

The Parenting Fund Evaluation of the Fundholder Model and Sector Provision

The Tavistock Institute



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The Parenting Fund
Evaluation of the Fundholder Model
and Sector Provision

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Judy Corlyon and Dione Hills
Project Directors

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Parenting Fund was set up by the DfES (now the DCSF) in 2004 with the aim of:

- Increasing specialist and generic parenting provision, particularly in areas of high need, and for those groups currently less well served
- Encouraging ownership and increasing voluntary sector capacity regarding parenting support provision
- Developing the sector strategically through promoting infrastructure development and networking.

The DfES commissioned the Policy Research Bureau and the Tavistock Institute to undertake the national evaluation of the Parenting Fund in 2005, with the aim of examining how successful the Fund had been in fulfilling these aims. There were two strands to the evaluation strategy:

- Strand A, carried out by the Tavistock Institute, examined how well the model of fundholding, and its implementation, had contributed to the achievement of these aims
- Strand B, carried out by the Policy Research Bureau, looked at changes in the nature, extent and quality of provision in the parenting sector.

Strand A: the fundholder model

Methodology

The evaluation of the fundholder model involved a number of different elements:

- Stakeholder interviews at the start, part way through and at end of the evaluation period
- A telephone survey of successful and unsuccessful applicants, at the beginning and end of the programme
- Review of documentation - including initial documents concerning the design of the programme, and documents emerging during the course of the programme
- Observation of the grant allocation process and of conferences and networking events at national and local levels
- Review of the monitoring and support activities
- Case studies of fundholding arrangements in other programmes.

Findings

The model of fundholding adopted in this programme was unusual, with the central government funding being distributed and managed by an independent fundholder. This brought together the sector experience from the National Family and Parenting Institute (now the Family and Parenting Institute), with the grant management experience of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). Like some of the other grant programmes examined, the fundholder had to hold together their role in managing the grants alongside dealing with the broader strategic goals of the programme.

The general feedback from successful and unsuccessful applicants and from key stakeholders was that the grant management side of their work had worked well, with the two partner organisations working well together and with the DfES. Although the time-scale had been tight, the funding of projects had been handled efficiently and, generally, effectively in terms of funding a broad range of activities at local and national level. Nearly 800 applications were processed and 134 grants awarded (54 major and 80 local) - a large number in comparison with similar programmes. The relatively 'light touch' monitoring process was well received by most grant holders, and it appeared to have worked well in picking up those projects that were genuinely in difficulties. However, some grant holders would have appreciated more contact with the fundholder: unlike some other programmes, staffing at the centre was insufficient to allow for visits to grant holders, except when they were in difficulties.

At a more strategic level, a number of activities were organised, including workshops for local projects, a seminar with national organisations to consider the infrastructure needs of the sector, a national conference, and a website for sharing information across the programme and with the wider world. The networking opportunities provided by these activities were welcomed, but the lack of involvement from the statutory sector, particularly at local workshops, was regretted. Again, the small size of the central team meant that less work than was originally anticipated was able to be undertaken in building networks and establishing links between the voluntary and statutory sector. Although many projects did feel that they had been able to have some impact on the policy and practice of parenting at a local level, those not receiving grants under Round Two of the programme faced considerable difficulties in continuing activities developed using their Round One grant.

Strand B: the funded projects

Methodology

The purpose of Strand B was to assess the extent to which capacity had been built nationally, regionally and locally, and to determine the potential sustainability of these developments. The method employed to achieve this involved:

- Sampling the Parenting Fund areas and funded projects to select six local areas, two projects from each area and eight major (regional and national) projects for inclusion in the study
- Mapping all parenting support services in the selected local areas at Time One, soon after the projects had begun (2005), and at Time Two (2006)
- Conducting interviews with project managers in the selected projects
- Holding workshops with stakeholders of the selected funded projects

- Reviewing projects' monitoring information and final reports and any other relevant documentation relating to the selected projects.

Findings

Local projects tended to concentrate on increasing service provision, often to less well-served groups, through extending or developing existing provision. Major (regional and national) projects focused more on strengthening sector capacity, through training, evaluation, and the development of resources, most frequently targeted at specific sectors or groups, for example, BME groups and parents of children with a disability or special needs.

By and large, funded projects, both major and local, were found to be successful in meeting, or even exceeding, the objectives they had set themselves, despite experiencing a variety of not insignificant difficulties. These included: reductions and delays in the receipt of grants; difficulties with the recruitment and retention of staff; unanticipated transport issues and costs; problems engaging users; and higher levels of user support needs than had been expected. The impact of these difficulties on the achievement of objectives varied among projects - some issues were significant enough to require revisions to targets or delivery, but most services successfully adapted to overcome any problems experienced.

Final reports indicated that services had been successful in increasing parenting provision and that many parents had accessed support. The majority of projects included in the sample set out to work with traditionally less well-served groups and reported that they had, on the whole, been successful in this, and had derived valuable learning from their experiences. Least success was achieved in reaching fathers. However, the extent to which the increase in either general or targeted provision impacted on other services working in their field or geographic area appeared to be slight. Joint working and networking, while seen as highly valuable, were not always a priority for services owing to a variety of other pressures on their resources. Very few funded projects actually worked co-operatively to deliver a service, but this was sometimes because other services were wary of joining forces with a project which might have only a short life. Finally, the awareness of other services of the Parenting Fund, and which services had received funding, was at best limited, though in some areas demonstrated the efficacy of a well established voluntary sector body providing co-ordination and support to local services.

While many projects recruited and provided valuable training to staff, with a focus on parenting issues, the sustainability of this recruitment is difficult to ascertain due to the volatile nature of funding for this sector, and thus the transience of staff.

The development of a strategic approach to provision was limited to a few major projects. This might be partly due to the fact that local projects did not aim to involve themselves in strategic issues, but it also reflects the fact that major projects were much more likely to have a specific domain focus (for example, mental health or learning difficulties) than were local projects, and, therefore, recognised expertise within a sector. Networking, and the ability to influence decisions, appeared to be easier for major projects which were already 'linked-in' and probably had access to greater resources than local ones.

The majority of projects had not become part of mainstream provision by the time their Round One grant ended and they consequently remained reliant on short-term funding. Although some projects were successful in obtaining Round Two funding, the future of others looked very uncertain. But while the Parenting Fund appeared not to have contributed significantly to the economic sustainability of projects, it had enabled some projects to effect sustainable change by modifying the attitudes of some parents and raising professionals' awareness of parents' difficulties.

Emerging recommendations for the future

- **More funding opportunities.** Voluntary sector organisations seeking to establish parenting activities continue to face considerable difficulties in finding funding to support these, which suggested that there is a continuing role for some central source of funding, in addition to clear guidance to local authorities about the value of funding voluntary sector organisations to run activities of this kind.
- **Clarification of the role of the voluntary sector.** It would be helpful if there were clarity on where parenting services provided by voluntary sector organisations fitted within the broad range of children and support services provided locally. Coupled with this should be a recognition, by both funders and projects, that the voluntary sector is entitled to request and be given a realistic amount of money to deliver a service.
- **Investment in workforce training.** Many projects provided training to new staff and volunteers but often received a poor return on their investment of resources, as trained personnel left to take up further education or more skilled employment. Setting aside a central budget for training on which projects could draw would alleviate the burden on small organisations whose contribution to increasing the parenting sector workforce often militated against their own interests.
- **Sufficient time.** The short time-scale under which everyone was operating within the first round of the programme appeared to have served to discourage more strategic thinking and partnership building, particularly at a local level, and placed individual projects under considerable pressure.
- **Continuing funding for major players at a national level.** These still, potentially, have an important role to play in supporting local organisations, particularly around issues such as finding funding, evaluation, and dissemination of learning about parent support for particular target groups.
- **Local authorities' involvement in local funding decisions.** With the advent of local parenting strategies and local commissioning, decisions about which projects to fund need to be taken in consultation with local authorities, which would ensure that those services most appropriate to the local context received funding. This is particularly important if long term funding for successful grant-funded services is to be secured.
- **A local presence.** In this context, it would be useful for the fundholder to have some kind of local presence, possibly through the identification and funding of a local champion who can support funded services, collate and disseminate learning from these.
- **Sufficient funds at the centre.** Having sufficient resources at a central level is crucial to the fundholder being able to undertake activities that add value to the grant programme. Devolution of some of the responsibility for selecting, monitoring and supporting local projects to a local level might be one way of freeing up the strategic capacity of the centre.
- **Dissemination of learning.** A key value that the fundholder can add to the grant programme is to ensure that learning from funded activities is disseminated to others and used for further development of the sector. Placing a greater requirement on local projects to evaluate and provide reports on their activities, together with greater support for these, would facilitate the process.

1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE EVALUATION

Background

The Parenting Fund programme was announced in the 2002 Spending Review, which allocated £25 million to parenting support activities over a three-year period (between 2003 and 2006). Following the setting up of an advisory group and a consultation process, three main priority areas were established for the Fund:

- To develop capacity within the parenting sector and to develop services, both universal services and those in targeted geographical areas
- To develop the sector strategically by funding national infrastructure projects and strengthening the network of services that support parents
- To address areas of high need through working with target groups poorly served in mainstream provision. These included black and minority ethnic (BME) parents, parents with mental health problems, families living with conflict, and parents with disabilities or who had children with a disability.

From the start it was clear that the programme was to focus on the voluntary sector, which included inviting the voluntary sector to take on the fundholding role. This caused some legal difficulties in the initial stages, and there was some delay before the Parenting Fund was handed to the DfES to deliver. In the first year, part of the funding (£8.6 million) was used to strengthen telephone helplines and infrastructure development work. The main Parenting Fund, involving grants to national and local voluntary sector organisations to provide parenting support activities, was officially launched by the Minister for Children and Families in May 2004.

Following a competitive tendering process, a fundholder was selected to administer the rest of fund. The contract was awarded to the National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) in partnership with Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC). With their history of work in this sector and links with other organisations in the field, NFPI was selected to have overall management of the Fund. PwC, with its history of managing large funding programmes, acted as a subcontractor of NFPI and provided the skills and experience to manage many of the administrative functions and processes, particularly around the application, assessment and financial monitoring of the projects.

The programme was advertised during the spring of 2004. A helpline was set up to support applications and a series of regional meetings took place for potential applicants. In total, 796 applications for funding were submitted, and over the summer and early autumn of 2004, a selection process took place which resulted in 134 grants being distributed. These were divided among 55 projects doing work of national or regional significance (designated as major projects) and 79 projects across 18 local areas (local projects). Between 2004 and late 2006, NFPI and PwC were involved in monitoring and supporting the grant programme, and running a number of additional support and infrastructure-building activities at both a national and local level.

Although initially the Parenting Fund was viewed as a 'one-off' programme, during 2005 the decision was taken to extend the programme to a second round, and NFPI and PwC were again asked to manage the programme.

The evaluation of the Parenting Fund

During 2004 a decision was taken to fund an evaluation of the Parenting Fund, in order to capture the lessons to be learned from it. The contract was awarded to the Policy Research Bureau in partnership with the Tavistock Institute. The evaluation was divided into two parts. Strand A, undertaken by the Tavistock Institute, looked at the fundholding mechanisms within the programme. It was designed to explore three issues:

- How far a fundholder model in itself could add value to a programme of this kind
- How far the fundholder was being successful in operationalising the model in relation to the Parenting Fund
- Which factors contributed to, or inhibited, the fundholding model adding value to the Parenting Fund

Strand B was carried out by the Policy Research Bureau and looked at grant-funded activities on the ground. Its overall aim was to ascertain how and to what extent funded projects contributed to the Parenting Fund's objectives of increasing provision and developing the sector strategically. It did not, therefore, attempt to measure an improvement in parenting or child outcomes, even though projects would obviously seek to impact on families themselves. Even if changes in parenting in the population could have been attributable to the Fund (which would have been very difficult to demonstrate), this would not have answered the main research questions about capacity building and infrastructure development.

This chapter gives a brief description of the approach and methodology adopted for each Strand.

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical overview of fundholding processes, drawing on some of the literature in the area, and material gathered during the comparative studies of fundholders. This sets the scene for, and outlines some of the key dimensions to be explored in, later sections of the report.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the model of fundholding adopted by the Parenting Fund, and the way in which this was implemented in practice. This includes a description of the selection process, the monitoring of grants and additional support and development activities undertaken by the fundholder. It draws on documentation, interviews and other material provided by the fundholder, from stakeholder interviews, the survey of applicants, information from the Strand B evaluation activities (interviews with funded activities), and our observation of fundholder activities.

Chapter 4 provides an evaluation of this, drawing on the experiences of grant-funded projects, stakeholders and on our own observations of the processes.

Chapter 5 looks at the sampled projects in six of the local areas in which the Parenting Fund operated, drawing on information from project managers, stakeholders and the mapping exercises conducted in the local areas. It explores the context in which projects operated, what they expected to achieve and how they anticipated meeting their aims.

Chapter 6 provides a description of the selected regional and national projects. It looks at their aims and activities and what they hoped to contribute to the Parenting Fund's aims. Information is drawn from project managers and stakeholders for the projects.

Chapter 7 explores the extent to which the funded projects, local and major, achieved their aims and contributed to the Parenting Fund objectives.

The final chapter draws together the conclusions from both strands of the evaluation and proposes some recommendations for future funding arrangements of similar projects.

During the life of the Fund, a number of names of the key organisations changed. For example, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), which initiated the programme, is now known as the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF); the National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) is now known as the Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) and the Parenting Education and Support Forum (PESF) became Parenting UK. Because much of the content of this report was written prior to these name changes taking place, we have decided to retain the previous names, except in the case of Parenting UK, where use of the new name helps to make a clear distinction between themselves and NFPI - a confusion which we note in several parts of the report.

The methodology used in Strand A (the fundholder)

The evaluation of the fundholder model involved a number of different elements. These included:

- Stakeholder interviews at the start, part way through and at end of the evaluation period
- A telephone survey of successful and unsuccessful applicants, at the beginning and end of the programme
- Review of documentation - including initial documents concerning the design of the programme, and documents emerging during the course of the programme
- Observation of the grant allocation process and of conferences and networking events at national and local levels
- Review of the monitoring and support activities
- Case studies of fundholding arrangements in other programmes.

1.1.1. Stakeholder interviews

Our overall approach to the evaluation was strongly influenced by a constructivist view (Guba and Lincoln, 1989), which recognises that different participants in a programme of this kind might take a very different view, according to their different positions or their 'stake' in programme outcomes. An important part of the evaluation was, therefore, to identify and interview a range of different stakeholders in the programme, to identify their perception of the programme and its processes. In the early part of the evaluation, this focused mainly on those directly involved in the programme activities and those who had been invited to be part of the advisory panel, brought together to make recommendations about which projects to fund. The panel itself also represented a wide range of different sectors relevant to the programme - academics, professionals and practitioners, and members of the statutory and voluntary sector.

Initially, we had expected to re-interview the same group of stakeholders a second and third time in order to track the progress of the Parenting Fund and the issues arising from it during the lifetime of the Fund and of our evaluation. However, although those involved in the development of the Fund (certainly at NFPI and PwC) largely remained in place, other key stakeholders at the DfES had moved on, and several of those involved in the selection of the projects from the outset no longer had any real involvement with the Fund. For subsequent rounds of the evaluation, therefore, we decided to incorporate a number of additional stakeholder perspectives, including those from other major voluntary sector players in the field of family and parenting support, and, in the last round of stakeholder interviews, representatives from the local authority sector who might be involved in funding parenting activities in the future.

Interviews with stakeholders were a mixture of face-to-face and telephone interviews. Table 1.1 provides the number of people interviewed in each stakeholder group at the different stages of the study.

Table 1-1: Numbers interviewed in each stakeholder group

Stakeholder group	Round one	Round two	Round three
DfES officers	2	1	1
NFPI	3	2	1
PwC	2	2	2
Advisory Panel	7	1	2
VCS		2	2
Total	14	8	8

The interview schedules used at each stage can be found in Appendix A: Strand A Stakeholder Interview.

1.1.2. Telephone survey of successful and unsuccessful applicants

Another major source of feedback on the programme was from grant applicants, including both those who successfully won grants, and those who were unsuccessful. Two rounds of interviews were undertaken with these applicants, one shortly after the grants had been awarded, and the second at the end of the grant period (late 2006).

The sample of applicants was selected from a database provided by the fundholder. In total 46 applicants were selected to represent both successful (30) and unsuccessful projects (16), and to ensure a balance of local and major grant projects (60%:40%), geographical distribution, and coverage of key themes.

In the first round, we had difficulty contacting two of the applicants selected, and by the final stage, we were unable to contact, or obtain sufficient information, from a further nine applicants. This was in part because key informants in some of the projects receiving grants had already moved on, as the grant was coming to an end, and we also had difficulty in making contact with, or even finding, anyone with relevant information in several of the organisations that had not received grants. However, additional information from grant-

holders about the grant-holding process was also obtained by inserting a few pertinent questions into the interviews undertaken as part of the wider programme evaluation undertaken by PRB.

Table 1-2: Profile of respondent organisations

Type of grant awarded or applied for	Round one interviews			Round two interviews		
	Successful	Unsuccessful	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful	Total
Local	17	8	25	11	4	15
Major	12 *	6#	18	10**	6#	16
Totals	29	14	43	21	10	31

*9 national and 3 regional projects / ** 8 national and 2 regional projects

4 national and 2 regional

The interviews consisted of a structured telephone interview lasting around 25 minutes. The questionnaires for successful projects and unsuccessful projects are set out in Appendix D1 and D2. The instruments were initially piloted with two successful local area applicants and two unsuccessful major grant applicants.

The data from the telephone interviews were inputted into SPSS to provide frequencies of responses and categories of the projects that responded in terms of unsuccessful / successful and major / local.

1.1.3. Review of documentation

All key documents from the programme (information for applicants, minutes from early meetings, strategy documents, website information and monitoring reports) were reviewed and data from these are reported in the following relevant chapters. We also undertook a brief overview of key documents relating to good practice in grant giving activities: this is reported in Chapter 2.

We did not review final reports or evaluation reports from projects themselves, as this was part of the Strand B evaluation activities. However, we did receive a précis of some of the key findings, relevant to the role of the funder, from the Strand B researchers, and this information has been incorporated, where relevant, into Chapter 3.

1.1.4. Evaluation of monitoring and support and infrastructure development activities

The evaluation sought to identify the role of the fundholder in ensuring projects' compliance with initial plans, and in supporting mutual learning and dissemination of knowledge. This included ways in which NFPI and PwC sought to identify and address potential difficulties, how monitoring information was collected and reviewed, as well as additional activities, such as providing support for networking between projects and dissemination of learning arising from projects within the Fund and to a wider audience.

Data for this stage of the evaluation were gathered from a variety of sources: interviews with NFPI and PwC staff on the monitoring process, NFPI documentation, and observations at regional events for local projects run by NFPI. Interviews were also undertaken with staff in other funding programmes to compare with the Parenting Fund model. Feedback on these activities was collected through the telephone survey of applicants, and from information supplied to us by the Strand B researchers from their case study projects and their final reports.

1.1.5. Observation of the grant allocation process and of conferences and networking events at national and local levels

A team member was invited to observe the initial selection panel meeting and to attend a number of the local and national workshops and seminars.

During the observation of the selection process, key points in the discussion were noted using a check list which covered the following points:

- Whether the project was considered to be risky or relatively 'safe'
- Whether or not the panel had prior knowledge of the organisation
- Whether or not there was a prior 'evidence base' to support the effectiveness of the proposed project
- Whether or not the application was perceived to be innovative
- Whether or not it was anticipated that the project, if funded, would require support
- Whether there was a consensus or disagreement about the decision
- Time taken to make the decision.

In addition to the panel meeting, the researchers also attended two local workshops, one national workshop and the national conference. We were also invited to attend the selection panel meeting for Round Two of the Parenting Fund, as at this stage it was anticipated that the evaluation might be extended to include Round Two. This provided a useful insight into ways in which learning from Round One had been incorporated into the planning for Round Two, although the data from this observation were not analysed in detail as an evaluation of the second round was not commissioned.

1.1.6. Case studies of other fundholders

The aim of this part of the evaluation was to gather comparative data from other programmes, in order to identify the unique characteristics of the fundholding model, as well as gathering information about its efficiency and effectiveness.

Case studies were undertaken of five other grant programmes, which represented a cross section of the following groups:

- Government funded programmes supporting parenting/family and child related activities
- Government funded programmes with another focus
- Independently funded programmes with another focus.

We had hoped to include independently funded programmes working in the parenting / family support / children sector but found that most of these were, in fact, government funded. An initial selection of nine programmes was made, and, in consultation with the DfES, this was reduced to six and subsequently to five when, for various reasons, we were unable to complete the interviews with one of the case studies. Four of the five were in the public sector and one in the independent sector. A list of the case studies is provided in Chapter 2. In each case study, a review of general information about the programme was carried out, followed by a semi-structured interview (usually by telephone) with:

- A programme director or trustee (someone with an overview of the programme, its aims, and how it fitted with the wider organisation)
- A programme manager - particularly if there were local managers - someone who had knowledge of the day-to-day practice
- A representative of a project in receipt of funding, if nominated by a programme manager.

In addition, we asked for copies of any key programme documents, evaluation or other information that would help us to understand the programme. The material gathered from interviews and documents was then compiled into a programme profile within a pre-structured format, and a comparison made across the programmes based around the questions listed above.

The methodology used in Strand B (the funded projects)

The evaluation of the funded projects involved several components which included:

- Sampling the local areas, local projects and major projects for inclusion in the study
- A mapping exercise of parenting support services in the selected local areas carried out at Time One soon after the projects had begun (2005) and repeated at Time Two (2006)
- Interviews with project managers in the selected projects
- Workshops with stakeholders of the selected funded projects
- Review of documentation relating to the funded projects.

1.1.7. Selection of local areas

As resources did not permit the evaluation to be conducted in all 18 Parenting Fund local areas, the study was confined to six areas, representing a geographical spread across the regions covered by the Fund. The 18 areas were allocated to one of three broad regions in England: North, Central, and South. The 18 areas and the overall number of projects were fairly evenly spread across these regions: seven areas containing 29 projects in the North; six areas and 26 projects in the Central region; and five areas with a total of 24 projects in the South. In view of this relatively even distribution, it was decided that two areas would be selected from each region. The areas needed to include:

- A mix of local authority types to obtain a spread of authorities from large metropolitan to smaller unitary areas. The 18 areas contained eight metropolitan authorities, six unitary, two shire counties and two London boroughs

- At least one rural area - and possibly two for comparative purposes. Within the 18 areas there were three rural areas and one mixed (urban/rural) area
- Some areas in which there would be a reasonable proportion of BME groups (one of the target groups for the Parenting Fund).

Initially it was intended that the areas selected should contain a minimum number of funded projects to make the selection of two projects possible and test the extent of capacity building. Subsequently, however, it was decided that the inclusion of at least one area with few projects would be desirable, in order to test whether capacity building - increasing the number of services or the ability of existing services in the area to meet the needs of parents - could be effective in such circumstances. The final selection of areas is shown in Table 1.3 below.

Table 1-3: Final selection of Parenting Fund areas

	Urban/rural	Authority type	BME groups	No. of projects
North				
Area F	Urban / Rural	Unitary	No	2
Area D	Urban	Metropolitan	Yes	6
Central				
Area A	Urban	Metropolitan	Yes	5
Area E	Urban	Unitary	Yes	4
South				
Area B	Rural	Shire	No	5
Area C	Urban	London borough	Yes	6

1.1.8. Selection of local projects

The sampling frame for the selection of projects was the database constructed and maintained by the fundholder (NFPI). The sampling procedure entailed constructing key variables generated from the database information and then using purposive sampling to select the local projects. Purposive sampling is appropriate when a targeted sample needs to be achieved and where sampling for statistical representativeness is not the primary concern. It is drawn to ensure that key characteristics of relevance to the research questions are represented in the overall sample.

The fundholder's database of projects contained a brief assessment summary for each project with information on, for example, the background of the project, the targeted groups and the means of delivery. Studying this information allowed key variables which cut across projects to be identified. These were reduced in number to the variables set out below which, it was believed, would be most crucial in addressing the aims of the evaluation.

- The location
- The proposed start date
- The size of the grant: large, medium or small
- Type of organisation: sole or partnership application
- Type of project: new or a continuation of an existing one

- Its focus: whether it focused on delivery of a service, training or an end product such as a library or resources centre
- Project aims: fulfilling an unmet need, increasing provision or accessibility, developing a strategic approach or strengthening sector infrastructure
- Intended beneficiaries as stated in the Parenting Fund: BME parents; faith-based community organisations; fathers; parents with special needs; parents of children with special needs; parents of teenage children; disability groups.

Projects were selected on the basis that they covered as wide a range of variables as possible to maximise variation within the selected sample: for example, different focus, different methods of delivery, and variety in the range of intended beneficiaries. The selection of projects in each region and area is set out in Table 1.4.

Table 1-4: Selection of projects

Region	Area	Project description
North	F	Training volunteers as home visitors
	F	Training parents to offer support to parents of disabled children
	D	Drugs-related parenting programme
	D	Extension of a family learning project
Central	A	Support, training and empowerment for vulnerable groups
	A	Support and training for isolated or socially excluded groups
	E	Family group conferences
	E	Increasing joint working and service provision
South	B	Series of support and advice sessions for parents of children with a disability
	B	Recruitment and training of volunteers to provide family support
	C	Parenting group work programme
	C	Parenting skills programme targeted at BME families

Base = 28 projects

A brief description of the projects and the work being undertaken is presented in Appendix D: Strand B Project Overviews.

1.1.9. Selection of major projects

The sampling frame for major projects was also the national database maintained by the project fundholder. As with local project selection, key variables which cut across major projects, such as location, size of grant, type of project and its aims, were identified by studying the qualitative text contained in the assessment summary. Also taken into account was whether the project had a national or a regional focus.

Selecting regional and national projects within the major grants programme

Fifty-five major projects received grants from the Parenting Fund: 41 nationally focused and 14 regionally focused. We excluded eight national projects and two regional ones as they had stated plans for a substantial evaluation to be carried out by external evaluators. We had hoped to include the results of these evaluations in the end of programme overview but they were not received in time to do so.

A sample of eight major projects was selected from the 45 remaining. From a base of 12 regional and 33 national projects, it was decided that a sample of three regional and five national projects would be sufficient to reflect the overall distribution.

Regional projects

To ensure a good spread of regional projects across the country, one project was selected from each region (North, South and Central). Again, a main consideration in the selection process was to ensure that there was sufficient variation among the projects: for example, different focus, different methods of delivery, and variety in the range of intended beneficiaries. None of the regional projects was new, all being extensions of existing projects. The selection is set out in the table below.

Table 1-5: Selected regional projects

North	Support network for families affected by a disability
Central	Coaching programme for parents of children with a disability
South	Piloting internet parenting programmes

Base = 12 regional major projects

National projects

The main criterion for selection from the 33 national projects was the value of the grant awarded, taken as an indicator of the size and scope of projects. The intention was to include projects with varying sizes of grant in order to explore any relationship between the amount of money awarded and the project’s ability to build capacity in the sector. Projects were thus divided into four percentage quartiles based on the size of the grant allocated. The aim was to select one project from each quartile, plus one other which had a focus and target group different from the four chosen from the quartiles. This would ensure as great a coverage as possible of the groups and topics specified for inclusion by the Parenting Fund.

As with regional projects, national projects were selected on the basis that they covered a variety of variables, for example, aims, focus, and intended beneficiaries. Additionally, attempts were made to ensure some geographical spread and avoid a sample too heavily biased in favour of London-based projects (where the majority were, in fact, based).

The projects selected are set out below.

Table 1-6: Selected national projects

Project	Grant	Location
Support and training for parents in a minority group	£98,487	London
Training for work with parents and courses for professionals	£174,817	S.West
Development and piloting models of parenting programmes	£231,372	London
Parenting education to support young mothers	£332,398	North
Development of information and training to involve and support fathers	£244,480	London

Again, a brief description of the projects and the work undertaken is presented in Appendix D: Strand B Project Overviews.

1.1.10. Additional (DfES) sample

The research design allowed for up to 10 further projects, local or national, to be identified by the commissioner (DfES) for inclusion in the analysis of project outcomes. These were projects which were expected to produce significant outputs (especially those planning sizeable local evaluations) or which were of particular interest to DfES. Three local projects were selected, along with seven major ones, of which two had a regional and five a national focus. See Appendix D: Strand B Project Overviews for brief descriptions and overviews.

1.1.11. Information from and about the projects

Review of documentation

Copies of the application forms to the Parenting Fund were received for all the projects that were successful in their applications. Milestone monitoring information, financial monitoring data, and final reports were received from NFPI and PwC for the selected projects where these were available.

Interviews with service providers

In-depth interviews were carried out with managers or co-ordinators from each of the funded projects. The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain more about the projects, their perceived effectiveness, anticipated impacts, and any barriers or enabling factors in implementation. The interview schedule was mailed to respondents in advance of the interview. This was important as some of the questions required respondents to find official data and documentation beforehand. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Workshops with projects' stakeholders

Local workshops

To ascertain what, if any, impact the Parenting Fund projects were having on local areas, or on domains in the case of major projects, stakeholder workshops were planned in each of the six areas selected for involvement in the research, and four regional workshops for major projects. The idea for the latter was to bring the selected national and regional projects together in one of four locations nearest to them. The intention was to invite between six and ten stakeholders for each of the selected projects to a workshop, at which the selected project would *not* be represented. The term 'stakeholders' was interpreted widely to include workers in projects with an interest in the selected projects through, for example, joint working, membership of the Board, a referral system, or general support.

Funded projects were asked to provide contact details for other services with whom they had worked around issues of parenting (i.e. those they had referred to, received referrals from, provided training to, or had worked with in some other capacity). Projects were contacted in early December 2005 with a request for this information. Contact details were provided for stakeholders by most of the local funded projects by the end of January 2006.

Local projects provided contact details of between five and 16 people or services from a variety of statutory and voluntary organisations with which they had worked. Individual names were not always provided by the funded organisations, which made contacting the most appropriate person difficult. Other issues impacting adversely on setting up the workshops included incorrect contact details, changes in employment, and organisations not involved to a degree where they would have been able to contribute. These issues were particularly pertinent in Area F, where a large number of organisations reported little contact with the funded projects. In most areas, approximately half the contacted organisations declared an interest in attending.

Local authority stakeholders working with children and families at a more strategic level were also identified through the first mapping exercise already undertaken (see section 1.5.6 below) and through the list of attendees of the NFPI regional workshop. Again, approximately half of those contacted were able to attend, except in Area F.

Major Projects

Individual workshops were planned for each of the eight major funded projects. Three of the major funded projects provided contact details of between seven and 18 people / services with which they had worked. Two provided details of between two and four people. Three were not able to provide any details: two had not yet begun delivering their work and one did not respond to requests for information. Ensuring attendance at the major workshops was more complicated than for the local workshops owing to the seniority of the recommended stakeholders and the wider geographical spread of the organisations.

Workshop numbers and supplementary interviews

Six workshops were conducted: five for locally funded projects, and one for a major project. Between six and eleven stakeholders attended each of the local workshops (the average number was eight) representing a variety of voluntary and statutory services relevant to the work of the project. Three stakeholders attended the major (regional) project workshop. All sessions from the workshops were recorded and fully transcribed.

For some projects only a small number of stakeholders was identified. This was especially true of major projects where stakeholders tended to hold more strategic positions. In addition, only a small number of stakeholders could attend some workshops, and, in one of the more rural areas, the stakeholders were located across a wide geographical area which made attendance particularly difficult.

In these cases, it was not viable to hold workshops. Instead, individual, structured telephone interviews using a prepared schedule were used to gain stakeholder feedback. These were conducted between February and March 2006. Between one and five telephone interviews were conducted with local project stakeholders (the average number was two per project).

Between two and seven telephone interviews were conducted with major project stakeholders (an average of four per project). The total number of telephone interviews was twenty. Telephone interviews were recorded and transcribed.

1.1.12. Mapping local provision

One of the aims of Strand B was to map parenting support services in the six selected areas where the Parenting Fund operated, describing the capacity and infrastructure of the voluntary and statutory parenting support sector and creating a picture of the overall inter-organisational context within which the Parenting Fund projects operated soon after the Fund's inception (Time One). This was analysed against the same type of data collected approximately one year later (Time Two) to ascertain if there had been any change in parenting support services' capacity over the life of the Fund.

Definition of parenting support

The initial step was to define parenting support and capacity building for the purposes of this study. Following a search of the relevant literature, the former was defined as:

Any intervention for parents, carers or professionals about parenting, aimed at reducing risks and promoting protective factors for children in relation to social, physical and emotional well being.

'Intervention' was taken to mean any formal, statutory or voluntary service or programme, which could encompass a wide range of activities and events involving parents, carers and professionals.

The operating definition of capacity building in the research was:

Strengthening the ability of organisations in an area to take the lead in increasing and expanding interventions needed to support parents and professionals who work with them. This would be achieved through: the development of organisational structures, resources, networks and coordinated services; improvements in targeting and in the collection and sharing of data on need; and increases in the number of personnel with sustainable skills, expertise, knowledge, commitment and awareness of relevant issues within the area.

This definition encapsulated the processes and structures which might arise for parenting support services and allowed concentration on individual and structural processes.

Mapping of Selected Parenting Fund Areas

The process began by identifying the statutory services which were expected to work with parents in each of the areas. In addition to these, area-based initiatives such as Sure Start and Home Start were identified, as well as local partnerships and funders (for example, Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships and the Children's Fund).

Voluntary services were identified using various sources: the Parenting Fund database for all applicants of Parenting Fund monies; local authority service databases; the NFPI database; the Parenting UK database; the local council for voluntary services databases; the NHS Electronic Quality Information for Patients database; the Netmums Local Information and Support for Parents database; Children's Fund directories (where available); Connexions; and local directories of community groups. Further to this, Internet searches were made and links from service websites were followed up where appropriate. Details of parent and toddler groups (also known as 'stay and play groups' and 'mums and tots groups') were gathered via the local children's information services which have responsibility for collecting and maintaining this information.

Service details were then verified and refined through a telephone call to the service provider and categorised within specific sector categories which would later be used to aid sampling. The final categories were: Health; Education; Area-Based Initiatives; Social Services; Other Social Care; Youth Justice / Criminal Justice System; Housing; Faith Based/Religious Services identified through Internet searches but not verified through telephone calls were not included in the mapping.¹ Across all areas, an average of 6 per cent of services had to be excluded from the mapping as a result of no contact.

The result of the mapping exercise was an Excel spreadsheet for each area detailing services in operation at 20 June 2005. The spreadsheet provided information on the following:

- services' contact details
- services offered to parents
- organisation type (i.e. statutory, private or voluntary)
- mode of delivery (i.e. individual or group)
- where the service was delivered (i.e. home or another venue)
- intervention type (i.e. therapeutic, educational, social or other)
- whether training was provided to volunteers or professionals.

Sampling

Excluded from the sampling process were those services which did not precisely meet the agreed definition, such as parent and toddler groups where the primary purpose was to provide parents with an opportunity for social contact. Had they remained in the sampling frame, they would have decreased the chances of sampling larger projects which would have shed greater light on capacity building in the parenting sector. However, these projects

¹ Services were contacted by telephone up to three times over a period of two weeks.

remained in the mapping database to provide information on the full range of parenting support services within each area.

We elected to use a stratified random sample in which the population is divided into sector categories (strata) and the data collected from the strata by simple random sampling. It was considered that stratification would almost certainly produce a gain in precision in the estimates of the whole population, because a heterogeneous population is split into fairly homogeneous strata. Following a validation exercise, 12 projects were randomly sampled from each geographical area and weighted so that the selection was proportional to the overall sample.

It was decided that the number of users would be counted over a one-month period as this seemed to be the optimum period. If the time period had been any longer, it was possible that providers would have needed to use estimates. A shorter time-period might have meant that data, particularly pertaining to shorter courses and interventions, would have been missed.

It was also decided that an intervention would be defined as live if in January 2005 it was ready to deliver the services it proposed, for example, having a helpline open and ready to give advice, or a drop-in centre equipped with a full quota of information leaflets.

Following a pilot study, telephone interviews were conducted with the most appropriate person in the selected services. A letter and a copy of the proforma were emailed to them in advance so that they could familiarise themselves with the questions and seek out any information, such as the number of service users, which might not be immediately available. In total, 60 telephone interviews were conducted with senior staff or co-ordinators from the selected services in July/August 2005. The intention had been to carry out interviews with personnel in 72 identified projects (12 in each area) but in 12 cases respondents either proved impossible to contact, were on holiday or no-one within the service could take responsibility for the interview. We thus had an 80 per cent response rate.

The mapping exercise was repeated approximately one year later to assess any differences in the number of services available to parents within each area. The number had increased considerably with the introduction of Children's Centres. Details of new services were added to the database created from the first mapping exercise. Services from the updated mapping work were chosen for interview on the basis of their work and client group most closely resembling those of the non-responding services.

We attempted to re-contact respondents from the Time One survey to maximise our chances of capturing impressions of change over time. However, a significant number had different contact addresses or telephone numbers from those previously recorded. We were able to re-contact 49 personnel from the 72 services selected for interview in the previous year: several of these were new respondents who had replaced previous interviewees who had left their post. A number of potential interviewees (n =10) could not be reached at all and a similar number were successfully contacted but subsequently missed arranged interviews. The total number of interviewees at Time Two was 58.

1.1.13. Validation workshop

When a final draft report had been prepared, but prior to its submission to the sponsor, a half-day workshop was organised for managers of the local and national projects, stakeholders, the fundholder and those responsible for policy in the DfES. The purpose was to share the findings of the evaluation and to ensure that suitable conclusions had been drawn from the information supplied to the research team.

2. CHAPTER TWO: FUNDHOLDING IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

In order to consider the success, or otherwise, of the model of fundholding adopted in the Parenting Fund programme, it was necessary to consider how this compared both with initial expectations for what might be achieved, and also against other fundholding practices, both by statutory bodies and in the independent sector. As part of the evaluation, we therefore undertook a brief review of literature relevant to grant allocation and fundholding practices, as well as a small number of comparative case studies of other fundholding arrangements.

This chapter sets out the results of these activities, in part in order to provide a framework and set of criteria for subsequent chapters. It seeks, amongst other things, to address the first of the evaluation questions, i.e., how far a Fundholder model in itself can add value to a programme of this kind.

Literature relating to the practice of fundholding

2.1.1. Overview

From a brief overview of the literature, it was apparent that the role of a grant giver or fundholder could be divided into two different elements: those relating to the practical management of grants (recruiting applicants, selection, financial monitoring etc) and those relating to the overall strategy being pursued by the fundholder. The latter might include the way in which grants are allocated and monitored, but include other activities, such as processes of consultation and engagement of other stakeholders, undertaking prior research or ongoing evaluation of its activities, or activities designed to share learning derived from grant-funded activities with a wider audience.

The overview of literature indicated that there had been a recent burgeoning of good practice guidelines for the funding of voluntary and community sector organisations, particularly by public sector organisations. These generally set out some of the broad principles that should underpin the funding of voluntary and community sector organisations (VCOs), together with specific advice on some of the mechanics relating to the awarding and monitoring of grants and contracts. We found rather less literature (from the UK, at least) looking at the broader strategic objectives of fundholders, and how these are reflected in different delivery mechanisms.

2.1.2. Good practice guidance

A growing policy interest in the role of the voluntary and community sector in the delivery of publicly funded services has led to a number of policy documents on the subject, as well as response to these from the voluntary and community sector, with the result of these being incorporated into a number of guidelines for the administration of grants and contracts. These tend to focus both on key principles that should underpin 'good practice' in funding voluntary and community sector activities, and some of the specifics. How these are defined varies from one report to another, but in general terms these can be broken down into six key areas:

- Planning and decision making
- Seeking applications (advertising the grant, the application process and how much information to ask for)
- Assessment and selection processes

- Financial management - including issues such as whether grants cover the full cost of activities, payment schedules etc.
- Other monitoring and support activities for grant-funded activities
- Any additional activities which might 'add value' to the grant giving activities.

One of the earliest sets of guidance was published in 1997 by the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF). Drawn up in consultation with a number of other charitable bodies (Charities Aid Foundation, the Corporate Responsibility Group, the National Lottery Charities Board) and with the Home Office on behalf of central government, these provide general 'good practice' principles for government agencies, grant-making trusts and foundations, and corporate givers, involved in giving grants to voluntary sector organisations, and advice on practical issues such as how grants should be publicised, what information should be provided to, and required of, applicants, the assessment and selection processes, payment schedules and monitoring procedures.

This guidance was published at around the same time as the Commission chaired by Professor Nicholas Deakin (1996) was reporting on the future of the voluntary sector, followed closely by the Labour Party's report of March 1997, 'Building the future together', which called for the strengthening of the role of the voluntary and community sectors (VCS) and a new 'compact' governing relationships between the sector and their funders. The idea of a 'compact' was taken up by a conference for leading voluntary organisations, hosted by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). Published in 1998 by the Home Office, the Compact has a strong emphasis on the key principles underlying funding decisions, and how to maintain an effective, and healthy, partnership between government and the voluntary and community sectors. This was followed by the development of local compacts in many local authority areas, as well as a number of more detailed codes of practice covering areas such as working with black and ethnic minority groups, and volunteering.

Difficulties remained, however, particularly in the area of procurement and financial management, these being articulated in the 2002 Treasury document 'Cross-cutting Review of the Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery'. This sought, amongst other things, to clarify what is and is not permitted under government accounting rules in relation to the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and to address the widespread concern that many public sector grants for projects and services were failing to take into account the need for VCS organisations to maintain a set of core services if they were to be effective and continue to grow and develop.

In 2003, these concerns were addressed in the Treasury's 'Guidance to Funders: Improving funding relationships for voluntary and community organisations', which addressed financial management issues such as:

- Stability in the funding relationship: moving from one-year funding to longer-term funding arrangements where appropriate.
- Timing of payments and the balance of risk: recognising that payment in arrears often results in the third sector bearing the upfront costs of borrowing and the risks that this entails;
- Full cost recovery: ensuring that funding bodies recognise that it is legitimate for third sector organisations to recover the appropriate level of overhead costs associated with the provision of a particular service; and

- Reducing the burden of bureaucracy: streamlining access and performance management requirements for multiple, and often very small, funding streams.

Shortly after this the Home Office, together with the Office of Government Commerce, published 'Think Smart, Think Voluntary Sector' (2004)², which also focused on procurement issues, and in 2006, key points from both guidance documents were embedded within a decision support tool (DST) developed by the National Audit Office. Designed to help public sector organisations involved in funding for what were now increasingly called Third Sector Organisations (TSO)³, a key theme was to ensure that small third sector organisations were not deterred from applying for public sector funding, by lengthy or excessively complex procurement and contracting processes.

The DST linked this to the importance of clarity at the planning stage, calling on funders to clarify their objectives for engaging with third sector organisations, since this will help to shape both the strategic decisions about the design of the programme and tactical decisions about the mechanics of funding. Broad strategic issues discussed include questions about the degree of competition for funding that is appropriate, and how risk should be assessed and apportioned. Specific guidance is given on practical issues, such as the amount of information that should be provided to applicants, the duration of the award, building in full cost recovery, determining the payment formula, and establishing the monitoring and evaluation processes.

The wider concern about the capacity of the voluntary sector to respond to and manage changing funding regimes was reflected, at about the same time, in the provision, initially through the Home Office Active Communities Unit of new funding to support some of the core services, particularly of larger local voluntary agencies who could help other, small and less formal organisations, to develop. This was initially provided through the Future Builders Programme, later through the 'Change Up' programme, with additional funding of £70 million becoming available in 2005, to establishing Capacity Builders, a new sector-led agency responsible for managing Change Up funds.

2.1.3. Different types of fundholding

As noted earlier, while these various guidance documents are strong on the broad principles that should shape funding decisions, and on the specifics of awarding and monitoring grants and contracts, they do not generally examine *different models* of funding, and how these relate to the overall objectives of the programme or policy being pursued. Some limited attempts at this are made, for example, in the ICF guidance making a distinction between funding arrangements that provide for *core funding*, those which fund *projects* and those which fund *services*. The DST also seeks to make a distinction between *procurement*, *grant* and *grant in aid*, but argues any clear distinction between these three have become blurred by the advent of new EU rules of competition in procurement.

A more thorough exploration of different objectives for funding, and linking these to different models of fundholding, is provided by a report commissioned by the Baring Foundation, 'The Grantmaking Tango' (Unwin, 2005). Like other reports described earlier, this starts from a concern that an extensive dependence by voluntary sector organisations on grants and contracts can be damaging to the sector if not handled sensitively. For this reason, it argues, funders need to be clear not only on their motivations or objectives and what impact they desire to achieve, but how this translates into different decisions about processes such as

² active communities unit (2004)

³ Third sector organisations are defined as those which are neither state nor private sector - this includes voluntary organisations, community groups, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutual societies.

criteria and assessment processes, level of risk and what the anticipated potential return will be to the funder.

It argues that there are three main sets of reasons why funding bodies (whether government or charitable) might award grants to VCO organisations:

- In order to fund services and activities
- In order to develop the capacity of the organisations funded (also called institution building)
- For wider 'system' change.

The focus of funding is very different according to these different purposes. For example, when funding for services or activities, the type of organisation through which these are delivered, or its long term future and development, are not a major concern. When funding for capacity, the strength and sustainability of the organisation itself is the central concern, rather than the services and activities it delivers. However, in funding for system change, the impact on the wider environment (possibly influencing policy and practice at a broad level) is of greater importance than either the value delivered for immediate beneficiaries of services funded, or the overall capacity of the organisation receiving the funding.

The report also provides a useful typology of grant making which funders can use in pursuit of the objectives outlined above. These are:

- *Reactive* - responsive to applications and interested in supporting the best proposals that are presented to them
- *Interventionist* - wishing to have an impact on a particular issue or area, frequently with a plan of intent
- *Compensatory* - wishing to make good deficiencies especially where there has been little funding in the past.

Another dimension of funding explored is the balance adopted between investment of resources in application and assessment processes, and breadth of selection criteria. A broad set of funding criteria generally results in a large number of applicants, requiring a heavy investment in assessment and selection processes. It also means a heavy burden of risk for applicants, who have to invest more in the application process with lower chances of funding. Tightly defined funding criteria allows for assessment to be more of an administrative process, identifying which applicants best fit the established criteria and provide clear guidelines for the kind of information required of applicants. However, it can also mean that more innovative projects can be overlooked and may deter smaller organisations.

A similar issue was explored by research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Leat, 1998a and 1998b), looking at application and assessment processes used by 50 charitable foundations. It found that the processes adopted reflected the volume of applications, the scale and diversity of the grant-making programme, use of information technology, and the value placed on different types of knowledge, trustees' preferences, and the foundation's perception of its role. Around a quarter sought additional knowledge (beyond information provided in application forms) via direct contact, through visits or interviews, which were felt to be helpful for organisations which might be put off by a very bureaucratic application and assessment process, as well as useful in gathering a broader picture of the applicant.

2.1.4. The value added of the grant holder

A key question that we sought to address was in what way a fundholder might add value to a programme, and what factors might contribute to this. This is a question that is specifically addressed by 'The Grantmaking Tango', in looking at the ways in which additional activities, such as consultancy and advice, opportunities for learning and dissemination of learning, enable the funder to 'add value' to the grants awarded. The report divides such activities into two clusters:

- Financial and technical support - helping to leverage additional funding, financial and technical advice
- Policy, partnership and profile - the opportunity to network with other organisations, making the activities of the grant recipients more visible, or informing policy debates using information derived from grant giving activities.

A different breakdown of the activities that funders can undertake to 'add value' to their grant giving activities is provided in a report commissioned by the Big Lottery Fund (Leat and Kumar 2006), which clusters these into four groups:

- Enabler - providing additional money, advice, support, dissemination capacity offered direct to the individual grantee
- Provider - the grantmaker uses its own staff and resources to provide resource or capacity building material for use of grantees and others
- Purchaser - commissioning third party to provide additional support at grant or programme level
- Infrastructure builder - funding third parties to provide sector or sub-sector wide support and advice

Linking these 'value added' activities to the different objectives for funding outlined in 'The Grantmaking Tango', it is helpful to see that these roles can be particularly useful when the fundholder is seeking to achieve either capacity- and infrastructure-building goals, or the wider strategic aims of 'agenda change' or influencing policy and practice. In both these sets of objectives, the aims are broader than that of just the benefit provided to the users of the grant-funded service. There are the additional objectives of enhancing the capacity of the organisations receiving the grant - amongst other things, to enable them to continue to provide services in the future. There are also the objectives of trying to change the environment or context within which this service is provided. Both of these objectives are very relevant to the task of fundholder in the Parenting Fund, where infrastructure and capacity building was a key objective, alongside seeking to encourage 'voluntary sector ownership' of the Parenting Fund objectives - arguably an important system level change objective.

Comparative case studies

It was partly in response to the lack of comparative data against which the functioning of the Parenting Fund fundholder might be compared, that it was felt useful by the evaluation team to take a look at some other fundholders, and how these functioned in relation to some of the points raised by the review of theory and good practice guidelines outlined above. The general evaluation questions initially raised (i.e., how the fundholder model had worked in theory and practice in fulfilling the aims of the Parenting Fund) gave rise to a number of other questions, such as:

- Are there any features of the Parenting Fund ‘model’ that are particularly unique, or is it a relatively ‘normal’ model of providing funding for work of this kind?
- How does the Parenting Fund approach to strategy and increasing service provision in a particular area compare to other programmes
- Are there specific issues, in terms of the overall aims, that need to be addressed when funding voluntary sector organisations, and how does the Parenting Fund compare to other programmes in this respect?
- Do other programmes similarly divide up their programme into different sections, e.g. top-sliced major grants and local grants, by different priority groups, by strategic and infrastructure building as against service access grants? Does it seem to be an effective approach to strategic development of a sector?
- How does the time-frame within which they were working compare with other programmes? If there were big differences, what implications did this have for the programme’s relative efficiency and effectiveness?
- Is there any evidence that it has been more successful than other programmes in achieving voluntary sector ‘ownership’?
- Are there any specific issues which arise when commissioning grant-aiding voluntary organisations to run parenting support activities, and how does the Parenting Fund compare with other programmes working in this area, in relation to these issues?
- What can we learn from other programmes about obstacles to successful implementation of grant-aiding programmes, and what evidence is there that the Parenting Fund has successfully sidestepped or overcome these obstacles?
- How does the fund compare in terms of cost, and efficiency, with other, similar programmes? For example, is there any evidence that lack of experience on the part of NFPI led to inefficiencies compared with other programmes?

These evaluation questions were selected as a result of the work in the first stage of this strand of the evaluation, and in discussions with both the fundholder and the DfES.

2.1.5. The case studies

To explore these questions, case studies were undertaken with five other grant programmes, two of which (the Children’s Fund and the Marriage and Relationship Support Grant (MARS), latterly part of the Strengthening Families Grant) were similarly addressing family or parent support, and three of which (Single Community Programme, the Baring Foundation

Strengthening the Voluntary Sector Programme, and Future Builders) were providing grants to the voluntary sector, but in other fields. The last three, in particular, were concerned with the objectives of capacity and infrastructure building. Only one of the grant programmes (the Baring Foundation) was in the independent sector. We planned to undertake a case study of another independent fund but were not able to complete this for various reasons.

The comparators varied considerably in the size of their operation - both in terms of overall budget, and the number and size of grant allocated. Most were smaller, both in terms of the number of grants and in the average size of grant, than the Parenting Fund.

Table 2-1: Comparative case studies: size of programme

Fund	Size	Number of applications	Approx number of grants awarded per round	Average size of grant
C1 Strengthening Family / MARS	£2m (04/05, £5m combined funds with SFG)	200	30–32	£75K
C2 Children’s Fund	£149m per year	149 partnerships	£1.2m per partnership 12 projects per partnership	£100K and £400-£7K for small grants
C3 Single Community Programme	£182m over 5 years £43m per year	88 local networks	Target 25,000 projects in 3 years	£500-£5K per project
C4 Barings Foundation	£1.3m 2005	413	68	£12K-£75 core grants
C5 Future Builders	£125m (+£90m)	641	90 (target 250 over 3 yrs)	£91K-£5.2m
C6 Parenting Fund	£16m	800	135	£74K local £188K major

Key variations in fundholding models

Question addressed: Are there any features of the Parenting Fund 'model' that are particularly unique, or is it a relatively 'normal' model of providing funding for work of this kind?

The most innovative aspect of the Parenting Fund - central government money delivered via an independent fundholder - was shared in some respects with the case study Future Builders (C5), which is also a central government fund, but contracted out to a partnership made up of a consortium of voluntary organisations. This represented a three-way agreement between the main fundholder, central government and a bank. Like the Parenting Fund, a central aim in this programme was to strengthen the voluntary sector, in this case, through providing financial stability for voluntary sector organisations by using a mixture of grants, loans and investment, and the fundholder arrangement brought together the sector experience of a voluntary organisation with the investment/financial base necessary for delivery of an investment fund model of funding.

Although most of the other case-study funds remained firmly in the hands of the government agencies (or in one case, charitable trust) managing them, there were a number of other examples of voluntary organisations taking some aspects of the fundholder role. Case study 3 (C3) the Community Programme had voluntary organisations (in this case, local ones) undertaking fundholder roles at a local level. Others had strong consultative structures through which voluntary sector organisations with an interest in the sector could contribute to the planning of the programme, and often contribute to the selection of grants for funding.

Another feature of the Parenting Fund is that it is a centralised model, with all the main decisions and management functions undertaken by the partnership in London, although many of the grants were distributed within the 18 local areas. Two of the case studies (C1 and C4) had similarly centralised management structures, in one case this was a government department and in the other, the main office of a charitable foundation. In the other three case studies, the management arrangements were devolved, to some degree, to a regional or local level. In two cases (C2 and C3) fundholding responsibilities were fully devolved to a regional or local level, while C5 had a mixture of central and local management structures. This meant that in three of the funds, regional or local staff were available to build up local experience, and ensure that the grants awarded at a local level were appropriate to the particular context within which they were awarded.

Another feature of the Parenting Fund model was the relatively small size of the central team managing the programme - for much of the time, two and a half members of staff at NFPI, and two members of staff (part time) at PwC but expanded to a much larger team (over 30) at PwC during the assessment and selection process. In most of the other case-study fundholders, there was also a team of link workers or project managers, operating either at a central or local level, tasked with liaising with individual grant holders.

Strategic approach

Evaluation question: How does the approach of the Parenting Fund to strategy and increasing service provision in a particular area compare with other programmes?

Another feature of the Parenting Fund relates to its strategic objectives, which included both service provision and the development of capacity and infrastructure in relation to parenting provision in the voluntary sector. All the programmes studied had a major focus on the provision of grants for services and activities, but they all, like the Parenting Fund, had a set of strategic objectives that went beyond this, and helped to shape the way in which the grant programme was organised and managed.

Two of the programmes, like the Parenting Fund, had a focus on supporting voluntary sector engagement and infrastructure building at a local level (C2 and C5). In the case of C5, this involved the development of new ways of financing the voluntary sector, through the introduction of an investment model for funding. Others were concerned with generally strengthening policy and practice in their particular area, and several had additional activities alongside their grant giving function, directed towards these strategic objectives. For example, C1 has funded development work in the area of marriage and relationship support and C4 has had a main focus on strengthening the organisational infrastructure of the voluntary organisations and contributing to knowledge and debate within the field. Several of the programmes were funding evaluations, either of the programme as a whole, or of individual projects, which were seen as providing a contribution to longer term learning in the field.

One issue that we tussled with was the distinction between the strategic aims of capacity building and infrastructure building, although there appears to be a certain amount of overlap in the usage of the two terms. The former is generally used to refer to strengthening the capacity of **individual organisations** while infrastructure building refers to strengthening **links between** organisations. We also wondered whether the distinction made by the study of grantmaking published by the Baring Foundation between reactive, interventionist and compensatory strategies was useful in this context and asked our informants in the case studies which of these they felt were more relevant to their fund:

- **Reactive** - responsive to applications and interested in supporting the best proposals that are presented to them
- **Interventionist** - wishing to have an impact on a particular issue or area, frequently with a plan of intent
- **Compensatory** - wishing to make good deficiencies especially where there has been little funding in the past (Unwin, 2005).
- In practice, all the fundholders felt that they were using a mixture of these three elements in their approach, although the overall focus varied, as did the way in which they operationalised these strategies:

C1 was essentially about capacity and infrastructure development and this was done in a reactive way by responding to applications. However, over time the programme has become more interventionist in terms of lobbying and making links with the area of children and families.

C2 has capacity building as a main objective, and is seen as being both interventionist and compensatory by regional and local interviewees. Like C1, the programme has, over time, engaged increasingly in infrastructure building through developing mechanisms for multi-agency commissioning and partnership working.

C3 can be seen as both building capacity and infrastructure through grants to community organisations, support for community networks and local services to improve community involvement, and was considered both compensatory and interventionist.

C4 does not fund service delivery per se, but funds infrastructure development of voluntary organisations, many of which are second-tier organisations. As such it was seen as interventionist and compensatory. Through its networks and knowledge-sharing activities, it has an indirect effect on strengthening the wider voluntary sector infrastructure.

C5 is also about improving organisational infrastructure and stability and thereby increasing the capacity of the voluntary sector to be involved in public service delivery. Again, the aims are interventionist and compensatory.

As will be noted later, in many cases there were some aspects of the programme that were funded through reactive grant giving (to the best applicant) while there were also other, more strategic, elements of the programme in which grants were awarded in a more interventionist or compensatory way.

One aspect that did offer a distinction between the funds was the extent to which the strategic aims were being pursued with individual organisations, in relation to service provision in a local area, or in terms of national policies and structures. For example, C4's approach is not about funding service delivery per se but about funding second-tier organisations or projects which will strengthen the infrastructure of individual voluntary organisations. C2 and C3 have created structures and processes, themselves infrastructure, at a local level as part of the funding process to increase the provision for children's services and involvement of community groups.

Similar to this, the Parenting Fund has funded a variety of national and regional organisations to support and strengthen provision of parenting services as well as directly funding local voluntary sector organisations to carry out parenting work. However, the structures by which links are made between the national/regional capacity building activities, and the services provided at a local level were more specific and well developed in some of the other programmes (C2 or C3). This was perhaps, in part, a reflection of the short time the Fund has been running (i.e., less time for more complex structure to be established).

2.1.6. Providing grants to the voluntary sector

Evaluation question: Are there specific issues, in terms of the overall aims, that need to be addressed when funding voluntary sector organisations, and how does the Parenting Fund compare with other programmes in this respect?

The issues that need to be taken into account when funding the voluntary organisations are explored in depth in the various guidelines discussed earlier in this chapter. These include issues such as ensuring that the information provided to, and required of, applicants is appropriate, ensuring that the time scale of the grant and what is required in terms of reporting and monitoring processes are manageable, risk is appropriately assigned between funder and fund recipient, and that the level of funding is sufficient to cover core costs as well as specific services or activities for which the grant is provided.

How each of the case studies addressed these issues varied considerably according to their overall strategic objectives. Perhaps even more crucially, it was influenced by their history and level of experience, and the time scale over which they were operating. The importance of the time dimension was reflected in the fact that this was identified as an additional evaluation question for this part of the work:

Evaluation question: How does the time-frame within which they were working compare with other programmes. If there were big differences, what implications did this have for the programme's relative efficiency and effectiveness?

Most of the other case studies (with the exception of C5) have been operating for a number of years. C1 and C4 had been running for at least 10 years, others such as C2 and C3, had been running since 2000/1. In each case they had had several rounds of advertising and selecting grants, and the opportunity to refine their processes over time. C4, for example, is a very experienced independent trust fund with many years of experience in awarding grants to the voluntary sector. The Trust does not advertise its grant programme, but information about it can be found in most funding directories, and on the Trust's website. Applications are received and assessed on an ongoing basis with all short-listed applicants receiving a visit from an assessor, and decisions are taken quarterly, by a panel of trustees.

This is in marked contrast to the Parenting Fund, which had to set itself up, develop its processes, advertise its availability to potential applicants, assess and make a selection of these, over a very short time period. Considerable resources were devoted to advertising the Fund and providing information events, a website and a helpline for potential applicants, but it was completely beyond the resources and time scale of the Fund to make visits to individual applicants.

The Parenting Fund sought to get around this to a certain extent by acquiring the necessary skills and experience through the experience of the two organisations involved. NFPI brought experience of the sector, while PwC had experience at grant allocation. The initial consultation period, which also involved a number of experienced voluntary sector organisations, also enabled the Fund to draw in experience from a range of sources, and the fundholder was also able to base some of its processes, such as its application materials and selection process, on those used by others in the sector (C1 in the case of application forms).

Number of grants awarded

The number of grants awarded in any funding round also has implications for the way in which application, assessment and decision making processes are handled. As has already been noted (Table 2.1) the number of applications being handled and grants being awarded in a single round by the Parenting Fund is larger than any of the other case studies studied, with the exception of C3. However, in C3, the grants were being awarded at two levels – initially to 88 local networks, which, in turn, are awarding grants to local groups and organisations. The Parenting Fund, in its first round, handled nearly 800 applicants, and awarded 135 grants - the closest to this was C5 which had handled 641 applications in its most recent round, awarding 90 grants (it was aiming for 250 grants over a three-year period, with annual rounds of application and decision making). As has already been suggested, the number of applications being received, and the time scale over which these are received, had important implications for the amount of time that can be spent in the assessment process, and particularly in the amount of time that can be spent talking to or getting to know individual applicants.

In the case of the Parenting Fund, the application forms were the main source of information that the fundholder had on each applicant, apart from where this was supplemented by the sector knowledge of NFPI, and in some cases, the DfES staff involved in the assessment and decision making process. The application forms themselves were assessed on a point system, by PwC, which had no sector-specific experience, with the applications awarded the highest number of points for fulfilling the relevant experience being short-listed for the final selection process.

Length of grant

Another of the core issues raised in the guidance related to funding for voluntary sector organisations was that of the length of grant, which has important implications for the organisation hosting the project or service, particularly in terms of providing job security and continuity for staff. The compact draws attention to the 'value of long-term, multi-year funding, where appropriate, to assist longer term planning and stability', and the Treasury's 2003 guidance on improving funding relationships with the voluntary and community sector also recommends moving from one-year to longer-term funding arrangements where appropriate.

The case study programmes had a range of different policies in this area, with most providing at least three-year grants, particularly for larger organisations, networks and infrastructure building activities.

C1 made three-year offers to successful applicants (with yearly reapplication)

C2 awards funding to local partnerships in three-year cycles (but on the basis of one-year guaranteed funding linked to yearly reapplication).

Work funded by C3 has been typically short-term, e.g., 12–18 months (grants need to be spent within 12 months of being awarded) although the networks themselves are funded over a longer period over the five years (2001–2006).

C4 currently funds project grants for up to one year and core grants for three years but this will be increased to a maximum of five years' funding when the two strands merge. The effect will be fewer grants but they will be larger and longer.

The average length of loan for C5 is over six years but it depends on the purpose of the loan and it can be shorter, e.g., for working capital, or longer, e.g., for a property purchase.

There was a strong link between the length of time a programme is operating, and the time scale for individual grants. For example, C4 has been operating its funding programme for strengthening the voluntary sector for many years and has recently increased the maximum funding period for projects to five years. C1 has also been running over a significant length of time, and some key organisations have received continuous funding. There is, however, a requirement that three-year grants are reapplied for yearly.

In the case of the Parenting Fund, the overall period of the first round of the programme was three years, and with the Fund itself being a new one, considerable time was required for initial planning, setting up systems, advertising the grant and providing time for applications to be submitted. This left the overall time for individual grants as only 18 months - considerably less than that allowed for either by the more experienced comparators, or than is recommended by the guidelines for good practice.

Covering core costs and size of grant

The size of grants has also been highlighted in all the guidance documents, because of the practice in the past, by many funders, of only covering the costs of specific activities or projects, but refusing to cover the core costs of the organisation which initially developed and then provides ongoing background support to the service or activity. Recent government guidance (e.g. the Compact, and the Treasury 2003 guidance for funding voluntary and community organisations) is insistent that funders should recognise the full costs involved in the provision of a service or project, and cover the overhead and infrastructure costs associated with this.

Core costs were specifically included in the grants awarded by the Parenting Fund, as they were in different ways by each of the comparator programmes. Programmes C4 and C5 have specifically funded infrastructure development, which involved funding core functions of the organisation, while C3 does this incidentally as part of its overall aim. C1 did this through core funding for key organisations.

As has already been noted (Table 2.1) the size of grant awarded by the Parenting Fund was relatively generous, compared with the other case studies, particularly for major grants (the mean size of major grants was £188K and for local grants, £74K). C5 awards were considerably higher than this (from £91K to £5.2 million) but crucially, these were loans, and investments, rather than simple grants. C2 had grants of £100K for large infrastructure

building projects, but much smaller grants of between £400 and £7K for local projects. Several of the other funds, as noted earlier, were funding projects over several years, but with the grant being renewed on an annual basis. It was therefore unclear from our data the extent to which the grants awarded represented the full costs of the projects or activities funded, or only the annual costs.

2.1.7. Structuring a grant programme

Evaluation question: Do other programmes similarly divide up their programme into different sections - e.g. top-sliced major grants and local grants, by different priority groups, by strategic and infrastructure building as against service access grants? Does it seem to be an effective approach to strategic development of a sector?

One way of making maximum strategic use of programme funding is to break the overall amount down into different categories with different sets of criteria. This means that, although overall the programme may be 'reactive' (i.e., responding to the best applications) the segmentation of the grants ensures that there is at least some coverage of different sectors, activities or geographic areas. All the comparator programmes had some way of dividing up their grants that was designed to complement their overall aims and objectives, in some cases with certain types of grants selected and managed in different ways.

Case study segmentation of grants

C1 initially divided its grants into strategic, core and R&D grants. However, after it was merged with other grant programmes, grants were divided into strategic and project grants.

C2 supports local partnerships to be fundholders, but does specify some key areas such as youth crime prevention. There is also a separate capacity building strand to its funding, which provides smaller grants, administered by voluntary sector organisations.

C3 focuses on deprived areas and has various streams through which the grant is allocated. These include supporting existing activities, supporting local networks to engage with local strategic partnerships, funding small-scale community projects and support for community involvement. Decisions about how much to apportion to these various streams are made by local networks, in relation to local needs. However, there is a suggestion that the overall split between regional / core activities, and neighbourhood level activities, should be 35/45 of the programme budget.

C4 is divided into core grants and project grants and to national and local organisations respectively (Core here refers to the core costs that an organisation has to bear). Project grants are divided between three geographical areas, which have a historical association with the organisation.

C5 divides its grants across domain areas: community cohesion, crime, education & learning, health & social care and support for children & young people.

The way that case studies divided their grants reflected, as did the Parenting Fund, the fact that they had broad aims, both for funding specific activities, and developing a broader strategy, such as infrastructure development. Several of the case studies divided their grants into those which were directly focused on activities or service provision, and others which had a focus on strategic development or infrastructure building. This might involve, for example, some grants which provided core funding to key organisations, research to strategically develop a particular area; or strategic level of support for local partnerships and

networks, alongside small grants projects to other organisations to strengthen the delivery of services. Segmentation of the grants is also used to ensure coverage across all public sector services, across organisations of different size and capacity, or to ensure coverage of different client groups and activities.

It was often this aspect of a programme which is changed over time, with subsequent rounds of the programme changing the segmentation to meet new sets of priorities or concerns. In several cases this had involved a simplification of the structure, as in C1 and C3, where several grant funds had been merged into one, and C5 where two streams within the same programme have come together to make one larger one. The impetus for this has been various; some have undertaken, or been subject of, strategic reviews, the impact of wider policy changes, such as the implementation of the Every Child Matters policy and the Compact has contributed to streamlining and the general thrust across government to reduce the cost of grant administration as well as the burden on the voluntary sector.

The Parenting Fund also segmented the programme into major grants and local grants, with local grants divided across 18 different areas. Within these there are also grants allocated according to different priority areas and by different client group. Overall, its structure can be seen to be somewhat more complex than that used within other programmes, but on the other hand, as already noted, the overall number of grants distributed within one round was rather larger than most of the other programmes. Nevertheless, it will be interesting to see if there is some streamlining of this complexity, as in some of the other programmes, over time, and as the programme gains more experience.

2.1.8. Voluntary sector ownership

Evaluation question: Is there any evidence that it has been more successful than other programmes in getting voluntary sector 'ownership'?

Part of the rationale for commissioning NFPI to distribute the Parenting Fund was that, as a voluntary organisation with a reputation in the field of parenting, it would facilitate a sense of 'ownership' of the Fund within the voluntary sector. All the comparator case studies were also funding voluntary organisations through their grant programmes, and most also had a range of ways in which the voluntary sector could be actively engaged in programme activities. The actual models of involvement tended to reflect their different contexts, stages of development and programme aims. For example, C2 and C3 have voluntary and community organisations involved as partners in local partnerships and networks. C4 involved voluntary organisations in learning and dissemination activities. C5 and C3, like the Parenting Fund, have voluntary organisations in a key role in the whole fundholding process. It is difficult to assess the relative effectiveness of these different processes, and ways of involving the voluntary sector, because of the diversity of contexts and aims in the different programmes. However, there were some interesting differences in the way in which the Parenting Fund operated in specific ways compared with some of the other funds.

Involvement of voluntary sector in decision-making processes

The Parenting Fund was managed by a voluntary sector organisation, with support from a private sector consultancy firm. In addition, it involved a number of other VCS organisations in its selection panel. Several of the comparator case studies involved voluntary sector organisations directly in the decision-making processes, including decisions about which applications to fund, and how grants should be monitored. C2 and C3, similar to the Parenting Fund, had voluntary sector organisations directly involved in the structure of fundholding either as the main fundholder or within the local partnership and networks which are part of their funding structure. A recent evaluation of C3 described the process as having established a robust participatory model.

All the public sector funds had been involved in some kind of consultation process with the voluntary sector prior to being set up, and at the time of any major reorganisation or restructuring of the grant process. The independent funder (C4) had gained its understanding of the voluntary sector through a range of avenues: staff experience, a knowledgeable and well networked board of trustees and communication with the voluntary sector directly through its learning sets of funded organisations. Most of the fundholders valued the use of voluntary sector advisory panels, particularly as a contribution to the strategic development of their programmes, and C1 is currently considering extending its consultation processes to ensure a wider input from the voluntary sector in this way. Involvement of voluntary organisations in the fundholding process could encourage communication in both directions. Part of the aim of programme C5 was to encourage a cultural change in the voluntary sector, from grant aid to investment, and involving NCVO in the consortium was one way of both getting feedback from the voluntary sector, and also providing a channel for raising awareness within the sector about this new way of working.

Communication and networking

Several of our fundholder informants stressed the importance of establishing and maintaining good communications between the fundholder and applicants and recipients, as a means of encouraging and fostering voluntary sector ownership. Ways of fostering good communication included the use of clear application materials which were designed to minimise the costs involved in applying, dialogue providing useful feedback between fundholder and applicant, and monitoring and evaluation processes which placed a minimum burden on applicants and which could serve a useful purpose for the VCO itself.

The other important element for several funds was the appointment of a team of staff who could maintain contact with individual grant holders. C1 had designated a link worker to each funded project; C3 offered funded projects an optional set up meeting, and also offered advice and support regarding their development needs as an organisation. C4 estimated that one day a week of the grant officer's time was spent speaking to applicants about their applications. This was in addition to feedback letters which every applicant received and twice yearly seminars for core grant holders. Support for projects of this kind was one of the C4's key values '...to seek to build purposeful relationships'. C2 gave applicants support and mentoring via statutory or larger organisations which were available to help with the applications.

Several of the comparator fundholders told us of networks and ongoing groups that had evolved out of their programmes. In programme C1, for example, a number of core funded organisations formed themselves into a group with collective aims and objectives, and this provided a means of holding a dialogue between these organisations and the fundholder. C4 sees facilitation of contact and mutual help between applicants as one of its objectives, and facilitates a core costs club for collective feedback and information sharing.

Having multiple opportunities for feedback and dissemination of programme learning was also seen as being one way in which the fundholder was contributing to strengthening the voice of the voluntary sector in the particular field in which it was operating. In some cases, the programme also adopted either an explicit, or sometimes more implicit, lobbying role by raising issues of concern to the voluntary sector with the government and a wider range of stakeholders. The independent funder (C5) also commissions research, and is planning in the next financial year to establish a number of project learning sets, through which learning from funded projects can be disseminated. It also disseminates learning through the various associations and funding networks of which it is a member (Reflection and collective discussion of fund making in general seems to be a feature of independent rather than public funders).

However, not all the funds were able to maintain this level of contact and communication, particularly in the face of reorganisation and restructuring of the central management structures. There was also the difficulty, expressed by C5, that as the overall number of supported projects grew each year, so the number of visits to projects would decrease as the case workload for each investment officer grew.

The main mechanism for feedback by the Parenting Fund from its grantholders was via its monitoring system, occasional visits to some of its funded projects and through a series of workshops both at the start and end of the programme, at which its emerging strategy was discussed. The size of its central team, however, meant that it was difficult to maintain regular contact with funded projects, or have in-depth conversations about their work. The distribution of grants across 18 areas meant that it was difficult for the central team to build up networks of contacts, or engage in meaningful ongoing discussion with other stakeholders in local areas. This was potentially a major weakness, given the infrastructure and capacity building aims of the programme.

2.1.9. Funding parenting support

Evaluation question: Are there any specific issues which arise when grant-aiding voluntary organisations to run parenting support activities, and how does the Parenting Fund compare with other programmes working in this area, in relation to these issues?

Parenting support is a relatively new area, and the field is relatively undeveloped in terms of established links and networks, as well as being embedded in the somewhat larger, and more established, field of child and family support. NFPI was generally seen by others as having good networks within the field, and was able to draw on considerable experience, and previous research and contacts, in establishing the programme.

In one respect, however, compared with other funds working in related areas (i.e., C3 and C4), the Parenting Fund was seen by at least one informant as having work to do in understanding, and creating links with, local delivery. Other funds had evolved structures and contacts that enabled them to work with local delivery structures at a local level, particularly statutory agencies, via Local Strategic Partnerships and Children's Trusts. The Parenting Fund fundholder, while having good links with national voluntary sector organisations, and some parts of central government, did not have the same kind of links with local authorities or with voluntary sector organisations at a very local level. This meant that, as will be described in later sections of this report, a great deal of effort had to be made to establish these links, particularly, for example, in trying to get local authority agencies or other local voluntary organisations to attend local workshops set up to discuss the operation of the programme and strategy building within the local areas.

2.1.10. Success in grant management

Evaluation question: What can we learn from other programmes about obstacles to successful implementation of grant-aiding programmes, and what evidence is there that the Parenting Fund has successfully sidestepped or overcome these obstacles?

What constitutes successful grant programme implementation is open to some debate, and can be very dependent on the particular context within which the fundholder is operating. For some it might involve the money being used to best effect, i.e. are grants being given to the best projects? For others, it might be the achievement of broader strategic aims, independent of the success of individual grants awarded. To others it might be ensuring that money was well spent, and as few as possible 'failed' projects.

Each programme has to make its own decisions about the balance of risk/innovation (i.e., whether to fund innovative, but risky projects, or safer, but more conventional and well established activities), and how much to invest in the application, assessment, monitoring and evaluation processes. This was something mentioned in the discussed by some of the guidelines described earlier. The decision support tool provided by the national audit office talks of ensuring a balance of risks, between the funder and funded, while the 'Grantmaking Tango' report describes the importance of finding the right level of risk to fit the overall aims of the programme. Part of the task lay in finding a balance between the tightness of the criteria that applicants are required to fulfil, and the rigour of (and resources required for) the assessment and selection process. The danger of having too tight a set of criteria or a lack of flexibility in the assessment process is that good, innovative, projects can be overlooked.

One way of addressing this is to have a two-stage application process, which places a relatively light burden in the first stage, but is considerably more demanding at the second stage. Only one of the comparator funds, C5, ran a two-stage application process. This programme operated a high risk model in that the sums of investment in organisations can be relatively high and the risk twofold; that the project will not deliver and that the organisation will not be able to pay back a loan. This required considerable resources in terms of risk assessment and support for applicants is high at the application stage. C3 also described itself as having a high-risk model because of the nature of its programme aims and the nature of the organisations it was funding, but the size of the grants awarded was relatively small, and it was felt that more focus on managing risk would be disproportionate. C4 applies proportionality to risk assessment according to the size of the grant requested and generally it was felt by this funder that a more rigorous investigation of risk would entail disproportionate costs for limited improvements because its projects tended to be quite low risk anyway.

Another approach to risk, mentioned by informants in two of the case studies, was ensuring that the fundholder established and maintained good relationships with potential applicant organisations (C1) and good sector knowledge (C6). Use of link workers or dedicated project managers was one way of minimising projects running into difficulties.

The Parenting Fund probably falls somewhere in the middle of these various approaches in terms of risk, as will be discussed in the next section. It was decided not to have a two-stage process for applicants, but there was a two-stage screening process, with the initial stage being quite rigorous in terms of financial risk, and in terms of whether the applicants met the criteria. At the final stage, the sector knowledge of both NFPI and DfES proved useful in including some applicants which had been screened out at the initial assessment stage, and in identifying some additional risks which were not identified in the initial stages. Overall, the decision was made to fund effective, rather than particularly innovative (and therefore, potentially risky) activities, as a key aim was developing infrastructure, rather than exploring new approaches to service delivery.

Monitoring & evaluation

Another approach to managing risk was to have effective monitoring and reporting processes, and to have some kind of evaluation in place. The most thorough monitoring process was the one used by C5, which involved quarterly reports providing financial information and updating on progress with regard to milestones and outputs. Two programmes (C1 and C2) used the annual reapplication within a three-year grant as a means of monitoring progress. C3 and C4 were somewhat more light touch and did not require any formal monitoring of the small grants strand of their fund over and above final feedback at the end of 12 months and a possible visit. Larger grants on the C4 programme were subject to an annual visit and a more in-depth look at what they had been doing, with evidence of expenditure.

The level of evaluation taking place similarly reflected the aims of the programme and was proportional to the size of the project grant. For example, in a programme such as C3, which awards a large number of small grants to increase the capacity of local voluntary groups, evaluation is more concerned with collective impacts and issues than the evaluation of individual projects. In programme C2, in which there is a mix of larger local grants and small grant programme, then a sequential evaluation process was used which focussed on different aspects, e.g., individual projects, partnership working and programme impacts over a number of years.

All the publicly funded programmes were, themselves, subject to external evaluation and scrutiny as well as requiring this of their funded projects. C1 was not formally evaluated but a review of the sector had taken place, C2 had a national evaluation, C3 a national evaluation and performance management framework, while C5 conducted an evaluation in the form of a learning investigation. C4 was not publicly funded, but had recently conducted a strategic review of its funding programmes.

The Parenting Fund fundholder considered itself to use a light touch system of reporting for projects and did not expect each project necessarily to conduct its own evaluation. It had made a point of talking to other fundholders, and based its monitoring system on one which had already been used by a related fund programme, C1. This had been developed by and with voluntary sector organisations and was believed to be something that grant recipients had found useful because 'we should be doing it anyway'.

2.1.11. Cost and efficiency

Evaluation question: How does the Parenting Fund compare in terms of cost, and efficiency, with other, similar programmes? For example, is there any evidence that lack of experience on the part of NFPI led to inefficiencies compared with other programmes?

What proportion of overall costs should be spent on programme management activities, compared with the amount spent on actual grants, was something of considerable interest to the fundholder itself, as a way of assessing its own efficiency. The programmes in the case studies were asked about this. Some were unable to provide information on the cost of administration of the programme, although they were generally able to identify the number of staff involved. For programmes where the elements of the fundholding role were on more than one level or where the programme had merged with others it was more difficult to estimate.

C1 was unable to provide this information.

C2 did not have a figure for regional administration but at a local fundholder level it equated to four members of staff (Manager, Administration support, Monitoring & Finance and Evaluator).

C3 gave a figure of 22% for infrastructure, administration and support costs and 10% of budget on staff costs, including finance and administration at central/regional and neighbourhood levels.

C4 estimated the costs of the programme to be 10% of overall expenditure.

C5 gave 10.7% as the figure dedicated to management and administration with 30% of this relating to direct input to development and capacity building done with projects.

The proportion of the overall amount spent on administration and additional activities in the Parenting Fund appears to have been low compared with the figures above. According to the original programme budget, around £800,000 or 5% of the overall budget of £16 million was spent on the fundholding element. NFPI estimated that around 1.5% overall was spent on support and infrastructure building activities, leaving around 3.5% spent on the assessment and management of the grants. The overall number of staff involved in the programme management was small - apart from during the assessment period, when a large team of assessors from PwC were involved. Other than this, staffing consisted of two and a half staff at NFPI, and part of the time of two members of staff at PwC. Other funds examined had considerably larger teams than this; in particular, several had a team of project officers to keep in regular contact with grant-funded projects.

The relatively low cost of these 'overheads' could be seen as representing considerable efficiency on behalf of the Parenting Fund fundholder, but this was also reflected in the fact that the fundholder was unable to do as much in relation to support and infrastructure building as it, and others, would have liked (this is discussed more in Chapters 3 and 4). The level of resources available centrally was particularly important when it came to consideration of the extent to which the fundholder was able to 'add value' to the programme of grants, as identified in the literature review earlier. Like other aspects of fundholding, this involves a 'trade off' between keeping overhead costs as low as possible, and having sufficient resources available to undertake some of the additional activities mentioned, such as supporting learning between grant holders, undertaking research or disseminating learning from the programme. A number of the other fundholders were becoming increasingly interested in their strategic role, and this was reflected in undertaking more additional activities, such as providing mentoring, consultancy, networking and joint learning opportunities for grant-funded organisations, than initially planned.

The Parenting Fund fundholder was similarly committed to a range of additional activities, as will be described in the next chapter, although these were constrained by the level of central resources available. Whether this seriously constrained the level of 'added value' that the fundholder was able to contribute to the programme will be discussed in later chapters.

Conclusions

Our literature review identified a number of issues of relevance for what constituted 'good practice' or a set of bench marks against which the fundholding model operated by the Parenting Fund could be compared, as well as a number of pointers to the way in which a fundholder might 'add value' to a programme. This information was complemented by a number of case studies which examined how other fundholders addressed some of these issues.

In comparison with other fundholders, key elements of the Parenting Fund to emerge were its relatively newness, the short time scale over which it had to operate, and its strong initial focus on strategic aims - building capacity and infrastructure building and encouraging ownership within the voluntary sector for support services for parents. These aspects were reflected in the decision to appoint a voluntary agency with existing experience in the parenting sector, together with a consultancy firm with experience in grant-managing programmes of this kind, to run the programme. It was also reflected in the relatively complex structure of the programme, which was divided into major grants, some of which were to contribute to the infrastructure and capacity building aims of the programme, and local grants which had a stronger focus on service delivery.

Several of the other programmes had similar segmentation of their grants to cover both strategic and service delivery aims, similarly reflecting a broad set of both service provision and infrastructure and capacity building aims. However, in comparison to these, the Parenting Fund was relatively complex. The Parenting Fund was also relatively ambitious in terms of the number of grants that it was awarding within one round, and the size of grants were relatively large. In conformity with recommended good practice, these were designed to cover the overheads, or core costs of the organisations receiving grants, as well as activities. However, the time scale for advertising the Fund, obtaining and selecting applicants, and over which grants had to be spent, were all relatively short, both in comparison with other programmes, and in terms of recommended 'good practice'.

The model itself - combining statutory sector ownership with independent sector delivery - was innovative, although there were several other programmes in which active voluntary sector involvement, including involvement in decision making and grant allocation processes, and in wider networking activities, was taking place. The amount allocated within the Parenting Fund for central management and support to its grant holders was relatively small, and did not allow the kind of direct involvement with grant holders found in some of the other programmes, and did constrain the level to which central staff could become involved in 'strategic' activities, such as evaluation, research or networking on behalf of funded activities. These were exactly the kind of activities which the two more theoretical reports, 'The Grantmaking Tango' and the Big Lottery Report on the Role of Fundholders, argued were the key to a fundholder 'adding value' to a programme. From this point of view, it could be argued that, although the small central team represented a very cost effective approach to awarding and monitoring the grants themselves, it also constrained it from undertaking some of the more productive activities that might have contributed to its infrastructure and capacity building aims.

3. CHAPTER THREE: FUNDHOLDING IN PRACTICE IN THE PARENTING FUND

Introduction

This section is concerned with the actual implementation of the Parenting Fund, and seeks to address the second of the evaluation questions to which this part of the evaluation was directed, i.e. How far the fundholder is being successful in operationalising the model in relation to the Parenting Fund?

The chapter is structured around the different elements of fundholding identified in the previous chapter. This covers

- Planning and decision making
- Seeking applications
- Assessment and selection
- Financial management
- Additional monitoring and support activities for grant-funded activities
- Additional infrastructure development

In each section, a summary is first provided of how this activity was conducted, using data either from our observation of these activities, from a review of documentation provided by the fundholder (including the original database of applications, the website data on grants allocated, and monitoring information). Then feedback on this particular element is provided, based on information received either through interviews with stakeholders (conducted at the start, middle and end of the programme), from the two surveys of applicants (undertaken at the start and end of the programme) and from interviews with those working in funded projects undertaken as part of the Strand B evaluation (of programme activities).

Finally, some general conclusions are drawn, which focus primarily on the process of fundholding, rather than on its overall outcome or impact, related to its original objectives. This is the subject of Chapter 4.

Planning and decision making

The Barings report, 'The Grantmaking Tango' indicates that fundholders have a number of decisions to make in the early stages of the programme, including being clear about their motivations or objectives as funders, what impact they desire to achieve, what kind of operation would suit them best, and practical aspects such as criteria and assessment processes, level of risk and potential return to the funder. There are also decisions to be made about the number, size and length of grants, what kind of infrastructure is required and how resources will be allocated between the grants themselves, and any other activities to supplement, or add value, to the grants. Cutting across all of these are decisions to be made about how the voluntary sector and other potential fundholders are to be involved – as consultees or directly involved in decision making processes.

The planning and design of the Parenting Fund programme began at least two years before the call for applications. The programme was initially announced in the 2002 Spending Review, which indicated that £25 million was available to be spent in the three-year funding cycle (financial years 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06). Following the announcement of the Fund, an Advisory Group was convened and chaired by the National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI). This was made up of a wide range of parenting organisations, government departments and others with a close interest in the subject, and concluded with a consultation paper for the Parenting Fund which was then sent out for wider consultation with the sector (The Parenting Fund Proposals for Consultation, 2003). This was done in accordance with the principles set out in the Compact on relations between government and voluntary sector which had recently been introduced (see Chapter 2).

The consultation process helped to identify the three main priority areas for the Parenting Fund:

- To develop capacity within the parenting sector and develop services, both universal services and in targeted geographical areas
- To develop the sector strategically through funding national infrastructure projects, and by strengthening the network of services that support parents
- To address areas of high need through working with target groups hitherto poorly served in mainstream provision. They include black and ethnic minority parents, parents with mental health problems, families living with conflict and parents with disabilities or who have children with a disability.

From very early in the programme, it was intended that the voluntary and community sector would deliver the Fund and take a fundholding role. This resulted in some initial delay, as the legislation under which the programme had been created gave the DfES the legal responsibility for the Fund and this had to be amended to allow for the more innovative approach to delivering the Fund. During the period of the delay, (2003-4) part of the Fund (£8.6 million) was used to strengthen telephone helplines and develop some of the infrastructure for parenting activities. The main programme was officially launched by the Minister for Children and Families in May 2004. This left only two years in which to seek applications, allocate grants and deliver grant-funded activities via the voluntary and community sector.

Following the set of priorities identified by the advisory group, the grant programme was structured into two main groups of grants: major grants and local grants. The Major Grants programme aimed to fund projects with grants up to a maximum of £350,000, and having a national or regional impact through:

- capacity building, by increasing the capacity of agencies nationally or across one or more regions to meet the needs of parents experiencing difficulties
- producing models of service that can be replicated nationally or across one or more regions of the nine regions in England
- filling a significant gap in provision nationally or across one or more regions.

The Local Grants programme was for projects taking place within the boundaries of eighteen local government areas. Local grants were for up to £100,000 over the funding period and the areas were selected for reasons which included already having parenting support services on the ground, and because they had high levels of deprivation.

There was further structuring of the grant to ensure that certain priority groups, which had previously not been particularly well served by parenting services, received services. These were black and ethnic minority groups, fathers, and parents of disabled children, bereaved parents, parents of older children, parents with mental health problems, and parents living with conflict.

The fundholder to run the programme was selected through a competitive tendering process, which was won by NFPI in partnership with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). Both had initially made an expression of interest in undertaking the work, and it was clear that they each brought somewhat different experience which, between them, provided a good combination of skills, links and capacity to undertake the role. With its history of work in this sector, NFPI is viewed by other stakeholders as having strong sector knowledge and as bringing 'street knowledge of the field into the process' thereby giving credibility to the Fund in the sector. In turn, PwC had considerable experience of managing large funding programmes and is viewed as having brought valuable organisational and financial skills to the task. They were subcontracted by NFPI to manage many of the administrative functions and processes, namely the application, assessment and financial monitoring of the projects (www.parentingfund.org 2005).

Feedback on the early stages

The main comment on this early process came from stakeholders, several of whom expressed concern that the initial delays had left a rather short time period for the actual application, selection and grant allocation process. However, the wide consultation was also welcomed by most stakeholders interviewed, and one side benefit was noted - that many of the organisations which were potential grant applicants had early warning of the arrival and aims of the programme, which gave them time to plan potential projects for which to seek funding. Several of the applicants in our survey indicated that they had initially heard of the Fund either through being involved in the consultation process itself, or from another organisation that had been involved in the consultation.

The other area which stakeholders were asked about was the fundholder arrangements themselves and the success of the partnership between the two organisations selected to run the Fund (NFPI and PwC). The partners' own feedback was that, as they brought together very different levels of experience and skill, and were from different sectors, the early days involved a steep learning curve as they got to know one another and developed mutually agreed strategies, as well as learning about the processes involved in seeking and assessing applications and awarding grants. However, the relationship is generally seen both by the two organisations involved, and by most of the other stakeholders, as having worked well, being open and reflexive. Where problems have arisen these were not seen as 'individual organisational problems, but programme model issues' (comment by stakeholder). NFPI and PwC themselves identified improvements that might be made in the future (independently and in a learning meeting following the selection process) to facilitate better working arrangements and understanding of the challenges that delivering a fund could bring. These mainly included increasing the time for working together on tasks, rather than separately, with more time spent combining their knowledge in the early stages of the assessment and selection process. This learning was incorporated in the planning for the second round of the Parenting Fund.

The application process

3.1.1. Generation of applications

Information packs and application forms were designed and, during spring 2004, sent out to a wide range of voluntary and community organisations. Considerable effort went into ensuring that information about the grants was disseminated through a number of different channels - information in 'trade' journals, on a website (with links to others, such as 'Grants on line'), and through a series of regional meetings to which local organisations were invited. A telephone helpline was also set up by PwC for enquiries from potential applicants.

The application documentation and final set of criteria by which projects would be selected were developed by PwC and NFPI in consultation with other stakeholders based on past experiences of grant allocation. Considerable thought went into designing an application form which was not too lengthy, complex or bureaucratic.

The process generated a large number of applications: 796 applications totalling more than £100m. Of these, 444 came from the local areas, and 342 were applications for major grants. However, the local grant applications were not evenly spread across the local areas, and the best way to handle this was the subject of some discussion at the selection stage (see below).

3.1.2. Feedback on the application process

The main feedback on the application process came from the first round of the survey of successful and unsuccessful applicants, conducted around three months after decisions had been notified.

Most informants indicated that they had first heard about the Parenting Fund through word of mouth or via another organisation or group. However, less than half the applicants interviewed had attended one of the information events. Local applicants, in particular, appear to have not heard about the workshops in time to attend, or in some cases, did not have an event in their area (North West). Around 67% of applicants did, however, make personal contact with the fundholder during the application process, usually via the telephone helpline. Most were very positive about the help that they had received and several (17%) specifically welcomed the level of support that had been available for applicants (via the information events, website and helpline).

The application process itself was generally regarded as being fairly standard and straightforward. In our study, 62% rated the general communication of the programme's aims and objectives as being good or very good, and 72% rated the clarity of guidance and information as good or very good, 58% of all applicants rated the application form as good or very good. However, a few (3) found the financial format difficult, some (2) had problems with the electronic form and several (5) thought too much information was required.

The main criticism about the whole process was the time it took to get feedback about the results of their application: 16 informants commented on having had no contact, feedback or explanation during the application process. Suggestions for improving the process from successful projects concerned the mechanics of the process, e.g. better on-line form (28%), better timescales (28%), more contact and involvement (28%) and improved administration (22%). Unsuccessful applicants wanted more contact and involvement with the funder (57%), but several also felt that a two-stage process (43%), clearer guidelines (21%) and an indication of number of interested applicants and money available (14%) would have made things easier for them. Unsuccessful *local* projects were particularly keen to have more contact and involvement with the fundholder prior to submitting their application (75%).

The assessment and selection processes

The assessment and selection of applications for funding took part in two stages. An initial review of all applications was undertaken by a team of PwC assessors, moderated by NFPI. A shortlist of projects was then sent to the Advisory Panel, which made recommendations to the DfES for funding.

The initial assessment was based primarily on whether applicants met the criteria set out, and their financial viability. The key criteria included:

- the potential impact of the funded work and how it addressed Parenting Fund objectives
- the capacity of the organisation to manage the work and proposed plan to measure impact
- the track record of the organisation
- the value for money of what was proposed
- the long term sustainability of the proposed work.
- the financial viability of the organisation. (www.parentingfund.org 2005)

A team of assessors rated each application and divided them into three groups: those that were rejected, those which were recommended for funding, and those which were 'borderline'. Borderline cases were those where there was merit in the applications but where minor concerns had been identified which warranted further discussion. The shortlist of 200 (recommended and borderline) applications was then sent to the advisory panel for the final selection. This included 114 applications for major grants and 86 for local grants.

The Advisory Panel

An advisory panel charged with making the final recommendations as to which applications were to be successful was set up. This was based a skills audit of experts in the field, and a set of criteria developed by the director and one of the trustees from NFPI. It included representatives from the following sectors:

- Local government
- Voluntary sector
- Social work
- Health
- Grant making
- Eminent figures in the field.

The panel met for a day and a half to make the final selection of applications. In the week before this meeting, each member of the panel had been given a selection of around 80 applications to review. (Representatives from DfES, NFPI and the chair read all the applications). Making decisions about 200 applications over such a short period was a major challenge, particularly as the members of the team had not previously met together. This meant that some time in the early part of the meeting was spent in a discussion about the programme and the selection process, with each panel member invited to say something about their personal 'key criteria' for good parenting projects. There was little time for detailed discussion about each application: the average time taken to reach a decision was 3 minutes for major grants, and 8 minutes for the all the grants in each of the local areas.

However, the speed of decision making was greatly facilitated by the experience of the chair. For example, when it became apparent that decisions were taking longer than time allowed, she changed to process to ensure that detailed discussion took place only where there was a lack of consensus on the decision - this was required for about a quarter of all applications. The main issues requiring discussion related to the value for money represented by the proposed project, its level of risk, level of innovation and duplication. There was also a more fundamental question as to what actually constituted a 'parenting' service, and what constituted more general family support. In some cases, it was felt that the services proposed should be funded by mainstream services, and in other cases there was concern about the lack of clarity about the underlying 'theory' or model that underpinned proposals, and the lack of evidence to support the proposed work.

Some of the local areas had many more, and better, applications than others and there was some discussion as to whether awarding grants in areas in which there were very few applications was unfair to those in areas in which the number, and quality, of applications had been higher. It was decided that some grants, even if only a very small number, would be awarded in each of the local areas, and the fundholder was asked to look again to see if some previously rejected applications could be reconsidered in those areas. However, none of the members of the panel had detailed experience of the local areas, so there was little discussion of the appropriateness of the applications to their particular local situation apart from criticism that some national organisations had put in a number of identical applications for a number of local areas, without tailoring these to the particular locality.

Feedback on the selection process from panel members

All the panel members agreed that the selection process had worked well and this was widely attributed, at least in part, to the skill, ability and charm of the chair in guiding them through the process, and the combined knowledge and experience of the two fundholding agencies: PwC's financial knowledge of the projects and the industry knowledge of NFPI. Another important dimension commented on by several was the breadth of expertise within the panel which gave the members confidence that the right decisions would be made. A typical comment was:

'There was so much expertise; there wasn't really an area that the panel didn't have some knowledge of. This was helpful. Also the people taking part made a good team, we had a consensus of values, even though our professional areas were different.'

The main difficulty mentioned was the time constraints, both during the meeting, and in the prior week, which, with at least 80 applications per person to be reviewed, was felt to be very demanding on their personal time. There was some disagreement as to how useful were the summaries of applications that were provided by PwC for the panel meeting. One person found them helpful and time-saving, while another felt that she needed more information in order to make a fair judgement.

Some concern was also expressed by several members about the role of the DfES during the selection process. On several occasions DfES staff used their prior experience of organisations or activities to comment on the suitability of an application, and also intervened to indicate that some applications fell outside the overall aims of the programme. The DfES representatives interviewed also felt that their role was ambiguous, as legislation required them to be responsible for final decisions made on selection of projects. Overall, panel members felt that the DfES input would have been more usefully made at an earlier stage in the selection process, although overall it was not felt to have undermined the decision making process, and panel members believed that the right projects were chosen for awards from the Parenting Fund.

A small number of the stakeholders interviewed also pointed out that there was a central tension within the Parenting Fund, which relates to the differing roles of the Fund: developing capacity, developing the sector strategically, and addressing areas of high need. While it was agreed that these roles were not necessarily conflicting in and of themselves, the tension lay in the Fund being able to select projects to fulfil these multiple objectives in the designated regions and areas. Concerns were also expressed that while 'thorough and objective', the selection criteria encouraged a 'first past the post' system whereby if eligibility criteria were met, the project would automatically be eligible for assessment, although in fact they were not automatically funded. (In the event, some lower scoring applications were funded, while a few higher scoring ones were not.) Several commented that a different method of selection altogether might have been more appropriate for a fund with intent to develop strategic capability, and local capacity. This issue is picked up in a later section.

At a different level, PwC and NFPI agreed that the application form and the assessment process should be designed together in future. This would also ensure that minor omissions on project application forms (such as omission of differentiation between special and strategic projects, which led to difficulties in identifying the strategic projects for national infrastructure development work) was less likely to happen.

3.1.3. The grants awarded

One key question relating to any assessment and selection process is the extent to which the process favours one kind of applicant over another - and whether this relates to the explicit selection criteria, or whether other factors also played a part. The evaluation team had two sources of data with which to explore this question - the fundholder's database, which contained some information about all applications, and our survey of a sample of successful and unsuccessful applicants.

Analysis of this information indicated a number of interesting differences between successful and unsuccessful projects, which suggested the selection process had worked in a way that helped to balance out variations in the number of applications coming from some areas, or sectors, to ensure a more equal distribution of grants in the final programme. There appears also to have been some rebalancing in terms of the size of grant, with applicants putting in applications for very large grants negotiated down towards an overall 'mean' across the whole programme. This meant that a number of applicants received only part funding for their projects.

Geographical distribution

There was a large variation, as already mentioned, in the number of applications received from the different local areas, something that caused some debate within the advisory panel as to how far criteria should be relaxed in order to ensure that all areas had at least a small number of funded activities. Areas with a small number of applications received fewer grants than those with large numbers of applications, but it remained the case that applicants in some areas, such as Cornwall or Redcar, had a statistically greater chance of receiving a grant than an applicant in Birmingham or Nottingham (Table 3.1).

Table 3-1: Local applications and grants by area

Area	Total number of applications	Number of grants awarded*	Grants as % of applications
Birmingham	65	6	9.1
Blackburn with Darwen	22	5	22.7
Bristol	30	4	13.4
Croydon	40	5	12.5
Designated areas of Cornwall	13	5	38.5
Designated areas of Norfolk	24	6	25
Greenwich	32	5	15.6
Leeds	32	6	18.8
Leicester	21	6	28.6
Liverpool	27	5	18.5
Manchester	30	5	16.7
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne	19	3	15.8
North-East Lincolnshire	14	3	21.4
Nottingham	26	3	11.5
Peterborough	12	5	41.7
Redcar and Cleveland	9	2	22.2
Slough	9	4	44.4
Stoke-on Trent	11	2	18.2
Multiple sites	3	0	0
No information	4	0	0
	444	80	18

* A small number of changes were made to the overall numbers of grants awarded after this information was passed to the evaluation team.

Target groups

There was also considerable variation in the number of applications received that targeted the different priority groups identified under the application criteria. Black and ethnic minority parents were the largest group of target applicants (32% of local applications and 27% of major grant applications). This was reflected in the final selection of projects, a large number of which went to projects targeting these groups.

However, the proportion of applications, and proportion of successful projects, was slightly different for other priority groups, suggesting that there was some compensation mechanism at work to ensure that there was at least some representation in each group, particularly within local areas. For example (see Table 3.2), relatively few applications were received which proposed services for bereaved parents and parents of older children, but there appears to have been some compensation made for this in the awarding of grants, particularly for projects in local areas. On the other hand, applications with fathers as their target group had a higher chance of being recommended for funding if they were a major grant application. This might have been in part because of the large number of local applications targeting fathers in one of the local areas.

Table 3-2: Applications and grants awarded by target group

Target group	Local grants				Major grants				Comment
	Applications		Grants awarded		Applications		Grants awarded		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Fathers	77	17.3	9	11.3	45	13.2	12	22.2	Proportionately more major grants (Sig.001)
BME	144	32.4	24	30	93	27.4	15	27.8	
Disabled	74	16.7	15	18.8	81	23.8	15	27.8	
Bereaved	13	2.9	4	5	8	2.4	2	3.7	Slightly more local projects funded
Parents of older children	47	10.6	12	15	40	11.8	3	5.6	Slightly more local projects funded
Mental health	49	11	6	7.5	37	10.9	6	11.1	
Living with conflict	30	6.8	7	8.8	23	6.8	6	11.1	
Other	46	10.4	32	8.8	31	9.1	8	14.8	Significantly more major projects funded (sig.01)
Total*	480	108.1	109	105.2	358	105.4	67	124.1	

*Some applications mentioned more than one target group

Major and local grants

A number of variations emerged between major and local applicants. Overall, major grant applicants put forward applications involving larger amounts of money, with the mean size of major grant applications being £191,652 and the mean size of small grant applications being £78,500 (some were for quite small amounts, with two applying for grants for under £2000). One way that the panel dealt with this was to agree to award more local applicants the full amount that they requested, while suggesting that a number of major grant applicants received only part of the amount they requested. In terms of the final amount awarded, the mean size of local grant was £74,000 while the mean size of the large grants was £188,000, with larger major grant applications levelled down toward the mean overall size.

There were also differences between applications for major grants and local applicants in terms of which of the Parenting Fund objectives they were addressing. Major grant applicants were more likely to indicate that they were addressing all four objectives listed, and in particular, to mention strategic aims and strengthening infrastructure. Local grant applicants were more likely to focus primarily on increasing provision generally, and providing access for groups that had previously been less well served by parenting services.

Table 3-3: Applications and grants awarded by priority area

	Local grants				Major grants				comment
	Applications		Grants awarded		Applications		Grants awarded		
Priority area	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Increased provision	380	85.6	71	88.8	267	78.5	44	81.5	More local projects funded (sig. 01)
Strategic development	224	50.5	42	52.5	200	58.8	36	66.7	
Strengthened infrastructure	236	53.2	47	58.8	196	57.6	40	74.1	More major projects funded (sig.01)
Increased access	403	90.8	75	93.8	317	93.2	53	98.1	Slightly more major projects funded
Total applications	444	100	77	17.3	340	100	54	15.8	

Activities

Little information was available in the applications database about the actual activities planned, so it was difficult to assess whether there had been any bias towards one kind of activity over another. However, the survey of applicants did ask about the services they planned, which indicated some interesting differences between successful and unsuccessful applications.

At the local level, applicants that were successful were usually planning to offer a broader range of activities than those that had been unsuccessful, with the latter tending to focus on direct support to parents, often with training activities and support groups. Successful projects were more likely to include other activities such as outreach services (12%), links into other services (18%), organisation and network development (18%), research or audit (18%), and peer education (35%). None of these were mentioned by unsuccessful applicants.

Table 3-4: Activities planned by successful and unsuccessful local grant respondents

Activity	Successful n=17		Unsuccessful n=8		Total n=25	
Direct support to parents	10	59%	8	100%	18	11%
Support groups	5	29%	2	25%	7	6%
Drop ins	2	12%	1	13%	3	6%
Outreach service	2	12%	0	0	2	6%
Training	13	77%	5	63%	18	56%
Peer education	6	35%	0	0	6	22%
Research / audit	3	18%	0	0	3	39%
Organisation and network development	3	18%	0	0	3	67%
Signposting and information	4	24%	2	25%	6	33%
Links into services	3	18%	0	0	3	11%
Crèche / holiday programme	1	6%	1	13%	2	6%

Similar differences emerged for major grant applicants, where a large proportion of unsuccessful applicants planned to provide training. Successful applicants were more likely to feature a broader range of activities, such as organisation and network development, research and audit, and signposting and information provision.

Table 3-5: Activities planned in successful and unsuccessful major grant respondents

Activity	Successful n=12		Unsuccessful n=6		Total n=18	
Direct support to parents	2	17%	0	0	2	8%
Support groups	1	8%	0	0	1	4%
Drop ins	0	0	1	17%	1	4%
Outreach service	0	0	1	17%	1	4%
Training	5	42%	5	83%	10	40%
Peer education	3	25%	1	17%	4	16%
Research / audit	6	50%	1	17%	7	28%
Organisation and network development	9	75%	3	50%	12	48%
Signposting and information	5	42%	1	17%	6	24%
Links into services	2	17%	0	0	2	85
Crèche / holiday programme	0	0	1	17%	1	4%

New work or extension of existing activities

Another difference, at least at a local level, was that the selection process appears to have favoured organisations building on existing work: 75% (6/8) of the unsuccessful local grant applications said their project was tackling a new area, compared with 30% (5/17) of the successful local grant holders. Of successful local applicants, 71% sought to extend an existing model of service to new parents - none of the unsuccessful applicants mentioned their intention to use existing models of service.

Interestingly, however, the opposite situation applied for major grants, with 83% of successful major projects wishing to become involved in a new area of work for the organisation, compared with 17% of unsuccessful applicants who responded to our survey.

Networks

Another area that was explored was whether applicants were already involved in partnerships and networks related to parenting, in part in order to establish a 'base line' against which to measure changes which may result as a result of their involvement in the programme. Most applicants were already involved in networks of some kind, although networks for local applicants were of a general kind rather than specifically focused on parenting issues.

Applicants that were already networked with other parenting organisations do appear to have been more successful than those without this network, particularly in the case of major grant applicants. Six of the 12 (50%) reported informal links of this kind, in contrast to none of the unsuccessful major applicants. At a local level, slightly more of the successful applicants already had some informal links to other parenting organisations (88% compared to 75% unsuccessful projects).

It is possible that better networked organisations found out about the Parenting Fund, and had a better understanding of its aims, than others. A number of the organisations in the field had been involved in the early consultation process, and successful applicants (69%) were more likely than unsuccessful applicants (50%) to have found out about the Fund through communication with others rather than through more formal channels.

However, the question on networks also highlighted another differences between successful and unsuccessful projects. Successful applicants (71%) were more likely than unsuccessful ones (42%) to believe that receipt of a grant would help them to increase their opportunities for networking. Unsuccessful projects were more likely to see the Fund in terms of its capacity building and service provision aims, enabling them to consolidate and provide stability for their work in parenting (67%) and increase coverage and expansion of their parenting service (42%).

Resources committed to writing applications

Another distinction was that successful applicants were likely to have dedicated more time, and a more senior level of staff involvement, than unsuccessful ones. Although the fundholder had sought to make the application form as straightforward as possible, the time required to complete applications was often considerable - between two and ten days. Over half the successful applicants had taken between five and ten days to write their application form, and successful ones (62% local, 75% major) were more likely to have involved a senior manager or above compared with unsuccessful applicants (43% local, 32% major). Few joint or partnership applications were sent in, but where they were, they had a greater chance of success (5 out of the 6 major, 2 out of 3 local, were successful).

Feedback on the selection process from applicants

As has already been noted, there was some concern at the amount of time that it took to get feedback on their applications, but generally speaking, the feedback from applicants, as might be expected, was that successful applicants were happy with the outcome of the decisions taken, while unsuccessful applicants were less happy. However, there was some frustration where the grants awarded had been less than the amount requested.

A key question for the evaluation team, given that the aims of the Fund were to encourage voluntary sector ownership and a voluntary sector fundholder was selected for this reason, was whether the fundholder was perceived by applicants as having an understanding of their work. Overall, feedback on this was balanced: 49% of all applicants felt that the fundholder's understanding of their work was good or very good and 21% rated the fundholder's understanding of their organisation's work as poor (23% did not offer an opinion in this category). However, perhaps unsurprisingly, unsuccessful projects were more likely to view the fundholder as not understanding the kind of work they were trying to do (50% of unsuccessful local projects and 60% of unsuccessful major projects).

The major complaint from the successful projects came from those who had not received all the funding they had requested. This was particularly the case for major grant applicants - as was noted earlier, quite a high proportion of these did not receive the full amount that they had requested. Feedback from those who only received part funding did not come over particularly strongly in the survey, but was expressed forcibly at a national 'validation workshop' that the evaluation team ran towards the end of the evaluation. One of the local projects represented at the workshop indicated that it had been very difficult to receive only part of the funding requested - they had also been expected to 'team up' with another local project with similar objectives, which had also received part of the funding requested. This proved impossible to achieve, given the somewhat different cultures and general objectives of the two organisations. The feedback from this project was that it would have been better to

have funded fewer projects to the full amount, than to expect projects which had been carefully planned and costed to go ahead with only part of their costs funded.

Unsuccessful projects, naturally, were disappointed at not having been chosen. They usually received the news that they had been unsuccessful by letter. Most (63%) could recall the reason they had been given for refusal but 38% said that there was lack of detail and or explanation in the rejection letter and 50% felt that there had been no real feedback on why their project had been unsuccessful. Some felt that the letter had been so general that it was not very useful, and that the time spent on the application merited some kind of constructive feedback and more detail on how the application was scored.

Three (21%) felt that they had been judged fairly against the criteria, four (29%) didn't feel they had been judged fairly and five (36%) did not know: however, several felt that they did not have enough feedback detail to gauge this and that had there been more dialogue the project might have been funded. One felt strongly enough about the decision to pursue a complaint, but this had not gone as far as a formal process.

However, in spite of the disappointment of not receiving funding, several of the applicants indicated that the process of applying for an award from the Parenting Fund had been useful. They got something out of planning and costing the project, writing the application had pushed forward the design of the service, and they now had an 'off-the-shelf' project should further opportunities arise. Most (79%) hoped to secure funding from another source and six (42%) indicated that they would either try to incorporate the project, or elements of the project, into other areas of work or implement a version of the service without additional funding. One felt that the process had encouraged them to focus on having parenting as a more important part of their work.

Financial management of the Fund

Once the application and decision stage was completed, a major role required of the fundholder was to undertake monitoring of the grants awarded. The administration for this was provided, at least in the initial stages, by PwC, with NFPI responsible for the decisions about which projects have complied with their grant and payments to projects. Later in the programme, NFPI took on a larger role in the whole monitoring process.

The process itself involved projects providing a financial report every three months and an operational / milestone report every six months. Milestones were set by the project in their application form. Information was requested via an electronic template which PwC sent out to projects with a deadline for its return. If the return was completed by the deadline with no concerns, the project received its funding for the period - if the deadline was not met, a second date was set, with payment about a month later. Projects were not required to produce invoices and evidence to support their reports. One reason for this was that the aim was to provide a 'light touch' monitoring process; another was that the fundholder did not have the resources to check all this information in detail so it was felt inappropriate to ask for it. A review of the monitoring forms indicated that some projects used these to ask particular questions of the fundholder, although it was unclear whether this was just to flag up a query that was taken up elsewhere.

Information from the financial and milestone reports was entered into a database by PwC, and sent to NFPI monthly, which drew NFPI's attention to any concerns, rating projects through a 'traffic light' system (green for fine, amber if some cause for concern, and red for those about which there were serious concerns). Financial overspends or underspends were flagged up. If the project was spending less than 50% of its projected budget, no more money was released to the project until a revised budget was received. NFPI then took up a role of discussing concerns and changes, and agreeing revised budgets or milestones with the projects.

Risk assessment

NFPI and PwC applied basic risk assessment exercises on projects which fell into one or more of the following categories: the grant represented a high proportion of the organisation's income; the organisation was new or not experienced in the parenting sector; the staff had little experience/expertise; there was a significant underspend; or the project had spent the entire grant in the early quarters. Fifteen projects were viewed by NFPI as 'risky' in this sense during the summer of 2005, but by October of that year, the number perceived 'at risk' had grown, because a number (around 20%) were having difficulties spending their allocation of funds.

The tight time-frame appeared to be one cause of difficulties - 18 months for the whole process of setting up, running, and closing down their activities. Delays in recruitment or a member of staff off sick for a few months were particularly disruptive within a short-term grant of this kind.

The F&GP committee reported the main reasons for underspend in the third quarter as:

Planned spending spread unevenly across project life	36%
Delays in recruitment	22%
Project completion date extended therefore reduced spend per quarter	12%

One project had its funding withdrawn on the basis that the organisation was unable to put into place the required governance and financial structures, and one project had to review what it aimed to achieve in the 18 months and the grant and activities were revised.

From July 2005, NFPI began to talk to these 'at risk' projects or visit them. Visits consisted of a soft audit on governance, qualifications and experience of the staff, and a discussion about what they sought to achieve, and how. The fundholder felt that they adopted a flexible approach, enabling grant holders to change their plans if required, and the personal contact enabled the fundholder to gain deeper understanding of the particular issue giving rise to concern and provided a channel for feedback and support.

The resources required for such a personalised role, however, were high and placed a heavy demand on the small number of staff involved in managing the Parenting Fund. Concern was expressed by the fundholder's manager that he was unable to fulfil this function to the extent he would have liked and that increased time for this kind of activity would have been helpful.

Feedback on the working of the monitoring system

Feedback on the monitoring system came from two sources: from those operating it (PwC and NFPI) and from the grant aided projects, either through feedback during interviews undertaken in the strand B part of the evaluation, or during the final interviews with applicants. There was also some feedback in final reports received from case study projects in strand B.

PwC staff felt they had been mindful of the voluntary sector compact and the need to keep the administrative burden light on the projects. They were aware of the status of PwC as a large corporate body and felt there was some resistance from voluntary sector organisations to their involvement. This is the first time that PwC as an organisation had worked in partnership with a voluntary organisation in this way, although both the main officers involved had personal experience of working with the voluntary sector.

NFPI officers felt that the feedback from the workshops was that the monitoring system had worked well. The projects that needed most help were those which were not strong on technology or were new to government funding. Apart from a couple of projects having difficulties filling in the form on-line, the feedback they had received had been positive, with projects appreciative of the lack of detail needed. In the early days of monitoring, it was felt that PwC were less likely to be concerned about a project than NFPI, but following discussion, the two organisations agreed to use a similar set of triggers.

Feedback from applicants

Feedback on the monitoring activities from the second round of the survey of applicants generally supported the positive view expressed by the fundholder. Key messages were that the processes were: simple and straightforward (8) (40%); striking the correct balance between accountability and usability without becoming too onerous (5) (25%); and demonstrating good use of technology which facilitated the process. This latter point was made particularly in relation to the use of the spreadsheet and its ability to update automatically (4) (20%). Only three projects noted serious concerns. These related to difficulty understanding the technical system and/or monitoring requirements, and concerns that the monitoring process prevented the level of elaboration that some would have wanted to communicate their work more fully.

Examples of comments given on the monitoring and reporting processes

Positive statements about the monitoring and reporting processes

Simple and clear (8)

“Found it very helpful. Found the forms to be clear, straightforward.

Found it to be easier than most to use.”

“Found it fantastic - very simple with a lot of tick boxes.”

“Found the process to be good - detailed and very clear. Very clear what they were asking for - no ambiguity. Format was very effective clearly structured and provided the form into which to input details - this was much better than funders who just provide a side of guidelines as to how reports should be structured.”

Struck the correct balance between accountability and usability. (5)

“They don’t ask for irrelevant information, only what is pertinent to what’s needed.”

“It was light touch but comprehensive. It was fit for purpose, there was a clear link between activities and outcomes built into the format with was very useful.”

“The milestones element of reporting was quite good. More tick boxes and less narrative than with other funding mechanisms which has its advantages and disadvantages - however the fact that there was space to expand and complete some narrative reporting meant that the system worked very well.”

Good use of technology and in particular the automatic updating on monitoring form and email prompts (4)

“A useful system that provided a common format for the... duration of the project.”

“Really liked the spreadsheet that updates itself - very good use of technology.”

“The system was good - financial templates were useful, especially the means of updating them and adding to your existing forms quarterly. System for reporting milestones was also clear and good.”

“The fact that quarterly reporting was prompted by an email request helped enormously. Being sent the forms by email shortly prior to the deadlines was a useful means of ensuring they were submitted on time.”

Negative comments about monitoring and reporting systems

Technically difficult or confusing (2)

“Found the forms technically horrendous. When you typed information into the forms it disappeared on screen and you couldn’t see it.”

“We found the monitoring form very complicated to complete. It was confusing the way it was set out, and it took a lot of time for us to read through the instructions on how to complete it.”

“At times found it slightly confusing. During the initial stages, received requests from both PwC and the Parenting Fund. The mention of PwC was particularly irritating - couldn’t help thinking cynically about how much money they had been paid for their involvement in the process.”

Limited in terms of how much it enabled you to communicate about project or outcomes (2)

“Too much of a ‘tick box’ process. need to be able to communicate the full context in which the work is situated - very important for a project like theirs, where resources and time needs to be spent on particular cultural issues, and translation.”

“Couldn’t elaborate as much as they wanted to as not enough space on the form.”

Additional criticisms of monitoring and reporting processes

“Request for forms was sent to the wrong person which resulted in delays and confusion.”

“Our only complaint was that the financial monitoring forms were required prior to the end of the financial quarter and so all the figures were not always available.”

There was similar feedback from the interviews with case studies in strand B of the evaluation. These conveyed a picture of the smaller organisations finding it difficult to cope with any more administrative burdens. Although they became accustomed to the Parenting Fund monitoring forms, there is some anxiety about the lack of feedback. There were some negative comments from some related to the Excel format being hard to get to grips with initially, and that more instructions would have been helpful. Three of the local cases put this down to lack of IT or accountancy skills. The lack of flexibility about the number of words that could be used to explain projects was difficult for five of the local cases. Many of the local projects mentioned that it got easier as they got used to the system and that they had been able to get help from the Parenting Fund. The major projects on the other hand seem to take the monitoring more in their stride although some also had (similar) complaints about the format.

However, there was feeling from a number of projects that they would have welcomed more feedback from the fundholder and more face to face contact. In the early stages of the programme, expectations about the amount of support and contact that grant holders would receive from the fundholder were not particularly high. The telephone survey of applicants conducted in April 2005 indicated that a third of the successful projects had little to say about their expectations. Of those which did respond to this question (14 out of 21), around half did not expect much in terms of support, while around half hoped to be able to access advice on mainstreaming, funding, sustainability and investment. A small number also hoped to have some interaction with the fundholder on networking and events (two projects), while two indicated they hoped to have support at the end of a telephone line or email.

However, by later in the programme, feelings about the level of support appear to have been stronger, and this was reflected particularly in the interviews with case study projects in strand B. In these, there was a clear majority that indicated a desire for more personal, ongoing contact from the centre. This was especially true of the smaller local projects. The following quotes were representative:

I thought they would have had more involvement, the NFPI. They're there, and we know they're there, but I thought they would have been actually more involved in what the projects were doing.

I would like contact like this, just so that a discussion could take place wherein I could say, this is what we're doing, these are the problems we're encountering, have you any suggestions how we could overcome them? Like this [named issue] for instance, I'm not saying that they would have any answers, but it would have been nice to have had the offer of support, you know, 'Would it help if we came along with you?'. That kind of thing, yes.

I had no expectation of support to be honest other than I know they are there if I have got a question. It is all email which is very impersonal sometimes. I am used to being funded by the Children's Fund and I meet with them once a month.

However, as already noted, this kind of contact was not possible within the resources of the programme. Indeed, one of the stakeholders indicated that such a level of ongoing conversation, when unsolicited by a project, especially if it involved more visiting, might not even be particularly welcomed by a project manager, keen to get on with the daily work. In this stakeholder's view, it would be more productive to invest this kind of resource in bringing projects together to exchange experiences and to learn skills from each other and from invited experts. These, as described below, were the main focus of support provided to projects which did not indicate, via the monitoring system, that they were having difficulties.

Additional infrastructure development activities

In addition to its project monitoring role, a key role for the fundholder was to develop infrastructure and support activities, in line with the broader strategic aims of the programme. These general aims of this part of the programme were identified during the early consultation process) but further developed during the first months of the implementation of the programme by the programme manager at NFPI, in consultation with colleagues. The main strands in this part of the programme were described in early documentation⁴ as:

- Running events to disseminate learning and good practice
- Identifying and brokering partnerships for dissemination purposes
- Supporting funded projects through advice and signposting sources of help, maintaining ongoing links with all funded projects, sharing learning
- Establishing an e-group to enable general communication between projects and networking across geographical areas.

This work has been further divided into work at national and regional/local levels and mirrors the structure of the Parenting Fund in so far as it is divided into the two main funding blocks of major grants and local grants.

⁴ The contract between DfES and NFPI.

National level activities

Work at the national level has the objective of 'strengthening the strand of parenting services as a concept, activity and responsibility within Family Support Services in line with the five aims of 'Every Child Matters' (ECM). Initial plans for this work included infrastructure development through networking, learning and identifying priorities, and corresponds with the focus of work of the major grants programme where funds were awarded to projects aiming for a national or regional impact. They were concerned with any one or more of the following: capacity building, defined as increasing agencies nationally or across one or more regions to meet the needs of parents experiencing difficulties; producing models of service that can be replicated nationally or across regions; filling a significant gap in provision across one or more regions.

Infrastructure building working group

Early plans indicated that an infrastructure working group would be established, which would bring together some of the main organisations working in the field in a regular series of events to plan and implement national infrastructure activities. The workshop was held in March 2005, attended by 25 of the major projects. The observation of this by the Tavistock Institute confirmed the note to the F & GP committee in June 2005 which drew out the key aspects of infrastructure development for parenting support services. Particular areas for focus were:

- A long term vision for the development of accessible coordinated training for agencies working in the field
- Strengthening the recognition of diversity in service planning
- A stronger partnership locally between the voluntary and statutory sector when it comes to the planning and establishment of services that have a preventative focus
- Understanding impact and using it to inform service development
- Clarifying and streamlining funding mechanisms
- The sharing of knowledge and training resources.

However, in part as a result of the feedback received at this event, the planned working group on infrastructure was not established.

National conference

A national conference was held early in 2006, and provided a major opportunity for the sharing of information across projects and activities. It was attended by around 100 people, predominantly those in receipt of the larger Parenting Fund grants. Other representatives there were from the DfES and Parenting Fund evaluation team. As well as providing short slots for projects to explain their work and impact, there was a workshop event where the fundholder was able to gather data from the projects on tackling diversity, workforce development and infrastructure development. Importantly, vital information for projects about the criteria for the second wave of the Parenting Fund was shared in a final session.

Discussion with participants at the event indicated that the conference had been found useful as an information sharing and learning event, but it was regretted by some that a wider cross section of the parenting world might have been invited. For example, this could have been an opportunity to engage with wider stakeholders to publicise the work of the organisations more widely, and disseminate learning. Equally, future funders, and especially local authorities might have had a presence.

Regional / Local activities

There has been a strong focus on local support activities during the first year of the Fund. Two rounds of local workshops were planned from the outset to support the development of local infrastructures and the first of these has been completed.

During the first year, 18 workshops were held around the country for funded projects and other organisations working in parenting support services - two each in each of the nine designated regions. NFPI delivered these workshops in conjunction with Parenting UK, which also used this opportunity to inform local projects about the other resources it had to offer.

The aims of the workshops were several: they provided an introduction to the Parenting Fund, and an opportunity for the PESF to publicise the support they could offer. An important aspect was also to provide local funded parenting organisations a chance to learn about the local statutory authorities in the areas in which they were working, the local networks of organisations working with parents in the region and, quite importantly, each other. Feedback on gaps in services and barriers to joint working were also identified in these workshops.

The Parenting Fund undertook its own cross-cutting analysis of the workshops and reported to the F&GP committee in June 2005, which identified a number of key issues emerging from local area work which had implications for the future work of the Fund. These clustered around the following:

- Local leadership and responsibilities for capacity building and infrastructure development to support sustainable services - the need for this and the concerns around lack of it especially by local authorities;
- Variations in services and lead agencies and the implications of this; the need to be aware of and part of new local arrangements for the provision of integrated children's services; and
- Recognition of the ongoing tension in provision of universal and targeted, crisis driven services, but interest in coordinating around key events in family life to provide support for families approaching and in crisis.

While the workshops went a long way to provide critical background information to support the development of local activity, it was clear that for the sector to develop in the ways envisaged, local leadership would be required: not a role that NFPI itself could provide. A second round of workshops was initially planned to pick up on some of these issues. However, the timing of these coincided with start of the second round of the Parenting Fund, taking place shortly after the new grants had been announced. In the event, they became a different kind of workshop - intended to provide, amongst other things, an opportunity for second round projects to learn from the first round. Attendance, however, from first round grant holders was reported to have been poor, possibly because many were coming to the end of their grant - apart, of course, from those who had been successful in obtaining a second round grant. One difference in the second round was that more effort was made to encourage grant holders to register with Parenting UK, and the policy field itself had also moved on, with stronger pressure on local authorities to develop a parenting strategy for themselves.

Additional support and information

In addition to the above activities, there were a number of additional sources of support and information potentially available, both to national and local projects, via the website set up by the Parenting Fund, and through resources being generated by the major grants. One of the most important of these was the support service provided by Parenting UK.

e-networking and the website

A website (www.parentingfund.org) was set up for the fund very early in the life of the programme, as a tool for funded organisations and others interested in the work of the Parenting Fund. A searchable database of funded projects was provided as soon as this information became available, and there are also links provided with other relevant programmes. A member's area, protected by password, provides an opportunity for discussion and exchange of information and ideas between funded projects.

Support from parenting UK

Additional support and advice, and a regular newsletter updating them on parenting issues, was also available from Parenting UK, which had received a grant from the Parenting Fund to help set up and facilitate the local workshops, to supply an evaluation pack to projects, and to provide ongoing support via their website, newsletter and team of regional advisors. However, in order to access this ongoing support, projects registered their details on the Parenting UK database. Information about this was provided at all local workshops, but not all projects availed themselves of this resource - it was calculated by Parenting UK that in the first round of the Parenting Fund, about a third of all funded projects registered with their scheme.

Resources provided by other major grant recipients

One of the aims of funding the major grants was in order for these to develop resources for other organisations providing parenting support services across the country. These included, amongst other things, plans for a major web resource, training activities, resource and information packs. However, during the first round of the Parenting Fund, these resources were mainly under development, and did not become available for other grant holders in the programme until the end of this round had been completed.

3.1.4. Feedback on infrastructure and support activities

Feedback from the telephone survey

In the second round of the telephone survey, successful projects were asked a number of questions about their uptake and experience of using a range of support resources provided by both the Parenting Fund and Parenting UK. These resources included the training pack, the evaluation toolkit, membership of Parenting UK and access to their regional advisors, the Parenting Fund website and regional and national events run by both Parenting UK and the Parenting Fund. Eighteen out of 21 of the successful projects who were contacted responded to questions in this area. Of these 18, only one project (6%) stated that it had not used any of these resources.

Of the resources mentioned, the website and regional events were cited as those most commonly used - both were mentioned by ten projects (56%) and the training pack the least commonly used - only one project mentioned its use (6%)⁵.

Of the ten projects which mentioned attending either **regional or national events**, nine felt they had been valuable and particular mention was made of their contribution in providing opportunities for sharing best practice, networking and disseminating learning and resources. One criticism of these networks was that they were neither long term nor strategic enough. It was noted by one project that these events, which brought together organisations with shared priorities relating to parenting, had provided an ideal opportunity for lobbying and addressing structural problems relating to the parenting sector, but that this opportunity was missed.

Further information from the Strand B case studies indicated that most of those who attended the workshops had found these in terms of networking, and gaining an understanding about some of the wider issues impacting on the sector. One manager spoke for others when she said:

[It was] useful to find out who else had been funded; and thinking about issues and gaps in services.

Being away from the office for a day provided managers and staff with the opportunity with the space to think for a while. As one put it:

I wasn't expecting it to be as useful as it was... quite good just to step back and see what else is going on and reflect a bit.

However, there were difficulties in releasing staff to attend the events for networking purposes. In common with most of the voluntary sector, the daily work of the funded projects takes up time and most of the available energy.

One project manager made the point that networking tends to be done by the larger national organisations which are often more able to afford the time. She said:

The smaller ones can't backfill so can't attend. They should be valued more locally and provided with funding to do this or for strategic work more generally.

In relation to the **website**, comments made by survey respondents was that it had provided some support to networking and partnership work and supported the dissemination of basic project information to others. One major grant holder explained that they had used the website to identify other organisations that had received the Parenting Fund and wherever possible tried to engage with them. This had proved successful on a couple of occasions, particularly in enabling their work with a fathers organisation, who now offered them support on this issue. Two projects also noted that they had used it to access information about the Round Two application process and another as source of general information about the parenting sector.

⁵ Resources used:

The Website: by 10 projects

Regional / national events: by 10 projects

The Evaluation toolkit/pack: by 5 projects

Membership of Parenting UK: by 3 projects

Regional Advisors: by 3 projects

The Training Pack: by 1 project

Similar feedback came from Strand B case study work, where most of those interviewed indicated that the main function and use of the website has been to publicise the projects and provide signposting to other resources. The majority of responses said that the first use had been to check the information about their own project, followed by a look to see who else was funded either in their local area or in their domain. Very few people think to use the website as a discussion forum or to exchange information, which is however, not uncommon. However, several of the informants did indicate that their main way of accessing information about the parenting sector was via the Parenting UK website.

Six projects in the survey of applicants mentioned taking up **Parenting UK membership** and a further two were already members before applying for their Parenting Fund grant. Parenting UK was noted to be valued for its newsletter and role in regional or national events and networking opportunities as well as for its website, as noted above. However, there appears to have been considerable confusion about the distinction between NFPI and Parenting UK as the two names were sometimes used interchangeably by projects, and respondents were sometimes unclear whether certain events had been delivered by Parenting UK or NFPI (they were delivered jointly). The question about regional advisors also indicated confusion: one project noted they had used them for financial issues, and another two projects acknowledged their presence and said they had 'probably' used them or met them at an event with no further comments.

However, at least five of the projects specifically mentioned their contact with the Director of the Parenting Fund as a key source of support - and this was also sometimes mentioned in response to the question about regional advisors. In all cases this contact was felt to be positive and was described as 'supportive', 'approachable', 'useful', 'reassuring and confidence giving'. Many expressed specific instances in which the director had provided assistance and guidance to their work, whether helping to facilitate negotiations with the DfES or advising with applications to Round Two.

Only five of the projects noted they had made use of the **evaluation pack**. Those that had experience of using the evaluation pack provided positive feedback and described it as 'very useful', 'clearly set out' and 'providing staff with clear processes through which to undertake evaluation'. In one project, the pack had been successfully used to support evaluation of other projects (not funded by the Parenting Fund). Among projects choosing not to use the pack, reasons given included the fact that evaluation had been carried out by an independent evaluator with their own methods and tools, or the presence of in-house evaluation resources. (This was particularly true of projects which were part of larger national organisations.) In some smaller organisations there was a desire expressed to undertake evaluation, however there had been little capacity to do so, due to funding and staff restrictions.

Engaging the wider community

One general point of feedback which emerged across these activities was the lack of success in engaging the statutory sector in activities - perhaps the corollary of actively engaging the voluntary sector. The importance of engaging with local statutory authorities and other future funders, supporters and champions has been one of the key priorities for this work, especially as funding for local initiatives becomes increasingly the responsibility of local authorities. Informants felt that there had been less success than hoped for in this respect. One stakeholder in particular felt that not enough time had been allowed in the lead up and planning time to engage these stakeholders. What had been learnt was that it was not just about giving sufficient advance warning about an event, but also about the level of effort needed in order to draw them in to the workshops and make them feel that this would be a worthwhile and relevant event for them to attend. Although Parenting UK, with its

regional advisors, had played an important role in setting up the local workshop, the lack of good local contacts on the part of the Fundholder did play a part here.

Another more minor issue was the role of DCSF in relation to local infrastructure work. For one stakeholder, the lack of any representation from the Department at local workshops was a lost opportunity for civil servants to engage with the sector and to become conversant with issues on the ground. Concern was expressed that this lack of active engagement (precisely because it had devolved responsibility to an arms-length organisation) allowed the DCSF to become the 'treasury' rather than actively engaging in the development of the sector.

Conclusions

The overall judgement appears to have been that the implementation of the fundholding model adopted for the Parenting Fund had gone well. The partnership between NFPI and PwC had worked well, with each bringing their different learning and experience to the fund, and that tasks were ascribed and completed in a timely fashion. Greater discussion in the earliest stages might have overcome some minor difficulties experienced at the assessment and decision making stages (such as having slightly different selection criteria) but both were working under considerable speed, and overall there appear to have been few major difficulties.

The picture emerging both from the analysis of the database of applications and the survey of applicants suggests that the selection process resulted in the funding of a broad range of approaches to parenting for a wide cross section of different parent groups. On the whole, the selection process also took a relatively 'low risk' approach, which favoured projects and organisations that were already reasonably well established in the parenting field, and which were building on previous work. The success of this strategy is indicated by the fact that only one project 'failed' to get going, and all, as will be seen from strand B of the evaluation, fulfilled their objectives.

However the tight time-frame did mean that not only did the application and selection process have to be undertaken under considerable pressure, but also that projects themselves had only a short period of time to set themselves up and deliver on their planned objectives. The tightness of the time pressure was reflected in the fact that the main difficulty picked up by the monitoring system was of projects falling behind their planned programme of activities, often because of unanticipated difficulties such as being unable to find suitable staff, or staff being unwell.

The tight time-frame was also blamed by at least one informant for the difficulty in attracting non-programme participants, and particularly local authority representatives, to the local workshops, because of lack of sufficient warning. The tight time-frame might also have been a factor in difficulties that some projects had in releasing staff to attend the workshops, even if the potential of these for networking with others was welcomed.

However, lack of contacts by the fundholder at a local level may also have been a factor in the difficulty in attracting non-programme participants in the local workshops. It was hinted by some projects (this is something explored in more depth in the Strand B evaluation) that there was also some resentment at projects being 'parachuted in' by a centralised programme with little knowledge about the local situation or what kind of projects were most appropriate to each area. As will be argued in the next chapter, the model adopted was quite successful in obtaining voluntary sector ownership, but the cost of this appears to have been some loss of statutory sector ownership. This is potentially a difficulty in terms of the longer term development of the sector, particularly as local authorities are likely to have a major role in picking up the funding of parenting activities in the future.

It is possible that greater resources at the centre, and the availability of regional staff, or staff maintaining strong links with projects in the individual areas, might have helped to overcome this difficulty. However, the model, as was noted in the previous chapter, was one of a centralised programme, with a relatively small 'central' team. Contacts with individual projects were maintained, on the whole, either through the monitoring system, or through occasional contacts when projects themselves took the initiative to get in touch with the fundholder, or when they attended workshops. The main exception to this was the visits made to projects that were getting into difficulties. The lack of contact was regretted by some projects, although others were very happy to be left alone to get on with things.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: STRAND A OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

This chapter attempts to capture the impact of the activities undertaken by the fundholder, how far the model of fundholding adopted was successful in terms of fulfilling some of the initial aims of the Parenting Fund. It addresses, amongst other things, the third of the evaluation questions set out in the beginning of this report, i.e. what factors contributed to, or inhibited, the fundholding model adding value to the Parenting Fund? The chapter should be read in close conjunction with the report on Strand B of the evaluation as the outcomes and impacts have to be seen in the context both of the role of the fundholder, and in terms of what was happening 'on the ground' in terms of establishing and embedding parenting activities within the voluntary sector at a national and local level.

This chapter focuses on general observations made about the success of the model, particularly in terms of its broad aims, received in feedback from the telephone interviews with applicants, and from a round of stakeholder interviews undertaken at the end of the programme. In this round, some of the informants were stakeholders directly involved in the programme (DfES, FPI, PwC) while others were stakeholders of the Parenting Fund not directly involved in the implementation and management of the programme (voluntary sector representatives and those from the statutory sector in areas which received funding). Data is analysed with the intention of understanding the main lessons learned as well as looking at how the Parenting Fund has had an impact on the sector.

This chapter first examines evidence that the programme had achieved an impact in terms of the initial objectives, and then explores the wider question of how far it appears to have encouraged ownership of parenting activities by the voluntary sector. The second of these two questions inevitably takes us into the area of sustainability - if the voluntary sector is to take ownership of parenting activities, then there are important questions to be asked about how far it is able to continue these activities in the longer term, and where the financial support will come from to enable it to do so.

Impact on the voluntary sector

A major aim of the Parenting Fund was to engage the voluntary sector in the provision of support to parents, and to provide additional funding to enable them to do this.

The Parenting Fund is to provide parenting support through the voluntary and community sector. (DfES press notice: 'More Support for Families - Hodge', May, 2004)

As was noted in chapter 1, this support was seen to be operating at three different levels:

- Capacity building - for individual organisations, particularly to enable them to provide services to parents that had previously not had access to this kind of support, the three main mission statements
- Infrastructure building - to enhance the networking and exchange of ideas between organisations providing parenting support and
- Transfer of learning - sharing learning from successful schemes and projects, not only within the programme itself, but also to a wider world, others who might like to develop, or fund, parenting activities in the future.

These three aims are described on the Parenting Fund website as follows:

Capacity Building:	<i>“Do more for parents who have been less well served in the past.”</i>
Infrastructure Building:	<i>“Strengthen the network of services in the voluntary sector that support parents in bringing up their children.”</i>
Transferability:	<i>“Highlight and promote good practices so that they can be used by all family and parent support services.”</i>

4.1.1. Capacity Building

One of the aims of the Parenting Fund was to increase capacity for parenting activities, both on a project level but also for the sector delivering parenting services. The grants themselves enabled a number of organisations that had not previously undertaken parenting activities to develop new services, while others were able to extend existing services to new sections of the community, or into new areas.

Most of the feedback from survey and stakeholder interviews suggested that organisations that had received grants to develop their services were now in a better position - in terms of experience, knowledge, staffing, management structures - to run parent support activities.

During the second round of telephone interviews, successful projects were asked for details about the current situation of the project and the implications of the Parenting Fund on the wider organisation. In response to these questions, 11 of the 21 successful projects (52%) mentioned that the Parenting Fund Round One had enabled them to develop resources or training models that had ‘a life’ extending beyond the parameters of that which was initially funded. These included training packs and manuals, printed information resources, resources for working with fathers and actual training courses. This was supported by stakeholder interviews where it was mentioned that projects have learned a lot in delivering parenting activities.

Quite a lot emphasis has been placed on training people to work with parents. This has been an important contribution to supporting the parenting agenda.

There is now a better offer in delivering parenting courses. (Stakeholder interview)

At least seven of the 21 successful projects had devised training models or courses as part of their work, all of which continued to be rolled out. Where project funding was uncertain or had finished, training appeared to be one aspect that people have been able to continue to attract funding for from local authorities and services. In at least two cases, those who were recipients of training which had been developed and funded through the Parenting Fund had themselves gone on to deliver related training. Training was delivered to a range of audiences including trainers, practitioners, volunteers and parents themselves.

Examples were also given where training enabled capacity building beyond the scope of the project itself. These included the 'training of trainers' or supporting other organisations to deliver training. One project was particularly impressed by the positive impact of peer education training upon its volunteers in terms of their own personal development. This was seen as an unintended but substantial outcome of the work that had been delivered. Three of the successful projects noted that the funding by the Parenting Fund had enabled their work to become a model of best practice and be replicated within the wider organisation of which they were a part.

How far the capacity of the organisation had been enhanced is difficult to ascertain from the data available - exact information was not collected about numbers of additional posts which were funded, what resources had been developed, and how far these would still be available to the organisation when their Parenting Fund grant came to an end. What was clear was that a considerable amount of training of staff, and volunteers, in parenting support skills had taken place and that the availability of new services and activities in the organisation had also provided the opportunity for staff to develop experience and skills.

Further potential evidence for capacity building that occurred as a result of the Parenting Fund came from comments relating to projects' abilities to influence and inform other organisations about the needs of parents and issues relating to parenting. While locating sustainable and ongoing funding sources for the work was a challenge, elements of the perspective that had informed the work funded by the Parenting Fund had gone on to influence wider organisations, networks and strategy.

The Parenting Fund work was cited as an influence in a number of cases in changing working practices within projects and organisations. Several projects explained how a local or small scale project funded by the Parenting Fund had gone on to influence the wider strategic aims and practices of the national organisation or network of which it was part. In this way, while the project itself may be short term, there was evidence of longer term ownership of the ideas and perspectives it gave rise to.

4.1.2. Infrastructure building

Infrastructure building or development is the availability of cross-organisation resources and support. It answers the first mission statement in strengthening the network of services in the voluntary sector. Most stakeholders reflected that a number of new services had been set up through the Parenting Fund. However, some stakeholders felt that projects worked independently and that there was not enough effort made to secure infrastructure development across organisational boundaries.

In general there was a feeling that Parenting Fund Round One has made a difference in terms of infrastructure, but it was suggested by a few stakeholders that this could have been improved. Especially regarding the statutory sector, where a lesson learned is to provide more jointed up working. On engaging parenting support, "*Yes but in a structured way*" (Stakeholder interview). It was claimed that the Parenting Fund was not structured enough in linking up to parenting strategies and other work that was happening in the regions. Two very different statements made that support this are:

Another major improvement is that there is now a more strategic approach to parenting. (Stakeholder interview)

Currently there are too many pockets of isolated work potentially duplicating the mistakes and learning of each another. (Project survey interview)

Increased Awareness of Parenting Activities

A majority of the projects (11 out of 21) asked in the telephone survey acknowledged that their knowledge and awareness of other projects had increased as a result of the Parenting Fund. Of those that had increased their knowledge one of the most often cited sources of new links with projects were other projects that had been funded by the Parenting Fund. Of those who felt it had improved their awareness of parenting activities, some suggested it had helped them in establishing greater informal links with a wide range of organisations. However eight of the 21 projects stated that they had not increased their awareness of additional projects or organisations as a result of the Parenting Fund. Two of the interviewed projects did not comment on the question of increased awareness of parenting activities.

What was less clear from the survey results was to what degree there was anything that was specific to the Parenting Fund which had facilitated this, or whether this would have been an inevitable outcome of any additional funding.

People who attended local workshops and conferences seemed to respond more positively to the question about awareness of other parenting activities and organisations. It was perceived as very positive to have the opportunity to meet with other projects and that people learned about other projects through looking at the NFPI website. In general funded projects felt that they would have benefited from more information sharing and joined up working with other projects. However, as the projects were selected by locations a number already did know of each other and heard who had received what in funding. As the projects were competing for a limited amount of funding this could have inhibited increased infrastructure between voluntary sector services.

Only one project interviewed in the survey expressed the opinion that the Parenting Fund had facilitated learning about partnership working and supporting the development of new local partnerships. One national project in receipt of a major grant noted how they had established several successful partnerships through liaising with other Parenting Fund funded projects. In particular a partnership they had developed with an organisation working with fathers had provided them with support on this issue.

Strengthening links with the statutory sector

There was some evidence that the availability of the Parenting Fund had enabled some of the voluntary organisations funded to strengthen their links with the statutory sector. However, a number of stakeholders also expressed the view that more could have been done to ensure that this took place, possibly through engaging the statutory sector more actively in the programme through improved structures of consultation, and possibly active engagement in delivery at a local level.

From the survey data, out of the 21 projects that were successful in receiving Round One funding from the Parenting Fund, 15 felt that the experience had strengthened or extended their links with the statutory sector to some degree. Of those survey interviews which reported strengthening or extending their links with the statutory sector, a few themes emerged about the nature of these links. These included the Parenting Fund's role in:

- Enabling projects to influence policy around parenting. This could be at a local or national level and included influencing the wider organisations of which projects were part. A particular project mentioned having been able to increase awareness and recognition of the needs of parents and enabling more strategic work (7).

- Developing partnerships with the statutory sector around training (5). Where the Parenting Fund had resulted in the development of training models or courses, these had provided opportunities for the voluntary and statutory sector to learn and train together as both co-facilitators and recipients of training.
- Supporting the establishment and development of partnerships and referral routes (4).
- Increasing projects' capacity to network. Several projects mentioned that the Parenting Fund had enabled projects to have a 'place at the table' with the statutory sector and more confidence to be there, in a way which had not previously been possible (2).
- Extending links with the statutory sector into different areas (1).

However, there were also a number of comments stating that the links between the statutory and the voluntary sectors **were not** strengthened as a result of the Parenting Fund. One stakeholder mentioned that once projects had Parenting Fund funding they did not need to seek support and additional funding from the statutory sector. Another commented that once funding ended in Round One, and a project did not get support for Round Two, a number of such projects had contacted local authorities when the projects were faced with a crisis or having to close down. It was argued that this 'emergency' way of working could have been prevented if the statutory sector worked more closely with the Parenting Fund programme. There were also a number of comments raised in the survey about the limitations to extending links made with statutory sector.

This is where the Parenting Fund has gone wrong, as there is no mainstreaming of parenting initiatives. (Stakeholder interview)

Most of these comments related to limitations that were imposed by the nature of the statutory sector itself. These included the fact that:

- The statutory sector continues to demonstrate a general lack of awareness and engagement with the voluntary sector.
- Building links with the statutory sector was long winded and frustrating. It rarely resulted in the outcomes that projects had hoped for due to the state of flux of local authorities.
- Divisions within the statutory sector itself make partnership work difficult and create a lack of clarity as to where certain work is aligned. For example, one project working with disabled parents noted that their work had relevance for a range of different departments; children and families work, education, social services and health. The divisions between these departments made it difficult to enable different aspects of the statutory sector to work together.
- The statutory sector and in particular local authorities were unable or unwilling to take the work around parenting on board. In one case this meant that staff from local authorities who undertook training developed under the Parenting Fund were unsupported to make use of their training and put it into practice within their work settings.

Influence on other Networks

The stakeholder interviews did not give strong evidence either for or against increased influence on different a range of networks and partnerships at local, regional and national levels. Some informants suggested that it helped projects in networking, by the fact that they had been selected by the Parenting Fund.

However, the survey material suggests that the majority (17 out of 21) projects reported positive outcomes in terms of the Parenting Fund's influence on networks and their role within it. In relation to networking, there was a sense that the Parenting Fund enabled some organisations to take part in networks in ways that may not previously have been possible. Some of the comments about ways in which the Parenting Fund was thought to have contributed to participation in and development of networks included:

- Helping to raise awareness of the importance of focusing work on parenting within networks. Specific mention was made of the increased recognition within networks given to the needs of specific groups such as fathers, parents with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities.
- Contributing to raising the profile and/or understanding of individual services within local networks and larger organisations of which projects were a part. One project shared how the Parenting Fund had helped to build their confidence as an organisation to contribute to networks and strategic thinking in their area.
- Increased referrals to projects through networks.
- Providing opportunities to share learning and disseminate ideas and expertise. One project noted that the Parenting Fund had enabled them to present expertise to a large number of organisations through their participation in a range of networks including local partnerships, children centre management boards, cluster groups and the RESPECT agenda planning group
- Enabling the sharing of resources.

However, some reservations were voiced about how sustainable such networks were. One project, which had had its funding under Round Two of the Parenting Fund reduced, felt that engagement in networking was one of the first areas to be reduced when their funding was cut, as direct service provision was their key priority. Others mentioned the fact that networks linked to short term funding were liable to 'pack up and go home' when the funding ended. Another project noted that they continued to feel marginalised as a specialist BME project within networks and that the Parenting Fund had in no way alleviated this. Sometimes activities were at the border between regions and their services served other areas as well. There were some examples of projects serving areas other than the one they received funding for, which could only have been found out through local knowledge and expertise.

The list below highlights some of the organisations, networks and partnerships which projects mentioned they established subsequent to receiving an award from the Parenting Fund Round One. Although the Parenting Fund was noted to have contributed to enabling projects to work with these networks or organisations, what is less clear are the other factors that may also have facilitated these links. It is also important to note that this does not necessarily reflect the full range and scope of networks with which services were involved as this was not possible to establish through the telephone survey alone.

Local *

Local Sure Start Networks and groups
Local Schools
PCTs
Children's Centre Management Boards
Cluster Groups
Respect Agenda Planning groups
Statutory Parenting Forum
County Council networks
Other voluntary sector organisations
Local Voluntary Action Group
Parenting Strategy Work
Teenage Pregnancy Strategy
Parenting Strategy Forums
Joint Area Reviews

National*

NCVCCO
National Sure Start Network
Parentline Plus
For Kids
DfES
National taskforce for parents of children with learning disabilities
Mencaps corporate strategy
National network focusing on disabled parents
The Boys and Girls network
Fathers Direct
Parenting Education Support Forum
Family Learning Centres
National family learning network
Parenting UK
Family interagency group

Ownership of parenting in the voluntary sector

Voluntary sector engagement relates to the extent to which the voluntary sector is now more likely to run parent support activities, and whether voluntary organisations had a sense of the Parenting Fund 'belonging' to them, or to what extent they were able to shape it to address their agendas. There was a broad consensus from the stakeholder interviews and the survey material that voluntary sector is crucial to delivering the parenting agenda. Their knowledge of hard to reach groups and at risk parents complement any other service and are needed.

Voluntary sector are crucial in delivering parenting activities with hard to reach groups. (Stakeholder Interview)

The voluntary sector at a local level is the right people to do this. (Stakeholder interview)

However, some stakeholders were concerned at the strong emphasis within the fund on only engaging the voluntary sector, as it was felt that active engagement of the statutory sector was likely to be the key to ensuring continuity of funding for parenting activities. Other stakeholders suggested that this was an 'out of date' view on parenting, as it did not provide a holistic view including the public services in delivering parenting activities. However, there were different comments as to what extent the statutory sector could have contributed. One informant felt that the local authorities especially should have had a more engaged approach both in selecting and monitoring projects. Another felt that statutory agencies that are also delivering parenting services were excluded from applying for money, as the Parenting Fund was only for the voluntary sector. It was claimed that this setup did not promote joined-up working between organisations and entities.

Feedback from the voluntary sector itself was that the focus on the voluntary sector was needed, as they tend not to get funding from elsewhere. Some felt that there should have been more joined up working with the local statutory sector, while others liked the fact that they worked directly with NFPI in delivering the work. Four of the 21 projects surveyed mentioned that positioning the Parenting Fund within the voluntary sector itself had helped to support the level of trust and understanding between funder and the funded.

A general reflection on the strong focus on the voluntary sector was that the voluntary sector is crucial in delivering parenting activities. However, most people seemed to suggest that the voluntary sector should work more closely with the statutory sector locally and that both services are needed to deliver parenting services in the regions.

Sustainability of Parenting Fund Activities

When you give out money to a large number of organisations it is difficult to have the impact that they would have liked. (Stakeholder interview)

The Parenting Fund awarded grants, in its first round, for a period of up to 18 months. As has already been noted, this was successful in so far as funded projects had been able to extend their services, and increase their levels of trained and experienced staff. However, the extent to which this enhanced capacity will be continued will be determined, to a large extent, by the success that these organisations have had in continuing to run these activities once their grants have come to an end.

In some respects, it is still early days to make an effective assessment of the long term sustainability of the activities developed. A high proportion (just under half) of the successful projects in the survey of applicants had also been successful in winning grants under Round Two of the Parenting Fund, so the continuation of their activities, in the short term, at least, was assured. All reported that they were engaged in seeking alternative funding so that they would be able to continue after their Round Two grant came to an end. One of the applicants who was unsuccessful in the first round was successful in obtaining a grant in the second round.

Table 4-1: Summary of projects attracting funding from Round Two of the Parenting Fund

Successful Round One		Unsuccessful Round One		Total
<i>Did not receive Round 2 funding</i>	<i>Received Round 2 funding</i>	<i>Did not receive Round 2 funding</i>	<i>Received Round 2 funding</i>	
11#	10	8*	1	31
21		10		31

of these 7 applied for Round 2 funding but were unsuccessful

** Of these 2 applied for Round 2 funding but were unsuccessful*

Of the remaining 11 projects (on which there was information) which had received Round One funding, but had not obtained Round Two grants, nine continued through a range of different funding arrangements and to a range of different degrees. Only one had completely finished the work it had undertaken using the Parenting Fund, and only one project reported a relatively secure funding situation.

- The relatively secure project was one working with fathers, which had gone on to become an independent organisation to the service from which it developed. It was now run by a committee structure and had grown into a range of localities, successfully sourcing funding from a range of local funds and fundraising activities. This project was reported to have successfully influenced practice within a local Sure Start service

- Two projects reporting continuing on a 'hand to mouth' existence through their own fundraising. Both were currently attempting to source additional funding but reporting it to be difficult.
- One project continued to operate by working in partnership with schools and other agencies and currently is looking for funding through the number of partnerships they have developed.
- One project continues the work that was developed via Parenting Fund Round One, by integrating it into the work of the wider organisation
- One project ended but had an ongoing training legacy funded through local authorities.
- Two had sustained partial elements of their original projects. In both of these cases they were continuing to roll out training and had continued to be funded by other sources to do so, including local authorities.
- One project had delayed completion of the Parenting Fund Round One project for a range of reasons and was continuing to complete the training aspects of the work - no future plans were identified

Four of the projects reported that they had been successful in continuing aspects of their work which involved training, and three felt that they were continuing to influence the wider partnership or organisation of which they were a part, around issues of parenting.

There appeared to be a general lack of clarity about where additional funding would be sourced from at this time, with most projects reporting that there were few or no alternative funding sources specifically recognising the value of work with parents as opposed to service delivery directly to children and young people. For those who had a Parenting Fund grant, another challenge was that being already in receipt of government funding made other funders perceive projects to have fewer financial support needs. Finally, it was also noted that the lack of infrastructure or capacity of small voluntary sector organisations prevented them from dedicating adequate time to funding applications.

Sustainability among unsuccessful projects

Another interesting 'test' of the Parenting Fund was the extent to which applicants that had not been successful in winning a grant in Round One had gone on to develop their service, and had found funding for this. During the first round of the telephone survey, a number of the unsuccessful applicants said that putting in an application for the Fund had encouraged them to make concrete plans for new parenting services, and several indicated that they hoped to find alternative sources of funding for these. In the second round of the survey, they were asked if these activities had gone ahead and if so where they had sourced funding from.

Of the ten unsuccessful applicants who were questioned, four had not undertaken the work, another four projects had found funding to develop the work in part, on a smaller scale or focusing on partial elements and two projects had found full funding elsewhere. Of the six projects which had completed the work for which they applied to the Parenting Fund to some degree (either fully or partially) funding was sourced as follows:

Outcome	Number of projects	Funding mechanism
Projects happening	2 projects	Round Two of Parenting Fund Funding from Trusts
Scaled down implementations	4 projects	Trust funding, Local authority, implementation without funding
No project delivery	4	No funding

Of the six projects that had delivered some aspects of the parenting work, five reported knowledge and awareness of other Parenting Fund projects and of these five had an active involvement in organisations or networks that were part of the Parenting Fund.

General reflections on the success of the Parenting Fund

The feedback from most informants from the survey and from most stakeholders, towards the end of the programme, was that they felt that the model of funding worked well. Most people reported positively towards the organisational partnership between DfES, NFPI and PwC. NFPI was perceived as 'a safe pair of hands', as its staff know and represent the voluntary sector. It was reported by four different projects that having NFPI as a fundholder helped them in understanding the funding relationship better. It was also suggested by stakeholders and projects surveyed that NFPI staff could understand projects better, as they deliver services themselves, and their knowledge of delivering projects on parenting meant that they could be more flexible with the projects.

The information sharing between DfES and FPI was felt to have worked very well and both parties felt that they learned from each other in the process. PwC's role was also crucial in that they could mobilize a team quickly to scan through large amounts of applications within a very tight timeframe. The programme was dependent on their work and positive feedback was given to the input made by PwC. In monitoring and follow-up projects it was more difficult as PwC are not in the voluntary sector.

One of the biggest concerns reported at this stage was a tension between local versus central decision making and monitoring. Most stakeholders reflected that one important lesson that had been learned was the importance of working more closely with local services:

The Parenting Fund should have looked more at the local parenting agenda in the selection and delivery of projects. (Stakeholder interview)

Parenting is a local issue. Parenting Fund should have a locality based approach. (Stakeholder interview)

Another comment was that projects would benefit from a closer relationship with NFPI, including visits and follow up after the initial awarding of the grant. Some stakeholders felt that there should have been more resources allocated for visiting and following-up projects. Sustainability of projects has been a major concern for most people working with and for the Parenting Fund. As the timeframe for the projects was short, one stakeholder questioned the use of start-up funding at all. It was suggested that it was not enough funding to provide a proper start-up of a new service and sometimes it led to good services having to be closed down in the end of the project life-cycle.

4.1.3. Observations on the impact of the programme

Both unsuccessful and successful projects were asked whether they felt that the Parenting Fund had made a difference. The answers from the two groups of informants have been separated to account for their very different perspectives.

Of the successful projects questioned, the vast majority of projects felt that the Parenting Fund had made a substantial difference at either project, sector and policy levels or in some cases more than one of these levels. Only one successful Round One project taking part in the survey felt that it had not made a difference.

The main impacts reported by stakeholders and projects surveyed were:

- Impact on the outcomes for parents' children and projects locally (10). This was seen to be evidenced through a range of means including increased referrals and uptake of projects and the rates of return to projects among parents and children. Likewise there were cases where parents themselves were the recipients of training, a range of unexpected outcomes were cited in relation to participants' personal development.
- The Parenting Fund's presence has contributed to raising debate and awareness around the issue of parenting at a national policy level (8). There is also evidence that more specific elements of parenting work has also received increased awareness and higher profile, such as work addressing issues of disabled parents, work with fathers, refugee parents, and parents of children with ADHD.
- Embedded parenting as key area within the voluntary sector and its work as a whole (4). Many projects noted how their own work with parents had influenced the work of other aspects of their own organisations or local authorities. There was a sense that the presence of the Parenting Fund had increased the value attributed to whole-family approaches to work, focused work with parents and the presence of parental needs.
- Influenced the direction of local and / or regional strategy (2).
- Been responsible for strengthening networks (locally and regionally) (2). As well as increasing the capacity of projects to network, a number of projects expressed how the Parenting Fund had contributed to their confidence as an organisation to participate in networks effectively and input into strategy in related areas.
- Raised the profile of the voluntary sector in general (2).

The perspective of the 10 unsuccessful projects was unsurprisingly more mixed to the question as to whether the Parenting Fund had made a difference. However, at least four projects which had **not** received Round One funding felt that the Fund had made a positive impact on the sector and context as a whole.

- Three projects did not know or were unable to answer
- Three projects felt it had not made any difference. One of these projects explained that in their view *"there had not been enough funding for infrastructure. Nor enough support to organisations to enable learning to be shared to ensure development work isn't being duplicated and that lessons learnt in one organisation can be used to the benefit of others."*

- Four projects felt it had made a difference (one of which had been funded by Round 2 of the Parenting Fund). Of these, one mentioned that the focus on parenting work had been needed. Likewise the successful applicant of Round 2 funding noted that they felt *“it had highlighted that the government is prepared to support the family and parenting agenda and had clearly communicated the message that families matter”*. Prior to this the informant felt that the emphasis from government had focused solely on skills development or children and young people. Another explained that the government nature of the funding had helped to put parenting on the policy agenda of local government.

4.1.4. Learning taken forward to Round Two

Another major area in which the impact of Round One of the Fund could be felt was in the learning that had been taken forward into Round Two. A number of significant changes had been made to the structure and shape of the Fund in Round Two, which reflected partly changes in national policy, but also reflected the feedback and understanding gained during Round One.

The NFPI website summarises the main changes that had taken place between Round One and Round Two:

(1) The criteria have been widened and a whole family approach is proposed. This time there is a greater emphasis on working with teenagers, an incorporation of aspects of the ‘Respect’ agenda and recognition of the value of supporting couple relationships as a way of strengthening parenting. Promoting social inclusion and improving access to services and support for less well-served communities remains a cornerstone of the Fund.

(2) The grant focuses on 23 localities (18 from Round One and five others). The Fund no longer covers national or regional projects, but funded projects are expected to deliver learning and outcomes that can be picked up nationally. Organisations would be able to apply to work in a number of areas, as is the case with Round One.

Several of the stakeholders reflected that Round Two was working better than Round One because the fundholder was now more experienced, and changes had been incorporated in a number of the processes and procedures. The process of selecting and assessing applications was felt to have been less stressful, although there was, once again, a general consensus that more time should have been allocated for projects to submit their application and for the initial screening of the applications.

The ‘maturity’ of the programme meant that potential applicants were more aware of the programme and what it was seeking to achieve. As one stakeholder commented:

Applicants had learned more what the Parenting Fund was about in round two.
(Stakeholder interview)

Although similar procedures were put in place (a helpline) for applicants to seek information prior to submitting their application, because many already knew the fundholder, more appear to have gone straight to NFPI with queries about their applications. This, together with the opportunity which new applicants had to hear about, or talk to, projects which had already received funding from Round One, may have enabled more to ensure that their plans were appropriate to the nature of the programme.

The grants in Round Two are for a longer time period - this is another lesson that has been learned from Round One. Information on whether the grants themselves are similar, or different to other programmes, and whether lessons about the difficulty in linking with local authorities in the local areas had been addressed, was not available to us. However, we were told that the difficulties in making links with local authorities and ensuring learning was disseminated from local projects was influential in the decision to set up a National Academy for Parenting Practitioners in 2007 to support research, training and knowledge exchange across the country.

One other change that was made in Round Two was in terms of the involvement of Parenting UK. No longer a grant holder in the same way as previously, but receiving funding for its role in supporting and developing the field, Parenting UK has been able to take a more active role in working with other grant holders to ensure that these 'register' for additional support from their regional advisors, access to their website and newsletter. It now has a member of staff with specific responsibility for working with the Parenting Fund projects to encourage this involvement.

4.1.5. Wider learning taken forward

While it was clear that a great deal of learning from Round One of the fund had been taken forward in terms of the internal processes of the Parenting Fund, it was less clear how far the Fund had had an impact on the wider agenda. There was feedback, already noted, that local projects appear to have had some impact on the parenting agenda locally, but it appeared, at the time of writing this report, that relatively little information was being disseminated more widely, either from local or major grant schemes.

In part this appears to be a matter of timing. As this report is being written, NFPI has commissioned someone to collate the final reports from Round One projects into a general report collating some of the experience, examples and lessons. Some of the 'products' being developed by the major grant holders have yet to be completed, and have not yet been put out into the public sphere. Some of the material from projects is being picked up by Parenting UK, to be fed into general information about parenting that is disseminated via their website, their good practice guidelines, and later, through information shared through the new National Academy for Parenting Practitioners.

However, there does appear to have been some loss of opportunities, both through the general lack of evaluation undertaken at a local level, and through the failure to create an effective channel through which evaluation and other material about funded projects could be shared as the programme moved forward. Parenting UK reported that it had been very hard to get local projects to generate the kind of data that could be entered into its database of practice for potential funders of parenting schemes. (This requires there to have been an evaluation and that the projects proposed are replicable in new areas.)

Few of the local projects took up the evaluation pack that was offered to them at the start of Round One, although those that did, found this helpful. However, evaluation was not a requirement for projects in Round One, and this does appear to limit the potential for replication of the learning from the projects funded, in other areas.

As has already been noted, a number of attempts were made to share learning from Round One grant holders with others - through local workshops, through a national conference. However, each of these had limitations. It proved difficult to get people not directly involved in the programme, particularly local authority officials, to attend the first round of local workshops, and it was difficult to get projects to come and share their learning with Round Two grant holders, in the second set of local workshops. The national conference was mainly

for people directly involved in the programme - this was seen as an opportunity lost to share learning with a wider audience.

It is likely that many of these difficulties will be addressed in Round Two, in part because the field has moved forward, and there are many new opportunities that the fundholder can utilise for wider dissemination. Local authorities are now required to have a parenting strategy, and a designated officer coordinating the commissioning of parenting services, in place. This will, hopefully, provide a key point of contact when liaising with local areas. The fundholder, NFPI, is also one of the partner organisations involved in developing the new National Parenting Academy for training professionals working with families and children. Both these developments are likely to make the task of sharing learning from the activities funded by the Parenting Fund with a wider audience somewhat easier in the future.

5. CHAPTER 5: LOCAL AREAS AND PROJECTS

Context in which the projects operated

5.1.1. Information from local project managers

Interviews with project managers of local services were conducted between September and October 2005. At that point in time, the common issue identified by all project managers was that existing services for parents appeared to operate in a context which lacked a co-ordinated strategy and which, according to managers, would benefit from infrastructure development. The specific, area-related issues which were identified by project managers are summarised below.

In Areas C, D and E, service managers reported an overall lack of provision catering to the needs of parents within their authorities, which the funded projects were attempting to overcome. An unco-ordinated approach to delivery was also highlighted in Areas C and D, although in Area D this was, reportedly, being addressed.

Projects in Area E reported a large amount of specific parenting provision within the authority but a shortage of more generalised support. One service provider felt that family support was particularly difficult for parents to access if the family were not already involved with statutory services (i.e. only families in particularly difficult circumstances received help). Provision in the area, therefore, seemed to focus on crisis interventions rather than on preventative work. In Area A, the main issue for services was the need to engage the large number of non-English speakers in the city who did not traditionally access services.

Areas B and F experienced major difficulties because of their rural nature and the associated difficulties with transport. The high cost and limited service provided by local public transport not only made access to services difficult for actual and potential users but also had a negative impact on the recruitment of staff. Services were sparse and those that existed tended to be clustered in more populated areas.

5.1.2. Information from projects' stakeholders

In the workshops and telephone interviews which took place in March and April 2006, projects' stakeholders were asked about the local context in which the funded projects operated and they were invited to highlight issues which they thought might impact on the success of the funded work. These are set out in Table 5.1, classified along broad lines of 'strategic issues', 'geographical issues' and 'other issues'. As can be seen, they are predominantly, though not exclusively, negative (positive comments are shown in italics) and, in several cases, mirror the comments made by project managers.

Table 5-1: Area-specific issues (stakeholder information)⁶

Area	Issues		
	Strategic	Geographical	Other
Area A	<i>Children's Centres seen as positive development</i> Services often linked in with PCT boundaries	Large city in which professionals can feel isolated	
Area B	Fewer services in less officially deprived areas despite high levels of need	Large rural county Inefficient and expensive transportation Parents unwilling to travel large distances	Lack of skilled staff High levels of mobility
Area C	Services duplicating work through lack of co-ordination	Large borough complicates joint working	High numbers of BME communities and diverse languages impact upon successes of generic services
Area D	City split into five planning wedges which are developed to different degrees No central co-ordination Infrastructure for parenting support seen as 'informal' or 'non-existent'	Large city impedes joint working	
Area E	<i>Council seen as pro-active on issues such as implementing Common Assessment Framework</i> <i>Strong commitment to multi-agency working</i> <i>Have a dedicated family support co-ordinator</i> Multiple service boundaries hinder joint working Changes to PCT boundaries may reduce services available within city	Service provision seen to be city-centric	

⁶ Stakeholders in one area were unable to provide any information

5.1.3. Information from the mapping exercise

The first mapping exercise was carried out between May and July 2005. In each of the six selected areas respondents were asked to list three organisations they perceived as being the main providers of parenting support services in the local area. Sure Start was by far the most common service mentioned by respondents in all six areas, which is unsurprising in view of its high profile. However, its remit is, in some respects, quite narrow as it deals only with the families of very young children (under five years of age). The local authority was also among those most often mentioned though this was often through their provision of other services such as family centres, social services and health visitors. Below, the most common providers are mentioned by area:

Area A (*n* = 8)

Respondents highlighted a wide variety of services providing parenting support, including four drug-specific services. Two respondents each mentioned Home Start, Sure Start, NCH and the local authority as the main providers of parenting support. Further to this, respondents highlighted a number of mainly voluntary organisations providing support, including Barnardo's, MENCAP and Freshwinds (a charity supporting those with life threatening illnesses). Interestingly, several respondents were able to think of only one provider and one respondent could think of none.

Area B (*n* = 9)

Over half of respondents mentioned Sure Start as the main provider of parenting support services in the area. An equal number also mentioned the local authority as being a main provider, though this was through a number of different services which included health visitors, social services, child and family services. Three respondents cited NCH and two mentioned the Scallywags service: both of these organisations were recipients of a Parenting Fund grant. A number of other voluntary organisations were mentioned, including the Promoting Effective Parenting service (which subsequently ceased operation).

Area C (*n* = 11)

Respondents again highlighted a wide variety of services providing parenting support. Sure Start was the most common, mentioned by over one-third of respondents. Services provided by the local authority, including specific children and family centres, were mentioned by most respondents, with health visitors and social services the main providers. A number of voluntary services were mentioned by respondents including Barnardo's, Parentline Plus and NSPCC. One respondent was not able to name any services working to support parents.

Area D (*n* = 11)

Sure Start was mentioned by nine respondents. Various services provided by the local authority, including social services, health visitors, family resource centres and parent partnerships were mentioned by respondents. Similarly, several major and minor voluntary organisations were highlighted, including Home Start, NSPCC, MENCAP and the Parent Partnership.

Area E (*n* = 10)

Just under three-quarters of respondents reported that Sure Start was one of the main providers of parenting support services. Over one-third mentioned family centres and over one-quarter mentioned the Family Welfare Association, which received a Parenting Fund grant for work in Area E. In addition to this, various voluntary organisations, including NACRO, were highlighted. One respondent was unable to name any services working to support parents.

Area F (*n* = 11)

Seven respondents mentioned Sure Start as the main provider of parenting support services in their area. Six mentioned the local authority, though again through several services, including social services and the local teenage pregnancy service. Further to this, a number of specific services in the health, housing, education and voluntary sectors were mentioned, which highlighted the limited number of region-wide parenting-specific services in Area F.

Existing networks and fora

As one of the aims of the Parenting Fund was to build capacity in local areas, the researchers considered it useful to establish whether prior opportunities existed to aid this, through networking and joint working, for example. In five of the six areas, projects' stakeholders were able to identify a range of useful fora or partnership arrangements which were accessed regularly. In the remaining area (B), its rural nature worked against attendance at meetings. This was not true of the other rural areas in the sample, in which local stakeholders were aware of a considerable number of opportunities for meeting and networking with workers in other services.

The groups considered most useful by projects' stakeholders are set out below.

- Area A:** 0–5 Forum
Schools Forum
Parent-link Forum
- Area C:** Children and Young People's Network (*sic*)
- Area D:** Family Strategy Group
Parenting Education and Support Forum (regional)
Early Years Forum
ABC Partnership Forum
Workers Education Association
Young People's Substance Use Forum
Drugs and Schools Group
- Area E:** Voluntary Sector Forum
The Parenting Network
Local Safeguarding Children Board
- Area F:** Parents and Carers Forum
Sure Start Planning Partnership
Child Protection Planning Group
Disability Partnership Board
Librarians' Meetings
Home Start
Connexions

Projects' stakeholders were asked to discuss the range of ways that organisations could make effective links with one another to aid multi-agency working. Many respondents felt that key individuals who pro-actively sought out and engaged other services were a prime means of partnership development. These individuals might also use previous contacts to publicise current work and identify future opportunities for joint working. However, where there was a marked absence of co-ordination of services and fragmentation of delivery across a city, workers might feel unsure of where, or with whom, they could develop links. One respondent from Area A (a large urban area) had received little support in fostering such contact.

“Sometimes it is a question of sort of who you know as to who gets involved.” (Stakeholder 3).

Formal contact between services was mentioned as the other means by which partnerships had developed. This might be through making contact with similar services, or through identifying common service gaps during formal networks or meetings where various agencies from both the statutory and voluntary sector (or staff from larger national organisations) came together. Local authority meetings such as those of the Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership and the Local Safeguarding Children Board were mentioned by a number of stakeholders as opportunities for such partnerships to develop, as were meetings run by local Sure Start projects and the Children’s Fund regional officers. This emphasised the importance of local voluntary sector projects being represented on these bodies. In two areas (D and E), the local authority or the local voluntary sector council ran specific networking events which participants found useful. In Area E, and also in Area A, workers benefited from parenting-related fora which co-ordinated the collection and dissemination of relevant information.

Other occasions, such as project open days, training seminars, conferences and voluntary sector council meetings, were highlighted as opportunities to develop contacts, share information and identify possibilities for joint working. A system of referrals to and from other services could also lead to the development of formalised partnerships.

Workshop attendees and telephone respondents alike considered that, whether partnerships developed as a result of individual efforts or through formal contact between services, it was crucial that services publicised themselves so that potential partners were aware of their areas of activity and future plans. This, however, required resources - both time and money - which were frequently outside the range of some projects which could only afford to focus on service delivery.

One workshop participant highlighted the benefit of sharing resources, such as office space and computers, between voluntary organisations. While the prime and motivating aim might be to reduce costs, an added bonus was that it facilitated voluntary services’ understanding of each others’ work, leading to greater opportunities for regular information-sharing and joint working. Services in which multi-agency working occurred, such as Sure Start, were also useful places to share information and practice.

Not all stakeholders within each area were aware of, or attended, the various fora, meetings, or events mentioned within the groups. Some respondents indicated that time, geographical distance, remit of work, and financial constraints limited opportunities to participate. Others were unaware that such meetings were taking place or of how to become involved in them. Increased publicity might be one way to overcome this problem, but there are wider issues to be addressed, around the ability of small projects with limited funding to do anything other than deliver a service. Simply looking for information about meetings and events, let alone attending them, might be outside their resources.

Joint working

Most projects’ stakeholders were extremely positive about information sharing, especially between voluntary services, and the positive outcomes that result from this in terms of effective joint working and positive client outcomes. Some projects’ stakeholders indicated that, because partnerships were more prevalent than previously, agencies were often seen to be more willing to share information.

A small number of workshop participants believed that knowledge protection could be a barrier to joint working and the sharing of expertise. Where services saw that disclosing information might prevent extra resources coming their way, they were especially likely to protect their knowledge. Competition for resources, especially from funding streams such as the Parenting Fund, which attracted applications from larger, national organisations wishing to work in local areas, could lead to smaller voluntary sector services being protective of their local knowledge.

Different practices within services and a general confusion, or lack of consistent practice, around issues of confidentiality and data protection could also hinder effective joint working and service provision. Workshop participants thought that data protection issues appeared to be a matter of greater concern for statutory services than they were for those in the voluntary sector. The statutory sector could be seen as a gatekeeper through which client information could or could not be obtained. Use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), which has direct implications for data protection, was discussed at one workshop. In this instance, respondents within Area C felt that, while its introduction was a positive development, it would still be difficult to gain co-operation from all the services which might be involved in a particular case.

The funded projects

5.1.4. Aims

Project managers were asked how they saw the aims of the Parenting Fund. To some extent their replies fitted with the broad aims of the Fund. The majority of responses referred to providing support to families, and in particular to parents.

I would say to increase parent support, to help them enhance their family life: that is what I would say would be the actual aim. Giving the decision- making process back to families and parents in particular. (L9)⁷

One respondent saw this slightly differently, identifying children as the ultimate beneficiaries: “empowering parents to give their children the best chance they can” (L12), while another replied in ‘Every Child Matters’ terms, mentioning the care and nurture of children and helping them to realise their potential (L5).

Other respondents highlighted the aim of extending provision by extending and establishing services to support parents, rather than dealing specifically with children’s behaviour.

I think basically provide support, and obviously financial support too, to projects such as [ours] within certain areas and I think in particular in [Area E] because there is quite a big need of parenting support. ... I think general parenting services because at the moment there is a lot of agencies that are actually running the Webster Stratton Programme so they wanted something more specific which focuses on the parents’ sort of side of things rather than children’s behaviour. (L10)

Two respondents focused on the more strategic aspects: one referred specifically to strengthening voluntary sector provision, though the other identified the aim as trying to co-ordinate services in the voluntary sector.

I saw the aim as trying to pull together or co-ordinate some of the local services for families, because that’s what seemed to come out of the criteria. (L11)

⁷ To preserve anonymity, respondents have been allocated a number preceded by ‘L’ for local project managers, ‘N’ for national and ‘R’ for regional project managers.

However, one project manager expressed some confusion over the specific aims of the Fund.

To be honest, I don't really know. I struggled with that one a little bit especially. I thought I had an idea when we applied for the money because the guidelines were quite tight in a sense and very specific - 'you have got to work with these particular parents' - but when you actually sat down and went through the application, as long as you were working with parents - and I know they emphasise BME and ethnic groups and things like that a little bit more, with fathers particularly - but we were just doing very general parenting work so it wasn't as tight as we initially thought. So overall the aim I suppose is just to create some sort of provision in the voluntary sector. (L8)

Managers of the funded projects all believed that the work they were undertaking fitted well with the Fund's aims, as they had specified them. They also fitted with other aims of the Fund which they had not mentioned. Thus, several projects were aiming to build capacity by training parents, volunteers and paid staff to work in the parenting sector, developing networks, and producing and disseminating materials. The needs of particular groups of parents, such as foster carers, those in BME groups and those whose children had a disability or exhibited challenging behaviour were a target in eight of the twelve projects.

Theory of change

Project managers were asked about the theoretical underpinning for what they were aiming to do. Although expressed differently in each case, it was clear that the various approaches and models of working were all based on an assumption that parents in general benefited from support and confidence-building. This, in turn, promoted parenting styles and practices which helped their children develop and succeed along the lines of the five ECM outcomes.

... the theory will go back to the fact that if you equip parents with the confidence, by giving them the knowledge and information at appropriate times, then they will parent better, that's what we're hopefully looking for. And that the long term result would be that their children attain their potential rather than be held back. (L3)

For those parents who were in more difficult circumstances, such as those who had a child with a disability, confidence-building and empowerment were even more crucial to facilitating positive outcomes for children.

It's about empowering parents to get on with their own and their families' lives in a much more positive way [...] they carry a lot of guilt, loss, denial, and that impacts on everything that they want to do for themselves, their families or their child. (L12)

In addition, such parents could be taught skills which enabled them to communicate better with the professionals in the statutory sector involved in their children's care, who often compounded parents' lack of confidence by their own approach to disability.

Well the assumptions on which the project is based...are that the children receive a good start in life which is absolutely essential to their functioning as adults. They must be parented well and so every project that we have operated is based on that assumption. ... We look at how parents are enabled to care for their children. (L5)

Particular help was also needed for parents who faced challenges by bringing up children in a different culture from their own, where some of their accepted parenting practices might not be the most beneficial to their children in this country.

... train, support parents from this immigrant community to become, to be positive about parenting, to reduce the blaming culture. ... We can keep on blaming the system, but the system will not make things right for us, we have to be responsible.
(L6)

5.1.5. Projects' activities

The funded projects' activities were explored in the light of the aims of the Parenting Fund and of how capacity could be built in the sector. These are discussed below under the following headings: provision of services for under-represented groups; staffing, training and skills development of the workforce; networking and joint working; providing an evidence base; developing materials; dissemination of findings and good practice; and strategic influence.

Providing new services for under-represented groups

At the application stage, the Parenting Fund listed several groups of parents who had not previously received and/or accessed support services to the same extent as other parents in the community. These included parents in BME groups, refugees, those with disabilities or whose child had a disability, fathers, teenage parents, and parents of teenagers. One of the aims of the Fund was that services for these groups should be developed.

The majority of the selected projects addressed this aim, either wholly, by providing a service exclusively for one of these groups, or partially, by specifically including one or more of the groups in their overall service provision. Six of the selected projects focused solely on parents who had children with a disability or were exhibiting problematic or challenging behaviour. Two projects aimed to extend their current provision to include or focus on foster carers, fathers, parents who experienced domestic violence, who were asylum seekers or refugees, or were from BME groups. Two further projects were aiming to provide support to parents who were facing some difficulty in fulfilling their parenting role, mainly as a result of minor or non-clinical depression. They might not necessarily be classed in the priority group of parents with mental health problems, but support for such parents is not typically and readily available in the statutory sector and they are, therefore, a group of parents who have not been previously well-served. One other service addressed addiction and, although it was intended to include families from BME groups, in fact the area of the city in which it was based had few such families. However, the generic nature of the project meant that it would be transferable to other communities.

Staffing, training and skills development of the workforce

Approximately half of the local services wished to use some of the Parenting Fund grant to recruit between one and two members of staff. These staff tended to have roles specifically related to the development of the funded work, such as project co-ordinators or development assistants. However, one of the problems facing several services at the onset of their funding was that various delays arose in their actually receiving their grant from NFPI. This meant that they were unable to recruit staff at the time they intended and this typically caused a late start in service delivery.

The timescale has definitely changed because we couldn't actually do anything until we had the money in the bank. Because we are only a small organisation we didn't have the reserves in that sense. But we needed the money up front in order to employ people. So everything really got put off by a quarter, so if you put three months on everything that is where we are, but we have done quite a lot of catching up since. (L8)

We had to delay in actually recruiting the facilitators and obviously we are a bit behind in that but we are in the process now of training them up ... and also the facilitators' supervisor - there was a delay in recruiting him as well, but obviously that was a knock-on effect from me coming into post. And then obviously my line manager ... she was supposed to be in post a bit earlier but only came into post I think a month before I did. (L10)

However, this was not the only staffing problem encountered by project managers. Even when the funding was in place, several encountered difficulties in initially attracting staff to the post and then in retaining them once they had been appointed.

We had two people in place to start but one of them gave notice so we had to go through that one again. So we started with staff in place in January. ... Short term employment, finding the right people for short contracts is quite difficult, especially as we were only looking for somebody part-time as well. ... Yes, that was the biggest difficulty: if I could have offered someone three years even part-time I would have got a better response. We had quite a lot of application packs sent out but only a few came back and so we did some follow-up on why people didn't (apply) and that is basically what they said: 'It's not long enough'. They couldn't leave the job they've got just to go and work somewhere for a year part-time. (L8)

Most projects employed between one and four full-time staff but approximately one-third were run by staff on a part-time basis. Both projects in Area B were run entirely by part-time staff. However, staff in the larger voluntary sector organisations might be employed on a full-time basis by the parent organisation, with part of their time allocated to work on the Parenting Fund project. Virtually all projects had access to part-time administrative support. Volunteers and sessional workers were recruited and used by just over half the projects. Typically, projects had between four and eight volunteers actively delivering work. Fewer projects used sessional workers to deliver work, but where they did, the number was often large: one service in Area D had nearly 140 workers employed in this manner. Such projects tended to focus on delivering training rather than a direct service.

Training for both staff and volunteers was widespread. Ten of the twelve funded projects provided staff with some form of training. Where internally provided, this ranged from general inductions and on-the-job training to extensive training programmes, and clearly made a considerable demand on resources.

We gave her a full induction: basically it was on-the-job training. She has also had some time at Head Office and some time with the other information officers in different offices, and they have also been able to show her on a one-to-one basis, and then through staff conference and development team meetings. (L2)

While the requirement for staff to undergo child protection/safeguarding training was mentioned by a number of project managers, training was more typically specific to the work being undertaken by the projects (e.g. drug awareness, mental health, and solution-focused therapy). Half of the project managers expressed a commitment towards staff development and had plans for further staff training. Where no training was reported, this tended to be because respondents felt that the staff recruited already had the experience or training required to undertake the funded work.

None of the project managers reported requiring any specific qualifications or prior experience from volunteers, and all provided some form of training. Training tended to be either a holistic and in-depth programme provided by the project's parent organisation, or a short, one-off introduction to a specific topic such as child protection or parental rights.

Joint working and networking

Projects in all six regions appreciated the importance of establishing and retaining links with the voluntary and statutory sectors' services. All projects reported good links with referring agencies and with those to which they referred or signposted users. These were other voluntary organisations undertaking general parenting work or more domain-specific work (such as substance misuse or domestic violence) and statutory services, including a mixture of relevant social, health and education services. Links with area-based initiatives such as Sure Start appeared to be more common in the rural areas (B and F): working with larger statutory bodies such as Sure Start could overcome some of the shortcomings of a less developed and connected voluntary sector.

Despite staff in all projects having met at NFPI workshops, and, in several areas, meeting regularly as members of various fora, there was no apparent wish to engage in joint working with other funded projects. However, such opportunities would be limited by the fact that projects frequently had remits which were tied to a specific user-base rather than to the wider community. Only two of the funded projects reported having developed formal links with any of the other funded projects in their region. Project L1 found that other funded organisations with the same user base had approached them:

When she [manager of another funded service] first got the role she came down to speak to me about how to set up groups. And [the other funded project] as well. ... And we have worked with them, they've been down here ... they've actually come and worked with some children down here. (L1)

The other project, in Area D, had had its grant drastically reduced and was informed that it should work with another funded project in the area doing work on the same topic. At the time of the interview with the project manager it was not clear that this working arrangement was functioning especially well.

...an extra condition of the funding was that we worked closely with one other agency anyway because they [also] only got half their funding, so the expectation I think was for us to work closely together and that is all it said – there was 'an expectation' for us to work closely together. So we meet with them once a month and discuss issues, publicise each other's events... Well, we have both got our own agendas in a sense, so it's a bit difficult. They are predominantly, they were almost a statutory agency because of the funding anyway, they do a lot of work for youth inclusion and young offending and things like that. It is different agendas I suppose, it is quite difficult. ... we decided amongst ourselves what we could do viably and that is what we do. ... (A)t the end of the day the more we do, the more pressure it puts on them, and again they have only a limited amount of time and staff to do things. So we have got a framework that we stick to, but other than that, there is not a lot else we can do. (L8)

Only four services had formal partnerships with other organisations that were not funded by the Parenting Fund. Both projects in Area C had contracts with the local authority to undertake work, and one project also worked in partnership with a local domestic violence service, which had benefits for both organisations in terms of training and information-sharing. All of these projects had been in operation prior to receiving the Parenting Fund grant. Conversely, other projects reported that partnerships might increase the (sometimes unrealistic) expectations of the funded services by other organisations and that conflicting agendas could hamper effective joint working. Being in receipt of a Parenting Fund grant did not appear to facilitate the development of partnerships with other organisations, at least in the early stages. A project with only short-term funding might not seem to be a reliable collaborator. However, it appeared that all projects had links with those services that were felt to be most relevant to their funded work.

At the time of the interviews with local project managers (some 10 to 12 months after they had received Parenting Fund grants), all projects except one reported attending, or having input into, locality-based forums. These were typically Children's and Young People's Strategic Partnership Boards and Early Years Networks. Funded projects were also represented on a wide variety of voluntary sector networks and other sector-specific forums relevant either to parenting in general and/or to the specific work they were undertaking (e.g., projects supporting parents of disabled children were involved in various disability-related groups).

Projects within the two most rural areas (B and F) reported attending the fewest meetings, either because fewer meetings were held or because the geography made travel difficult and the input of time necessary greater than in urban areas. Where services were represented on groups, they identified a number of benefits which included:

- Linking and networking with the statutory sector, local government and other voluntary organisations to build capacity, largely through enhanced training opportunities, efficient signposting and appropriate referrals
- Placing the agenda of users and communities at the heart of service delivery. Shared missions and values could be translated into general practice and users' knowledge could be increased. One service within Area A reported gaining a significant strategic influence over the development of local authority policy as a result of their forum attendance
- Recognising the need for a holistic approach, which provided effective, coordinated services. Gaps in services could be filled and workloads reduced.

Engaging in opportunities to meet other practitioners was highlighted by respondents as the main means of enhancing joint working. However, even at this early stage in their grant-holding, projects spoke of the difficulties they were experiencing in committing resources to engaging in this form of work. This was especially the case for services in Area B where the large distances between organisations limited networking opportunities. The future of such networks appeared to be contingent upon continued and increased funding: indeed several respondents believed that more funding needed to be provided to voluntary organisations either directly through the funding streams, or indirectly via the local authority, to facilitate networking opportunities.

Few projects felt they had the capacity to join any more groups, and one service had already stopped attending network meetings completely in order to concentrate fully on service delivery (L6).

Providing an evidence base

All funded projects stated that they were, or would be, evaluating their work to some extent. Typically, services reported gathering information from service users by means of either questionnaires and feedback forms, or interviews during and following interventions. One project used a range of methods to ascertain user outcomes and levels of satisfaction, which included facilitating focus groups. However, the use of information gathered through evaluations varied: most services used it summatively or simply for monitoring purposes, but some used it to make alterations to their service. Examples of changes made as a result of evaluation or feedback included: altering the provision of support (for example, offering drop-in days), amending course structures, and developing the content of information packs.

We change all the time in response to service user feedback. (Project in Area C)

In addition to undertaking internal evaluation and monitoring, three services reported intentions to evaluate their work formally following receipt of the Parenting Fund grant. It appeared that such evaluations would be conducted internally and would be summative in their content. One service in Area C reported that it would aim to use a student on placement to carry out the research, owing to concerns over the expense of undertaking the evaluation, which had not been costed in their proposal. The lack of experience and training around evaluation, coupled with the lack of resources to undertake such work, were serving as barriers to undertaking formative evaluations, despite the benefits to users and the service itself. While Parenting UK had provided projects with an Evaluation Toolkit, it appeared that awareness of it having been received was limited and its actual use was scarce. One manager found that it was useful 'to flick through' to establish whether there was anything new he could add to his existing repertoire of evaluation approaches and instruments.

Project managers were required to complete bi-annual milestone and quarterly financial monitoring forms for NFPI and PwC respectively. Completing the forms was seen by managers as either very simple or very difficult. In part, this depended on whether or not project workers had previously been required to fill in monitoring forms for other funding organisations which made greater demands on them. A particular problem was the use of Microsoft Excel. As many as half of the local project managers reported difficulties entering information in this format, and one described it as a "*wretched form*". Workers either lacked the IT training and skills to use this comfortably, and/or they found Excel an unwieldy package for entering text in the manner they would have liked. Several of these projects expressed a wish for guidance or examples from NFPI on how to enter data. Furthermore, three projects did not feel that the milestone monitoring forms allowed them to provide an accurate picture of the work undertaken. In the absence of feedback from NFPI on previous reports, project managers had no confidence that their attempts to complete the forms were satisfactory or that NFPI understood what the project was doing.

Well no because I didn't actually ring up I just filled the form out as I thought I should and thought let's see what comes back and they didn't come back so I thought it must be all right. I think that is part of the problem, you don't get any feedback from them so you just take it that no news is good news, whereas the reality is they could probably tell you quite a lot. (L8)

It almost feels like a bit of a one way system, at the moment. We don't get much comment back from them about what we are doing and I think that would be of value to be honest. (R3).

Few respondents referred to the financial monitoring forms. Where they did, it was to comment on the difficulties of completing financial spreadsheets at different times of the year for different funders. One project manager, reporting difficulties in delivering the quarterly financial returns, protested: "*I am not an accountant, I'm a teacher*" (L4), and commented that greater support should have been offered by NFPI/PwC.

Developing materials

Only a small number of projects intended to develop materials as part of their provision. The limited time available might have been a factor in this decision. The two projects which did intend to do so were both established prior to the Parenting Fund and, therefore, had both ideas and resources already in place.

A third project which had developed its manual at a very early stage in the funding period had, similarly, had the benefit of previous involvement in the particular topic the project was addressing. This meant that they were in a strong position to market their materials, which included a pack for parents.

Well the manuals, the course itself is complete and we can now sell the course if we wanted to or we could deliver the course on a small scale. ... I think it's almost definite we are going to run some training for Sure Start workers and they will then fund that themselves, they will put on their own crèches and things like that and buy the manuals. (L8)

Disseminating findings and examples of promising practice

Few project managers stated that they had specific intentions or had identified means of disseminating information from their projects. Again, it is likely that the short timescale of funding meant that resources were concentrated on project delivery. Those who did refer to dissemination were from local projects belonging to larger, national organisations which could draw on expertise and utilise existing networks and outlets to inform others of their work. Project L12, for example, was part of a national service which had established local projects in a number of areas and ran open days to which they invited local stakeholders. The purpose of these was to see what impact the project could have on the local area and how links between services could be made.

Strategic influence

Project managers were asked whether their project had any impact on local strategic decision-making. One manager believed that having the Parenting Fund grant increased interest in the project at a strategic level, but, like most others, thought that it was too soon for the project to have had any real impact. However, most managers held out hope that this would happen in the future, once the project had become better established, and most had a pro-active approach to making this happen.

Not at the moment, but again we would hope that's where we're going to go with it in the next 10-12 months. (L12)

... this is early days [but] we managed to get the steering group together - which I think was a great achievement - based upon good links with social services. ... And hopefully, once again, as it's demonstrated and we learn more about what the parents' needs are and once we've got more of a body of information from that we hope that it will impact strategically so that we will have a continuation of effort working with parents. (L3)

For one project, it was felt that there might be a strategic influence in the future, but this would come about fortuitously rather than intentionally.

I am not sure, but (Area D) itself is going down the route of manualised courses with accreditation. It is something that fits in with the ethos in a sense, but impact - I am not sure, I can't tell you for a while. (L8)

One manager felt that the project was able to exert some indirect influence on local strategic decisions by having people with a degree of authority on their committee; representatives from the PCT and social services, and a county and district councillor.

The aim of one of the funded projects was to further relationships and develop partnerships with statutory agencies and voluntary organisations so that they became an integral part of mainstream delivery (L12), while two others (L7 and L10) specifically looked to develop a co-ordinated and strategic approach to provision and a strengthening of the sector infrastructure in their respective areas. Time seemed to be the factor here: projects that were already seeing evidence of a more strategic influence were those which had been in existence prior to the Parenting Fund grants becoming available and were well established in the community. One had had their courses incorporated into a professional development programme, while another had provided intensive training for the local police and, additionally, had influenced the new local arrangements for children and families. This was due to their groundwork with the parents, which had led to their writing the development plan and some of the family support package being delivered at a children's centre. The project manager felt that they had "*had a real say in a very local way*" and also had a greater reach through being seen as a model of good practice across the whole city.

5.1.6. Anticipated outcomes

Service managers were very optimistic about the impact their intervention would have on families, the wider community and other services.

Families

Most frequently mentioned was the direct impact on parents, in some cases leading to an indirect impact on children. It was felt that parents would benefit primarily by having their self-esteem and confidence raised, and, for those parenting in difficult circumstances, it would prevent parental stress from becoming a crisis. They would then be able to be more effective as parents. One project expected not only to improve parents' skills but also to effect a change in their attitude towards parenting. The anticipated results would be an increase in their mental health, because they would be able to take more pleasure from being with their children, and an overall improvement in parent-child and family relationships. This, in turn, would bring about an improvement in the well-being, welfare and behaviour of the children which could lead to improved socialisation and educational ability. In some cases, parents would also benefit by learning which interventions they could access and how to manage their relationship with the professionals involved with their child, thereby improving the service they received.

Community

Two managers envisaged that improvements in parenting would bring wider - and more long-term - benefits for the community through a reduction in anti-social behaviour and level of crime committed by young people. Others who were working with BME, refugee and asylum-seeking parents considered that their project would reduce the social isolation of these families and that this would lead to improved social development and integration.

One of things that we try and encourage as well is that local people who actually develop whatever they develop are taking on a support role to other local people.
(L1)

In one instance, they foresaw the people currently described as 'community problems' being turned into community leaders.

Service provision

Several project managers predicted a positive impact on both their own and other services through a rise in the number of referrals, with increased supply creating increased demand. However, one manager thought the reverse might be true, and that the preventative nature of their service might result in fewer referrals to statutory services for more targeted intervention.

Where professionals were involved in training, it was felt that this, alongside more joint working, would strengthen the local infrastructure.

... part of the programme was to work with foster carers and we're doing that, but there have been other professionals like people from a health visitors team and behaviour improvement team, youth offending teams, they've all been on the programme and we're developing a very good infrastructure altogether in [Area D] now. (L7)

Other services' awareness of the Parenting Fund and the funded projects

5.1.7. Information from the first mapping

To determine how widely the Parenting Fund was publicised within each area, we asked respondents in our first round of mapping whether they had heard of it, and if so, whether they had considered applying for funding. It is worthy of note that these interviews with service providers took place in the relatively early stages of the Parenting Fund grants being distributed and prior to interviews with project managers and workshops with stakeholders. As can be seen in Table 5.2, only 29 of the 60 respondents had heard of the Parenting Fund prior to being contacted by the researchers. Area D had the highest number of respondents aware of the Fund (n = 7) while Area A had the lowest (n = 2). None had seen an advertisement for the Fund, and relatively few had seen a flyer or website where it was mentioned. At least one respondent in each area had attended an 'information event'. While most were unable to specify precisely what this was, two mentioned it was an NFPI-run event (and, therefore, either an initial meeting prior to the allocation of funding, or a local workshop held once the grants had been awarded). The majority of respondents reported hearing of the Fund through other means, including through colleagues, both within their own organisation and in other settings, including Sure Start centres.

Table 5-2: Awareness of the Parenting Fund

	Heard of Parenting Fund	Flyer	Website	Information event	Other
Area A (n = 8)	2	1	0	1	0
Area B (n = 9)	4	2	0	1	1
Area C (n = 11)	6	0	1	1	4
Area D (n = 11)	7	0	1	2	4
Area E (n = 11)	5	0	1	1	3
Area F (n = 10)	5	1	0	1	3
Totals (n = 60)	29	4	3	8	15

Only half of those who had heard of the Parenting Fund had considered applying for funding, the majority were workers in statutory organisations who were aware that they would not have been eligible for funding. However, among those eligible to apply, the narrow timeframe for applications and their own limited resources were mentioned by several respondents as factors which prevented them from preparing an application.

Respondents were also asked whether they knew of any projects in their area which had been awarded a Parenting Fund grant. The majority (72%) of those interviewed had not heard of any. When this information is broken down by area (see Table 5.3), it can be seen that respondents in Area A had the lowest awareness of funded projects while those in Area B had the highest.

Table 5-3: Awareness of local projects with a Parenting Fund grant

	No. of respondents who knew of any funded projects
Area A (n = 8)	1
Area B (n = 9)	4
Area C (n = 11)	2
Area D (n = 11)	4
Area E (n = 11)	4
Area F (n = 10)	2

5.1.8. Information from projects’ stakeholders

Area F stakeholders had no knowledge of either the Parenting Fund or services funded by it. Many other stakeholders had heard of the Parenting Fund and knew it was for support for the voluntary sector.

When projects’ stakeholders were asked to recall where they had heard about the Fund they gave a variety of responses including:

- The Parenting Fund website (www.parentingfund.org)
- Identified when looking for sources of funding
- Applied for Parenting Fund monies
- Through joint work with other agencies (including funded projects)
- Through presentations given at local forum or network meetings.

Although many projects’ stakeholders had undertaken work with the funded projects, this did not necessarily translate into an awareness of the Fund, its aims and objectives. There was limited understanding of what the Fund was set up to achieve and few respondents were able to offer more than a vague explanation of its aims, beyond offering support to parents, or about opportunities to meet with the funded services.

All the Parenting Fund to me is doing, or should be doing, is offering generic support to people who are, parents who've taken on a really quite difficult role.
(Workshop participant in Area E)

I've still got that lack of knowledge on what the Parenting Fund has, has funded in [Area A], let alone questions about criteria and changing criteria. (Workshop participant in Area A)

6. CHAPTER 6: MAJOR PROJECTS

Five of the 40 major projects with a national focus and three of the 16 with a regional focus were selected for the evaluation.⁸

Existing networks and fora

For the major projects, information from sources other than project managers was confined to that obtained from the projects' stakeholders. As already noted, two of the five national project managers and one of the regional ones did not supply any information about stakeholders. Information, therefore, is limited to that obtained from interviews with stakeholders of four projects (three major and one regional) and from participants at one regional workshop.

All stakeholders of the national projects attended meetings with, undertook joint work with, or received referrals from, the national projects in our sample. Networking opportunities were found to be useful for developing stronger relationships with other services and encouraging joint working. Where services had developed formal links with one another, this tended to be as a result of networking undertaken by pro-active individuals. Close contact, either through networking or informal / formal joint work, could also have a positive impact at both strategic and service delivery levels. For example, networking and attendance at meetings could serve as an opportunity to publicise the service to potential referrers, raising awareness about appropriate referrals and what capacity the service had to accept new referrals. Close relationships could also lead to more effective information-sharing and campaigning opportunities between services, thereby reducing the duplication of effort among organisations which had limited resources to engage in such work. In addition to this, projects' stakeholders perceived that, through developing links with the funded projects, they had gained access to research findings and training opportunities, which had broadened their awareness of the specific needs of particular client groups and helped strengthen the parenting infrastructure.

Stakeholders for the regional funded projects were aware of the selected projects through joint working, and through attending meetings which the funded projects either hosted or attended. One of the regional projects had a concentrated geographical presence and so had opportunities to develop stronger links with a variety of local services. Stakeholders working within a specific disability field believed that practitioners within this sector were particularly good at working cooperatively and sharing information. Joint working was seen as particularly useful for reducing the duplication of provision within specialised sectors and, therefore, saving valuable resources. Both joint work and networking were found to be important for sharing information and forming new ideas for service delivery, as well as for publicising a service's own work. Networking and fora attendance also provided services with a voice with which to influence strategic decisions.

The funded projects

6.1.1. Aims

As with the local project managers, respondents were certain that their project fitted ideally with the aims of the Parenting Fund and, with one exception, consequently chose a specific aim of the Fund which coincided with their own project's aim. Two managers described the aims in terms of capacity building, and three as meeting the needs of specific groups of

⁸ Based on the original figure of 135 funded projects. The Parenting Fund also refers to 133 or 134 projects as there was some variation in the number of grants accepted after they had been awarded,

parents. Another considered it to be about developing new support services with a regional focus, while one other stressed that it was about starting, but not sustaining, new services.

That capacity building aspect of the Fund to us was very important. It enables us to do something, demonstrate that it works ... and then share that information with others. (R1)

My understanding was that it wasn't just about continuing existing practice it was about [something] new, and something that would have - that was one of the difficulties for us - it had to have a regional focus, it had to be something that could be rolled out regionally. (R3)

It seems to us that the Parenting Fund objectives are very much around providing support and developing better practice, particularly to support families from hard-to-reach groups. Economic groups, groups who are secluded from mainstream support, either because they don't know how to access the support or because the support isn't there for them to access. (N4)

However, one manager of a national service articulated the aims of the Fund in terms of wider Government policy on children and families:

I mean basically the Government's objectives around, obviously the five outcomes [of ECM] ... So you know, obviously it's tied in with the Government's objectives, but what is encouraging about it is the fact that it recognised the importance of the family in doing that as opposed to seeing children outside of the family environment. (N2)

The theoretical basis

For the majority of project managers, the underlying theory behind their service provision was that children benefit when their parents receive support, but either parents do not readily access generic support or the appropriate support is not there for them to access.

The assumption is that you can change outcomes for children for the better if you support and educate their parents, and to be able to support and educate parents, you have to have properly trained parent educators. (N3)

One manager had noted that parents' attendance at parenting courses was often sparse or intermittent and felt that one way to reach them would be to provide web-based materials which they could access at times to suit themselves.

So we thought 'Well if it was a little bit more flexible then parents might be able to access it'. And we also wanted to build on the idea that everything is web-based now and we have got, like, the technology and we need to learn to live with it. (R3)

Parents of children with disabilities of many kinds had traditionally been poorly served with support, and several of the major projects were attempting to redress the balance in various ways. For one regional project this was predominantly about making parents aware of the range of services available to them, which varied greatly from one local authority to the next within the region.

Those assumptions were that there was a need for support, there was a need for information, there was a need for advice, and there was a need for signposting or enabling people to plug into what was already available. Some of it is about providing new services, but a lot of it is about 'let's make the services that are already there relevant to you'. (R1)

Other projects focused on establishing a service which was relevant to the needs either of parents who belonged to a minority group, and who frequently felt stigmatised by mainstream provision, or of parents of children with a particular disability.

I think one of the basic assumptions which has been shown by the audit is that generally speaking, parents of [these] children won't be accessing mainstream provisions around parenting. ... There was a real need for an organisation that understood the needs of parents of [these] children to provide that kind of parenting support when they wouldn't be able to get it from anywhere else. (N4)

Finally, one project manager saw the underlying assumptions in much broader terms, as part of Government policy and legislation to safeguard children:

Well it's basically, I mean it's the Children's [sic] Act, so it's legislation, it's the body of research and it's the rationale of the assessment framework. (N2)

6.1.2. Projects' activities

Two of the major projects which had found themselves with a major discrepancy between the amount of grant they had requested and the amount they had received had had to cut the service and outputs they had planned.

Providing new services for under-represented groups

Six of the eight selected major projects had a specific focus on groups of parents traditionally unwilling to access generic services and for whom few or no services geared to their specific needs existed. These included fathers in particularly difficult circumstances, parents of children with a disability and teenage parents. One of the two other, more generic, services (N3) had had to forego plans to support the less well-served groups, when it received only half of the funding requested.

Staffing, training and skills development of the workforce

Major projects reported having relatively few full-time staff funded exclusively with Parenting Fund money. Instead, they tended to rely on using existing staff based within the organisation to undertake the work as part of their job. In many cases, senior staff were funded partially by the Parenting Fund grant and undertook more of a co-ordinating role than those funded within local projects. While several of the projects had attempted to recruit one or two members of staff to work on the funded projects, it appeared that they had significant difficulties with recruitment, and it was unclear whether any permanent staff were actually employed. Difficulties attracting suitable staff were identical to those experienced by the local projects, that is, the short-term nature of funding and, therefore, the length of contracts being offered. Short-staffing, as a result of limited funding or recruitment difficulties, did impact upon the ability of services to undertake the funded work, especially when other staff were sick or on leave. One of the projects experiencing recruitment difficulties resorted to hiring external consultants on temporary contracts to carry out the work.

However, this was not the situation for one of the regional project managers who found that a fairly broad job description attracted the kind of people he wanted to employ.

[Recruitment was] absolutely amazingly easy. ... Because it was such an attractive-looking job. ... It was quite clear that they had to have had some experience working with children, but it wasn't incredibly prescriptive in that they were not required to have a particular qualification.

Int: *With children rather than parents?*

Yes, because we thought that - if you're working with children, you would automatically have had to have worked with parents. If we'd narrowed it down to 'must have had experience working with parents and supporting parents', I think what we'd have got - we'd have probably got a load of disaffected social workers who are fed up working in children's teams. ... Yes. they've all stayed and I think they all absolutely love it. (R1)

Three of the five national projects also used volunteers, either in a research capacity or in delivering a service. Apart from one of the projects which had specialist, professional volunteers supporting clients, volunteers tended to be recruited and trained to act in a supporting role to project workers.

As few, if any, new staff were recruited by the national funded projects, the staff carrying out the work tended to be experienced in the sector within which their organisation operated. Two services which did not provide details of training needs reported that staff were highly experienced in their fields. Where staff did require training, this was often around administration skills, child protection or evaluation methods. One service, which did not have a great deal of experience with parenting prior to obtaining the grant, sent several of its staff on the 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities' parenting training run by the Race Equality Unit. This project, as well as another, also went on to provide training to a number of facilitators who would themselves then provide training to parents and practitioners.

Two regional projects⁹ reported having a small number of full-time staff (between one and three) funded by the Parenting Fund grant. Neither project reported any difficulties recruiting suitable staff. Project R2 reported encountering a staffing problem in one of their services when a key staff member left, and the time taken to recruit and train a new member of staff meant that the service was unable to engage in work throughout the county for almost a year.

Where specialist training was deemed necessary, all frontline paid staff and volunteers had received this. For project R2, this training had taken longer than had been originally anticipated and had compounded the difficulties in recruitment referred to above. The manager of project R1 highlighted the importance of ongoing support for volunteers working with parents and had established links with other organisations to facilitate this. The R1 manager also reported a need for greater numbers of support staff, but the lack of funding for recruitment to take place made this difficult.

Training featured in the delivery plans of one regional and three national projects. One provided both training and service delivery to parents of children with behavioural difficulties, while another offered training programmes to other organisations to raise awareness of the issues with which this project dealt. Two national projects which had not received the amount of funding requested had had to reduce or remove an element of training from their original

⁹ Only two regional projects provided details of staffing levels.

plans. One had had to abandon its intention to recruit and train peer researchers, and the other, which was established with the explicit remit of providing a training course for professionals to work with parents, was unable to afford to train some trainers to deliver part of their work designed for the harder-to-reach parents.

Networking

None of the three regional funded projects had attended the workshop for major projects run by NFPI in London, either because they were unable to do so or because (they thought) they had not received an invitation. However, all except one of the national ones had sent a representative. While there was limited information reported on the value of the workshop, some respondents felt that it was useful in terms of networking with other funded projects, identifying local and national policy issues requiring to be addressed, and publicising the work they were undertaking.

As a result of receiving the Parenting Fund grants, many of the national projects reported developing substantial new links with other statutory and voluntary organisations to inform or deliver their work. One of these projects went on to undertake formalised joint working with a variety of statutory services across a number of areas.

Two of the national projects undertook work funded by the Parenting Fund in conjunction with another organisation. While this had benefits in terms of each organisation delivering an aspect of work in which it specialised, it also resulted in joint difficulties when one or other of the organisations experienced problems (for example, in recruitment).

Major projects were less likely than local ones to be involved in general parenting-related fora, but, rather, attended groups and conferences which had a greater national strategic focus. The main advantages of having good links with other services in this way tended to be associated with promoting the service itself and in influencing strategic decisions. Network involvement also led to a greater awareness of forthcoming funding opportunities, which, when discussed within a meeting, resulted in more of a consolidated approach to service provision and, therefore, better co-ordination of services. Lastly, involvement in networks and fora in which strategic level discussions occurred were felt to serve as excellent opportunities to influence both service delivery and government policies.

While there appeared to be a number of benefits from engaging in joint work and networking, one of the smaller national organisations found that a lack of capacity meant that it was difficult to engage in such relationships with other services. As with the local projects, links were perceived as important in the development of services, but it was easier for larger organisations with larger pots of money to harness resources to make appropriate links. Several respondents mentioned how important networking was seen to be within their organisations, which served to sanction their attendance at such events. The relevance of fora and networks was highlighted by several other services as important in determining their attendance. Nevertheless, one national service, working with a minority client group, initially reported difficulties developing partnerships or in finding appropriate networks for it to feed into because it perceived a lack of awareness, both among other organisations and the parenting support world generally, of the needs of its clients. Following receipt of the Parenting Fund grant, this service subsequently developed good links with a number of local and national services, and this served to increase awareness and understanding of their particular clients' needs.

All three regional projects had developed a network of links and partnerships with other agencies in the voluntary and statutory sector. While two had no formal partnerships or contracts, they both undertook joint work with other organisations. This tended to be mostly through cross-referring where applicable. However, one project (R3) had developed significant links with other organisations which were able to support them in their funded work. Several of these links were developed following the award of Parenting Fund monies, including one with another funded project.

The three projects had developed strong links with a number of voluntary and statutory services in their regions, which led to greater access to, and effective signposting of, clients and a more widespread understanding of their work. One regional development manager (R1) had conducted a mapping exercise prior to the launch of the service, and had also run a formal launch event for parents in the region to publicise their service. As a result of this, they made useful contacts with local authorities and voluntary services at an early stage. This was seen to be extremely beneficial for encouraging effective referrals to the service. Project managers and workers attended a relatively small number of network meetings, seemingly those directly relevant to their work. These were found to be very useful for identifying funding opportunities and for instigating joint working opportunities.

Effective networking was highlighted by all the regional project managers as something which needed addressing. While networking was seen as vital for sharing information, especially about funding and preventing the duplication of provision, managers of regional projects, like those of local services, recognised that networking could be time-consuming and could reduce time spent delivering a service. The manager of R3 believed that networking efforts were themselves being duplicated, and suggested that a website could be developed and a virtual network established to reduce the competing demands of attending various groups.

Providing an evidence base

Each project manager reported undertaking some form of evaluation to monitor and assess their work. In all projects this was done internally using quantitative monitoring data and gaining qualitative feedback from users through a variety of methods including focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires to users. This was sometimes done in a formalised pre-/post-intervention format to identify measurable outcomes, though in others it was simply a process of gaining user feedback. In two national and two regional projects this was to gain formative feedback on the developing work and it led to changes in service delivery where appropriate. In the remaining projects, it was for summative purposes which, in the case of one regional project, was specifically to support future funding bids. One regional and three national project managers reported commissioning formal evaluations of their work from external agencies or individuals (one was established on an existing service prior to the Parenting Fund grant being received). In one of the national projects, the reduction in the size of the grant awarded had resulted in the scope of the evaluation being reduced.

Overall, milestone monitoring forms were thought to be an accurate and well-designed tool to record progress, if a little time consuming to complete. Only one national project manager reported difficulty completing these, and that was owing to the lack of space allocated within which to write narrative. Another commented on the fact that other funders' forms might be preferable.

They [lottery forms] are more sensible because they give you a chance to talk, not just to fill in the boxes, and the budget is actually laid out in detail so that it's like an Excel spreadsheet, so you're actually filling in information that's relevant to your budget lines as opposed to total spend. ... Two little boxes. ... [give an accurate picture] if you can work your way through the boxes and sort out all the ticks and tiny comments, but I don't think it gives a flavour of the work. (N4)

The manager of R1 preferred the attitude of some funders who demanded very little in the way of accountability, but, nevertheless, found the Parenting Fund forms easier to complete than those for some other bodies, such as the European Social Fund.

I'm always amazed at the hoops that you've got to go through, because in some cases it is literally a case of 'we want to do this particular piece of work and it costs that much money' and they say 'there's a cheque, get on with it, let us know how you've done at the end of it.' ... And yet others, some LSC funding and European Social Fund funding - it drives you absolutely mad. The amount of record-keeping on an ESF application or an ESF project is absolutely mind-numbing. If it was extended to the Parenting Fund you'd be having to complete an individual ESF short records form for every person that you talk to. So in comparison with an ESF application, it's a doddle. In comparison with some, it's very onerous. (R1)

Another manager of a regional project (R3) did raise concerns over the ability of the monitoring to communicate effectively the work being undertaken. This was primarily as a result of using Excel as the reporting package. It was thought that the milestone reporting was too broad and, therefore, became reliant on the experience of the person receiving it to interpret it correctly. As with the local project managers, it was felt that feedback from NFPI would have helped to assuage these feelings of doubt.

Developing materials

The development of materials was a key component in the delivery plans of all eight selected major projects. One project manager reported having to re-consider the production of materials because of a reduction in funding, and had already, at an early stage, decided against producing a DVD for parents which had been planned. All others, however, intended to produce a range of materials including a directory of services for parents of children with a disability, information sheets and booklets for parents, carers and professionals, advertising posters, and a parenting resources catalogue. Two projects had plans to produce web-based materials for parents.

Disseminating findings and examples of promising practice

Project information gave very little indication of explicit plans for dissemination, other than from one project which intended to run parenting information seminars. It is possible that the sharing of practice and findings from the projects was implicit in project plans, especially those where capacity building was among their aims. Indeed, some projects referred to their dissemination activities in the milestone reports, though this was predominantly in connection with publicising the project rather than its results.

Funding cuts obliged one project manager to abandon the dissemination of planned training and to postpone a scheduled conference to a later date.

Strategic influence

Only one manager felt that some strategic influence had already been achieved by the organisation's involvement with the relevant Government body: "*When thinking is being done about young women and young women with children we are more likely to be around the table now*" (project N5). At the same time, their representation on other strategic fora had helped in terms of getting funding from this body.

Other managers were slightly tentative in their claims about any strategic influence at a relatively early stage in their project development, though one felt that a recent change in policy had given their project more impact. One felt that the uncertainty of funding made strategic planning very difficult.

It's very important to us to find out who actually is going to be making the decisions long-term about sources of finance, and what are the criteria for that, so to that extent it's inextricably linked with strategy in a negative way. (N3)

One project manager explained that strategic influence can be effected indirectly.

I'd say that it's had an impact on the attitudes of some professionals who are working in the field, and that may well be feeding into strategic decision-making, and I also think that when we start disseminating some of the information, that might have an impact as well. And I say that from the point of view of the experiences of the service over in Z where I think some of the findings of work that they've done - particularly with some of the stuff on people from minority ethnic groups - that stuff there has probably ... had an effect on strategic planning in some local authorities. But even if it just changes the way that some people think, and then that feeds into strategic planning, that's probably important. (R1)

6.1.3. Intended outcomes

Managers of major projects were more likely than those of local projects to expect some far-reaching and systemic changes to occur as a result of what they were doing. For example, a project manager who placed her project in the family policy context looked to improve the situation of children and their fathers by exerting some influence on how the system operated.

We would certainly expect clear recommendations to policymakers and practitioners and to families actually about engaging fathers more effectively in preparing the decisions about their children. ... [Longer term] the objective should be a significant shift in policy and practice in how fathers are being engaged that could be clearly evaluated. (N2)

Another manager also anticipated that his project would be instrumental in bringing about changes in practice for parents of children with a disability.

I think that long term, if we ran this for 5 years, I think that we'd see much better liaison between parents and professionals. ... Professionals understanding a bit more about what the needs of the parents are. ... and I think also that this thing about sharing what works, what doesn't work, I think will feed into service development quite well, and that's voluntary and statutory. (R1)

Other managers saw their outcomes more narrowly focused in the short-term on actual delivery - reaching specific groups or larger numbers of parents - but still expected a greater impact in the long term. This might be an attitude change towards parents in a minority group or an acceptance of integrating disabled children and their parents into mainstream service provision.

The outcome will be that there will be 80+ highly-qualified parenting facilitators or parent-educators in national circulation ... Training is a gift transaction to the next generation of parent-educators because it's training teachers. (N3)

I think there are two elements. It's about in terms of long-term impact, it's about parents of deaf children parenting their children in a way that exemplifies better practice if you like, so that they are familiar with that; and then around parents of deaf children being able to access local provision. I think this is quite a challenge; I don't think we should underestimate the challenge of trying to make mainstream provision accessible. (N4)

Other services' awareness of the Parenting Fund and the funded projects

Stakeholders for one of the national services had not heard of the Parenting Fund. However, stakeholders for the other two had a reasonably high level of awareness of the Fund and its aims. This had been developed predominantly through contact with the funded project, but also through searching for services and funding online. One project's stakeholder had applied for Round One funding but had been unsuccessful. Stakeholders were broadly positive about the Parenting Fund and its perceived impact on parenting-related provision. There was a general feeling that the money and support provided to funded projects was beneficial as it promoted both research and good practice around parenting provision. However, projects' stakeholders were quick to qualify these points with the fact that the Parenting Fund only helped to support these projects, and, therefore, to promote these goals, in the short-term. This was seen to be a severely limiting factor of the Fund.

The main impact of the funded projects on their stakeholders appeared to be in the area of service development, both strategically and on the ground. Two projects were considered to have increased stakeholders' awareness of the needs and skills in dealing with specific client groups, through the provision of training or the development of resources. One of the projects had developed strong relationships with several of its stakeholders, improving each of their networks, increasing campaigning opportunities, and raising service profiles. Another project was mainly valued as being a source of support and referrals to the stakeholders.

For the two regional projects for which there was information, stakeholders' knowledge of the Parenting Fund varied considerably. Those for R1 had limited awareness of the Parenting Fund or the funded projects, other than the one with which they were working. Some of those for R2, on the other hand, showed a much greater awareness. Half of them had been involved in bidding for Parenting Fund grants during Round One and knew of the other funded projects. They, nevertheless, demonstrated only a limited awareness of the Fund's actual aims. One remarked: "*It's money, at the end of the day*". The remaining stakeholders of project R2 had very little knowledge of the Fund. In general, projects' stakeholders felt the Parenting Fund grants had the potential to aid multi-agency working and increase support to parents, and, thereby, to benefit children, albeit with no guarantee of sustainability.

7. STRAND B OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

Extent to which the funded projects achieved their aims

Milestone monitoring information and final reports, where available, were analysed to ascertain whether projects had been able to meet their stated aims. It is clear from the milestone reports that many projects suffered initial delays and further setbacks along the route, yet the vast majority succeeded in achieving at least most of what they intended.

7.1.1. Major projects

During the period of funding, all of the eight selected major projects reported problems of some kind which affected their ability to deliver the service as they had intended. These were:

- Initial funding cuts
- Delays in notification and receipt of funding
- Problems with staff recruitment, owing to delays in receipt of the funding or inability to recruit suitable staff
- Problems recruiting volunteers
- Inadequate staffing levels leading to difficulties during staff absences
- Unanticipated transport problems / costs
- Difficulty contacting or engaging users
- Level of user need/support higher than expected
- Technical difficulties
- Office re-location.

Some of these problems were sufficiently great to require revisions to be made to the milestones and aspects of delivery, but the majority of projects succeeded without making significant changes to their plans.

Final reports from the managers were the only source of knowledge of whether they had brought their projects to a successful conclusion. However, only four of the five national reports and two of the three regional ones were received. In addition, reports for two of the five national projects and one of the two regional ones selected by the DfES for inclusion in the study were received.

Of the six national projects, all managers felt that they had fully met most of their objectives and three managers reported exceeding at least one of them. Four of the six had had only partial success in meeting one objective. None had failed to meet any.

Two of the projects (N1 and N4) reported being highly successful in meeting their stated aims. Both worked with under-represented groups, with limited existing provision in place, and in policy or practice contexts which had recently changed. Both succeeded in increasing the provision offered to parents and in strengthening the sector's infrastructure through the

delivery of training and production of resources. Neither had any formal partnerships and both attended fora very selectively.

Another project (N5), originally focused on both service delivery and evaluation, appeared to have been drawn away from evaluation and more towards delivery. It reported considerable successes in increasing capacity of its services, reaching more elusive user groups, and strengthening networks with partner organisations. This was despite experiencing a number of difficulties including insufficient staffing, project relocation, transportation difficulties, and fluctuating user attendance.

The fourth project (N2) focused on researching barriers in engaging one of the Parenting Fund's identified priority groups in services. Despite difficulties in the recruitment of staff, a reduction in funding, and the slow development of work with partner agencies, the project was successful in developing sector knowledge through effective research and the dissemination of findings to parents and practitioners.

The remaining project (N3), for which there is no information, had not received the full amount of grant requested and had experienced other difficulties, which resulted in alterations to the planned work.

The regional projects encountered the same type of difficulties as the national ones, in particular, reductions in grants, late starts, delays in recruiting staff, unanticipated transport problems, and office re-location. One project had amended one of its milestones.

From the three final reports of regional projects (which included one from the DfES sample), it appeared that they had fared slightly less well than the national ones. All three had fully met at least one objective but they had all only partially met at least two. One had failed to meet two of its five objectives.

Of the three projects in the sample, one (R1) had been successful in developing an integrated model of working with their user group, though delays in the start of the project and difficulties in the recruitment, training, and retention of staff had reduced their ability to work with the number of users they had anticipated. However, a significant amount of influencing and capacity building had been undertaken through multi-agency training and dissemination of materials. Despite a favourable independent evaluation, the project had concerns over funding for a number of its services. Furthermore, it had had difficulty attributing changes in children's behaviour to its work as the parents were often receiving other services at the same time.

The second project had, likewise, suffered from initial delays which had meant it was unable to meet the number of parents it intended to target, and was unlikely to do so for about another year. Developing the intended service had been more of a challenge than anticipated, partly as a result of not receiving enough practical guidance. There were concerns about future funding as the project had not been completed. The organisation itself had benefited from receiving the Parenting Fund grant, in terms of staff development and developing links with larger organisations who could offer further support and guidance with developing the service.

Only milestone monitoring information was available for project R3 but it appeared to have been meeting the majority of targets it had set itself, in terms of delivering a service to parents, developing materials, and increasing sector awareness. It reported developing stronger links with statutory services to increase parents' awareness of the services it provided.

7.1.2. Local projects

Several local projects experienced a range of difficulties in establishing and running their services. Chief among these were issues of late notification and receipt of the grant, which had delayed recruitment and, therefore, the start of the service. In the two rural areas, difficulties with poor or costly transport had also impeded some aspects of service delivery, and in one project, childcare costs had been an unexpected drain on resources.

Other issues which appeared to be relevant only to local projects were service overload and difficulties in engaging stakeholders and parents. Three projects commented that their service had become stretched by more users and potential users than they had envisaged. In one case this was because several approaches had been made to involve BME communities, which had resulted in bursts of referrals, and in another it was caused by the withdrawal of support to users by the relevant statutory organisation. One project encountered difficulties in engaging some steering group members from the statutory sector and in receiving essential documentation from statutory agencies. A third problem lay in recruiting parents to run proposed drop-in sessions, which had not resulted in any success. Final reports for seven (out of a potential 15) local projects were received, which included three of those selected by the DfES. Another of the selected projects submitted a report not in the standard format, which meant that it was not subject to the same analysis as the other reports.

Four of the seven projects had exceeded at least one of their objectives, and in one case, three out of four set objectives had been exceeded. All had fully met at least one of their objectives, and one project had fully achieved all four that it had set. Partial success of one objective occurred in three instances. There were no reports of any set tasks not having been achieved. In this sense, the local projects for which we have information performed well in realising their aims.

One of the projects in Area A provided a final report. This outlined the array of work undertaken in consulting with, and providing events for, parents (including those in specific groups). The project appeared to have been very successful in empowering both community support services and parents themselves to develop support mechanisms. This success led to the subsequent development and funding of other support services and a network of parenting-related support groups. The project also widely disseminated publicity and publications in formats appropriate for parents in their area. The project had not initially been successful in reaching the targeted BME group, but workers had learned from this experience that contact was most effectively made through personal contact and not through other organisations or general approaches.

In Area B, both projects were primarily focused on delivering work with parents. One was also engaged in awareness-raising among practitioners in the local authority and the other trained volunteers to deliver their service. Both the training and awareness-raising amongst practitioners and volunteers had been successful and could be seen to be strengthening local infrastructure. In the final reports, both projects reported successfully meeting their objectives. The only one which was not met was in a service which had not attracted fathers to meetings in the numbers they would have liked.

One project from Area F submitted a final report which indicated considerable success in meeting or exceeding objectives, which included awareness-raising about the difficulties faced by parents of children with a disability. To some extent, the project was a victim of its own success in the training of a number of volunteer befrienders, who had rapidly moved on to further education or full-time employment. A small number of fathers had also accessed the service, which was viewed as a considerable success.

A final report (albeit not in the standard format) from one project in Area D was received. It had been highly successful in training practitioners within the local authority to deliver a new programme of work to parents. Their successful engagement of institutions and practitioners in the local authority had led to the training programme being mainstreamed in the Children's Services Integrated Training Programme. This work could be said to have significantly strengthened parenting-support infrastructure within the authority through the wide transmission of skills. It should be noted, however, that the project was not established with the Parenting Fund grant but had been running in the area for some time before it received the grant.

No final reports were received from Area E.

Two out of the three DfES projects had reportedly been very successful in meeting or exceeding their objectives. Both had worked with a relatively small number of high-need families and had found that they required longer and more intensive interventions to help them. Both felt that they had been successful in making links with other local agencies, primarily to raise awareness of the issues. The third service had met one of its objectives but only partly met the other. However, the partial success appeared to be a result of having been rather ambitious in the number of parents from BME groups who were expected to benefit from the service and then receiving funding which required the workshops to be carried out in an area with relatively few BME groups.

Extent to which the funded projects contributed to the Parenting Fund objectives

Despite the reported obstacles which the funded projects encountered in delays and under-funding, it would seem that they were, on the whole, able to make significant contributions to those objectives of the Parenting Fund which concerned their own delivery. In some cases, projects were able to undertake tasks which they had earlier felt would have to be abandoned. Project N2, for example, had stated in an early milestone report that they would not be training peer researchers as planned, but, according to their final report, they had succeeded in doing so.

However, in terms of influencing what was happening in the 18 local areas, the projects had had more limited success. The second mapping exercise carried out in July 2006, towards the end of the first funding period, indicated that, although some changes had occurred since the first mapping had taken place, there had not been a major or uniform shift in the impact of the Parenting Fund in the local areas.

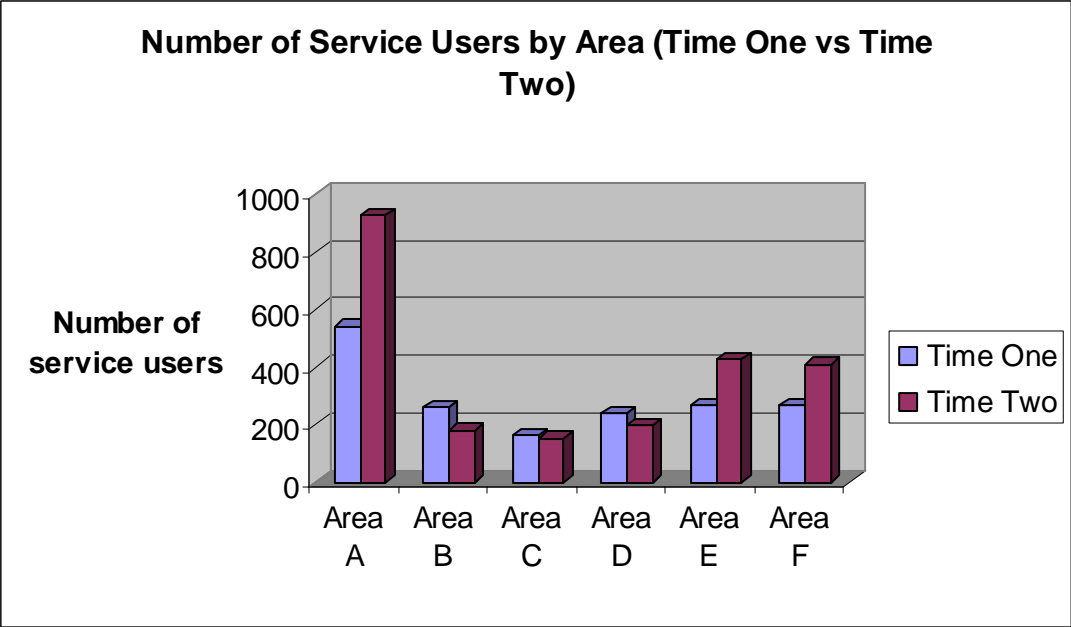
7.1.3. Increasing parenting provision generally

It is clear from the final reports that more services for parents had been created or extended as a result of the Parenting Fund grants and that many parents had accessed these services. Although some project managers felt they might initially have over-estimated the number of users they would see, nevertheless, all except one did reach parents and, in some cases - both major and local projects - the number involved with the service was large. R2 reported a client base of over 650 families and one of the DfES local projects stated that 791 parents / carers and 1546 children had benefited from their service.

However, what is less clear is the extent to which this had a knock-on effect on other services operating in the area, either by increasing the number of users of the services as a result of their receiving more referrals from the funded projects, or by decreasing the number because potential users were, instead, accessing one of the funded services. As noted in Chapter 7, respondents were of the opinion that either, or both, of these scenarios could, and did, happen. Although not using strictly comparable data, the mapping exercises seem to

support this. As Figure 1 below shows, non-funded services in three areas had seen an increase in service users in the time between the two mapping exercises, and in the case of Area A, this had been a substantial increase. The non-funded services in the three other areas had witnessed an overall, albeit slight, decrease.

Figure 1: Number of service users by area



7.1.4. Increasing provision for and access by specific groups of parents

One of the objectives of the Parenting Fund was that more users from their stated priority groups received a service. The majority of projects included at least one of these groups among their targeted users, either in a service designed specifically to meet their needs or as part of a more generic service for all parents. The indications are that, on the whole, projects were successful in increasing access to services for these traditionally less well-served groups. All of those who aimed to include one or more of the priority groups in their service delivery, and from whom final reports were received, stated that they had fully or partly met their target of increased provision for the specific groups, and one reported having exceeded this objective.

One reported difficulty lay in the initial engagement of some BME groups who did not readily access services and who could not be reached through other organisations, as workers in one project had anticipated. Levels of literacy were also a problem. Workers’ assumptions that their potential users were discouraged because they could not read the advertising materials written in English found that, by and large, those who could not read English could not read in their native language either. This meant a revision to the way in which parents were approached, there appeared to be no substitute for being out in the community and making personal contact.

The least success seems to have been achieved in reaching fathers. A national project designed to work with fathers found that its partner agencies experienced difficulties in identifying and engaging young fathers. In one local project, which aimed to work with fathers serving custodial sentences, problems of access to the high security prison had limited what they could achieve directly with the fathers. Nevertheless, a training event which they had run had been attended by practitioners in the prison who were then able to use some of the project’s materials in their classes. Another local project which had a stated objective to vary

the times of sessions to facilitate the attendance of fathers at its information sessions, reported that this objective had been only partly met. Although they had succeeded in involving some fathers, it was not to the extent that they had envisaged. However, one project which had had some success in engaging fathers from a minority group had found that providing fun activities for them and their children was more effective than inviting them to meetings. In response to demand, a local project had added establishing a fathers' group to its initial objectives. However, the absence of a final report for this project prevents any comment on its success.

In terms of what was happening in the local areas, there appeared to be little change in the type of service user in the time between the two mapping exercises, other than that more young parents were accessing services. The first mapping showed that the main groups of parents accessing the 60 sampled projects were, in order; parents in general, lone parents, and vulnerable children and parents. At the time of the second mapping, the main groups among the 58 sampled projects were; parents in general, young parents, and lone parents.

7.1.5. Building capacity and strengthening infrastructure

Although a research definition of activities which came under the heading of capacity building had been formed at an early stage in the evaluation (see Chapter 5), project managers and workshop participants did not differentiate these activities from those which might be classed as infrastructure building. Consequently, this section does not attempt to draw any distinction between the two but, rather, looks at those activities which might have influenced the way projects worked, and worked together, to enhance the provision of services which met users' needs. The main issues for this evaluation - information sharing; networking; expansion of the workforce; links with other providers; assessment of services; and adequate funding - are examined below in the light of the evidence. Finally, the extent to which other services were aware of the Parenting Fund's presence in the selected local areas is explored.

Information sharing

The area workshops organised by NFPI in the early stages of funding appeared to have been successful in engaging the funded projects in discussions about local provision and networking. They were generally well attended by at least one member of staff from the local funded projects and by representatives of other relevant services in the area. The main reported benefits of the workshops lay in highlighting local needs and gaps in service provision, and also meeting others who had experience of similar difficulties, such as obtaining funding and accessing families. Several projects found the meetings useful for gathering information on what other projects were doing, for networking, and for discussing future opportunities for joint working. Indeed, project managers mentioned wanting both more time in the workshop to network and a repeat workshop to update each other on current activities. It appeared, however, that many of the gains made in these workshops were largely short term, since NFPI and Parenting UK were unable to develop and strengthen those relationships that had been initially established. Local project workers, focused on meeting their service objectives, had little time for organising their own information-sharing sessions.

The Parenting Fund website might have filled this gap to some extent, but it did not offer workers the level of information and interaction they would have liked. Project managers used it primarily to check the information about their own service, rather than as a tool for establishing links with other services in their area for the exchange of information.

Expansion of the workforce

As mentioned previously, projects experienced initial difficulty recruiting staff and volunteers but, by and large, were ultimately successful. They also invested considerable resources into training both staff and volunteers, and several projects were engaged in the development of generic or topic-based training programmes and courses. Final reports indicated that the training element in projects' objectives had been successful. One project (R2) had delivered 128 multi-agency training sessions across the region in which it had been working, and another (selected by DfES) reported delivering its training to about 500 volunteers and staff in 150 centres. One project (N2) had successfully engaged and trained a number of young fathers, the majority from BME groups, to conduct research.

In some cases, onward referrals from a Parenting Fund project to other services resulted in an increased workload for these services, which might have been translated into extra staff. It was hoped that the two mapping exercises might shed some light on this, though the evidence is limited. At Time One the surveyed services reported having an average of nine full-time and eight part-time staff. By Time Two, this had increased slightly to 13 and nine, respectively. The average number of volunteers had increased from 11 to 12. However, training of both staff and volunteers had reduced between the two episodes of mapping, which might suggest that local services were not accessing the training supplied by the Parenting Fund projects.

Establishing links with other providers

Analysis of the final reports of local projects indicated that projects throughout the areas tended to build relationships with stakeholders through attending or arranging various groups with both the voluntary and the statutory sector (for instance, holding steering groups/strategic planning groups to inform trustees, sponsors and other interested parties of the project's developments). Many projects perceived stakeholding to be more than formal involvement of external networks, but, rather, viewed users and clients as stakeholders, too. One project in Area B engaged both current and potential stakeholders in strategic project development through their management committee. Building up links and networks was also perceived as relevant to building capacity within the wider parenting infrastructure. This could lead, for instance, to increased training for facilitators, broadening areas of specialisms and raising awareness of issues dealt with by the various local projects.

Assessment of services

One of the issues raised by project managers was the impact on other local services and on the community when a funded project belonging to a large national organisation was parachuted into an area, with the intention of setting up networks and making contacts. With little grasp of the issues relevant to that area, the project could easily encounter a wall of resentment erected by workers in other services who had invested considerable resources in establishing ways to meet the needs of the community they served. It was felt that at the initial assessment stage of the grant-awarding process, no consideration had been made of how a project might fit into a local area.

Funded projects were monitored on a quarterly basis by NFPI, which allowed checks to be made on whether suitable progress was being made towards meeting their stated aims. As already noted, there was no feedback to projects from this exercise, and managers worked on the assumption that if they heard nothing from the fundholder then there was no cause for concern. This, coupled with the fact that evaluation was not a requirement for projects, meant that any assessment of projects was predominantly focused on keeping them on track, rather than looking at their overall contribution to parenting support. This was compounded by the fact that projects, and especially local ones, were typically operating in a strategic vacuum.

Adequate and secure funding

All three managers of the regional projects reported that the current funding from the Parenting Fund was adequate, but all received funding from additional sources. However, three of the managers of national projects stated explicitly in interviews that the Parenting Fund grant they had received to undertake their work was inadequate: two of these reported receiving less money than they had requested. This had resulted in their altering and reducing the outputs expected from the project and, in one case levying, a charge on clients. Two of the three reported that they were looking into other funding sources to supplement the Parenting Fund grant, but the remaining one had long-term plans to adjust the service and become reliant solely on Parenting Fund money. The remaining two managers of national projects reported that the money received was scarcely adequate to undertake the work they had planned.

Approximately half of the local services in each area received funding from sources in addition to the Parenting Fund. These were typically smaller amounts of time-limited funding from other grant-giving organisations and were used primarily to supplement staff salaries. Four services reported receiving some funding from statutory services for delivering work within the local authority. However, participants at the evaluation's validation workshop reiterated the comments made in previous interviews with project managers, that once they had received a reasonably sized grant (in this case from the Parenting Fund) other funders became very reluctant to provide any money.

Managers of projects in Areas B, C, E, and F viewed the grants received from the Parenting Fund for their individual projects as adequate. In all but one of the services sampled in these areas, the amount of grant received was identical to the amount requested: in the remaining case (a project in Area B) it had been reduced by around 10% from the amount applied for. Nevertheless, perceptions of the adequacy of funding were not necessarily related to the amount requested: in Area E, for example, the manager of one project thought that efficient staff training and knowledge within the organisation as a whole had off-set the relatively small amount of funding received, and in the other service a delayed start to the project had meant that the grant had lasted to the end of the project. Other sources of funding had allowed one project in Area F to complete its tasks.

Managers of the projects in Areas A and D, the two largest urban areas, were much more likely to express dissatisfaction with the amount of grant received. In Area A, both projects had been awarded the level of funding they had asked for, but neither manager considered that it was enough. One project application had been under-budgeted by not accounting for administration costs, and it subsequently struggled to meet its objectives. The manager reported feeling that voluntary organisations were fearful of asking for too much money in case they did not receive any at all. This could lead such organisations to under-sell themselves, which impacted on project sustainability.

In Area D, neither project had been awarded the amount they had requested: in one case it had been reduced by nearly a fifth and in the other by half, which led to difficulties in providing the service according to plan. The requirement from NFPI was that the two projects, which broadly covered the same issue, should work together to provide a service, though their differing approaches and different client bases did not make this possible. The implications of serious reductions in funding, such as these, were discussed in the validation workshop where participants pointed to the fact that less money did not necessarily mean that one specific element of service delivery could be cleanly removed. Furthermore, the chances of obtaining money from another source to cover the deficit were very slim. Participants were of the opinion that, in many ways, receiving a reduction was worse than receiving no funding at all.

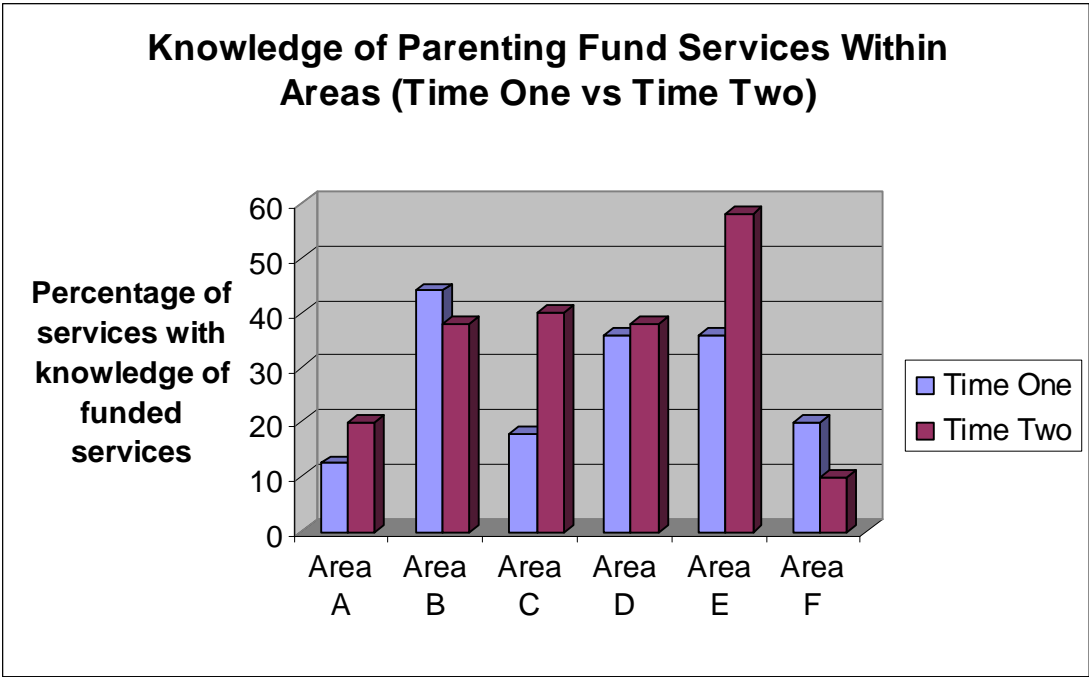
The time-limited nature of the grant received from the Parenting Fund was highlighted by virtually all the projects as having a negative impact on both current delivery and future service planning. There were no guarantees that these projects would continue to be adequately funded to cover the costs of operation once the grant had ended. Small to medium-sized organisations were especially vulnerable to financial pressures and it would seem that Parenting Fund money did nothing to ease these in the long term.

Awareness of the Parenting Fund

The mapping at two stages in the life of Round One of the Fund allowed some insight into its impact on the local areas.

At Time One (2005) knowledge and awareness of the Parenting Fund projects were highest in Areas B, D and E. In the remaining three areas, fewer than a fifth of respondents had any awareness of the Fund. A year later, awareness had increased considerably in Area E and was relatively high in Areas B, C and D, but in two areas (B and F) it had deteriorated slightly since the previous year (see Figure 2). However, organisations in Area B were more able than services in the other areas to name (correctly) a local project with a Parenting Fund grant.

Figure 2: Knowledge of Parenting Fund services within areas



Consequently, the projects' and the Parenting Fund's development of and impact on local parenting infrastructure, was limited. In Area F, no interviewed project managers believed there had been an impact on development or provision. In Area D, only one service reported any impact, that of more interagency working. However, in terms of development of local provision there was a more positive response, with half of the services surveyed reporting benefits in terms of additional funding, greater provision and more information and training – factors which are not unique to the Parenting Fund but would apply to most funding streams. No partnerships were reported to have been developed with the selected projects and, with the exception of Area C, no sampled project was mentioned as the main provider of parenting support. In Area C, one funded project was referred to twice as a main provider in the area.

The evidence appears to suggest that the Parenting Fund had not, at this stage, achieved a significant impact on the wider parenting context and infrastructure. This might be because services with short-term grants from the Parenting Fund were unable to reach out widely to the local community, coupled with the fact that the voluntary and, indeed, statutory sector were, to a large extent, working in isolation.

7.1.6. Developing a strategic approach to provision

Few local projects set out with the intention of developing a strategic approach to provision themselves. Some felt that they might ultimately achieve this to some extent, by being in the right place and having the appropriate connections to bring some influence to bear on local strategy.

Major projects were slightly more inclined to state, either explicitly or implicitly, that they aimed to exert some strategic influence. This was largely because major projects, both national and regional, which were delivery-focused (as opposed to providing training, for example) tended to focus on a specific domain, such as parents of children with a disability or behavioural difficulties, and came with recognised sector knowledge and expertise. This made it easier for them to attempt to promote strategic approaches among those with similar areas of interest. One national project had undertaken research, in an under-researched area, which had increased knowledge and informed the development of training and best practice. As well as running their own conference, staff in the project had attended national conferences and seminars to publicise their findings which they hoped would have an influence on policy and practice at national level.

Nevertheless, national projects which set out to develop a strategic approach to provision were likely to state in their final reports that that this objective had been only partly met. It seems possible that the time factor is important here. Influencing strategy, like building capacity, is not a short-term activity which can be accomplished in a year, and those responsible for writing the funding applications might have been overly optimistic in their vision of what could be achieved in a relatively short period of time.

7.1.7. Sustainability

While projects' stakeholders were positive about the benefits for areas in receiving Parenting Fund grants, they countered this with concerns over the sustainability of projects receiving such short-term funding. Lack of consistent funding was mentioned in all except one local area. Stakeholders were particularly concerned that inconsistent funding could lead to inconsistent provision which, in some cases, might be worse for users than receiving no service at all.

You have to be very careful...because of the nature of the funding that you're not setting people up to fail, or raising their expectations beyond what you can actually deliver. (Project stakeholder in Area A)

I think if your life has been raised from the ground and put somewhere here and is now dumped...you'd be worse off. (Project stakeholder in Area C)

During interviews with the project managers (which took place before the announcement of Round Two funding) all stated that they wished to maintain their service. A small number were hoping that their project might become part of mainstream provision, but all also said that they would apply for more money from the Parenting Fund if it should become available. On the whole, the reasons for this were positive.

Well certainly in terms of the last round of bids, it was very appropriate for the work that we were doing. It has been easy to administer. We've had some internal problems but that's been nothing to do with the Parenting Fund, and actually they've been a pleasure to work with, because if you want something you ring and ask them, and if you don't want them, they're not always on your back. ..., so I found the whole thing totally realistic and quite comforting to see that somebody knows how to send out a form that people can actually answer. (L12)

... it fits in with [our] way of working, [and] it hasn't felt too arduous in terms of the way they approached the monitoring. I think there was a bit of a change of objectives at one point and that just seemed terribly easy. ... much more relaxed in its approach, which makes it more parent-friendly. (L2)

I mean they're a really good funder. It's not just because the monitoring has been quite easy to do, you know, from our perspective, they've just been flexible as well. It's like on that day, when we were changing the way that we were doing the BME work, I was really quite worried about it, because you do get funders that once you set your plan, you must follow your plan. ... And that feeling they trusted that you knew your community best and actually if you were making a tweak to what you'd done it was going to be for good reasons. I mean, in the best interests of the people that you're serving. (L1)

... the fact that it supported different types of models and different ways of working. Sometimes funding is very prescriptive and that can prove quite difficult particularly when you do your work in a needs-led, person-centred type of way. (N5)
The climate is getting harder all the time: you know there is less money in the PCTs, less money in the district council and the service level agreements that we have are very prescriptive about what we can do, so that reduces the flexibility of being able to respond to parents' needs as much as we would like to. (R3)

Round Two funding was available for local projects, and the majority of those for whom there is information (from final reports) did apply for this. Five out of the six had been successful. The project that had not received Round Two funding was reportedly looking for other sources of funding to continue the service, from which, they estimated, 350 families had benefited. One of the other two local project managers had sought statutory funding in other, adjacent local authorities to replicate the programme, and the other had obtained funding from a charitable organisation to continue its work.

Round Two of the Fund focused solely on 23 localities, which meant that major (national or regional) projects were no longer eligible for funding. However, one of the national projects in this sample had made a successful application to continue some elements of its previous work in two of the specified local authorities. Two of the remaining national and two of the regional projects reported that they had obtained funding from elsewhere.

Four of the major projects stated their intention to cut back the service as a result of no further grant being obtainable from the Parenting Fund. In two instances, this meant continuing to provide some sort of intervention in at least one of the areas in which they had been working previously with Parenting Fund money. One project which had offered free parenting skills training intended to continue to offer the training but to make a small charge to participants. The remaining one was looking for alternative sources of funding. Notwithstanding the importance of economic sustainability for the projects, the work that they had undertaken could also be sustained by the impact it had on the community, especially in bringing about a change in attitude and/or behaviour. One example was a project which worked with refugee and asylum-seeking families to help them integrate into their local

community. The project manager reported success in this, once it had been recognised that there might be as many areas of difference within groups as between them.

What we found was cultural barriers within the group, that some of them didn't really want to be associated with each other. You know, like cultural differences, religious differences that meant that actually there was some friction there and I think it was always going to be ... partly about actually meeting those specific needs but also about integrating those women into the wider community. And actually it just seems like at the end of the day they are more comfortable being part of everything rather than being in a little ghetto support group. ... I mean, they're from all over and that's part of the problem that they experience here is that they actually don't really have any sort of community focus. ... And then you've got lots of people who are on opposite sides of the same conflict that are coming together which actually causes more problems. ... And I think before, as well at the school, you'd see the mums standing in their own group and they are sort of integrating more now. (L1)

8. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS: LEARNING FROM THE FIRST ROUND OF THE PARENTING FUND

Strand A of this evaluation focused on the fundholding model adopted by the Parenting Fund and looked at the way in which this was able to add value to the programme. Chapter 2 outlined some of the key features of the model, and how the model compared with those of other fundholders working in related fields. Chapter 3 reviewed the way in which the model had been implemented in practice, and the feedback from various participants involved in the programme, or related work. In Chapter 4, evidence was reviewed from the survey of applicants, and stakeholders, of the impact that the programme was having on parenting developments, either locally or nationally.

Strand B looked at the situation of the local and national projects which received grants from the Parenting Fund. Chapters 5 and 6 explored the background and networks in which the funded projects operated and how local and national projects respectively saw their activities and underlying assumptions fitting with the Parenting Fund's aims. In Chapter 7 the available data were used to assess how successful projects had been in meeting their own objectives and, by extension, those of the Fund.

In this chapter, the broader questions are addressed: which factors contributed to, or inhibited, the fundholding model adding value to the Parenting Fund, and to what extent the funded projects helped or hindered in fulfilling the Fund's aims. Recommendations are also considered for taking forward parenting activities in the future. These recommendations come from the data gathered from project managers, projects' stakeholders and the service mapping in Strand B of the evaluation, and from informants in the last stages of Strand A. These include all the informants in the survey of applicants, 31 projects (both successful and unsuccessful) and the eight stakeholders interviewed who were all asked to make suggestions for the future in terms of either further rounds of the Parenting Fund, or of future funding mechanisms for parenting activities.

Factors contributing to, or inhibiting, the fundholder model adding value

The general feedback from those involved in Round One of the Parenting Fund was that the model, and its implementation, had worked well. Although the time-scale had been tight, the funding of projects had been handled efficiently and, generally, effectively in terms of funding a broad range of activities at local and national level. The relatively 'light touch' monitoring process was well received by most grant holders, and appeared to have worked well in picking up those projects which were genuinely in difficulties.

However, it was noted in Chapter 2 that the programme itself was unusual, both in terms of the large number of grants allocated in a very short time, and in terms of the relatively small overhead apportioned to the fundholder both for the administration of the programme and any additional activities which were designed to add value to the grants in terms of achieving broader strategic goals.

The time-scale, and relatively small core function, had important implications for the overall performance of the Fund in Round One.

8.1.1. Short time-frame of funding

The short time-frame of the programme meant that the fundholder had to work very quickly to acquire the relevant expertise, establish appropriate systems, and award the grants. This process was successfully managed through the appointment of two organisations with complementary skills and experience, and by drawing on experience from others in the field.

However, for grant applicants, there were difficulties in having insufficient time to work strategically when submitting their applications. Few formed partnerships or submitted joint applications with other organisations working in similar ways locally, which might have considerably strengthened their embeddedness in the local area, and few sought to establish effective links with their local authorities. Establishing partnerships and links of this kind takes considerable time and resources, and many services appear to have been unable to find time for such networking or building of strategic alliances either before or after receipt of their grant.

Once funded, projects had only 18 months to establish themselves and deliver their services. The tightness of this time-frame was reflected in the difficulty that a number of projects had in keeping to their original timetables, particularly those which had difficulties recruiting staff. By the time all the projects were established, some were already beginning to consider winding down their activities and making staff redundant, given the uncertainty over whether funding would be available to continue. In several cases, the timing of the announcement of Round Two appeared to have come too late to avoid some staff leaving in order to secure their own future.

The narrow time-frame in which projects were working might also have contributed to the difficulty of some projects in participating in workshops arranged by the fundholder, particularly those towards the end of the programme, when some key staff might already have left. Loss of staff, and the demands of winding up services, might also have contributed to the fact that many of the final reports from projects were late (and some had still not been received when the evaluation ended), which also means that the information about projects for wider dissemination has been limited.

8.1.2. The need for more coordinated and strategic thinking

In terms of the different types of grant outlined in 'The Grantmaking Tango' report (see Section 2.1.3), the aims of the Parenting Fund were essentially strategic - to enhance infrastructure and contribute to the furthering of the parenting agenda. The benefits to the immediate recipients of the funded schemes were important, but the aims of funding the projects was to enhance the capacity of the voluntary sector to deliver support to parents in the longer term, and increase the infrastructure - particularly of networking and joint learning - to facilitate this.

What is apparent is that the fundholder was very committed to this broad view of the objectives, setting out a clear strategy and programme for infrastructure building early in the programme, and inviting other leading organisations to contribute. The local and national workshops and events were part of this broader strategy, as were the fundholder's ongoing discussions with leading organisations in the field, with the DfES, and their close working with Parenting UK.

In this context, the criticism from some of the stakeholders that the programme could have taken a more strategic approach, and lacked 'joined-up thinking' is surprising. One informant noted that "*currently there are too many pockets of isolated work potentially duplicating the mistakes and learning of each other*". Another felt that there might have been more sharing of good practice, while another felt that there should have been greater encouragement and support for projects to network between themselves. Another noted that there was lack of integration and communication between different government initiatives. One project manager noted that, prior to receiving a Round Two Parenting Fund grant, there had been a duplication of the work they were undertaking, as another DfES initiative had funded identical work in the same locality. Although this had not prevented the project in question from making good use of their funding, it had required them to tread very carefully in order to avoid any replication of work.

In part, the lack of strategic integration at a central level can be attributed to the early stage of development of the parenting field, and the fact that there are still only a limited number of parenting-related networks available for projects and organisations to join. It was noted, for example, that local applicants, where they were part of networks, tended to join generic networks related to children and families, or voluntary sector activities generally, rather than those specifically related to parenting. Yet there are many generic networks with which projects might have established links, and it would have been unrealistic for the fundholder, with limited resources, to be able to tap into all of these.

The lack of more work at this level can also be attributed to the limited resources available to the fundholder, which was unable either to keep close and regular contact with funded projects, or to undertake all the broader strategic activities centrally that it would have initially liked to. In this sense, the apparent efficiency of the fundholder noted in Chapter 2 (with only 5% of time dedicated to core functions, compared with around 10% in other grant-holding arrangements) could be seen to be a false economy if the fundholder was unable to undertake activities which might have considerably added value in terms of strategic infrastructure building and dissemination activities.

8.1.3. The centralised model and lack of local presence

Another major limitation of the Parenting Fund was its centralised model, which made it difficult to establish good links within the local areas. This had a number of implications. Firstly, the panel distributing the grants, and those involved in undertaking the initial assessment of these, were not conversant with local needs and opportunities, which meant that some of the services funded were criticised for having been ‘parachuted in’ to the local area.

Secondly, this meant that there was no one in the central team with a local presence who might have been able to keep an eye on the projects funded, build up and support local networks, or provide relevant local advice in terms of opportunities for further funding.

Thirdly, it meant that it was very difficult to establish the kind of personal links that were required in order to secure active involvement by, for example, local workshops. With local authorities being required by central government to engage more actively in the parenting agenda, this might change. It might still be useful to consider whether, in the future, the centralised model of funding is the most appropriate one.

Barriers or enabling factors in projects’ attempts to fulfil their aims

To a large extent, the funded projects were very successful in meeting the objectives they had set themselves and, thereby, meeting the aims of the Parenting Fund of increasing service provision and building capacity. Given the short time-scale, referred to above, this was a considerable achievement. Where they did not succeed so well, it was not for the want of trying. One of the striking features of project managers’ accounts in interviews and written reports was their tenacity in keeping to their tasks. Certain factors aided them in this, while other factors served as barriers to their achieving what they set out to do.

8.1.4. Realistic applications and realistic funding

A common feature of delivery-focused projects, both major and local, was that, despite being successful in engaging parents, they had not attracted as many parents - or as many specific groups of parents - as they had stated they would. It is not clear if this stemmed from a lack of research (for example, checking whether the area in which they intended to work did in fact have a significant number of BME families if their project aimed to deliver a service to this group) or a desire to impress the funder and secure a grant, or some other cause. The

net result, however, was very often a sense of frustration and a search for reasons why fewer families than anticipated had benefited from the service.

Similarly, some project applications appeared to have been based on either a naïve or an underestimated assessment of how much money was needed to achieve their ambitions or simply to administer the service. For example, some project managers who expressed an intention or a desire to engage in networking activities and explore opportunities for joint working did not appear to have costed this, or costed it sufficiently generously, into their budget. Consequently, they found themselves lacking the necessary resources and having to give priority to service delivery.

However, the other side of the coin is the response of the fundholder to applications for grants. In several instances projects did not receive the requested amount of money and in a few cases the amount received fell a long way short of what was requested. On the whole, projects could not simply lop off a branch of their work to compensate for a reduction in funding, receiving half of what they requested did not mean doing half of the work they said they would do. As noted, managers in smaller local and regional voluntary sector services tended to be parsimonious in their requests for money for fear of appearing avaricious. But if their requests could not be met in full it might have been kinder not to meet them at all. Projects would then have been at liberty to apply for full funding elsewhere, which they were more likely to receive than top-up or matched funding from another agency.

8.1.5. The fundholder

NFPI played a major role in helping projects achieve their aims, in many cases by leaving them alone. While a small number of project managers felt that NFPI kept too great a distance and failed to provide enough support, the majority appreciated the 'arm's length' style of management which allowed them to concentrate their efforts on providing the service. Furthermore, when projects did not run smoothly, NFPI showed flexibility in allowing them to adjust objectives and milestones which increased the chances of ultimate success. However, there were two, related, spheres where NFPI and/or Parenting UK might have helped projects more, although it is appreciated that their own resources would not have stretched to these. The first was in providing opportunities for workers to meet those in other services, whether Parenting Fund projects or not. It is clear that providers would have welcomed the chance to network more with other services operating in their area - and this is especially true for those involved in projects in the local areas - but typically lacked the resources to organise this themselves.

The second was in helping workers to access findings from and materials produced by other projects. Although it is obvious from milestone and final reports that projects were doing their best to advertise and disseminate, their audience was relatively limited. The Parenting Fund website, which was little used, would have been a very useful means of providing information and learning from projects to a much greater number of workers and might have prevented duplication of effort and repetition of the same mistakes.

8.1.6. Staffing and training

Both recruiting and retaining appropriate staff presented problems for many projects, and especially for those working in the local areas. The temporary and often part-time nature of contracts on offer often acted as a deterrent to potential employees. However, an additional barrier to finding staff was the fact that parenting support remains a relatively new area of work, with a workforce not yet able to cope with a great deal of expansion. This meant that projects typically recruited inexperienced and / or unqualified staff and volunteers who required training, often absorbing a considerable amount of a project's time and budget. However, this could rebound on projects as trained (and usually enthusiastic) staff and

volunteers moved on to advance their knowledge and skills in other workplace or educational settings.

8.1.7. Other services

The relationship of the funded projects with other services variously hindered or helped the projects to achieve their aims. On the positive side, the new funding stream which enabled services to develop or expand was welcomed, and in general the funded projects appeared to have no difficulty in being accepted as part of the local parenting support scene (though they were, apparently, not necessarily identified as Parenting Fund services).

The relationship with statutory sector services could be more detrimental to the funded projects' attempts to meet their objectives. Some project managers referred to the unwillingness of workers in this sector to share information, while others mentioned their tendency to withdraw support to users once a funded project had become involved in helping them. This made for a heavier burden than expected on the funded projects, in which staff had anticipated services working alongside each other to support users.

Another problem arose from the fact that projects had funding for only a limited time. This could lead to other services' reluctance to venture into joint working with them as they had no confidence in their longevity.

Recommendations for the future

8.1.8. Funding opportunities

It is apparent from the continuing difficulty faced by projects that did not receive Round Two funding, that funding for parenting activities remains a challenge for the voluntary sector. This suggests a continuing role for central government in providing an additional fund for which local voluntary sector projects can apply. However, it also suggests the need for clear guidance to local authorities about the need to direct funding to parenting services provided by the voluntary sector (which parents typically prefer to statutory sector services), possibly with this message being reinforced regularly through additional guidance and recommendations for suitable projects to fund.

8.1.9. Clarification of the role of the voluntary sector

The Parenting Fund was founded on the assumption that it was important to have the voluntary sector actively involved in providing support to parents. At least one stakeholder suggested that it is still the voluntary sector, together with central government, that is pushing forward the parenting agenda. In many areas, local authorities still lag behind. However, it is apparent that it will be the local authority in many cases that will be funding services for parents in the future, and it would be useful to draw on the experience of projects in the Parenting Fund to make a careful delineation of what kind of parenting support is best provided by the voluntary sector, and what kind of support is best embedded within mainstream services. Alongside this should go a recognition, by both funders and project managers, that a voluntary sector service is entitled to request and be given a grant of sufficient size to deliver an intervention.

8.1.10. Investment in workforce training

Many projects found it necessary to provide training to new staff and volunteers but often received a poor return on their investment of resources when trained personnel left to take up further education or more skilled employment. Setting aside a central budget for training on which projects could draw would alleviate the burden on small organisations whose

contribution to increasing the parenting sector workforce often militated against their own interests. The availability of long-term funding specifically for training purposes would strengthen the voluntary sector and overcome some of the difficulties for projects which arise through the transient nature of project work.

8.1.11. Sufficient time

The message of the disadvantage of short time-scales has permeated throughout this evaluation report and it is recognised that steps have been made to address this in the future, with Round Two grants being for projects lasting up to two years. However, the research team still received reports that the time-scale for submitting applications was too short to allow for partnership building, and there was also concern that the announcement of Round Two came very late in the day, and after some projects had already issued redundancy notices to their staff. These two issues need to be addressed if there are further rounds of the Parenting Fund.

8.1.12. Continuing funding for major players at a national level

The second round of the Parenting Fund did not award major grants. This appeared to take some of the national organisations involved in Round One by surprise. Knowing that the second round of the Parenting Fund was going forward, they missed the opportunity to apply for other sources of funding, and then found they were unable to apply to the Parenting Fund. However, if there are to be many local services funded by local voluntary organisations, or by branches of national organisations, there remains an important function to be fulfilled by the national organisations in supporting them, particularly in obtaining funding from local sources, supporting local evaluation, or the dissemination of learning from local projects in so far as this relates to particular minority groups.

8.1.13. Local authorities' involvement in funding decisions

If some kind of central funding for local parenting activities is taken forward, then it would be useful to consider a somewhat more devolved decision-making process, in which local authorities had some role to play in the decisions taken about which local projects would be most appropriate to fund. This would help to fill gaps and avoid duplication. Such decisions need to be taken in the context of local parenting strategies, if the projects funded are to have a chance of receiving ongoing funding once their central government grant has come to an end.

8.1.14. A local presence

Irrespective of whether local authorities become involved in funding decisions, it is strongly recommended that local champions are identified, and funded, to support local projects in their networking activities, and in working strategically at a local level. Such a person could also provide a focus for collating learning from local projects and sharing these with local services or with other local champions, via a learning network.

8.1.15. Sufficient resources centrally to support the wider strategic goals

It was apparent that the central resources were very stretched in trying to cover all aspects of the fundholding role over a short period of time. It can be difficult to balance managing grants with building the kind of links and networks required to take up a more strategic role, and it might have been useful to have some kind of division of labour within the team, to ensure that sufficient work was undertaken at the strategic level. The devolution of some of the responsibility for monitoring and supporting local projects to a local level might be one way of freeing up the strategic capacity of the centre.

8.1.16. Dissemination of learning

Having sufficient resources at the centre is crucial for ensuring that learning from local projects is effectively disseminated, not only within the programme, but also to the wider world. However, it is also important to ensure that grant-funded projects are generating, and collecting, the kind of information that is useful to others, should they wish to replicate their experience elsewhere. In this respect, the relative lack of evaluation in local projects is to be regretted. While an evaluation pack was useful, it might in future be valuable to provide some kind of regular evaluation workshop, or ongoing support for evaluation activities for local projects, and to make clear to them that the funding is, in part, to generate learning for others as well as to provide a service to their immediate users.

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