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First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund Evaluation

Executive Summary, July 2018



Photos (from top): 1. Worcester Cathedral stained glass (Credit: Acanthus Clews Architects); 2. Durham Cathedral scaffolding installation (Credit: Tom Banks); 3. Clifton Cathedral interior (Credit: Phil Boorman).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

In December 2017, ERS Ltd was appointed by The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England to evaluate the First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund. The Fund was set up to support urgent repair work at listed Anglican and Catholic cathedrals in England to keep them weatherproof, safe and open to the public, and to prevent further deterioration to the buildings. Further, this aimed to ensure that cathedrals would be in an appropriate condition to host First World War commemoration events.

The first round of funding was announced in 2014 and totalled £20 million, with a further £20 million announced in March 2016. The £40 million Fund was administered by the Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division (CCB, also known as ChurchCare) of the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England on behalf of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). An independent Expert Panel, the chair of which was appointed by the Secretary of State, assessed grant applications and allocated the funding. It funded repairs to 57 Anglican and Catholic cathedrals across England.

Overall, the Fund was successful in achieving its aims and met a funding need that could not be met elsewhere. It was seen as successful for many in safeguarding their existing activity, while also sparking greater interest from the public in the heritage of the buildings. ***"If the Fund hadn't come up in the way that it did and when it did, it would have resulted in temporary closures of cathedrals while they attempted to raise the money - and I'm not sure where that money would have come from."***

Evaluation aims and methodology

Broadly, evaluation findings are based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered through 89 semi-structured telephone consultations with a mix of grant team members, Expert Panel members, cathedral representatives and architects or surveyors. Aims included assessing:

- To what extent the grants have met the Fund's original objectives and criteria;
- The extent to which the grant programme has met the identified long-term maintenance and repair needs of Anglican and Catholic cathedrals in England;
- The wider economic impact of the funding;
- The wider community benefits of the funding; and
- Lessons learned in terms of grant processes, to inform future delivery.

Outcomes of the Repairs

Repair works were wide-ranging in scope. Many of the repairs related to external masonry but projects also covered roof repairs and replacement; guttering and rainwater disposal; heating, sound, electrical or lighting infrastructure; window repairs; and drainage and damp remediation.

Notably the ability of the Fund to support infrastructure work in addition to repairs to historic fabric was particularly appreciated, as it can be very difficult for cathedrals to obtain funding for such "unglamorous" but essential work. These can be equally important in keeping a building safe and open: ***"it is not often there is a funder that will offer money for unexciting things that are very necessary; and people don't understand how costly things are"***.

In the vast majority of cases, the grant-funded repairs meant that the issue went from demanding urgent attention to merely requiring routine maintenance once repair projects were complete. Respondents were, on the whole, very positive about the effectiveness of the repairs, stating that they had achieved exactly what they had set out to. All respondents stated that the outcomes represented value for money and were commensurate with the level of investment. ***“It was a real game changer – it gave people a bit of mental space to not wake up terrified their bell tower is falling down”.***

When asked what would have happened in the absence of the fund, the majority of respondents stated repairs would not have gone ahead. It was suggested this would have resulted in: inefficient and costly ‘patch-up’ repairs; significant building deterioration; and health and safety concerns for the public. ***“Channelling this amount of money into repairs has been an enormous boost to cathedrals.”***

Findings suggest the Fund met its intended aims of addressing urgent repairs in order to keep buildings wind-proof, weather-tight, safe and open to the public, and to prevent further deterioration.

Wider Outcomes of the Fund

The key outcomes of the Fund were considered to be the repair works which enabled the cathedrals to remain safe and open and to safeguard their existing activities, such as civic and cultural events, social outreach and religious worship, as was the aim of the Fund. In some cases, respondents found it difficult to define wider outcomes beyond this.

Benefits to the community were mostly considered to be implicit through the continued running of the cathedral and it was difficult to directly attribute additional community engagement to the funded works. However, in some cases the repair works enabled cathedrals to hold additional community events. **This has included First World War commemorations.**

The projects supported a wide variety of jobs and apprentices in traditional building skills, most notably stonemasonry. ***“The whole scheme has brought on professional development at all levels from architect to stone mason.”***

Another key outcome was the development of the cathedrals’ capacity and skills in relation to delivering large-scale repair projects. In some cases, it was also felt that the work had expanded the cathedral’s ambition and expectations around conservation, particularly for Catholic cathedrals. ***“The whole process has improved our communication and ability to work together.”***

A number of cathedrals were able to leverage further funds as a result of receiving the grant/s for their project/s. This is expected to continue as a positive benefit into the future, though this would require further verification in future years. ***“When other donors see that investment has been made, it encourages them to do so and it is easier to draw in funding. It is harder to get people to invest in a building if they’re uncertain about its future.”***

Fund Processes

Respondents were clear about the benefits of selecting CCB to administer the fund. These included efficient running costs (initially 0.1% (£20,000) of the initial £20 million and then 0.5% (£100,000) for the 2nd round of funding); familiarity of CCB with Anglican cathedrals; and their ability to lever in support from the Expert Panel quickly due to their existing contacts.

The Expert Panel were active in the assessment of applications and award decisions. This included meeting five times over the timescale of the Fund. It is estimated that this amounted to an in-kind contribution of £100,000. Risks were largely mitigated through the voluntary role of the Expert Panel.

This included ensuring that funding was directed towards appropriate repairs and that it was spent within the timescales by having procedures to redirect underspend to other eligible work. A robust risk framework and mitigation measures from the outset would have been beneficial in responding to unforeseen risks beyond the allocation of funding i.e. contractor issues and so forth.

Grantee Experiences of the Fund

Respondents were asked to score on a scale of 1 (not at all satisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) their satisfaction with various aspects of the Fund. These were: the application process; timescales of the Fund; communication with the funding body; payment of grant instalments and progress reporting.

Overall respondents were most satisfied with the communication and support from the funding body. Prompt communication from CCB was praised by respondents and many found their existing relationship with CCB hugely beneficial, along with their expertise.

The application and progress reporting processes were also viewed positively by respondents, with most stating these were straightforward and commensurate with the nature of the project. Therefore, striking the right balance between providing due diligence whilst not being overly burdensome. The evaluation of the Fund would have benefitted from more rigorous progress reporting mechanisms from the outset; however, this would have required an increased administration budget to direct appropriate resource towards this.

The timescales of the Fund scored the lowest of all of the categories and were generally considered tight by respondents. This was commonly considered a major delivery challenge, although some felt it provided the impetus for efficient delivery. Many experienced difficulties in delivering within the government financial year due to the need to tender for contracts and seek permissions which could feasibly take up much of the allotted time. In this sense, 'oven-ready' projects were seen to be favoured.

Project delivery

Key challenges around project delivery related to timescales as outlined above. For some the tendering process became more problematic due to the fact that experienced contractors were in high demand. It was noted that such large injections of funding create a 'boom-and-bust' pattern in the sector. In contrast, in a few cases, contractors went into administration during a project and a cathedral had to appoint an alternative contractor, significantly delaying the works and resulting in mounting costs e.g. for scaffolding. Unforeseen complications were a relatively common occurrence, whereby the full scale of deterioration wasn't known until the repair works had begun, uncovering hidden or high-level problems.

Effective and thorough planning was seen to be the key way to mitigate potential issues, alongside effective communication and ensuring that experienced contractors were hired to carry out the work.

Overspend and Underspend

Marginal underspends were relatively common and either resulted in surplus funding being reallocated with the agreement of the Expert Panel to eligible work elsewhere within the cathedral, or else being returned centrally and reallocated by the Panel. Underspend was most common where cathedrals received the full amount of funding requested. This was more likely to happen in the earlier stages of the Fund where competition for funding was less fierce. As funding rounds progressed, grantees became more adept at forecasting costs, meaning that variations in spend were less likely.

For projects that were overspent, cathedrals were sometimes able to obtain extra 'extension' funding from reallocation within the Fund, or to leverage funds from elsewhere. Overspend was most often due to additional urgently necessary repair works being uncovered in the course of a project.

Overall, the fund has made a notable contribution in keeping cathedrals across England safe and open and improving the overall building condition. In addition, a range of wider outcomes were evident which further contribute to cathedrals' fulfilment of their important civic role.

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