performance.

In assessing whether the scheme was cost-effective in relation to outcomes such as building local capacity and improvements in local social indicators, economic modelling is generally less reliable due to the subjective nature of such measures. However, modelling was carried out in relation to issues such as crime and vandalism reduction, and improvements in school refusal rates. The results suggest that even if a project has only a small impact it can yield social benefit and, in this sense, it can be regarded as cost-effective. A note of caution has to be sounded though. Such modelling should not be taken to provide a causal account - many of the benefits may not be directly or entirely attributable to the work of the LNF and some benefits may be yet to appear.

In relation to the wider objectives of the LNF, concerned with tackling poverty, there is a trade off between economic efficiency and equity. However, considering the wider economic impacts of the LNF, it is clear that if grants prevent, say, anti-social behaviour in only a few young people, the financial costs involved in the delivery and use of these grants are effective. Overall the evaluation paints a very positive picture of the LNF's achievements with some limited reservations. The LNF has been broadly cost-effective and successful in meeting many of its objectives but it could be more so, particularly in reaching the more so-called 'hard-to-reach' groups and in achieving more sustainable gains with an increase and shift in the way resources are used locally.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Local Network Fund for children and young people (LNF) was proposed in the cross-cutting review on young people at risk, as a response to the publication of the Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team 12 (PAT 12) report on Young People.¹ The latter report identified a number of issues in relation to services for children and young people. In particular, in the context of the present report, that government spending had not always been targeted effectively on children and young people living in the most deprived areas, and that policies and services had also failed to consult children and young people effectively. The PAT12 report therefore argued the need for coherence in government policies towards children and young people, to be overseen by a new unit (later to be called the Children and Young People's Unit [CYPU], a non-departmental Government body).

At the same time, the government was committed to the goal of 'ending child poverty within a generation', announced in 1999 by the Prime Minister. This goal was to be achieved by a combination of three approaches: changes to the taxation and benefits systems; policies to improve the prospects of poorer people wanting to get back into the labour market; and a series of more general policies - including some area-based and national initiatives - to address the issue of wider and longer-term disadvantage. The LNF, politically sponsored by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, emerged as part of this third broad group of policies.

In order to evaluate the value and role of the LNF, the former CYPU² (now the Children and Young People's Family Division - CYPFD - within the DfES) commissioned an evaluation by a consortium led by University of Hull and including BMRB Social Research and the Universities of York (and, later on, Sheffield). The research was carried out between October 2002 and January 2005. An interim report was produced to provide evidence from the period between October 2002 and September 2003.³ The final evidence from this national evaluation has been presented in three reports, the first two of which each deal with a different aspect of the evaluation - with process (Report No 1) and impact (Report No 2) issues. This Synthesis Report (No 3) draws together the key themes from the evaluation and considers these in light of the possible future development of the LNF within a

1 Social Exclusion Unit (2000) *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, Report of Policy Action Team 12: Young People*, London: TSO.

2 The CYPU - Children and Young People's Unit - effectively disappeared under the reorganisation of parts of the DfES which occurred during the autumn of 2003 as a result of the appointment of a new Minister, Margaret Hodge, with responsibility, *inter alia*, for children's services. During the period covered by this interim evaluation report, the CYPU was the Unit to which the national evaluation team reported.

3 Gary Craig et al., (2004) *A Promising Start?*, DfES with Universities of Hull, Sheffield and York and BMRB Social Research.

changing policy context. It looks in particular at whether the LNF delivers value for money in relation to its defined goals.

The report reviews the development of the LNF in this first chapter, in which we also revisit some of the key findings from our Interim Report, *A promising start?* and assess these in the light of recent research evidence documented in Reports No 1 and 2. **Chapter 2** presents the findings from the economic evaluation of the LNF which was developed as part of the overall research design. Finally, **Chapter 3** draws together the major policy conclusions to emerge from this evaluation with recommendations for the future of the Local Network Fund.

1.2 The LNF

The LNF was started as a five year small grants programme⁴, with a total spend of £150 million. It had four broad aims, to:

- reduce underachievement and the overall effects of child poverty, by raising the aspirations of children and young people between the ages of 0 and 19;
- ensure funding reached those groups best able to provide local solutions to child poverty - particularly those small grass-roots organisations operating in the poorest communities. Through these groups, the fund aimed to strengthen communities to help themselves - bringing people together to support each other, share problems and identify solutions;
- reach out to those children and young people most in need and who have trouble accessing services; and
- help children and young people to express their own views.

The Fund aimed to encourage groups to develop new projects and activities, rather than support existing activities. Another requirement of the Fund is that all applicants should have effective child protection policies and procedures in place before funding is released.

Grants are available for between £250 and £7,000 and most are for one year or less; however, provision is available for two-year funding up to £12,000 in total (the maximum two-year grant is £6,000 each for years one and two). Preference was intended to be given to small, embryonic groups which may have trouble accessing other funding sources and where the LNF covers the majority of project costs. Grants are not supposed to be used to part-fund large-scale activities and the LNF does not support applications from individuals, statutory or national voluntary organisations.

⁴ It is now due to continue until 2008 albeit with different management arrangements from 2006. See below, Chapter 3, for further discussion of these.

To date grants have been made across four themes⁵, related to the LNF aims; the themes were intended to ensure that the fund is directed at the target recipients. These are:

- Aspirations and experiences - projects that give children and young people experiences or help them achieve goals that other children and young people may take for granted.
- Economic disadvantage - projects that help families improve their living standards and cope with difficulties that come from being on low incomes.
- Isolation and access - projects that help children and young people who are isolated, alone, or have trouble accessing services.
- Children and young people's voices - projects that give children and young people the chance to express their opinions and give advice on matters that concern them.

The LNF is distributed through 55 local funds across England which have been 'rolled out' in three Waves; 25 (Wave One) areas were operational from 2001, 17 (Wave Two) in 2002 and a final 13 (Wave Three) from the late Spring of 2003. These areas broadly coincide with single or multiple local authority areas: either shire counties or metropolitan urban areas. Thus North Yorkshire LNF covers the North Yorkshire county area; South Yorkshire LNF covers the four metropolitan districts of Sheffield, Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster.

The Community Foundation Network (CFN), a national voluntary organisation, was initially appointed to manage and administer the Fund and work in partnership with voluntary organisations (e.g. Community Foundations, Rural Community Councils) to provide an experienced fund administrator in each Local Network area. In October 2002 it was decided by central Government that from April 2003, the LNF central administration would be managed in-house rather than by CFN. The delivery arrangements for the LNF are set to change again from 2006 when it will be managed under the umbrella of local children's trusts.

Applicants wanting to apply for funding must approach the Sheffield-based National Call Centre, which dispatches application forms and guidelines. Support is available throughout (and on completion of) the application process by an outreach and support team, located in each area, and may also be attached to the local delivery team.

Applications are then processed and assessed by the appropriate LNF Area Office, before being passed to members of independent panels (local people with experience of issues affecting children and young people) that make decisions on funding, on the basis of their understanding of local needs.

⁵ It is likely that these themes will be adapted to line up more exactly with the five outcomes for young people governing children and young people's services. These are 'making a contribution; enjoyment and achievement; reducing poverty of experience; health and well-being; and being safe'.

1.3 Aims of the evaluation

There were two key aims of this evaluation, each relating predominantly to different phases of the programme. The first phase related largely to the application and grant-approval process (the focus of report No 1), whilst the second phase related to the groups and activities funded by the LNF and how these have benefited children, young people, families and the groups themselves (the focus of the impact report, No 2). These phases asked:

- ***Distributing the Fund:*** How effective (and cost-effective) is the application and grant-approval process in directing funding to groups and activities that are closest to LNF objectives and grant-award principles?
- ***Supporting children and young people:*** How effective are funded groups in reaching and benefiting children and young people most in need through their LNF-funded activities, and what are the (potential) longer-term benefits to children, young people, and the families and groups who support them?

In order to address these broad objectives the evaluation team aimed to address the following questions:

- How does the LNF fit alongside the Children's Fund and other schemes with broadly similar aims i.e. to address childhood poverty and encourage the development of children's voices?
- Is the organisational superstructure effective in facilitating the goals of the LNF?
- How effective is the application process in reaching smaller and newer voluntary and community groups?
- How effective are local decision-making processes (e.g. the various combinations of local administrative staff and grants panels) in reflecting local needs?
- How effective is the outreach and promotional work undertaken by local LNF administrators in helping smaller and newer groups to apply to the LNF?
- Are deprived groups accessing the fund?
- How is the funding used?
- What are the immediate, medium and longer-term impacts of the Fund?
- What is the impact of the requirement for local groups to have in place a Child Protection Policy before applying to the LNF?
- Is the LNF leading to more participation by children and young people in community groups?
- Are local communities increasing their capacity to develop groups like those funded by LNF, as a consequence of gaining funding from the LNF?
- How cost-effective is grant-giving within the current structure of the LNF?

1.4 Design of the evaluation

In order to understand the design, implementation and delivery of the LNF as well as to assess the feasibility of our proposed evaluation, a short developmental study was carried out by the team during the first 4 months of its work. This resulted in certain aspects of the research being slightly redesigned. The final research design comprised the following components: interviews with central policy actors, analysis of application form data, analysis of child poverty data, telephone surveys with applicants, case studies, telephone surveys with local administrators, tracking of a sample of applications from the Call Centre, and an economic analysis. The design and conduct is discussed in more detail in both Reports No 1 and 2 and the economic analysis is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 below. A profile of respondents who were involved in the research can also be seen in Reports 1 and 2.

1.5 Children's Event

During the last stages of the evaluation a feedback meeting was held in London to enable a sample of children and young people's groups to present their views on what the LNF has meant for them and their communities. Six projects from different case-study areas were represented and 3 young people from each, together with their project leader, made presentations to the evaluation team, members of the DfES policy team and the former Minister for Children and Young People (Margaret Hodge). This was intended to be part of the process by which young people's voices could be heard through the work of the evaluation team.

2 Building on our earlier findings

In our Interim Report, which reported on progress to the end of 2003, we identified a number of key questions for the ongoing evaluation. These questions demonstrated differing interpretations about the design, implementation and deliver of the LNF. The focus of the questions also reflected the ongoing development of the LNF as practices and procedures were being changed in order to improve performance in part due to the changed national management arrangements. The issues raised are outlined in the following sections alongside the evidence from the final stage of the evaluation. The findings are presented in full in the companion Process and Impact Reports.

2.1 The changing context for the evaluation

Since the Interim Report was completed two years ago, a number of aspects of the LNF have changed, providing a different context for the final stage of the evaluation as well as for its future development. The Third Wave of LNFs, which had only just begun to operate at the time of the Interim Report, is now fully operational and has had two years of experience of grant-giving. Our fieldwork involved two sets of contact with Wave Three case studies (Cambridgeshire and Essex) as well as two further sets of contact with the other six case studies from earlier Waves. The shift of central management from the Community Foundation Network back to the policy team at DfES was completed and, during the second phase of the evaluation, the entire central direction of the LNF programme has been handled from within the DfES, albeit with some substantive organisational and nomenclature changes as a result of broader departmental reorganisation. Administrative systems, including the accumulation of data in the national database, the Guidance Manual, and some of the Call Centre systems, have been updated and improved. Contracts with two local delivery agents were terminated because of their failure to meet baseline requirements for the delivery of the LNF.

At a national level, the policy context has changed significantly, with work on the establishment and development of children's trusts (including the piloting - 'pathfinding' - of 35). By 2008 it is assumed that local children's trusts will have been established, based on local social services authority areas, which will incorporate - but in ways yet to be determined - the work of the LNF and related programmes such as Connexions and the Children's Fund. When the LNF might become - as currently hoped - part of local children's trusts, it is expected that the four themes which currently form the focus of its work, are likely to be replaced by the five outcomes governing children and young people's services referred to in footnote 5 earlier. In light of this, funding for the LNF nationally and locally is assured until March 2008. Beyond that point, the future for the LNF is currently uncertain. We return to this discussion in Chapter 3 but the evidence of this evaluation strongly supports the continuation of the LNF much in its present form, subject to new structural arrangements.

2.2 Issues arising from the interim report

The targeting of resources: are funds going to smaller, less experienced groups and representatives of children, young people and their communities in poorer areas, identified as the original core target?

The evidence from the final stages of the evaluation suggests that this goal is increasingly being addressed but that there is still need for further targeting of specific groups. Analysis of the distribution of funds suggests that they are targeted broadly on areas of greater levels of child poverty, both between LNF areas and within them. However, there remains a concern reported to us by local administrators, that some sections of local communities, typically the more marginalised groups - black and minority ethnic communities, or those living in deeply rural areas, or of those with special needs - are still not being reached very effectively by the LNF. The evidence from interviews with groups not known to local LNF teams also confirms this finding. It is clear however that there is a need for more creative forms of publicity, innovative outreach work and application forms which are in languages other than English. It may also involve experimenting with different kinds of application procedure, using for example, members of staff who are more easily able to target these groups through their familiarity with other languages. At the same time, there is generally an increased recognition of the multi-faceted nature of child poverty and a move away from a focus simply on income poverty which, all parties now accept, the LNF is not able to address except in a very marginal way.

Outreach work: what was the role of outreach work and how effective was it in promoting access to the LNF by smaller, more marginalised groups?

As noted above, outreach is continuing to improve access for more marginalised groups. With more focused outreach and perhaps some more detailed priority setting by local LNFs this could be further improved. One outreach worker, for example, commented that he felt driven by required levels of output set by the local LNF to encourage groups to apply when, in his view, they were not yet ready to do so. With less pressure on the need for numbers it might be feasible for local LNFs to direct the energy of outreach workers more strongly towards reaching marginalised groups whilst not expecting that this will necessarily translate immediately into a large volume of applications from such groups. This, in turn, would require some tolerance in terms of annual budgeting and might, for example, suggest that a more flexible funding regime allowing for carry-over from one year to the next would be helpful to address the slower pace needed for such groups to achieve full applicant status.

The four themes: would, over time, the early focus of the bulk of applications on the 'soft' themes of 'aspirations', 'experiences', 'isolation' and 'access' be replaced by an emphasis on the so-called harder themes of 'economic disadvantage' and 'children's voices'?

Our analysis of the central database suggests that there has been a shift, but only a small one to date, away from the 'softer' themes towards the 'harder' ones, over the period of the whole evaluation. There are several explanatory factors at work here but they all relate to the one year funding period which is characteristic of most applicants. One factor, of course, is that, there is a constant turnover of new groups applying who will find it easiest to engage with local agendas at the 'softer' end of the scale of goals. Indeed, given that many applicants have only recently developed, it is indeed likely that they would apply for what might appear to be more obviously realisable goals, those which new groups might find more manageable.

A second associated reason is that these 'harder' themes are likely to require a slower more developmental approach than one years funding (which occurs in most cases) will allow. Addressing both economic disadvantage and facilitating the voice of children typically - if they are to be meaningful - each require longer periods of developmental work, both by and for facilitators.⁶ Within the other themes, work might involve the provision of activities, trips or facilities, rather than facilitating the participation of children and young people, many of whom are likely to have had little experience of project management. A major shift in this area would require structural changes in the LNF, in terms of enhanced possibilities for two-year funding at the very least.

Child protection: would the child protection policy, then seen as an (unexpectedly) positive aspect of the LNF, remain seen in this light or would it, as had been feared, act as a barrier to applicants?

Here the evidence is virtually unequivocal. From a position at the start of the evaluation where anxiety was reported about the extent to which the child protection policy would represent a huge barrier to many applicants, and particularly those less used to constructing formal instruments of governance (e.g. the small and embryonic groups which were privileged in much of the early literature about the LNF), it seems clear that the child protection policy is now almost unanimously seen as a positive aspect of the LNF. Typically, it is seen as having helped a group think through a number of important aspects of their work in relation to safeguarding children. This is an enormous gain since the messages of child protection - which have created such political and policy turbulence over the past twenty years for local and central government - are clearly now reaching quite deeply into the heart of many local communities through the work of voluntary and community organisations, which themselves are increasingly adopting these messages

⁶ See for example G. Craig (2000) *What works in community development with children?*, Ilford: Barnardos.

too. Credit for this aspect of the work of the LNF probably lies in the main with outreach workers since it is they who have been engaging with local groups over child protection issues alongside other key - but run-of-the-mill for new local groups - issues such as forming a constitution, opening a bank account and paying attention to financial probity.

The Call Centre: would the early criticisms of the Call Centre, in relation to some perceived shortcomings of its administrative processes, continue?

We did not detect, in the final phases of the evaluation, any substantial ongoing criticism of the Call Centre's administrative procedures. It seems reasonable to suggest that such difficulties, as were reported in the early stages of the evaluation, were a reasonable and understandable reflection of start-up difficulties in settling into what has been a complex organisational framework. Our interviews with Call Centre staff, and the work we did on tracking a random sample of applications, (see Reports 1 and 2), suggested that the Call Centre was generally aware of issues emerging in the work of the LNF which had some impact on their procedures. Call Centre staff felt however it was unhelpful to exclude them from national consultative fora. They argued that their presence on a normalised basis could have more quickly resolved some difficulties within administrative systems between themselves and the LNFs.

The Call Centre, we found, was keen to respond to issues by updating and refining its systems as far as resources allowed. Indeed, case study respondents were sometimes at pains to suggest that they had no criticisms of the efficiency of the Call Centre or of the helpfulness of its staff. Those criticisms which remained of the Call Centre by the end of the evaluation - but which were not strongly shared across all LNFs by any means - related to its structural place in the LNF system. Questions were raised by local LNF staff as to whether the work of handling applications from initial enquiry onwards might be done more effectively by giving that responsibility to each LNF. The arguments against this, rehearsed in more detail elsewhere, are essentially that such a move might undermine national consistency (or, conversely promote a kind of postcode lottery) and encourage manipulation of the application process. Applicants left us in no doubt, however, that, despite some difficulties (such as not having other modes of application early on than by the telephone helpline - a criticism which the Call Centre was latterly dealing with), they were satisfied with the role and performance of the Call Centre. Our evidence suggests quite strongly that the National Call Centre function should remain, balancing the interests of consistency and accessibility, but that its staff should be incorporated more fully into - and consulted about - the ongoing process of administrative change. It is always open to DfES to ensure adequate ongoing publicity about the Call Centre to promote its service, separately from any local publicity undertaken by LNF teams.

Flexibility: could the LNF continue to manage the tension effectively between local need and national consistency?

This has been a difficult question to address. There is not a postcode lottery in the sense that the application process is, at the start, transparent, even-handed and effectively open to all who are aware of it (itself still a fairly significant issue), save those who find using a Call Centre or working in English problematic. Every applicant then has to go through the same procedures to get an application form. From that point, local discretion - or flexibility - in procedures, kick in. The local LNFs have considerable discretion as to how outreach resources are used to support applicants (subject to what we said earlier about the role of outreach work), how grant panels work and so on. The pattern of applications, the proportion of those which were successful and unsuccessful, the percentages applying as between the four different themes, the extent to which more marginalised groups were attracted into the LNF 'net', varied considerably between different areas. To a large degree, the evidence suggests that these variations appear to be a reasonable reflection of differing local conditions. This is not to say however, as we have observed above, that more could not be done to improve certain aspects of the local LNF process. However, for a grant-giving scheme run by the voluntary sector - although still managed by central government and subject to the inevitable constraints resulting from this - incorporating such a degree of responsiveness to local needs is a key achievement.

This is in part, of course, a reflection of the structure of the LNF itself with the checks and balances built into it. But it also reflects favourably on the way DfES are 'managing' the national programme effectively from the centre and have created an appropriate level of political and administrative 'space' to allow a strong degree of local discretion. This has in part resulted from the substantial experience of the voluntary and community sectors that key central staff associated with the LNF have. As a consequence of this experience they were more likely to be trusted to understand and communicate and respond appropriately to issues that were raised at the local level.

Where more might have been done - if lack of central resources had not prevented this ⁷ - was in sharing and disseminating valuable lessons learnt from the local level, through national and regional conferences and workshops. There is doubtless much valuable experience still locked into local LNFs which has yet fully to be disseminated and shared at a broader level both within the LNF as a whole and in other fora working with children and young people. ⁸ This is particularly important as the development of children's trusts gathers pace. We have consistently argued throughout the life of this evaluation that the

⁷ At one stage in 2004, the central policy team was operating effectively at half its staffing complement, the result of uncertainty about its future and a broader programme of cuts in civil service staffing levels imposed, ironically perhaps, by the Treasury.

⁸ The evaluation team used its own local bulletin, four copies of which were sent at intervals to local LNFs to keep them informed of the progress of the evaluation, to encourage this kind of process. Copies of these Bulletins are available from g.craig@hull.ac.uk

LNf has been poorly publicised as a policy instrument and that the lessons from it have yet to be used as effectively as they might have been. In the light of the research evidence it would seem to be a highly appropriate time to address this gap in promotion and publicity.

Overall, it seems that the balance between central consistency and local discretion has generally worked well and to the advantage of recipients of LNf funding.

2.3 Measuring the success of the LNf

In our Interim Report, we also reflected on how differing respondents indicated they would measure the success of the LNf and we conclude this Chapter by returning again to this debate. This is important because of the success of the LNf should be measured in terms of process and impact goals and not by numerical outputs, helpful though these latter may be in providing a simple quantifiable account for political purposes. Again, we list here the measures of success identified by respondents and provide a commentary in the light of the overall findings of the evaluation.

It is important to remember that these measures were set in the Interim Report within a growing realisation that the goal of the LNf, to address child poverty, could only be achieved if understandings of child poverty widened out from a focus on financial poverty to broader understandings - for example, to do with participation in the life of the community, with the development of education and skills, and with widening experience and aspirations. This realisation has now, we believe, been consolidated and this is important as it places the LNf in a context which is perhaps more realistic - though no less ambitious - than was originally implied. This perhaps has also been an important learning point from the experience of the LNf to date - that many people have come to understand more clearly what child poverty entails and ways in which it can (and cannot) be addressed; and that the LNf has to be situated within a much wider programmatic approach to the eradication of child poverty.

One crude measure of success identified by a respondent during the early stages of the evaluation would simply have been, assuming the profile of organisations is appropriate, *'to spend'*. We argued then that this profile might, of course, take some time - several years perhaps - to become established, as spending moves from more established organisations to the newer ones which it was generally hoped that the LNf would target. Our continuing experience with the evaluation has shown this to be the case. Newer organisations are still emerging and organisations exist that could be potential applicants, but which have not yet been reached by the LNf. Leaving this to one side, however, we do not believe, given the goals of the LNf, that simply spending local budgets is an appropriate measure of success. We have already commented on the fact that outreach workers felt they were driven to achieve targets inappropriately simply to justify their contract and that this led to applications which were made before groups were ready. Spending budgets is reflected in the kinds of output beloved of Treasury officials and government spokespeople but they

remain just that - outputs. The LNF, as we have come to understand it, emphasises the process aspects of its work - the means by which outcomes are achieved - as well as the outcomes themselves. It is these measures of success which, as we have stressed, should be regarded as most important.

One respondent described the issue of success more specifically and perhaps challengingly as *'does the LNF reach those targets [i.e. smaller defined areas] which are deprived, especially in the more affluent areas'*. The evidence suggests that the LNF is doing this both in generally more deprived and less deprived areas (using the term area here to describe the entire geographical area of benefit of a local LNF). We have commented positively on the fact that LNF funds are available to those living in pockets of poverty within more generally affluent areas, which cannot access other major government funding streams targeted on deprived people and that this is a potential gain for the LNF. There seems little doubt that the majority of funding available through the LNF reaches the more deprived communities across the whole of England; and the findings of this evaluation suggest ways in which this targeting can be further consolidated.

A systematic measure was characterised by another respondent as wanting to *'see the LNF as best practice in grant giving'* although that of course begs a number of questions as to how best practice might be defined. We examine the extent to which the LNF is effective, efficient and economical within its own terms and, as far as possible, in relation to other small grant schemes in the following chapter but there are characteristics of the scheme, which we have identified earlier in this and the parallel reports on process and impact, which are worth stressing. These include its local flexibility and responsiveness to local needs, its national consistency, its accessibility to most groups representing the residents of deprived communities and neighbourhoods, the successful propagation of the child protection message, some success in local capacity-building, and the relatively 'light touch' of the application process and subsequent monitoring. Against this, we have observed a need for a stronger focus on the most marginalised communities and on longer-term and 'harder' outcomes, recognising that this might require some structural shifts in the parameters of the scheme and greater structural acknowledgment of the question of sustainability.

Other individual measures of success described by respondents in the earlier phases of the evaluation included the following, many of which we have addressed in this and the parallel reports on process and impact.

- **Poverty:** is the profile of local spend closely related to local needs?

There can never be a precise fit between local spend and local needs, given that LNF spending patterns are often demand-driven rather than needs-led in any strategic sense despite grants panels trying to skew the profile of successful applicants in the direction of need. However, the localness of the profile of applications, increased targeting of funds on more deprived areas and groups, and the growing sensitivity of local LNF delivery agents

to local needs, all suggest spending is focused strongly on needs. These factors all help to shift patterns of spending closer to one determined by needs rather than demand.

- **Development:** has the profile of spend shifted away from 'soft' targets and goals towards the 'tougher' goals?

The evidence suggests that there has been 'not much' movement but this is due to the very real structural constraints which impede this shift happening to a substantial degree. As already discussed this is due to the structural framework in which local delivery agents have to operate.

- **Targeting:** is the fund reaching groups addressing children and young people facing poverty and disadvantage?

It is clear that the Fund is achieving this aim although more can be done in certain areas to reach the most marginalised groups. Where the LNF has yet to make a more significant impact is in fully engaging children and young people in the determination of projects, the management of projects and the administration of the fund locally. This again is a result in large part of the structural constraints under which the Fund operates, which has limited the time and resource available to do the necessary development work with children and young people. That said, the innovative work in involving young people in some areas (referred to in Reports 1 and 2) could be disseminated and replicated more widely. As we found in some areas, fuller involvement of young people in the more strategic aspects of each LNF as one goal was not a goal of the young people themselves. These young people appeared to prefer greater control over activities, structures and processes which they themselves had been involved in initiating. In a more limited number of cases, however, young people were energetically involved in structural aspects of the work of the LNF including sitting on grants panels.

Outreach: has outreach helped less-established groups access the fund (including dealing with form-filling and new procedures such as child protection)?

Again, this has been dealt with earlier in this and other reports and the evidence is broadly positive. The outreach function is a very important and unique aspect of the LNF and should be further enhanced and developed. This may mean further training and support for outreach workers, a larger budget and clearer expectations of what they can achieve beyond crude numerical indicators such as the 'numbers of applications per year'.

- **Ownership:** does the voluntary sector own the scheme?

The LNF, despite a few changes in local delivery agents and despite the return of management centrally to within central government, is now reasonably firmly embedded within the voluntary and community sector at the local level. This may seem a paradoxical comment to make in the light of the central management arrangements. However, given the relatively light managerial touch from the centre, the central team's sensitivity to

voluntary sector issues, the level of consultation occurring with local delivery agents, the high degree of flexibility at the local level in terms of the mode of delivery (for example, in the organisation of outreach and grants panels), it seems justifiable. In one sense the central control can be seen as a backup to ensure quality control, consistency and proper accountability for public funds. Local LNFs clearly valued the degree of autonomy they had from local authorities (whilst being keen to use skilled professionals where appropriate, for example in helping with grant assessment and decision-making) and perceived themselves very much as independent of local control. Whether this creative organisational relationship can continue into the future is an open question which we return to in Chapter 3.

The balance of ownership of the LNF is clearly weighted towards the voluntary and community sectors. This is evidenced by the way the scheme has extended its reach into local voluntary and community organisations (and particularly the latter) through its natural growth, through the extension of those applying successfully, and through the work of outreach staff. In these senses, the LNF has become an important part of the local funding tapestry and one which was particularly valued by smaller organisations and by organisations working for deprived children and young people in areas where such funding opportunities were limited. If it is able to consolidate this work by even greater attention to more marginalised groups such as BME groups and those in deeply rural areas, this ownership will be further strengthened.

- **Children's participation:** does it engage children, allow them into the mainstream ('get onto the radar' in the words of one respondent) and engage in experiences on a systematic basis, which in turn allow them to engage more widely outside the LNF, and thus empower them?

This is discussed at some length in the Impact Report (No. 2) and the conclusions of that discussion were, in summary, that very many children and young people - literally tens of thousands - were engaged in a range of activities, groups and organisations which extended their experiences, developed their skills and gave them different aspirations for the future. Some - probably measured in thousands - were involved more deeply with the work of groups and organisations in terms of determining ideas for new projects and activities, and being involved in some way in helping to run them. Much less typically young people in the research were involved with the detailed organisational work of the LNF itself, in sitting on grant panels, advising LNF staff and, in a few cases, contributing to assessments. There is no doubt that many young people had, even if in a limited way, a sense of greater control over their futures. In our case study work, there were recurrent examples of engagement with the LNF's leading to very positive outcomes. This was evident, for example, also in the Children's Event, reported on above, when four groups of young people came to the DfES to give feedback on the benefits of their involvement in the LNF, in person, to the Minister for Children and senior officials.

However, what the evaluation has not been able to do is to track the progress of young people over a longer period of time to see what the sustainable outcomes of involvement

with LNF and its funded activities might result. This is a structural weakness of the LNF, reflected in the evaluation, which is that, to date, it has focused on short-term activities (because of its funding parameters). This in turn has meant that it cannot engage young people over a longer period of time. Of course, as we have noted elsewhere, children and young people move on - into work, college or simply into adulthood - and there will always be this ephemeral dimension to its work.

- **Capacity:** does the LNF reach newer groups which then continue on a sustainable basis?

The evidence from the evaluation is that there has been a perceptible and significant shift during the life of the LNF away from the 'usual suspects' - well-organised and long-standing groups familiar with applying for funds - towards newer groups, many of which are small and community-based. In addition, a significant proportion of these small groups were either wholly or partly stimulated into existence by the arrival of the LNF. In many cases, these groups have indicated that they now felt more skilled in making funding applications which would help in seeking further funding when the LNF funds expired. However, the question of their long-term sustainability would need to be subject to further research revisiting areas in two to three years to explore this question, and the longer-term impacts on children and young people in particular. Capacity of specific kinds has certainly been increased in deprived communities. For example, there are more groups and organisations, most of them controlled by local people who are representative of those communities and these people are more skilled at managing organisations, at thinking about child protection issues and at taking a wider view of their own communities. The key task for LNFs over the next years is to extend these gains to the most deprived or marginalised groups in some areas.

- **Social change:** what (sustainable) difference does the LNF make on the ground in the view of local communities and beneficiaries?

At the level of individuals, families and parents, the impacts of the LNF were clear and, again have been discussed in the Impact Report in some detail and earlier in this report. Given that individuals move on and, in the case of children and young people in particular, may not stay within the communities targeted by the LNF, one key question is what difference the LNF has made to local communities, which may be sustainable. There is no doubt that the pool of skills, talents and experience has been deepened and widened in these communities and this will have an impact which knocks on into other areas of community life. Some adults found that their experience in working with groups provided them with enough self-confidence and experience to help them into the labour market. It seems reasonable to assume that, in the same way, these skills and experiences would be, for many more adults and parents, transferable into other local community activities, such as running tenants groups or becoming involved in other local organizations and generally enhancing their level of political skills. In a number of cases, respondents talked about the importance of bringing people together within the community to make it

more cohesive (although not necessarily using this language) and this may have been particularly significant in relation to the question of inter-ethnic relations. A significant number of young people were either encouraged to meet others from their own cultural or ethnic background, thus increasing a sense of identity, self-confidence and solidarity, or to meet and interact with young people from other cultural backgrounds. This is an extremely important gain if it translates into greater sensitivity towards other cultures, religions and heritages as these young people grow into adulthood, given the continuing high levels of racism in UK society (as reflected in, for example, police data on incidents of racial abuse and violence). These kinds of projects were thus clearly making an important contribution to community cohesion.

This picture is a broadly positive one, despite some ongoing difficulties in targeting and delivery which remain to be addressed. The LNF however, was described by some - albeit a few - respondents as a rather 'messy' arrangement and one which sat rather untidily outside other structures for the delivery of funding to local communities, children and young people. It is reasonable to ask whether these outcomes might have been delivered by some other means or, to put it another way, whether the structure of the LNF was effective and economic in delivering the sums involved to local communities. This was the task of the economic evaluation and we turn to examining the findings from this in Chapter 3.

3 Assessing the economic and administrative effectiveness of the LNF

In order to assess whether the structure of the LNF was economically and administratively effective, members of the team carried out an economic evaluation. This aimed, first, to determine whether the grant-giving within the current structure of the LNF was cost-effective and, second, to determine whether the LNF as an organisational form was effective in meeting its objectives.

To investigate these questions, data was sought on the different costs of administering the LNF and some modelling of different outcomes and potential consequences was attempted. This work would have been strengthened by some comparative data from similar types of scheme - for example, a simple comparison of the cost of administering the costs of distributing grants for other initiatives. Economic evaluations are usually conducted to answer questions such as whether a particular programme or option provides good value for money compared to an alternative, or set of alternatives, including the option that the scheme under evaluation did not exist. In this instance, given that, despite extensive searching, no published evaluations containing cost information were found, this latter alternative is the comparison used in the modelled costs and outcomes in this analysis.

Economic evaluation is a set of techniques for comparing costs (or inputs) and consequences (or outcomes) of a number of alternative programmes, schemes or activities. In order to make comparisons, many of the inputs and outcomes are measured in a common unit, money, so that programmes can be compared directly. Valuing all costs and consequences in monetary terms is known as cost-benefit analysis. More commonly, evaluations measure the (net) cost of a common unit of output, such as the cost per family raised above the poverty line. Such an evaluation is a cost-effectiveness analysis.

Economic evaluations are therefore potentially powerful tools, but caution should be exercised when undertaking economic analysis and interpreting results. First, results should not be used prescriptively, but instead, the evidence should be used in conjunction with other criteria, for example equity (an important implicit goal of the LNF), and an understanding of who actually derives the benefits from the programme. Furthermore, evaluations of social programmes with multiple outcomes are very difficult to undertake for a number of reasons. For example, measuring and quantifying the improvement in a child's 'life skills' as the result of participation in a locally-run initiative would be almost impossible in meaningful units and completely impossible in a short-term evaluation such as the one described here. Even if outcomes are measured before and after, attributing the change to the programme is only possible if the study has been undertaken using a comparison group to control for other factors that may be responsible for observed changes. This kind of laboratory approach is very rarely available for human resource social

policy programmes: the world does not and cannot be made, in reality and in political and ethical terms, to 'stand still' whilst such an 'experimental' approach is adopted.

For this study the following sections outline the total estimatable costs of the scheme. A societal perspective was taken which includes all the resource costs such as the central and local administrative staff, space and capital costs but also an estimate of the time costs to applicants and the volunteers such as panel members involved in this scheme.

3.1 Evaluating the cost of administering the LNF

Since the LNF involves a new form of distributing grants to help children living in poverty, it is first necessary to identify the major costs involved and the consequences of the grant process.

Resource inputs can be categorised into the following four items:

1. The central administration costs of the LNF
2. The national Call Centre
3. Local area costs
4. Costs to applicants

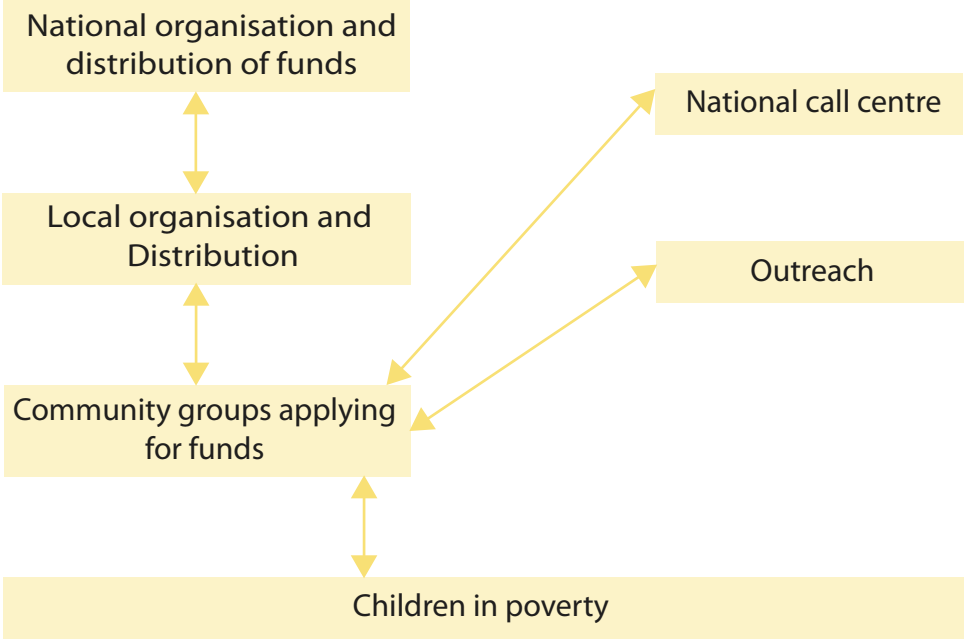
However, as in any economic evaluation, it is important to consider the perspective from which it is being conducted, since this will determine which costs and outcomes are included in the analysis. For example, an evaluation from the perspective of the government will include administration and call centre costs, but may not include any costs borne by wider society. These include the time taken to complete grant applications and the time committed by panel members, young people and children involved in the LNF process, and volunteers engaged in activities from the local community: these costs were in reality very considerable. On the other hand, a societal perspective would include all costs whether they were incurred by the government or by other components of society. It is the latter perspective which we are concerned with here, since the (time and opportunity) costs incurred by those outside the formal LNF system were, as we note, considerable.

The following (and Figure 2.1) illustrate the structure of the LNF process and the different parts of the process for which costs have to be estimated:

First, the LNF has a national organisational framework, which is supported by local panels that use outreach to promote wider activities and capacity-building and also to generate LNF demand. A major aim of the outreach work is therefore to find new areas of need. The original allocation of funds to local LNFs at the start of the economic evaluation was based on a formula based both on the number of children under 16 in households with key means-tested benefits, and on the proportion of households in receipt of benefits. Other

adjustments were made for rural areas to allow for expected extra costs of delivery. The boundaries were originally those of the DfES-supported Learning and Skills Council areas (also those for Connexions partnerships, but not for the Children’s Fund areas, which were all contiguous with individual local authority social services areas⁹) and, initially, outreach was based on the same criteria, as the funds were allocated. These incorporated elements of about 10% of total funds for administration and 5% for outreach purposes. For Wave III, there were some additional starting-up funds and 19% of funding was allocated to administrative and outreach work. This higher percentage, particularly for outreach work, allocated to shire counties was because of the large and sparsely populated geographical areas they covered. It was considered by DfES officials, however, that funds had been determined more by needs than by a formula. Not all the data were available for the whole period and so in the estimates used here the proportion of administrative and outreach costs compared to the total grants awarded have been estimated from the inception of the LNF to April 2004.

Figure 3.1: Simplified structure of the LNF



Available data to model the total costs of administering the LNF are now considered in turn.

3.2 Administering the LNF: the costs

3.2.1 The central LNF administration costs

The majority of cost involved in administering the LNF was the cost of central staffing. The scheme employed - at its full complement (which was never achieved) - two Grade 7 staff,

⁹ Children’s Fund areas were identical to local authority social services areas; LNF areas might be but were often also equivalent to a combination of several such areas. Thus Children’s Fund and LNF areas might be contiguous, but might not be.

two Higher Executive Officers, two Executive Officers and one Administrative Officer. Staff costs include full salary costs including employer NI and superannuation.

Table 3.1 Equipment and travel costs for the LNF administration 2001-04 (2002 prices)

| | Qty | Cost | Full annual cost | Cost (3 years) |
|---------------------------|------------------|--------|------------------|----------------|
| Office space | 36m ^w | £18.73 | £674.28 | £2,023 |
| Computers (3 yr lifespan) | 7 | £1,000 | £2,333 | £7,000 |
| Printer (3 yr lifespan) | 1 | £250 | £83 | £250 |
| Fax (3 yr lifespan) | 1 | £150 | £50 | £150 |
| Travel | | £4,500 | £4,500 | £13,500 |
| | | | | £22,923 |

The staff costs for administering the fund were £567,000 over a three-year period allowing for the full economic costs of these staff. It should be noted again that this may be an overestimate because the team was not at full complement for any of this period.

Equipment and travel costs for the LNF administration are shown in Table 2.1. The costs for computers, fax and printer are converted to annual costs by using straight-line depreciation, over an assumed lifespan of 3 years. The total cost is £22,923.

The total cost of administering the LNF, therefore, was an annual £197,000 or £590,000 for three years (2001-04).

3.2.2 The Call Centre

The costs for the Call Centre were not made available to us, presumably for reasons of commercial confidentiality. To model these costs reasonable estimates of the staff time taken and connection times need to be made. Using an average call time and personnel cost yields an estimate of £5 per call. Assuming there are 12 calls for every submitted application, this would yield costs of approximately £660,000 or £220,000 per year. This cost would need to include the cost of the initial call and the consequent actions.

Obviously such central costs for the scheme as a whole are very dependent on the flow of calls. If the calls were spread out evenly, a £5 per call estimate would yield approximately 15 to 30 minutes of staff time per call. However, it was clear that there were peaks and troughs of such calls and in order to cope with demand, extra members of staff were employed from time to time. The model below uses both £5 per call and £10 per call estimates, that is, an annual cost of between £220,000 and £440,000 per annum. On the basis of these assumptions, this would translate to a cost of £27 or £54 per successful applicant.

3.2.3 Local area costs

Direct and quantifiable local area costs comprise of three major categories, the costs of local panels, the cost of outreach work and local administration costs. Outreach and local administrative costs were set by the central administration and varied across Waves as described above. Full figures for the period were not available. Total cost for administrative costs, outreach costs and total grant were available up to 2003. A final figure for administrative and outreach costs was calculated from these figures by adjusting these totals in proportion to total grant spend for the period of the evaluation. This results in an estimate of £4,306,800 for administrative costs and £2,359,800 for outreach expenditure.

Part of the administrative costs however was spent on the direct cost of panels. However, these panels also involved the time of a number of volunteers. The number of panels, the number of grant panel members and the frequency of panel meetings varied between areas and between panels. For example, Staffordshire ran three panels (one in each area) at every grant/panel session. London administrators and Essex had one panel per grant-making quarter. In Northumberland there was only one panel that met monthly. Not only is it important to know the frequency of meetings and time taken in each meeting but to provide an estimate of the time resource required the number of panel members is required. Northumberland, for example had meetings attended by between four and 10 members.

In South Yorkshire, from January 2004 each of the component districts (four in total) had its own panel, with panel members meeting every six weeks. Grant panels throughout the LNF areas ranged from around five to ten members.

The annual cost for the total number of panel meetings, (assumed to be four hours in duration), for a ten person panel for the South Yorkshire area would be given by an average of 8.6 meetings per year, multiplied by four panels, making 34.4 meetings annually. To estimate the cost of panel members' time, the average hourly wage rate was used (£11.70 per hour), reflecting the opportunity cost of time spent by these volunteers on this activity rather than any other volunteering, work or leisure activity. This also follows general economic evaluation guideline procedures.¹⁰ Each panel has ten members working four hours, a total cost of 40 hours at £11.70 per hour, which gives a total of £468. The total number of meetings multiplied by the cost per meeting therefore gives an annual cost of £16,099 for South Yorkshire. To this we should add the cost of premises, although the wide range of venues used - and different forms of implied cost - makes it very difficult to estimate a cost, or the time and costs spent travelling to meetings by panel members.

It is very speculative to provide a cost across all the LNF areas but we attempt to do so, taking a modest estimate of £10,000 per area. This estimate balances the fact that some areas were more sparsely populated, and may have had fewer panel meetings (although

¹⁰ See for example Office for National Statistics (2003) Labour Market Trends, TSO: London for validation of this approach.

the costs of convening meetings may have been correspondingly higher), and some areas had more panel meetings because they covered several different local authority areas. If a modest cost, based on the South Yorkshire example, is £10,000 per year, this equates to £30,000 (without any inflation) for three years. For the seventeen areas in Wave 1 areas which have been operational for three years, this would equate to £510,000. For the further seventeen areas in Wave 2s which have been operational for two years, this would equate to another £340,000. For the fourteen areas in Wave 3s which have been operational for one year, this would equate to £140,000. The total cost of panels on this basis would be £990,000: again this is a modest estimate - but nevertheless reflects the large investment in time and resources made by the panel members and LNF administering organisations.

3.2.4 Applicant costs

In addition to the central government cost of the scheme there are costs incurred by applicants as part of the LNF process. Applicants spend time completing forms in order to apply for grants from the LNF. This time has a value or opportunity cost, as it could be spent working or pursuing other leisure activities, and we again use the cost per hour of £11.70 as outlined above. Interviews with applicants showed that there was a huge variation in the times needed to complete grant applications, ranging from two hours to two days. Applicants' time varied according to the programme they were attempting to fund, and the time spent in searching for the information required by the application form. If we assume that an application takes one day (assumed to be eight hours) to complete, the cost of a single application is £93.60 based on the above valuation of time.

If we then multiply the cost per application by the number of applications, which is 11,131, the cost of applicants' time across the three-year period is £1,041,900. This is probably a far more substantial underestimate than other estimates since the inputs of time and associated costs (travel, internet searching, visits to advisors etc) from local communities went well beyond form-filling.

3.3 What are the total administrative costs of the scheme?

From these figures the total administrative costs of the scheme from a societal perspective can be estimated. However, it must be re-stated that these are estimates. Table 3.2 shows the estimates in the different categories and the total is estimated to be around £9.9 million for three years for the whole scheme using the lower estimates of the Call Centre costs or £10.6 million using the higher estimate. These figures suggest the total administrative costs are approximately 20% of the total LNF expenditure, which includes the grants awarded. It does not of course factor in the very considerable hidden ('voluntary') inputs of time and money however [aren't the panel and applicant costs 'hidden']. This can be regarded as a cost or a benefit depending on one's perspective.

Table 3. 2 Total estimated administrative costs of the LNF

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Central | | |
| - Staff | | £567,000 |
| - Equipment | | £22,900 |
| Call centre | <i>Lower estimate</i> | £660,000 |
| | <i>Upper estimate</i> | (£1,320,000) |
| Local area | | |
| - Admin | | £4,306,800 |
| - Outreach | | £2,359,800 |
| - Panels | | £990,000 |
| Applicant costs | | £1,041,900 |
| Total | Lower estimate | £9,948,400 |
| | Upper estimate | (£10,608,400) |

Putting these costs together for a modelled case is presented in Table 3.3. Another way of examining the costs of the scheme is to use a bottom-up approach to model the “typical” administrative costs of a successful application.

Table 3.3: Costs of a successful grant application

| Item | Units | Cost/unit | Units | Total |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|-------------|-------|--------------------------------------|
| LNF Central administrative costs | Cost per grant | £72 | 1 | £72 |
| Call centre contacts | Per contact | £27 (£54) | 1 | £27 (£54) |
| Local administration and outreach | Cost per grant | £815 | 1 | £815 |
| Panel costs | Per grant | £117.30 | 1 | £117.30 |
| Applicant’s time | Hours | £11.70/hour | 8 | £93.60 |
| Total cost | | | | £1124.90 (£1151.90) |

In Table 3.3 an example of such an application is outlined. The table gives the estimated resource use and associated costs. This yields an approximate cost of £1125 (or £1152 if the higher unit cost for the call centre is used) per successful grant. This compares to the average award of about £4720.

3.4 Is the LNF administratively cost-effective?

To address the first question of the economic evaluation it is necessary to combine the data available on the costs of administering the grants with intermediate, or process outcomes. These outcomes include variables such as the number of grants allocated or the number of beneficiaries of the grant process. They can inform how the scheme

is performing in terms of throughput and volume, but not how effectively the LNF can achieve its final social goals - this has to be understood in an evaluation of this kind through the combination of qualitative and quantitative data discussed elsewhere. A further intermediate outcome is the sustainability of programmes following an initial injection of LNF resources. There should be some capacity-building within the LNF, in terms of the development of skills, knowledge and expertise, so that the groups can apply for more complex grants and sources of funds, and on an ongoing basis, what is conceptually sometimes described as “seed bedding”. However, it was recognised that there were some activities that would stop when there were no more sources of funds. A full analysis of the success of the LNF in this domain would require a follow-up of services after a designated period to assess how, or if, the programme is operating without LNF finance.

Table 3.4: Administrative costs of LNF intermediate outcomes

| Intermediate outcome | Total | Cost per intermediate outcome (low admin cost) | Cost per intermediate outcome (high admin cost) |
|------------------------------------|-------------|--|---|
| Total grant money | £39,978,204 | £0.25 | £0.26 |
| Total beneficiaries | 1,178,803 | £8.41 | £8.97 |
| Total number of grants approved | 8,184 | £1,211.93 | £1,292.57 |
| Total number of grant applications | 11,131 | £891.06 | £950.35 |

The need for some longer-term follow-up has been argued for also in Chapter 1 above in order to understand the longer-term impact on children and young people and the communities in which they currently live. Several key intermediate outcomes are presented in Table 3.4 for the same three-year time period with some estimated ratios of costs per intermediate outcomes. These figures suggest that administrative costs were reasonable when set against these outcomes although without data from comparable schemes it is very difficult to draw any firm conclusions about economic efficiency.

3.4.1 Did the money provide useful outcomes?

To answer the second economic question it is necessary to consider the more sustained impacts of the LNF and how they could be measured and valued. These final outcomes include the building of social capacity, and improvements in local social indicators. A primary aim identified by key LNF personnel was that the funds should reach activities not reached by other grants, with the aim to build capacity for civic engagement, broadly defined. However, this is very difficult to measure and is a particularly subjective outcome domain. Wider social outcomes include providing young people with transferable life skills to help them to be better able to help themselves in the future.

A selection of the impacts mentioned by recipients and administrators can, however, be subject to some sort of modelling. The development of LNF-funded programmes may, for example, reduce the number of children on the streets and or those not engaging in education, reducing vandalism and other criminal behaviour. In Table 3.5 some unit values of these types of problems are presented. It can be seen that the total value given in grants plus the total costs can be compared to the potential value of preventing these impacts. In general, even a small impact of a programme could yield a social benefit. Using the schema in Table 3.3, for example, would suggest that the total costs, including the (averaged) value of the grant awarded is about £6,000. Preventing three burglaries would bring more social benefits than this total cost. That is the grant would “pay” for itself even if no further benefits occurred. Similarly, retaining one child in the education system, or two children requiring drug treatment, would yield similar benefits and suggest the grant was cost-saving.

Table 3.5: Examples of the costs of events potentially averted by the LNF grants

| Item (Source ¹¹) | Social cost (2002/03 prices) |
|--|--|
| Shop -lifting offence (1) | £107 per offence |
| Burglary (1) | £2469 per offence |
| Car theft (1) | £950 per offence |
| Drug arrest (2) | £3812 per arrest |
| Cost of 16-18 year olds not being in employment, education or training (3) | £5,300 (current costs); £45,000 (present value over lifetime) |
| GP visit (4) | £20 per surgery consultation |
| Emergency ambulance (4) | £205 per journey |
| Drug treatment (5) | £3356, total treatment over two years |
| Hospital stay (4) | £164 per stay in paediatric ward |

11 Sources for this table and the commentary above are as follows:

1. Brand, S. and Price, R. (2000) *The economic and social costs of crime*. Home Office Research Study 217, Research Development and Statistics Directorate, London: Home Office.
2. Godfrey (2002) Godfrey, C., Eaton, G., McDougall, C. and Culyer, A. *The economic and social costs of Class A drug use in England and Wales, 2000*. Home Office Research Study 249, London: Home Office, 2002. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hors249.pdf>
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In fact, if only one child involved in schemes funded from every eight grants awarded was prevented from being in the “not in education, employment or training” group at age 16 to 18 the LNF scheme would “pay” for itself. On this basis, the LNF is financially a very effective way to use government funds.

However, it is very difficult to measure and even more difficult to directly attribute these impacts to LNF activities. In addition, there may be a considerable time-lag before the full benefits are realised, for example through future improvements in the employment performance of young people as a result of skills and abilities developed as a result of LNF-funded programmes and described in the two parallel reports.

The establishment of local initiatives will also impact upon the individuals’ quality of life, although again this is very difficult to measure, since the usual ‘quality of life’ instruments such as EQ5D are typically health-focussed and not sensitive to the domains of interest in this study. A range of benefits of the scheme both to young people and adults, in addition to helping to reduce anti-social behaviour, were highlighted in the evaluation and described at length in the companion Process and Impact reports to this volume. These include the impact on confidence and sociability of young people; changed behaviour; impacts on family members and the wider impact on the community. There are currently no available monetary estimates of these types of benefits. A clear research need is to be able to put some values on these benefits, and methods such as contingent valuation could be employed with groups of the population to provide a value for these type of benefits in future evaluations.

3.5 What else is important to consider?

3.5.1 Could efficiencies be made by altering the distribution of costs?

Interactions between cost categories are likely to be evident in the cost structure of the LNF and the balance to be struck between costs and outcomes is a critical issue. Our view is that the balance seems about right. For example, outreach work aims to make individuals aware of the Fund and can stimulate demand. Spending more on outreach would be expected to increase demand and therefore increase the overall (although not necessarily the average) costs of administering and allocating grants. Hence, it is important to establish whether sufficient demand exists, and whether this is the appropriate type of demand that the LNF is aiming to fund, or whether demand should be created through outreach work. In any case, cost alone is not a deciding factor: in rural areas, the cost of outreach and administration is relatively higher for obvious reasons but these additional costs are justifiable in the interests of equity. Similarly the cost of reaching BME populations might be higher than the average because, for example, of the need for translation and interpretation services.

The amount of resources committed to central administration and support will also impact upon the time spent by individuals filling in grant applications. Hence, less expenditure on support and administration can act to shift costs onto local applicants, and may discourage grant applications, thus undermining the overall goals of the scheme. These issues are particularly important if the scheme is evaluated from the narrower government perspective, as outlined at the start. In this case, shifting costs to the local community from the public sector can make the administration of the Fund, for example in terms of cost per pound distributed, appear more cost-effective. This would not be likely to accord with the broader goals of the LNF however and such a shift would clearly be counter-productive in the long run.

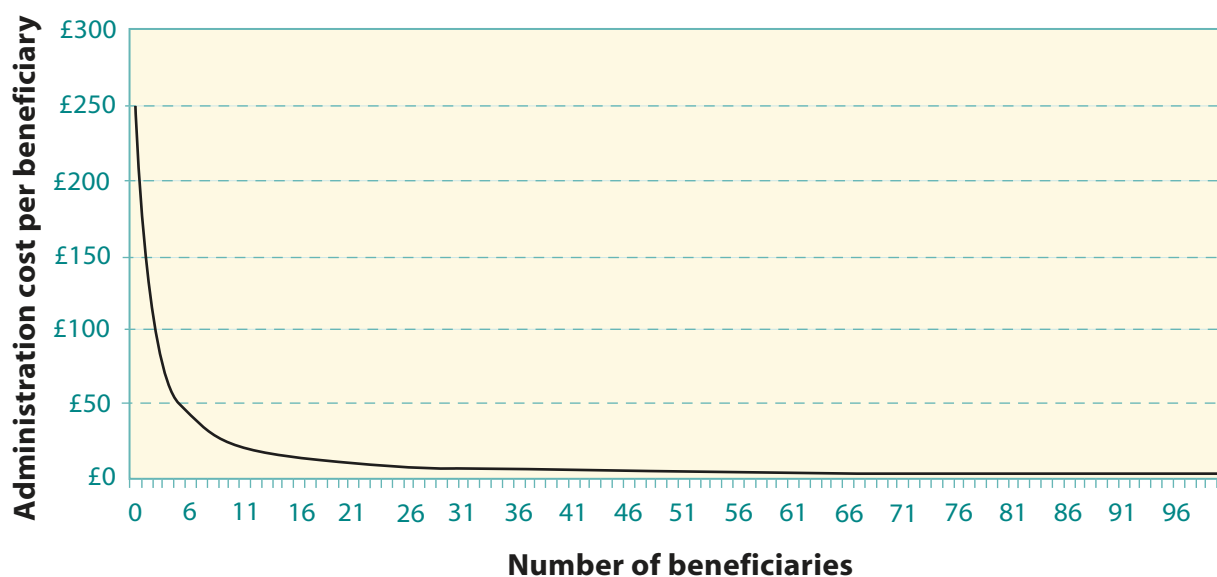
The aims of the Fund are also important in establishing the level of resources to commit to monitoring the criteria by which grants are allocated. Applying and monitoring stringent criteria for grants will be expensive. The greater the degree of monitoring, the more likely grants are to go to those judged in greatest need, but on the other hand the more resources must be allocated to monitoring and thus the total pool of funds available for those in greater need may not necessarily increase. If administration is more costly, it may be at the expense of grant money and therefore again some groups may lose out (and probably those which incur more administrative cost), therefore reducing the total number and scope of beneficiaries.

3.5.2 Are there economies of scale?

From an economic viewpoint, it is evident that the grant process is likely to be characterised by economies of scale if outcomes (more properly outputs) are denominated in terms of cost per beneficiary. It is assumed that the central administration costs, the time input for the applicant, and the number of call centre costs will not necessarily be related to the number of beneficiaries, and are what are termed 'fixed costs'. Hence as the number of beneficiaries from a grant-funded scheme increases, with other parameters held constant, the cost per beneficiary will fall. This is illustrated in Figure 2.2, using a hypothetical grant administration cost of £250 and a range of beneficiaries from one to 100.

Therefore, if the number of grants applications received exceeds the available resources, the most efficient way of allocating grants in terms of administrative cost per beneficiary is to fund programmes with the greater number of beneficiaries. However, when all of the costs, including the grant itself, are considered, this may not hold since the relationship between grant size and number of grant beneficiaries is not clear. Allocating a fixed grant to a greater number of beneficiaries would reduce the cost per beneficiary, but thinly spreading the budget and reducing the grant per beneficiary would also affect outcomes in a negative way, seen from the wider perspective of the LNF as a whole.

Figure 3.2



This is dependent upon the nature of the programme in question, and whether it has a ceiling capacity constraint. For example, a scheme providing local community information whereby beneficiaries and cost are unrelated will have very different implications in terms of the grant size-beneficiaries-outcomes relationship than a scheme where the cost is related directly to the number of participants. It also, as noted, depends on the value base of the scheme and the LNF has had, from its political inception to the present time, a clear orientation towards more marginalized groups. A funding regime devoted simply to finding the most cost-effective way of delivering a defined volume of money will quickly come into conflict with this goal. The future of the LNF should bear this stricture firmly in mind.

3.5.3 Equity and Efficiency

An important distinction between equity and efficiency can and should thus be made when examining outcomes. Equity and efficiency are both potential programme outcomes. Efficiency relates to allocating grants at the lowest cost per monetary unit distributed and maximising the amount of grant money distributed to community groups. From a narrow monetary perspective this may be important. However, equity is concerned with fairness, and ensuring grants reach the 'right' people, which is a key goal of the LNF. This suggests a more rigorous process of assessing grant applications to ensure they meet strict criteria to ensure the monies go to those in greatest need. However, this is at the expense of greater cost in the administration process that may use resources that would otherwise be allocated to groups in the community. Hence, there is a trade-off between efficiency and equity. It is also possible to measure the value placed on equity. Making rules more strict and assessing grants more carefully will be more costly. The decision must be made as to how much extra time to spend in assessing these applications rather than allocating more money to the community but using less strict (and thus less costly)

criteria. Again, the balance seems to be appropriate from the evidence we were able to draw together.

A vital aspect of the LNF grant process is the targeting of new groups, and the sustainability of these groups once funding ceases. A potential outcome indicator for a full evaluation of the LNF would be the number of groups continuing after the end of funding. However, this would involve further - and longer-term - evaluation work. It would also require a clearer idea about the nature of sustainability since the fact that a group continues after LNF funding ceases may say little about its sustainability. A range of questions would need to be addressed: for example, does it downsize its level of work; are new people involved, does it alter its orientation; can it access other sources of funding, and so on?

Evaluating the LNF in terms of social endpoints is made more difficult because of the relatively small size of grants. The mean grant awarded throughout the scheme was £4,921 (standard deviation £2,835). Despite providing a valuable input for young people at a local level, it is unlikely that such a sum in itself will provide significant changes in social endpoints at a local level that would be detectable through changes in, say, crime rates, rates of drug taking and unemployment rates. Changes of this kind may be detectable but would require a much more intensive evaluative regime over a longer period of time.

3.6 The cost-effectiveness of the LNF - in summary

Little conventional data are available to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the LNF scheme. Here, an attempt has been made, first, to evaluate the full costs of the scheme including the effort - or costs - expended by the participants. The economic analysis suggests that the LNF, despite the effort required to be extended to attract new groups, did deliver grant income within reasonable economic costs. Administrative costs were unlikely to exceed 20 per cent of the total costs of the scheme, a level which we would argue is quite acceptable given the complex goals of the scheme, the nature of its targets and the requirement - reflected in organisational arrangements - to produce consistency across the country as well as address the key goal of equity. There were however insufficient data to undertake further analysis about the relationship between costs and delivery within the scheme.

Considering the wider economic impacts of the LNF, it can fairly securely be demonstrated that if these grants prevent, say, anti-social behaviour in only a few young people, these grants are likely to bring greater - perhaps much greater - social savings than the financial costs involved in their delivery and use.

4 Conclusions: where now for the LNF?

The Local Network Fund makes an important contribution to the broader attack on child poverty. Whilst it cannot address the conventional narrow sense of child poverty, that is, by improving levels of income in the poorest family, it can make a difference to some of the other broadly 'environmental' aspects of child poverty. These are aspects strongly associated with financial poverty and which recent governments have characterized as social exclusion. The LNF has offered, through a universal scheme offering modest and manageable grants, a variety of opportunities for children and young people, and their parents, carers and communities. These include enlarging their horizons, extending their experience, developing skills, knowledge and abilities, contributing to community improvement and cohesion, making a more modest contribution to quality of life in local communities and enhancing local social and environmental activity. It is not possible to quantify these gains precisely but we might point, as examples, to clear gains described in terms of improvements between inter-ethnic relations, a key issue at a time of apparently increasing racism within British society as a whole. There are similarly gains in terms of enhanced capacity at a number of levels within local communities and a modest strengthening of voluntary and community sector activity. The LNF has also, we argue, made a substantial contribution to enhanced safety for children and young people, through the requirement to incorporate child protection procedures into local activities and in doing so has extended the notion of child protection deep into local neighbourhoods.

Apart from the overall cost of the scheme itself - which we have suggested in Chapter 2 is a reasonable cost given the aims of the project - there are no obvious downsides to this equation. The reservations we have identified relate almost entirely to the limitations of the scheme - given its goals - than to the existence of the scheme itself. Most obviously, we would point to the difficulties in ensuring that the gains won by the LNF are sustainable. This is not an argument for never-ending funding for schemes but ensuring that, given the constituency at which the LNF is aimed, local projects and activities are given a realistic chance of surviving (where appropriate) beyond the 'kick-starting' period in which LNF funding is available. This, we argue, requires serious consideration to be given to a much greater possibility of two-year funding being available. We have also identified the innovative organizational way in which the goals of national consistency, equity, local ownership and accessibility have been brought together. Our reservations about this hinges entirely on the question of whether this set of arrangements will continue or whether some alternative form of arrangement can be established which protects the essential qualities of this approach.

This in turn leads onto the question of the new organizational regime which is about to arrive following the publication of the government's Green Paper, Every Child Matters and the emergence of children's trusts.

In Chapter 1 we noted government plans to establish local children's trusts across England. At present, the LNF may (but not will) become part of local children's trusts in 2008 - at present each children's trust has the discretion as to whether to have an LNF, and to determine its size and location. If an LNF is established within a children's trust, it is to be expected that the four themes which currently form the focus of its work, and are reflected in the application procedures, will be replaced by the five key outcomes governing children and young people's services. These are 'making a positive contribution; enjoying and achieving; achieving economic well-being; being healthy and staying safe'. We see no difficulty in the LNF making this particular transition in terms of its outcomes and indeed, as we have argued, there are areas such as child protection and involvement of children and young people in local activities where it might be regarded as something of a market leader and has much to bring to the children's trust table. In light of this current scenario, funding for the LNF nationally and locally has been assured until March 2008. Beyond that point, the future of the LNF, however, will be uncertain.

We therefore conclude this evaluation by making some observations about this process of organisational change and by emphasising the gains which LNFs can bring to children's trust arrangements. The evaluation argues effectively that the LNF should continue to exist within broadly the same value parameters and with, as far as possible, the same organisational structure as at present. There is an important political task initially which is to raise the profile of the LNF and hopefully this evaluation will contribute to this aim. The valuable learning which has taken place needs to be highlighted, particularly, but not solely in the area of children's services (but in other important areas such as, for example, amongst funders of local community activity). The LNF has both brought about an improved network of grant-makers nationally, helped to pump-prime and build capacity amongst key community-based funders (particularly the network of Community Foundations) locally, and acted as an important bridge between very local communities and the funding opportunities open to them but of which they have often been unaware.

The modest level of funding accorded the LNF has perhaps meant that it has lived in the shadows of its sister schemes. It is therefore an urgent task for it now to come out of these shadows, particularly as there is a risk that it may simply be rolled over by the larger partners currently jostling to establish the culture of children's trusts at a local level.¹² The modest level of funding should not be confused with the frequently more-than-modest gains which it can make and which are quite distinct from other schemes in terms of local engagement by children and young people. Modest funding levels have also, unfortunately, meant that there has been, as far as we can tell (and certainly from our

¹² We use the term 'jostling' advisedly since there is concern expressed in some quarters, for example, that senior appointments in the area of children's services have been dominated by appointments from the field of education rather than social services.

reading of the evaluation reports of the children's trust pathfinders) virtually no discussion at proto-children's trust level, about the importance of the LNF and ways to protect the integrity of its aims and - as critically - its budget.¹³ Again, it is important to ensure that this debate is had. Grant-making of the kind which is characteristic of the LNF is an unfamiliar element in the make-up of statutory bodies and they may see it, if not convinced of the value of the LNF, as a diversion from the 'serious' business of providing services. One key task of LNFs and their network is to ensure that children's trusts and the DfES more generally understand the very considerable extent to which LNFs are already focusing their activities on the five outcomes defined in Every Child Matters and the wider ways in which these outcomes are being operationalised within local communities.

4.1 LNFs in the world of children's trusts

If there are to be more than one hundred children's trusts, it appears to follow at present that there will be more than one hundred LNFs. If this is the case, this implies that existing arrangements will have to be changed: many LNF delivery agents cover more than one first tier (i.e. education and social services) local authority area. The implication of this might be that LNF budgets for each area would be much smaller and this would almost certainly result in some losses of economy of scale, greater rationing and greater difficulties in targeting the more so-called 'hard to reach' populations. This would effectively reverse the present trend which is increasingly to reach those target populations which are more difficult to reach, and would be a retrograde step. This suggests that existing local arrangements should, as far as possible, be protected, that is that where an existing LNF covers more than one social services area, this arrangement should continue with appropriate mechanisms established to ensure accountability to the relevant number of local children's trusts. This accountability is present in an implicit form at present in the sense that panels often contain representatives of all relevant local children's services and this would therefore require merely some more formal recognition of this line of accountability. It would also help, in a more general sense, to address the widespread anxiety expressed to us by LNFs at a local level that children's trusts - in periods of financial exigency (and particularly given the concerns, reflected by a recent report from the Education and Skills Select Committee of the House of Commons - see Community Care 07.04.05, p. 4 - that the start-up costs for children's trusts are currently inadequate) - might be tempted to 'plunder' LNF budgets for other purposes.

What this suggestion does not address is the question of the central management of the LNF from within the DfES. It is unlikely to be felt appropriate that this should continue and, in any case, the generally positive relationship which has existed between the 48 LNFs

¹³ Although the Minister for Children announced, shortly before the General Election of 2005 was called, that 'forthcoming guidance on children's trusts will include transitional arrangements for the Local Network Fund ...' (Regeneration, 5th April 2005)

and the centre has been predicated to a significant degree on the level of trust developed between centre and periphery (or more precisely, the reverse). That in turn reflects an acknowledgment that the central team has had significant levels of understanding of the voluntary and community sectors and of grant-making procedures. If this central team is not to continue to manage the LNF (and we had had no indication that this will happen), and if at the same time the goals of national equity and consistency are to be maintained, this would imply the need for some other central body (which of course would not necessarily be based in London) to perform this function. The alternative to this, in the absence of such a central management body, would be - in the absence of clear nationally-established criteria and guidelines - that local LNFs would almost certainly drift apart in the way they interpreted their role and the potential for shared learning and experience be lost - a substantial waste in reality. Children's trusts will, of course, be subject to central and local inspectorial and accountability regimes; and there is a strong argument for local flexibility and responsiveness. But - and this rehearses an argument which is a very familiar one throughout the history of UK social policy - schemes which attempt to maintain geographical equity have in some way to work not only to national inspection regimes but also to national standards, however these are interpreted. The historical resistance of local government to taking on the role of delivering social assistance benefits is but one clear example of the way in which the needs of geographical equity have, in the end, often won out over the calls for local responsiveness.

Being part, however, loosely, of a national network, brings other important benefits, for example in the ways in which dissemination of good practice (and information about funding opportunities) can be promoted; or in the way in which common forms of monitoring and evaluation can be developed (building perhaps on the present national evaluation). There are yet other arguments for the model we propose. If the call centre approach is to be maintained - and our evaluation again clearly suggests it should be - there are cost savings to be won by keeping it funded from within a central 'pot' rather than from more than a hundred local pots. All of these considerations suggest that the place for LNFs at a local level should indeed be closely related to children's trusts - with funding routed through them - but also perhaps slightly at arms' length from them. This would bring the benefits of close alignment to other mainstream activities related to children's services in a local area, whilst protecting the key elements of the LNF identified in this evaluation. These elements mark it off from, for example, the Children's Fund stream which, whilst it has involved voluntary and community sectors to some degree in partnership arrangements, has been more concerned with improvements in service delivery for children and young people and not with grant-making. It would also provide a living example of very good partnership working between statutory and voluntary and community sectors, reflected in both governance and delivery arrangements, and a clear route for children's trusts to reach very deeply into local communities and to the children, young people and parents within them, in a way which is accessible and acceptable to those communities. This would be very much in line with the aim of children's trusts to

ensure that 'local authorities become more closely engaged with their local communities in defining local needs and the ways to meet them'.¹⁴ This reinforcement of the present arrangements for local LNFs would be, in short, an important way of ensuring that the important and distinct role of the voluntary and community sectors is recognised in the development of children's trusts. Concern has already been expressed about the extent to which the voluntary and community sectors may be marginalised in the development of children's trusts which adds to existing concern about the difficulties the VCS has had in being recognized as equal partners in the development of the Children's Fund¹⁵. The national evaluation of children's trusts pathfinders indicates both that 'user involvement of children, young people and their carers and communities would be easier where arrangements build on pre-existing participatory work', and that 'the voluntary and independent sector needed to provide a more robust evidence base on how their work improved outcomes for children'.¹⁶ This report, and the work of LNFs, meet these demands substantially and provide further arguments for protecting the work of LNFs at a local level.

The evaluation of pathfinder children's trusts currently involves no assessment of the role of elements such as Children's Funds or LNFs¹⁷. There may be a case, to ensure that appropriate arrangements are developed, for establishing from an early point (perhaps April 2006) some pilot arrangements for a few children's trusts involving LNFs. These would be along the lines described above and with appropriate evaluation built in. This would aim to establish the most appropriate ways in which LNFs could continue to operate post-2008 in a way consistent with the goals of the scheme and able to interact effectively with the other elements of local children's trusts.

14 As cited by the National Evaluation of children's trusts pathfinders, drawing on the Laming Report on the death of Victoria Climbié.

15 see for example 'Anger at downplay of voluntary role' (in children's trusts), *Community Care*, 20 April 2005; and G.Craig, S.McNamee and M. Wilkinson, (2004), *The Children's Fund?*, London: The Children's Society; and *Collaborating for the Social Inclusion of Children and Young People: emerging lessons from the first round of case studies*, The National Evaluation of the Children's Fund, Autumn 2004, DfES (Research Report 596).

16 *Children's trusts: developing integrated services for children in England*, National Evaluation of children's trusts pathfinders, Summary report, University of East Anglia and National Children's Bureau; www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/childrenstrustpathfinders/

17 See www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/childrenstrustpathfinders

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