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EirGrid Pilot Community Fund Evaluation Report

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Executive summary

This report evaluates EirGrid's pilot community fund for the Mullingar–Kinnegad 110kV line. EirGrid decided to provide community funds in 2014, following a policy recommendation by the Irish Government in 2012. Given the recent introduction of the fund, growing interest by European policy makers and TSOs and the opportunity to learn lessons for future implementation of similar schemes, it was judged useful to conduct independent research on the community fund in practice. The research has three aims: first, to provide an assessment of how the fund was framed, governed and interpreted by different stakeholders; second, to comparatively assess the two methods of fund distribution; third, to share the findings of the research with key stakeholders in Ireland and internationally, informing and fostering good practice by energy sector stakeholders. The evaluation is based on qualitative data derived from observation of stakeholder teleconference and evaluation panel meetings; analysis of documents produced by stakeholders for the community fund; and face-to-face interviews with stakeholders and applicants to the fund.

The findings indicate that the pilot was successful in several ways. It delivered much needed grants to local communities to undertake a range of projects with local benefit. It provides EirGrid with the opportunity to learn useful lessons for future fund administration, as well as creating and maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders at both local and national levels. The findings support the view that the distribution of community funds in contexts of energy infrastructure siting should become the convention, as encouraged by the 2015 White Paper (DCENR, 2015). The study reveals that the fund was viewed positively overall, welcomed by applicants and stakeholders alike. When scrutinised in detail, it is clear that aspects of the fund were evaluated in different ways by different stakeholders, some more positively than others, indicating the value of employing the qualitative method.

We draw seven key conclusions that are intended to inform and guide the planning and future implementation of community funds.

First, governance of the fund led to situations when different values came into conflict and difficult choices had to be made. This was most visible concerning whether to award funds to the 'best' applications (the meritocratic principle) or spread funds as widely as possible across the area impacted by the power line (the 'casting the net' principle, which also has the merit of producing only winners, not losers from the process). The necessity for fund stakeholders to confront and resolve clashes in values highlights why fund administration will always involve value-based decision-making rather than a purely objective or rational analytic process. This is a key conclusion of the research. The design of fund procedures can offer solutions to potential dilemmas. For example, moving from a single to a multi-annual award process would offer EirGrid the possibility to combine both 'meritocratic' and 'casting the net' approaches within a broader and longer-term benefit strategy in which different awards had different goals and criteria (see Recommendation 1a below).

Second, local knowledge contributes to the successful delivery of community funds. The input of social, spatial and economic knowledge about the impacted area should inform fund delivery across all stages of the process. Local councils could provide this knowledge and connections with community groups to form key partners in future delivery of a fund of this kind, as we

found that council representatives have detailed local knowledge, empathy with local communities, and experience of grant administration. However, councils are constrained by other responsibilities and concerns outside of fund delivery, and are territorial institutions with clear boundaries. As such, they are less suited to the delivery of funds in line contexts characterised by the crossing of institutional boundaries. In such contexts, an agency is required to ensure consistency in decision-making across the length of the line. This role could be outsourced to a voluntary sector organisation that has the knowledge, experience and skills to deliver this role. However, if EirGrid wishes to use fund administration as a means of constructing positive relationships with local stakeholders, this role could be taken by the company itself, provided that sufficient and suitable resources, human as well as financial, were put in place to ensure effective delivery of this coordinating role.

Third, boundary setting serves many useful functions as an instrument of governance. The boundary used in the pilot was collectively agreed upon by the stakeholders that delivered the funds for EirGrid, aided decision-making and for the most part was accepted by local stakeholders without complaint. Nevertheless, the assessment of those impacted by a new power line could be improved. We recommend that EirGrid consider other methods of constructing boundaries for future funds, taking account of both objective and subjective data, including measures of population density, concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage and zones of visual impact as well as local residents' views about where their community lies and what its boundaries are. The combination of these attributes would produce a useful tool that will enable better decision-making by stakeholders in future cases.

Fourth, we endorse the discourse of 'pragmatism' that was applied by stakeholders to this pilot across the stages of the fund. While pragmatism in evaluation led to the successful identification of applications worthy of award, observation of panel meetings and interviews with stakeholders suggest several useful lessons that can increase the quality of evaluation in future funds. If EirGrid staff continue to be involved in decision-making about awards in future cases (and this is not always the case across the energy sector, Rudolph et al., 2015), we recommend that clearer guidance is provided about what kinds of kinds of applications are more likely to be favourably assessed, as well as those not likely to be funded. We also recommend that more consideration is given to the interpersonal dynamics among panel members, particularly when panels are small in size, in order to ensure that panel members' opinions carry equal weight in deliberations. These measures will guarantee greater transparency, which is also likely to benefit EirGrid in being less open to complaint and post-hoc challenge by unsuccessful applicants.

Fifth, the research reveals the important role played by stakeholder expectations of the applicants, supporting previous studies of social acceptance. These expectations were positive as well as pejorative, influencing how funds were framed and administered, informing judgements about incomplete or low quality applications as well as the degree of support that should be provided to applicants. We recommend that organisations involved in future fund delivery make explicit these assumptions to constructively challenge pre-existing ways of thinking. For example, engaging in perspective-taking exercises such as role play prior to the launch of a scheme can make explicit pre-existing beliefs. This can also help to establish a collective approach based upon pre-existing beliefs that will maximise the potential for

constructive engagement with applicants (as recommended in community engagement with energy projects, cf. Regen for DECC, 2014) and fair scrutiny of submitted applications.

Sixth, the pilot was affected by an unexpected delay in announcing the outcomes of the evaluation panels. This, together with the ways in which fund outcomes were eventually communicated (i.e. using standard emails and letters), negatively affected some of the potential benefits of the scheme. We recommend that future funding procedures allow for a longer duration of time for the internal ratification of panel decisions within EirGrid and the transfer of award funds to the administering organisation; communicate clearly the likely timetable of decision-making; inform applicants of any delays, and ensure that communications are tailored to applicants to provide effective feedback within an 'applicant-centred' communication approach. We also recommend that EirGrid investigate the potential to release funds in at least two rounds in future cases, particularly when larger amounts are available for distribution. In our opinion, the advantages of multi-award processes outweigh the disadvantages, not least enabling EirGrid to distribute awards prior to or during construction phases when impacts on local communities are likely to be greatest.

Finally, given the aims of the scheme for funds to have significant local impact, it is important that robust mechanisms of evaluation are put in place that return to successful applicants – particularly recipients of large grant awards - three years after awards were provided to investigate the impacts of community funds in the locality, taking both objective and subjective indicators of impact into account. This evaluative research should be conducted independently, to guarantee that findings are perceived as robust and impartial.

To inform and guide actions arising from these conclusions, we make 24 specific recommendations. These are fully explained in section 3 (Findings) of the report and listed below.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Multiple rounds of award provision should take place in future power line contexts that are higher voltage (i.e. 220 or 400kV), longer length (>25km) and cross local authority boundaries.

1a: The aims and criteria for each round of award could differ. An initial round can be viewed as capacity building, providing small sums to many groups to enable applicants to prepare for larger applications in a subsequent round.

1b: Timing of future award provision should ensure that there is a balance of fund distribution across time. This should take place after planning consent has been secured, but before and after a new line is energised. Agreement for the release of funds pre-energisation should be secured by EirGrid from national stakeholders (e.g. CER) prior to the launch of a fund. The rationale for doing so should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders, since it enables EirGrid to benefit impacted communities at the time of local impact (i.e. line construction) instead of only afterwards.

Recommendation 2: The choice of delivery mode for future community funds should be determined according to the best 'fit' with the context of the specific power line. Choices open to EirGrid include in-house delivery of all stages of fund administration, external contracting of all stages (to a private, voluntary sector or local authority partner) or some mix of these options. Key issues that would inform this choice include cost (given that funds spent on fund administration reduce the resource available to impacted communities), capacity (which organisations possess the knowledge, skills and experience required for which aspect of fund delivery), control (here referring to whether EirGrid would opt to remain distant or closely involved in decision-making during specific stages of fund delivery) and legitimacy (what structures and procedures would be seen as impartial, fair, equitable and transparent by stakeholders). In the case of a lengthy power line that crosses multiple council boundaries, a consistent and coordinated process of application and award along the entire length of the line should be devised by EirGrid, and either contracted to an external agency or delivered in-house. Local councils could be a valuable partner in fund administration, in order to provide local knowledge that feeds into specific stages of fund delivery, notably scoping and boundary setting, as well as application evaluation. If EirGrid play the role of coordinating local councils on this body, sufficient resource must be made available to do so, in particular the human capital skills and capacities required for effective liaison with local stakeholders.

Defining the boundaries of communities impacted by future power lines:

Recommendation 3: Multiple sources of data should inform how 'impact' boundaries are devised. This can include materials already collected for the planning application (e.g. topographical information, social impact assessment, landscape and visual impact assessment) as well as additional objective and subjective information about the context of the power line (e.g. population density, areas of socio-economic deprivation, local residents' views on community boundaries and spatial patterns of socio-cultural and economic activity). The stated aim should be to spread the benefits of high quality applications as widely as possible across the impacted area.

Recommendation 4: The process of devising impact boundaries should begin at an early stage once the preferred power line route corridor has been selected. An initial proposal for the boundary should be constructed by EirGrid and shared with stakeholders to gain their feedback and acceptance. Any revisions arising from stakeholder input should be documented and their rationales clearly recorded. This will ensure transparency and legitimacy (procedural justice) prior to the actual distribution of funds.

Recommendation 5: Once the impact boundary is agreed, an assessment should be undertaken of the different communities that lie within (see also Recommendation 7 below). This could be included within, or build from, the social impact assessment conducted as part of the planning application. If a group(s) is identified that would likely be excluded by the conventional application process, EirGrid should provide targeted support measures for potential applicants from this community(s). The purpose of this activity is to ensure equity in opportunity to apply for funds (i.e. distributional justice). Both the process of targeted support and its outcome should be set out transparently. The effectiveness of providing this support should be evaluated afterwards.

The process of application:

Recommendation 6: Conditions of eligibility should be laid out clearly from the beginning of the process. These should be easy to find and read on web and print documents related to the fund. The preconditions should also be clearly communicated to local intermediaries (e.g. councillors, community networks) that publicise the fund to potential applicants. The rationales for organisational criteria should be clearly explained (e.g. PPN, audited accounts).

Recommendation 7: Judging the 'locality' of an application (and therefore whether it is judged eligible or ineligible for award) is complex. Initial assessment of the eligibility of the applications should therefore consider the following broader criteria:
- Where will the project be based?
- Where are the majority of the users of the project based?
- Where is the applicant group based?

Application forms should be structured to produce this information and answers to these broader questions should determine applicant eligibility in conjunction with the map. When applications mix 'inside' and 'outside' across these criteria (e.g. when the project straddles a boundary line; when users come from both inside and outside of the designated area), applications should be favoured where a majority of these answers are 'inside' and the rationale for a decision on eligibility should be set out transparently.

Recommendation 8: The application form should be designed to better reflect the range of criteria actually used in the evaluation, in order to facilitate initial scoring of applications by the evaluation panel and transparency in decision-making.

Recommendation 9: Small and recently formed groups should be provided with assistance to meet the preconditions of application, either indirectly (e.g. by signposting them towards existing sources of community support) or directly from fund stakeholders.

Recommendation 10: When small groups enter into partnerships with larger organisations in order to qualify for application, this partnership should be transparent in bid documents and representatives of the larger organisations should not play a role on the evaluation panels.

The evaluation process

Recommendation 11: Presentations should be included in the latter stage of evaluation of large grant awards, as they give voice to shortlisted applicants, and enable direct contact between applicants and decision-makers. The purpose and content of the presentations should be clearly communicated to applicants in advance. Presentations should focus upon the application project, including financial aspects, and be strictly time limited. Support should be made available to applicants who have little prior experience of presenting proposals.

Recommendation 12: The evaluation process for future funds should have several stages. First, applicant eligibility should be determined, including the assessment of 'locality' referred to above. Then, evaluation should begin with assessment of the merit of each application. It should produce two outcomes: first, a rank order of eligible applications from strongest to weakest; second, an acceptability threshold, i.e. a level above which all applicants are considered 'good

enough' in principle to fund on merit alone. A second stage of evaluation should then focus on all of the applications lying above the acceptability threshold and take any other relevant considerations into account, for example spatial distribution and socio-economic disadvantage of applications. Panel members should be provided with clear information (e.g. coded maps) that communicate this information to them in a format that will support their decision-making. The outcome of panel deliberations should be a decision taken on the final applications for award. The reasoning behind any altering of rankings between the two stages should be recorded transparently.

Recommendation 13: EirGrid should be clearer prior to fund launch about the objectives of the community fund to make it simpler for applicants to prepare applications and for evaluation panels to determine whether or not an application fits with 'the spirit' of the scheme.

Recommendation 14: If EirGrid representatives are to sit on the evaluation panels for future funds, they should be aware that their opinions will guide those of others around the table. The Chair of the panel should ensure a consistent process of deliberation on each applicant, for example other representatives could be given the opportunity to express their opinions before the EirGrid representatives, in order to ensure equal weight in the discussions and final decision-making.

Recommendation 15: Panel members should be selected to minimise conflicts of interest with the applicant groups. If some involvement does exist, this should be openly declared prior to the evaluation meetings to ensure procedural fairness and impartiality. Panel members with an interest in specific applications should be requested to leave the room when those applications are discussed.

Recommendation 16: EirGrid should clearly communicate from the outset that certain projects will not be eligible for award (e.g. those only accessible via membership fees).

Recommendation 17: EirGrid should discuss beforehand with local and regional stakeholders whether certain types of project (e.g. energy related, such as addressing fuel poverty; or technology related, such as addressing computer skills and capacities) should be more strongly sought and valued by the fund in given geographical areas. Even when this is the case, EirGrid should also be responsive to the needs of local areas, as perceived by local groups.

Recommendation 18: Applicants should be eligible to apply for 100% of project costs from the fund, particularly when submitted from groups in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

Recommendation 19: Guidance for applicants should make clear that the majority of project funds will stem from the group's application to the fund. It should be clearly communicated that applications piecing together small awards from several sources are discouraged.

Recommendation 20: Steps should be taken to ensure that any assumptions held by fund stakeholders about the applicants, which might reveal habitual ways of thinking and implicit biases, are made explicit and constructively challenged prior to the evaluations taking place, in the interest of procedural fairness and justice. These steps should include trialling the use of exercises by panel members that promote perspective-taking and empathy with applicant

groups (e.g. role play). The impact of these exercises should be carefully monitored and evaluated.

Post-award fund administration

Recommendation 21: Detailed, tailored feedback – in writing or verbally as appropriate – should be provided for both successful and unsuccessful applications in future community fund provision. The resource required to ensure this takes place effectively should be factored into the cost of the community fund from the beginning.

Recommendation 22: A longer time period should be communicated in future funds to inform applicants and other stakeholders (e.g. local councillors) when the outcome of decisions will be made public. If delays take place in future fund administration, these should be communicated quickly to the relevant groups and intermediary bodies.

Recommendation 23: EirGrid should devise an online and publicly accessible 'community fund register' that transparently records the funds distributed over time for different power line projects. This could be linked to a broader community benefits register associated with renewable energy projects, as recommended by the Energy White Paper (2015).

Evaluating and communicating project impacts

Recommendation 24: A project evaluation mechanism should be devised that will clearly identify the impacts of fund awards. Impacts should be judged not only in terms of delivering concrete facilities, but also in terms of less tangible outcomes such as raising skills, empowerment and esteem. Evaluation should be conducted by an organisation that is independent of EirGrid and local groups to ensure impartiality, and be based on both quantitative (e.g. financial data, equipment use data) and qualitative data (e.g. interviews with applicants, project users) to ensure rigour. EirGrid should carefully consider what data is required from applicants in order to inform the independent evaluation. This should be communicated clearly at the time of award, and if necessary data collection should be supported by EirGrid as part of the award process.

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1   Introduction

Constructing grid power lines has proven controversial in many countries, including Ireland, the UK, Germany, Norway and the US, provoking strong opposition from communities located nearby. Such objectors are typically dubbed NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard, Dear, 1992) and associated with a range of deficits, including technical knowledge, rationality and public mindedness (Burningham et al., 2015). In response to these objections, policy makers and energy companies have innovated practices of engagement and consultation, introducing a range of novel approaches varying from community exhibitions and community liaison officers to the provision of financial benefit packages or community funds (Walker et al., 2010; Barnett et al., 2012; Cotton and Devine-Wright, 2012).

This report focuses on a community fund trialled in the Republic of Ireland by EirGrid, the national Transmission System Operator (TSO), in response to a policy recommendation by the Irish Government in 2012, which involved the distribution of financial benefits to communities living near to a new 110kV power line. To date, TSOs have mainly given financial compensation to the owners of land on which their infrastructure is sited and to proximate property owners to remedy any decrease in property value (Porsius et al., 2015). The distribution of funds to nearby communities – i.e. to individuals that are neither property nor land owners as defined above – is relatively new in relation to the construction of grid power lines and one that is of increasing interest to TSOs across Europe and worldwide.

Although novel for grid companies, the provision of benefit funds to nearby communities has become the convention for renewable energy projects, particularly wind farms, over the past decade. A body of social science research has grown around this provision that has produced several insights that are relevant for this report. Chief among these is the observation that, although funds of this type are typically viewed by policy makers and energy companies as an instrument to foster social acceptance (Cowell et al., 2011), they may in fact have the opposite effect, leading to resistance if benefits are perceived as a bribe by affected communities (Cass et al., 2011).

Given the novelty of the Irish trial, growing interest by European policy makers and TSOs and the opportunity to learn lessons for future implementation of similar schemes, it was judged useful to conduct independent evaluative research on the community fund. The research has three aims: first, to provide an assessment of how the fund was framed, governed and interpreted by different stakeholders; second, to comparatively assess the two methods of fund distribution; third, to share the findings of the research with key stakeholders in Ireland and internationally, informing and fostering good practice by energy sector stakeholders.

1.1 The development of benefit provision in energy infrastructure projects

Benefits arising from energy projects come in many forms, both monetary and in-kind. Cass et al. (2010) review ten case studies of renewable energy projects, noting heterogeneity across sectors – monetary benefits are more commonly provided for wind farms by comparison with tidal, wave or biomass energy projects, where in-kind benefits include local contracting, landscaping and employment. Devine-Wright (2011) showed that communities can perceive benefits in less tangible ways, including feelings of pride and esteem when an innovative energy

project (e.g. a tidal array) is sited 'in their back yard'. Monetary benefits come in several forms and lie outside of statutory land-use planning procedures (Strachan and Jones, 2012). Although community funds are most common (the provision of a set amount of money by a developer, either as a once-off payment or in annual instalments across the lifetime of an energy project), other financial mechanisms include community ownership (releasing equity in the energy company by selling shares to local residents), direct investment, distribution of revenues, electricity discounts, apprenticeships/studentships and educational programmes (Rudolph et al., 2015; Devine-Wright 2012).

Three contrasting contexts have been identified to lead to the implementation of community funds (Rudolph et al., 2015). First, it occurs when energy companies are obliged to respond to national or local policies and legislation. For example, in Denmark, the 2009 Renewable Energy Act mandated wind farm companies to release 20% of the equity of their projects to citizens living within 2.5km of the site. Second, community funds occur when local communities demand financial reward as a precondition of their acceptance of local siting – there have been instances in the US and UK where communities have given clear messages to energy developers that the provision of benefits is a pre-condition of social acceptance. Third, community funds have occurred when energy companies voluntarily implement benefit provision as part of broader community and stakeholder engagement procedures.

It is the latter context that has arisen in the UK in relation to wind energy. A voluntary code has been proposed and adopted by the industry, prompted but not mandated by government, to the value of £5000 per MW per year for each project, alongside a publicly accessible 'community benefits register' that provides details of what has been agreed by stakeholders in different wind farm projects. Official guidance on 'Best Practice' has been collaboratively produced by UK stakeholders with government approval on how to engage with and distribute benefits to communities affected by wind energy projects (e.g. Community benefits from onshore wind developments: Best practice guidance for England, Regen for DECC, 2014). This guidance also identifies and recommends 'principles of engagement and benefit provision', namely: timely, transparent, constructive, inclusive, fair and unconditional (Regen for DECC, 2014) arising from social science research on social acceptance (e.g. Gross, 2007; Wolsink, 2007). However, to our knowledge, no equivalent guidance or protocols exist in Ireland for the renewable energy sector, nor in Europe generally for grid companies to follow.

1.2 What is the rationale or purpose of community funds?

Research has shown that there is no single, consistent rationale lying behind providing community funds. Consequently, their meaning is often contested amongst stakeholders in cases of controversial energy projects, particularly when there is a lack of trust in the development company (Cass et al., 2010). Developers typically employ positive narratives to communicate their funds, including 'being a good neighbour', 'sharing the rewards', 'accounting for impact' and 'recognising the hosts', whilst attempting to avoid negative narratives such as 'PR' and 'bribery' (Aitken, 2010; Cass et al., 2010; Rudolph et al., 2015). As Rudolph et al. (2015) point out, these narratives matter not just because they influence acceptance in different ways, but because they have material consequences, leading to different definitions and ways of operationalising 'the community' that should receive benefit funds (see below).

A consistent theme in the literature is criticism of the general tendency by policy makers and energy companies to view community benefits instrumentally as a means to secure social acceptance and public relations benefits, neglecting important justice aspects of infrastructure siting (e.g. Cowell et al., 2012). Nationally significant infrastructure projects present challenging contexts where perceived inequalities in the distribution of costs and benefits between national and local levels are frequently observed (Haggett, 2008; Batel and Devine-Wright, 2015). Framing community benefits in terms of distributional justice – providing a fair distribution of both benefits and costs – can involve recognition of local impacts and contribute to alleviating perceptions of the unequal distribution of negative impacts arising from these projects.

Experimental research has investigated the impact of different narratives on social acceptance. One study found that a community benefit narrative was more likely to lead to project acceptance than either a 'dual-frame' narrative containing elements of both community benefits and bribery or a no frame control group (Walker et al., 2014). The same study also suggested that the impact of community benefits on social acceptance is partly moderated by whether benefits are provided to individuals or the community as a whole, with findings suggesting that collective benefits are more likely to lead to acceptance than individual benefits (Walker et al., 2014). Other studies suggest that providing benefits has a more positive impact on social acceptance when it is believed to be embedded within a comprehensive strategy of community engagement (Terwel et al., 2014) and understood to be obligated by national policies rather than arising from the discretion of the developer (Walker et al., 2016). In summary, research shows that the provision of benefits does not necessarily lead to an increase in social acceptance, since they can be interpreted both positively and negatively by different actors. In addition, benefit provision cannot be viewed separately from other factors that influence social acceptance of energy projects, notably beliefs about the quality of wider engagement practices by the developer, the ability of communities to have a say and influence decision making and how funds are distributed.

1.3 How is the community that will receive financial benefits defined?

Just as benefits may be interpreted in different ways, so also there is some variability in how 'the community' associated with benefit provision should be defined (Walker, 2011). Most common is a definition by spatial proximity where a 'community of locality' is defined by the developer to include everyone living within a certain geographical distance from the project site (Rudolph et al., 2015). However, there is no accepted definition of what distance should be employed, and research has highlighted how topography interacts with distance to influence whether energy projects are even visible to nearby residents (Aitken, 2010).

Visibility is an important element of a second way of defining community – according to impact from the project. In this definition, a fund should be distributed to those who are materially affected by a new energy project. However, this also presents complications. As already mentioned, visibility will vary with topography so that highly proximate residents may not be able to see a new energy project. In addition, the impact of construction (e.g. truck movements) will impact some nearby residents more than others, regardless of proximity.

A third method of definition is to draw on already existing institutional (i.e. local council) boundaries, particularly when these bodies are involved in administering the funds

(Markantoni and Aitken 2015). Whilst this approach benefits from the clarity and legitimacy of pre-existing institutions, it has also raised challenges when projects are sited on the periphery of existing boundaries or straddle multiple council areas, as has been the case with onshore wind farms in remote upland areas (Aitken, 2010). Finally, Rudolph et al. (2015) identify an additional definition – an 'all embracing community' – which has been used to refer to a wider regional population that could benefit from a series of renewable energy projects in that wider area. This approach has been used by the Highland Council in Scotland with the aim of utilising benefit funds to stimulate regional economic development (Highland Council, 2014 cited in Rudolph et al., 2015). It has also been applied by the wind farm developer Scottish and Southern Energy, who split their community funds equally between a local and a regional or 'strategic' development fund (SSE, 2012). It represents a particularly useful approach when very large energy projects are sited in areas that are relatively under populated.

As well as showing multiple methods of definition, these examples reveal that who defines community varies across energy projects – typically the developer, but sometimes the local or regional authority. Rudolph et al. (2015) also report that communities themselves play a role in defining beneficiaries, most commonly in energy projects instigated and owned by the community itself. For onshore and offshore wind farms, it is more common for 'the community' to be involved in administering funds than defining the community itself (see below). In summary, the community that will receive financial benefits may be defined in multiple ways, with spatial proximity most commonly employed.

In addition to these definitional aspects, research shows the importance of assumptions or expectations that are held by stakeholders about the communities that are affected by energy projects. A conceptual framework produced by Walker et al. (2011) outlined processes of public engagement in the siting of energy projects, in particular the role of stakeholder expectations of communities. Key insights from the framework are that the expectations held by different actors are related and dynamic, influencing action and reaction over time. Empirical research guided by the framework has shown that energy project developers typically view a 'latent, potential hostility of the … public' that presents a 'real and present danger' to their proposals (Walker et al., 2010). These expectations have important consequences for technology deployment, influencing how energy technologies such as wind turbines are designed (e.g. preferring three to two-bladed turbines), where they are located (e.g. preferring offshore to onshore wind farms; Walker et al., 2010) and what strategies are employed to engage communities (e.g. use of public exhibitions instead of public meetings, Barnett et al., 2012).

1.4 How are funds governed and when are they distributed?

For onshore wind farms, it is common for energy companies to delegate control of fund disbursement to the local community, typically in the form of a parish council or a board of trustees. However, this can lead to intra-community tensions regarding to whom in the locality funds should be distributed and what they should be spent on (Aitken, 2010). Ultimately, although fund distribution by the community itself can be a source of empowerment, it fundamentally rests on the capacity and cohesion of that community, which rarely reflect the levels of trust and reciprocity commonly assumed (Walker et al., 2010).

Although community payments typically commence once planning permission has been gained and a project becomes operational, on occasion earlier payments have taken place as part of a 'good neighbour' strategy with the aim of building trust with local communities (Rudolph et al., 2015). However, there is a dilemma with this approach. Early communications regarding community funds that take place before planning consent has been given may be perceived as bribery; however, late communication (i.e. post-consent) may leave a developer open to accusations of a lack of transparency and reduce opportunities to build trust (Cass et al., 2010). Weighing up both of these, researchers have recommended a strategy of early communication, particularly when communities are likely to expect developers to distribute funds given the normative adoption of benefit distributions by other energy companies (Cass et al., 2010).

1.5 Distribution of benefits to communities: from wind farms to grid power lines

In relation to controversial plans to extend the German transmission grid, Sander recommended further research on "*compensation of individuals or potential benefit sharing*" and "*how compensation could help to increase acceptance of grid extension projects*" (2012:70, cited in Keegan and Torres, 2014). A report by the Renewables Grid Initiative (2016) identifies four schemes recently initiated by grid companies in Germany, France and Italy, in addition to EirGrid's trial. Of note is the fact that these other European initiatives pay funds directly to local institutions such as parish or county councils, who then make decisions on how funds should be spent. Funds are regulated by state institutions, varying between a set rate in Germany (up to 40,000 Euros per kilometre) and a proportion of project costs in Italy and France (6-10%, depending upon the voltage of the line). Not mentioned by RGI is a recent initiative by German TSO Tennet that aimed to release bonds to communities affected by a proposed new power line. However, take-up was low and the scheme was abandoned. None of these initiatives have received independent, in-depth evaluation. Nor does any Best Practice guidance exist for TSOs across Europe in the implementation of community funds. It is against this background that the pilot Community Fund that is the focus of this research should be seen.

1.6 The Irish context: evolving policy support for community benefit provision

In the Republic of Ireland, a policy statement issued in 2012 on the 'strategic importance of transmission and other energy infrastructure' focused on the social acceptance of new energy infrastructure. Several high-voltage electricity transmission projects across Ireland are planned as part of the 'Grid 25 Programme'. The statement recognises that public acceptability of such large-scale projects is a 'major challenge' even after 'all the regulatory processes have been gone through' (3). In addition to adherence to international standards for safety, health, and environmental impact, and extensive statutory and non-statutory consultation to bolster public confidence, the policy statement says,

'The Government considers that greater focus needs to be given to co-operative work with local communities and local councils on landscape, biodiversity and civic amenity benefits bringing long lasting benefits for communities. The Government therefore underlines the appropriateness for the State Companies and energy project developers to examine appropriate means of building community gain considerations into their project budgeting and planning. The Government is therefore fully supportive of a community gain approach in the delivery of energy infrastructure.' (DCENR, 2012:7)

Furthermore,

'The Government would like to see enhanced co-operation with local councils on the potential for delivering landscape, biodiversity and civic amenity benefits as part of Grid 25 and other energy infrastructure development. Delivering long lasting benefits to communities is an important way of achieving public acceptability for infrastructure' (5)

NESC (2014) gave recommendations towards the achievement of a socially acceptable low carbon transition in Ireland, with a particular focus on wind energy projects. The report argued that community engagement using participatory methods was key to a successful transition that benefited all stakeholders and that:

'The substantive agenda around which engagement will occur should be shaped with communities and include a range of renewable-energy and energy-efficiency possibilities, as well as local value-sharing mechanisms (from community benefit to community ownership)' (NESC, 2014:6).

The NESC report – and EirGrid's community trial – was endorsed by the 2015 Energy White Paper (DCENR, 2015), which encouraged greater community and citizen engagement in the development of new energy infrastructure that:

'can give rise to a wide range of local concerns including the siting of the infrastructure, the decision-making process, the distribution of costs and benefits, and the impact on individuals, local communities and the environment' [22].

Included in the document were two actions listed to promote a transformation from 'passive consumer' to 'active citizen':

- *Developing a framework for how communities can share in the benefits of substantial new energy infrastructure which is located in their area;*
- *Establishing a register of community benefit payments (DCENR, 2015:45).*

Best practice guidance is emerging in Ireland in how to engage communities and provide community funds in energy infrastructure siting. In relation to wind farms, industry has identified a range of ways that community engagement can take place, yet only briefly refers to community benefit provision (IWEA, 2012). Guidelines for community engagement, recently published by the government as part of a Code of Practice in wind energy development, recognises that a 'well-designed and well executed community benefit scheme can provide material and lasting value to communities that host wind farms', as well as 'the potential for such benefits to become a source of division at local level' (DCCAE, 2016:4). Although project developers are recommended to be 'open and transparent' in providing information on community benefits, the Code provides little detail on how community funds should be administered. It is hoped that this report will inform future frameworks or guidance documents.

1.7 EirGrid's Community Fund Pilot

EirGrid's community fund was initiated in 2014, and sits alongside other benefit measures implemented by the company such as proximity payments to land and property owners situated within close proximity of new power lines. As a TSO and semi-state company, EirGrid are responsible to the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) who issue licences to EirGrid (and ESB networks) mandating them to *'plan developments in a safe, efficient and economic manner'* (DCENR, 2012:3). Therefore, provision of community funds cannot take place without regulatory approval.

The fund was trialled in the context of a new 110kV power line that is 24km in length and located in the east of the country between the towns of Mullingar and Kinnegad, in the counties of Westmeath (22km) and Meath (2km). The line has been relatively uncontroversial to date, and had already been granted planning consent at the time of the trial, with the release of funds to communities timed to coincide with line 'energisation'. EirGrid opted to trial two distinct modes of fund distribution within the pilot scheme, in order to better understand the issues involved in working with different types of partner organisation when distributing community funds. Small grants (<10k Euros) were managed by a local council across whose territory most of the line crossed. Large grants (between 10-50k Euros) were managed by a charitable body with a national remit and experience of community grant management arising from corporate donations and philanthropy. Although separate modes of distribution were employed, each was conducted in close cooperation throughout the process, which was deliberately instigated by EirGrid to assess and evaluate the benefits of different ways of distributing community funds. In contrast to the German case identified by RGI (2016), the amount of funds available was set by EirGrid and varies according to the voltage of the line involved (15k Euros per kilometre for 110kV lines; 30k Euros for 220kV; 40k Euros for 400kV lines). In this case, 360,000 Euros were available, split equally between the small and large grant funds.

1.8 The research objectives

Due to the relative novelty of community payments by grid companies and the absence of in-depth research to date, it is important to rigorously investigate how community funds are framed, governed and interpreted by stakeholders, including community groups. This research was informed by four key themes:

Procedural justice: this refers to how decisions are taken, and by whom, with a particular focus on fairness, transparency and equity. Existing research suggests that perceived procedural injustice is one of the strongest factors that can lead to community objections to energy projects (Aitken, 2010; Devine-Wright, 2013; Gross, 2007).

Distributional justice: this refers to how the costs and benefits of an energy project are perceived to be distributed by the stakeholders involved, both in terms of social distribution (across different groups and individuals) and spatial distribution (across different geographical areas). Existing research suggests that perceived inequalities in community fund distribution can lead to community objections (Aitken, 2010).

Defining the community: this refers to the way that the 'community' is spatially bounded in a community fund process, and is closely associated with spatial aspects of distributive justice (Rudolph et al., 2015). It involves how boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are drawn on a map, the perceived legitimacy of these boundaries and their consequences for fund outcomes. It also refers to the assumptions that are held by stakeholders about communities affected by the power line. Of primary interest in this research were the assumptions held by the three main stakeholders of the community groups (i.e. the applicants to the scheme) and the assumptions held by the applicants of the stakeholders and of other applicants.

Comparing methods of fund delivery: the research aimed to comparatively assess the two methods of fund delivery employed in the community fund pilot for small and large grants (local authority and charitable body) in order to make recommendations for the organisational administration of future funds.

1.9 Research questions

The objectives and themes above were articulated in five questions:

1. How were the boundaries of the fund set and administered?
2. How was the application process framed by stakeholders and interpreted by community applicants?
3. How was the evaluation process designed and implemented by the stakeholders and received by the community applicants?
4. What were the outcomes and impacts of the fund?
5. What are the merits of each method of fund distribution?

Collectively, the report aims to provide lessons that can be learnt for future community funds of this kind, both in Ireland and elsewhere, and particularly for contexts associated with greater controversy and objection.

2   Methodology

This report uses a qualitative method to rigorously investigate the questions listed above. The reason for this is that the way that the community fund is seen or valued is not singular or consensual, instead it is a matter of perspective. Different stakeholders will have different opinions about what the fund represents and the value it holds, and these opinions are likely to change over time. The virtue of qualitative methods is that they are best suited to reveal the plurality in meanings about community funds in participants' own words, giving voice to stakeholders including those that might otherwise be overlooked. This report does not attempt to evaluate the fund using a cost benefit analysis methodology. No attempt is made to quantify the costs of the fund (both in terms of fund administration and total awards) or to monetise community benefits.

Data was collected over a 12 month time period from October 2015–September 2016 using three methods: documentary analysis, participant observation and in-depth interviews. First, documentation produced by EirGrid and other stakeholders was collated, including government policy documents; EirGrid policy documents on community engagement; advertisements about

the funds posted by the company in the media; minutes of fund management meetings; and media reporting about the funds (both before and after awards are made) and maps showing the community fund boundary areas.

Second, participant observation was employed to identify processes of stakeholder interaction and relationships. This represents a form of 'thick description' that is often employed in anthropological research to describe social relations (Geertz, 1973). Three kinds of event were observed: weekly phone meetings amongst stakeholders during the period prior to the launch of the fund, the launch event and evaluation panel meetings. The weekly phone meetings were audio recorded with the consent of the stakeholders; however, not all the evaluation panels were recorded, since some of the panel members refused to give their consent arising from their concerns that they might receive complaint, even litigation, from unsuccessful applicants following award decisions being taken. The output of this observation was a corpus of field notes that recount both verbal and non-verbal communication amongst those in attendance.

The third method of data collection employed was in-depth semi-structured interviews which were employed to give voice to different actors – in this case, the multiple stakeholder organisations involved in managing the scheme, the individuals involved in evaluating the applications and both successful and unsuccessful applicants. The total number of interviews conducted was 13, comprising 6 stakeholder interviews that were conducted in two waves, before and after the evaluation process, and 7 applicants (4 successful, 3 unsuccessful). The transcribed interviews amounted to just over 10 hours (616 minutes) of data, as well as just over four hours (249 minutes) of stakeholder phone meetings and 22 hours of meetings observed. All interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed.

The project has produced an extensive new qualitative database of secondary materials (e.g. stakeholder reports), field notes and interview transcripts. This material has been analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which is a process that involves immersion in the dataset and repeated reading and re-readings of verbal materials. An initial sift was undertaken by one of the researchers to code data in relation to each of the first four research questions listed above. A second stage involved this coded material being shared with the second researcher. Separately, each researcher subjected the materials under each question to analysis, identifying underlying themes for example concerning procedural and distributional justice, stakeholder expectations etc. A third stage involved this preliminary analysis being shared between the researchers during extensive discussions with the view towards reaching a consensus about the themes underlying quoted materials. A fourth stage involved the writing up of the analysis, a process that involved both researchers. Across this process, the researchers were guided by existing literature on rigour in qualitative data analyses (e.g. Baxter and Eyles, 1997; Bailey et al. 1999; Bickerstaff et al., 2015), in particular ensuring that the findings produced fulfil criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Baxter and Eyles, 1997).

Research on aspects of controversial energy infrastructure siting – including payments that may be perceived as 'bribes' – raises important ethical issues. University guidelines on ethical research were followed throughout. Primary data was collected in an ethical manner, ensuring the provision of information to interviewees about the purpose of the research; gaining their

consent to take part, to be recorded and to have freedom to withdraw at any stage; and guaranteeing their anonymity in project reporting.

This study was funded by two sources: the UK Economic and Social Research Council's Impact Accelerator Award programme and EirGrid. The rationale for the research was mutually agreed by the principle investigator (Devine-Wright) with EirGrid prior to the funding award. Given the collaborative nature of the proposal, there is the potential for the research to be perceived by wider stakeholders and publics to have less independence and impartiality than might be expected from an academic research project. In response, the researchers have maintained a reflexive position throughout in which they worked constructively and collaboratively with EirGrid and other stakeholders, yet simultaneously strove to retain an independence of thought and interest with regard to how the research is conducted, how the findings are interpreted and what implications they may have for policy and practice. We have discussed the potential publication of project findings and mutually agreed that this would be a beneficial outcome, and that consent would be sought from all parties prior to publication.

3   Findings

The following sections provide an in-depth analysis of all aspects of the fund from the process around defining the boundary map prior to launching the fund to the final evaluation panel meetings and their decision-making processes. The sections address how the boundaries of the fund were set and administered using the boundary map; how the application process was framed by stakeholders and interpreted by community applicants; and how the evaluation process was designed and implemented by stakeholders and received by community applicants; the outcomes and impacts of the fund; and a comparative assessment of the two funding methods. The final sections summarise and discuss lessons for future community funds both in Ireland and elsewhere, and particularly in contexts associated with greater controversy and objection.

We quote directly from stakeholders and applicants to support our findings. To ensure participant anonymity, the notation used in quotations throughout the analytic findings adopts the prefix 'S' to denote a 'stakeholder' and 'A' to denote an 'applicant'. Stakeholder notation '1' denotes interviews conducted prior to the evaluation panel meetings and '2' denotes post-evaluation meeting interviews.

3.1 Setting and applying the boundaries

3.1.1 Observations on the boundary map

This section addresses the boundary map created by the stakeholders delivering the funds, one of the key means with which the community was defined in the pilot. Beginning with why the boundary was constructed and what functions were attributed to it, we discuss in section 3.1.1 how the map relates to broader notions of 'impact', 'community', 'fairness' and 'inclusion. Section 3.1.2 considers how the boundary was framed by stakeholders and traces its evolution over time. The boundary map as used by key stakeholders was found to play an important role during the fund evaluation process, particularly in relation to the goal of sharing benefits equally across the length of the power line (section 3.1.3).

3.1.2 Why was the boundary constructed?

This section draws on the variety of ways in which the map was talked about by stakeholders and applicants. These focused on visual impact, bribery and compensation and supporting a discourse of pragmatism in fund governance.

3.1.2.1 Discourse of (visual) impact

'Impact zone' was the language used by stakeholders to define the space where money from the fund was to be distributed and spent. The impact zone defined an area around the power line within which local communities were considered to be directly impacted by the line. In this sense the boundary was intended to restrict applications to those groups within the area. Most, but not all, of the applicants we interviewed were aware of the map and the boundary. Some admitted that, even though they were eligible to apply to the fund, they were not visually impacted by the power line. This illustrates why future funds could draw on assessments of visual impact when setting boundaries for community fund distribution.

> 'they just wanted to be… reassured that the money we're spending … is being spent in the impact zone around the project essentially' (S2,1)

> 'as I said, I could see the boundary and it was kind of…"okay, I don't know who picked it." But very interesting...we're trying to make it that…it's in the affected area and I thought, again, that was fairly fair of them but how fair the formula is I have no knowledge! (A5)

> 'no, we wouldn't actually see it from where we are… But they'd have that worked out. But, no, it doesn't actually have a direct impact on us at all, visually or anything.' (A5)

3.1.2.2 Showing minimal impact

Amongst applicants there were very few mentions of the fund being put in place as a compensation or bribe and where these themes did arise, they were combined with an assessment of an overall positive benefit for the area. However, there was an understanding that the line did have an impact and the assumption was made that the larger the boundary area, the larger the impact of any scheme, which might then have an effect on public responses.

> 'we thought that that was the bribe for the people and farmland in that area, that this would help get over any serious objections or minor objections, for that matter, and it would smooth the whole thing. Plus it had the advantage of EirGrid putting back something into the area which would be of long-term benefit as well.' (A7)

> 'I suppose the message EirGrid were trying to portray as well that this had minimal impact … you draw the line out you are indicating that this has wider implications and bigger impacts so I suppose from the perspective of EirGrid, that the narrower the line is shown perhaps then the public perception of impact is less' (S3,1)

3.1.2.3 Pragmatism and fairness in fund governance

The boundary map reinforced a 'pragmatic' view for both stakeholders and applicants (see also Section 3 Evaluation process) that eligible applicants were by definition inside the line and ineligible applicants outside. This pragmatic approach contributed to seeing the boundary map as rationalising decisions made by the evaluation panels.

> 'I think it did in that it focused the applications within that area. Obviously Mullingar is a very strong geographic nodal point in that area and as a result it's going to dictate or hoover up a lot of the applications. The same with Kinnegad to a lesser extent but looking back at Milltownpass, Milltownpass is quite a small area, small village, they received – a number of community groups there received funding' (S2,2)

> 'the only thing I would say is taking in the entire town of Mullingar probably skewed where the funding went to, people on this side of the town, Mullingar, the lines … are on the other side of the town, they wouldn't even have any awareness whatsoever of the line, you know! But you couldn't draw a line through the town, the middle of the town either, so you have to take a pragmatic view' (S3,1)

> 'But I thought it was a fair thing that they were trying to just get a region or an area and then how fair can you be when you are doing that. But I thought it was fair in the sense of what they were trying to do, saying, 'Look, this is the area we're affecting, this is the area that we have picked' (A5)

3.1.3 How was the boundary devised?

EirGrid's boundary map was the outcome of negotiation by different stakeholders prior to the fund being launched and informed by existing local authority institutional boundaries. The underlying discourse around boundary making was aimed at keeping it consistent, as far as possible, remaining at the same or similar distance all around from the proposed route of the line. While this rationale initially created a 'sausage' shaped area, a uniform 2-3km distance from the line itself, it was quickly realised that it would run through the middle of the two largest nearby settlements – Mullingar and Kinnegad. For this reason, the boundary was extended to include each settlement in its entirety, culminating in a boundary area consisting of a narrow band of space around the rural parts of the line, with bulges around Mullingar and Kinnegad at each extremity to west and east.

Discussions, first with the local authority and then with an evaluation panel member, raised issues of including villages or smaller towns that lay outside of the initial boundary but which served the surrounding rural communities that lay inside. This request for inclusion recognised that different conceptions of the community existed and highlighted the distinction between an abstract line on a map and how locals use space and where they feel a sense of belonging (Walker, 2009).

> … it's all part of our community – people are very strongly affiliated with this village even though they are in that rural hinterland, this is the community that represents them … they are all our relations, family, friends and all gather here' (A3)

The argument in this case raised the point that if residents living inside the boundary within sparsely populated rural areas use a nearby settlement that is outside the boundary for services and amenities, then would it be appropriate to include that settlement inside the boundary too? Requests for boundary changes such as this were negotiated by stakeholders and included some limited expansions following suggestions from the local authority. However, requests to include two larger villages beyond the boundary (Rochfortbridge and Killucan), which were approximately 6km from the infrastructure, were refused. Ultimately all stakeholders agreed that the larger expansion should be seen as excessive and inappropriate. Applicants and stakeholders alike showed some recognition of the ways that the boundary line was negotiated and evolved over time, together with an awareness that alternative boundaries could have been drawn.

> 'But if you change the rules then you have to change them again, precedents would have been set' (A4)

> 'It probably would have been better but it's subjective. Yes, I think it I was looking at it and looking back in hindsight you would argue that around the rural areas it should be wider and the urban areas should be narrower, you could certainly make that argument' (S3,2)

> 'I remember thinking "I wonder how they figured it where to draw the line?" Were they using some scientific formula or something. ... How they came up with the exact figure….I say, good luck, well done for choosing it!' (A5)

Once the final decision on the boundary had been made, the stakeholders produced a document explaining inclusion/exclusion to applicants. The document served to defend the stakeholders' decision, thereby minimising the potential for future complaint and be answerable to challenge.

> 'we had no grumblings from the applicants' (S1,1)

Recommendation: Multiple sources of data should inform how 'impact' boundaries are devised. This can include materials already collected for the planning application (e.g. topographical information, social impact assessment, landscape and visual impact assessment) as well as additional objective and subjective information about the context of the power line (e.g. population density, areas of socio-economic deprivation, local residents' views on community boundaries and spatial patterns of socio-cultural and economic activity). The stated aim should be to spread the benefits of high quality applications as widely as possible across the impacted area.

Recommendation: The process of devising impact boundaries should begin at an early stage once the preferred power line route corridor has been selected. An initial proposal for the boundary should be constructed by EirGrid and shared with stakeholders to gain their feedback and acceptance. Any revisions arising from stakeholder input should be documented and their rationales clearly recorded. This will ensure transparency and legitimacy (procedural justice) prior to the actual distribution of funds.

3.1.3.1 Boundary use during fund evaluation to include and exclude applications
Copies of the boundary map were available to evaluation panellists for reference during the evaluation meetings. At the start of the local authority small grant panel meeting, the underlying rationale of the boundary line was explained by EirGrid paying particular attention to the 2km of the line within County Meath. At EirGrid's suggestion the applications were divided into two groups, one to deal with applications from Westmeath (65), the other from Meath (3).

A councillor from Meath made a representation for a particular group who were based within the boundary but who were applying for equipment to be located beyond the boundary. There was strong opposition from other panellists on the grounds that allowing this group into consideration opened the door to criticism and the potential of being sued at a later date. This concern about future legal challenge echoes existing research on stakeholder expectations of danger from communities to their proposals (Walker et al., 2010).

The map focused applications within specific areas. The distribution of applications across the boundary area was also taken into account in the evaluation meetings. This was especially evident in discussions of the few applications from Meath. These applications were either deemed to be ineligible (e.g. due to the applicant organisation lacking a PPN number, or being sited outside of the boundary area) or lacked the quality necessary to pass the evaluation criteria, and a separate arrangement with the county council was sought. Nevertheless, the intention to spend the allocated funds for the Meath part of the power line – in part arising from knowledge of a future power line proposed for that county - meant that the evaluation panels wondered if there was any leeway with the criteria.

The majority of applications were submitted from the larger settlements of Mullingar and Kinnegad. Rural applications were concentrated in a small village, Milltownpass. The concentration of applications in Milltownpass caused some disquiet, perhaps in part because of the low population density compared to rural areas.

> 'Obviously Mullingar is a very strong geographic nodal point in that area and as a result it's going to dictate or hoover up a lot of the applications. The same with Kinnegad to a lesser extent but looking back at Milltownpass, Milltownpass is quite a small area, small village, they received – a number of community groups there received funding' (S2,2)

Recommendation: The evaluation process for future funds should have several stages. First, applicant eligibility should be determined, including the assessment of 'locality' referred to above. Then, evaluation should begin with assessment of the merit of each application. It should produce two outcomes: first, a rank order of eligible applications from strongest to weakest; second, an acceptability threshold, i.e. a level above which all applicants are considered 'good enough' in principle to fund on merit alone. A second stage of evaluation should then focus on all of the applications lying above the acceptability threshold and take any other relevant considerations into account, for example spatial distribution and socio-economic disadvantage of applications. Panel members should be provided with clear information (e.g. coded maps) that communicate this information to them in a format that will support their decision-making. The outcome of panel deliberations should be a decision taken on the final applications for award. The reasoning behind any altering of rankings between the two stages should be recorded transparently

3.1.3.2 Geographical spread and the fair distribution of funds

The impact of the community fund was thought about in different ways, and difficult choices were often represented as 'either/or' dilemmas. For example, some stakeholders reported a dilemma concerning whether to provide a small number of large grants to create strategic projects or reaching a lot of smaller community groups with small grants that may be quite significant for them in terms of what they do on a day-to-day basis (see Section 3 on the Evaluation process; see also Recommendation 1a). Another dilemma mentioned by stakeholders presented a balancing act concerning the merit of applications on the one hand, with their geographical spread or concentration on the other:

> 'I mean, obviously on the quality side I don't think we can fund things for the sake of it if the quality isn't there, equally though it is difficult if one area, for whatever reason, has a number of applications and that area geographically is quite limited. So it is a bit of a balancing act' (S2,2)

and applicants understand the challenge too:

'but I understand that with a lot of them, what they may try to do is give you a percentage so that they include more projects' (A4)

Applicants who were aware of the boundary map, and not all of them were, saw the boundary line as fair, especially if it reflected well on their likelihood of success. There was a suggestion that they would not contest the 'objectivity' of the line if it was not in their interest to do so.

> 'But it wasn't worrying me because I knew I was inside the area anyway because I was in Mullingar so I'll let other people haggle with them over it!' (A5)

> 'Well I suppose if I'd looked at it objectively I might have thought "well, maybe this is a way of EirGrid limiting the areas that can apply for funding", but from a not objective point of view; being in a village that was covered by the area, it stood in our favour we thought that at least it meant there wasn't going to be as much competition in terms of what was going on and then in fact while we probably were the smallest village within the area, the geographic area that we represent from a community point of view, all of the actual line was running through that entire community' (A3)

Successful applicants were mindful of the boundary on the map when considering the area in which they intended to spend their award. In instances where groups operated both within and beyond the boundary, they made the point of stating that EirGrid's support would be obviously recognised in the areas within the boundary but there was no appreciation of the fact that the fund was solely intended to benefit those within the area and not beyond.

> 'So we'll probably have extended it a bit in the sense that while staying within the parameters that we're going to give it full coverage' (A7)

Recommendation: Judging the 'locality' of an application (and therefore whether it is judged eligible or ineligible for award) is complex. Initial assessment of the eligibility of the applications should therefore consider the following broader criteria:

- *Where will the project be based?*
- *Where are the majority of the users of the project based?*
- *Where is the applicant group based?*

Application forms should be structured to produce this information and answers to these broader questions should determine applicant eligibility in conjunction with the map. When applications mix 'inside' and 'outside' across these criteria (e.g. when the project straddles a boundary line; when users come from both inside and outside of the designated area), applications should be favoured where a majority of these answers are 'inside' and the rationale for a decision on eligibility should be set out transparently.

3. 2 The application process

Applicants had mixed experiences with the process of applying to the fund, with concerns expressed about the eligibility criteria or preconditions of application. Whilst the need for strict preconditions is understandable given the need for EirGrid to administer public funds with accountability, it may also serve to exclude small or recently formed groups from applying to the fund. This was most apparent with the requirement for audited accounts in the voluntary sector organisation's large grant strand of the fund and the partnership solution designed to work around this requirement. Other observations showed evidence that applicants attempted to second guess what EirGrid might want to see in a 'good' application, that there was some suggestion that more support for applicants could have been provided and the possibility that a longer time period might have been beneficial in order to organise application partnerships. The sections below discuss these issues further.

3.2.1 Application preconditions

The eligibility criteria for applications to the local authority's strand required membership of the public participation network (PPN) and a tax number. This was generally regarded by participants as a fair requirement but for smaller groups that formed specifically to apply to the fund it raised difficulties as obtaining a tax number took longer than the application period allowed. A similar requirement, to present audited accounts, for the larger strand was also challenging for some applicants. The area of impact as defined by the boundary line was considered by some applicants to cover an area where smaller community groups exist. These groups were seen as less likely to be registered as a charity or to have audited accounts and therefore be ineligible to apply to the larger funding stream. Additionally, the impact of the requirement to have audited accounts might have the outcome to 'lock-in' both small and large organisations, with large ones staying large and small ones staying small.

> 'we would have had to have our books audited and all that stuff and we're only a voluntary organisation, we're not a business, we're not a social enterprise, we just have an AGM every year like any committee, like any GAA Club or anything else. And that's the way we operate. So we decided that we'd go for the ten thousand [i.e. small grant scheme]' (A6)

The partnership mechanism that was used to resolve the requirement for audited accounts and registered charity status for the larger fund strand did not appear to add anything to the governance arrangements for managing the fund. One applicant described:

> 'it made a bit of a mockery of the process because they weren't going to do anything other than put their name on it because they had an entity and it was still our application and still our project. So to my mind they weren't adding anything and in fact it kind of undermines them because the people then that were on the evaluation committee were people representing that organisation' (A3)

The requirement for charitable status and evidence of registration with the Charities Regulatory Authority underlies the need for reassurance that any grants awarded will be delivered successfully. But community groups felt that having tax clearance, providing copies of charitable trust documents and accounts should provide sufficient evidence and reassurance. Nevertheless, maintaining a balance between adhering to these preconditions whilst remaining flexible to community organisations is challenging. Subsequent guidance by the Charities Regulatory Authority (issued in June 2016) has been adopted by the voluntary sector organisation. The guidance specifies that a charity with a gross annual income of €10,001 to €100,000 is required to provide a profit and loss account (or income and expenditure account and statement of assets and liabilities for the reporting period) rather than audited accounts. This change may make it simpler for community organisations to meet eligibility criteria for larger grants in future fund contexts.

In conclusion, application preconditions were seen to make it difficult for some applicants to meet the deadline. While these preconditions are essential for accountability, future fund mechanisms should ensure that these are communicated and justified clearly from the outset in order to lessen the potential for such conditions to be seen as obstacles to application.

> 'that's okay for us because we were early and we were lucky enough that we could actually find a way to circumvent it but there could have been a lot of organisations that were up against the deadline or past the deadline and first they may have known was they didn't qualify by virtue of the fact that they didn't tick that box … maybe that undermines a little bit what EirGrid is trying to do; if they are trying to reach the genuine places of need and yet they are putting stumbling blocks like this up without being clear about it from the very start' (A3)

Recommendation: Conditions of eligibility should be laid out clearly from the beginning of the process. These should be easy to find and read on web and print documents related to the fund. The preconditions should also be clearly communicated to local intermediaries (e.g. councillors, community networks) that publicise the fund to potential applicants. The rationales for organisational criteria should be clearly explained (e.g. PPN, audited accounts).

Recommendation: Small and recently formed groups should be provided with assistance to meet the preconditions of application, either indirectly (e.g. by signposting them towards existing sources of community support) or directly from fund stakeholders.

Recommendation: When small groups enter into partnerships with larger organisations in order to qualify for application, this partnership should be transparent in bid documents and representatives of the larger organisations should not play a role on the evaluation panels.

3.2.2 Application deadline and support for applicants

Applicants varied in their views on the timing of the application deadline. As outlined above, certain application preconditions were seen as making it more difficult for some applicants to meet the deadline, especially the more demanding requirements for the larger grants, whereas others considered that there was enough time for them to put everything together.

> 'No, we were tight … we didn't have enough time, as a voluntary group, to get our application ready for the fifty … it happened too quick for us' (A6)

Both delivery organisations noted the effort required to obtain all the required documentation from applicants to help them submit eligible applications. Stakeholders had differing views on providing additional support to applicants, as well as different expectations of the communities (see section 3.3.10 Stakeholder expectations of applicants). There was evidence that applicants attempted to second guess what EirGrid would want in a 'good' application and how EirGrid and the other stakeholders would view a 'good' applicant. These assumptions included the need to illustrate that they are organised groups with a plan, that there are concrete projects that the group can demonstrate will be completed, that there is something tangible like equipment, and a group with lots of members engaged in it.

> 'I was kind of hoping because it was EirGrid who are ESB, the electricity, I was kind of like – well, they are engineers, digital…it would immediately be something that…wow!' (A5)

Recommendation: In future funds, EirGrid should undertake an assessment of the different communities that lie within the 'impact' boundary. This could be included within, or build from, the social impact assessment conducted as part of the planning application. If a group(s) is identified that would likely be excluded by the conventional application process, EirGrid should provide targeted support measures for potential applicants from this community(s). The purpose of this activity is to ensure equity in opportunity to apply for funds (i.e. distributional justice). Both the process of targeted support and its outcome should be set out transparently. The effectiveness of providing this support should be evaluated afterwards.

3.3 The evaluation process

This section is guided by material from participant observation of the evaluation panels and subsequent interviews with stakeholders, independent panel members and applicants. The panels for each of the small and large grant evaluations met on two occasions, first for an initial sift of applications and second for a final evaluation. Here, panels are viewed in terms of the social relations amongst the panellists and the ways that panel members regarded each other, both verbally and non-verbally. Panels were made up of representatives from EirGrid, the stakeholder organisation managing the grant scheme, and independent panel members drawn

from the local community. In addition, one or more researchers were present in an observatory capacity.

The task for each panel was challenging. There were 68 applications for small grants and 20 for large grants. The panels were charged with sifting through applications to rule out low quality applications at the initial sift, and eventually to judge which applications merited award. It is important to point out that considerable effort was expended by both grant administering organisations prior to these panel meetings to ensure that all relevant materials had been submitted by the applicants and that their spatial location ensured that they were eligible for award. In addition, each panel member individually scored the 20 large grant applicants prior to the initial sift meeting.

3.3.1 Taking pragmatic decisions

Given the large volume of applications and quantity of scoring criteria to be applied, panels sought to be both fair and efficient, operating in ways that were rational and objective, transparent and fair. They drew on data from the applications and from their scoring of each application on the evaluation criteria. All applications were discussed and chairs sought to deal impartially with each. However, it was clear that the panels were imperfectly rational in practice, for a variety of reasons, each discussed below. Overall, this practice was evident in the words of panel members themselves, who described a 'pragmatic decision-making' to account for how the panels took account of other contextual factors (in addition to the material at their disposal) to reach their decisions:

> 'the reality is that that is where sensible pragmatic decision-making can actually achieve, make sure that the thing isn't out of kilter' (S1,1)

Imperfectly rational practices arose for the following reasons:

- limited time for deliberation, given the volume of applications,
- tendency to judge applications by the perceived quality of applicants,
- tendency to use criteria scoring for defensive reasons,
- relative status of individuals within the panels,
- relative impartiality of local panel members,
- exclusion of certain applications by EirGrid,
- desire to ensure spatial equality of grant distribution,
- treatment of match funds.

These issues are discussed in turn below.

At the initial sift meeting for small grants, it was stated that if each application was considered separately, the expected meeting duration would provide them with a total of five minutes to spend discussing each application individually. The prospect of concluding meetings on time or early would have been especially attractive to the independent panel members, who were participating in the panels in a voluntary capacity. Given these constraints, we observed heuristics or shortcuts that panellists proposed in order to get through the volume of applications efficiently.

First, it was proposed to simply part-fund all applications. At its simplest, this approach subdivides the total amount of funding available by the total number of applicants, a process colloquially dubbed 'divvying up' by panel members. It is advantageous in being time efficient and in ensuring that there are no losers from the evaluation process. However, it overlooks differences in the quality of the applications. For this reason, this approach was discounted by both panels even though it was proposed at each of the meetings. Second, panels engaged in benchmarking. This occurred when several groups applied for a similar project (e.g. a walkway). The assumption was made to treat each as equivalent for scoring purposes, at least initially, before the panel collectively took a view about the merits of specific applications.

Applications were partly judged on the perceived quality of the applicants. This connected with a field on the application form that asked 'when was the group established?' During evaluation meetings, the length of time that a community group had been in existence was sometimes taken as a proxy for the quality of that group and by extension, its application. By corollary, large applications from recently formed groups (i.e. less than two years) were sometimes treated as risky, given the absence of a prolonged track record to judge their capabilities and competencies.

Shortlisted applicants for large grants had the opportunity to give a PowerPoint presentation to the evaluation panel. These presentations mainly focused on the applicant groups themselves, rather than their applications for funds, attempting to show the worthiness of their cause, the commitment of their members and the numbers of their users. Given time restrictions on how long each applicant could present for, it often occurred that applicant presentations concluded without the presentation of financial information about the cost of projects, suggesting some limitations to this method of contributing information for the evaluation.

There was a lack of consensus amongst panel members on the value of applicant presentations. Panel members generally regarded the presentations as a positive opportunity to meet applicants, raise specific questions and ask for clarity on issues that might not have been clear in the application. There was an expectation that presentations would provide value by expanding on information provided in the application form or present additional information but applicants tended to speak about the organisation rather than the project, provided little detail on the financial aspects of the project, and ran out of time.

> 'we ended up missing out … getting the information we needed most to come from that which was around the financial side of things. … I think we didn't have enough time in the meetings' (S2,2)

Although some financial detail had been requested in the application form, members of the evaluation panels suggested the type of financial information they were looking for included why the organisation was looking for the amount they requested, how they were going to spend it, how were they going to phase that spending over time, and what applicants would do if they didn't get 100% of the grant.

Given previous research findings on the expectations of communities by stakeholders in energy projects (e.g. Walker et al., 2010) and the findings from this research on the expectations

identified in this case (see section 3.3.10, below: Stakeholder expectations of applicants), it is important for grant managing stakeholders to carefully consider any prior expectations held about community applicants with the aim of ensuring 'constructive' engagement (RegenSW for DECC, 2014) during energy projects.

Recommendation: Presentations should be included in the later stages of the evaluation process for large grant awards, as they give voice to shortlisted applicants, and enable direct contact between applicants and decision-makers. The purpose and content of the presentations should be clearly communicated to applicants in advance. Presentations should focus upon the application project, including financial aspects, and be strictly time limited. Support should be made available to applicants who have little prior experience of presenting proposals.

3.3.2 Criteria used to score applications

The panel meetings employed a variety of approaches to scoring applications against the criteria. Members of the voluntary sector organisation's evaluation panel scored all of the eligible applications against pre-defined criteria in advance of the first evaluation meeting. These criteria are given in more detail in Appendix two but are in short:

1. Strategic fit
2. Realistic budget
3. Reach
4. Measurable results
5. Collaboration

The organisers of the panel meeting collated scores from panel members which were then presented at the meeting. All of the applications were then discussed and a decision was made on whether or not to invite the applicants to present their projects at the second evaluation meeting. Given that all projects through to stage two had met the initial criteria, decisions were informed by further discussion of those criteria and additional criteria as listed in Table 1.

This procedure differed from that used in the local authority where a two-stage process was used. Stage one was an eligibility test where each application had to pass three 'tests':

- Is the project located in the geographical area outlined by EirGrid?
- Does the project proposal meet one or more of the EirGrid criteria listed in the literature?
- Is the project promoter a member of the PPN in Meath/Westmeath OR – A charity or social enterprise?

If the project met all three 'tests', it was passed to stage two, discussed and scored against criteria. Scored applications were then ranked by score and considered in order, highest rank first, for grant funding. Local authority panel members therefore saw and scored applications for the first time at the first meeting.

3.3.3 Shared and additional criteria

Both delivery agencies referred to EirGrid's four project type categories that had been identified by the voluntary sector organisation in a scoping report. The scoping report was part of the pre-

planning process for the fund in which EirGrid were encouraged to be very clear in setting out which criteria and eligibility requirements would apply. Furthermore, the categories determined by the scoping report to be of most benefit to the community were: employment, education, environment and community facilities. Successful projects had to fit into one of these categories. In addition, both agencies shared these common criteria:

- Does the project meet an identified need?
- Does the promoter have the training/skills, track record or experience to deliver?
- Are the project costs clear and justifiable?
- Will the service continue to be delivered or demonstrate long-term impact in the area?

Each agency had additional criteria set out in their evaluation score sheets which were based on those used in previous funds (see Appendix two for details). But, in addition to scoring against criteria evaluation panels used other means of assessing projects including 'getting a feel' for how well the application met the criteria, aiming to spread projects across the geographical area, and judging some projects to be more 'needy' or 'beneficial' than others.

Close observation and listening to the two panels showed that members discussed how best to use the criteria and tried to fit the projects to what they thought were the objectives of the fund:

'I suppose the intention here is "to what extent does it meet the criteria set out" … "is it a very good fit with the grant scheme or is it a poor fit?" (S3,3)

'… it's more of meeting the spirit of the grant scheme…' (S3,3)

Deciding on whether or not a project was needed by the community was subjectively tested against whether or not it was a 'nice to have' or a 'need to have'. These kinds of decisions were informed by detail on the application forms where the panels referred to the main objectives of the project and who the project beneficiaries were considered to be. Further informing these decisions was local knowledge of the community groups applying to the fund and knowledge of what was considered to be needed in the local area.

'I think it's a subjective call really …' (S3,3)

Issues additional to criteria used in evaluating projects are listed in Table 1.

Table 1   Additional issues drawn upon when discussing and evaluating projects.
(Questions with a * indicate those partially addressed by questions on the application form.)

Is the project seen as a 'good use of money'?
Where organisations had to partner up, were the arrangements considered to be appropriate? Was the partner organisation considered to be suitable?
*What presence in the local community was the applicant organisation seen to have?
*What was the deemed potential of securing funding from other sources?
Was the organisation run or staffed by volunteers or professionals?
Was the organisation actively and strategically collaborating with other community groups?
*What were 'realistic' budgets? Were the quotations accurate?
What was the status of the ownership or lease on premises used by the organisation?
How familiar were panel members with the organisation or the community it was based within?
Would access to facilities paid for by the fund be open to all or conditional upon membership?
Were projects relating to environmental improvement or sustainability more in line with EirGrid's objectives?
*What level of additional funds was required to complete the project?
*What evidence was there to suggest the capacity of organisations to keep themselves going in the long term?
What was the sustainability of technologies applied for?
What was the planning permission status of the project?

Whilst some of the issues listed in the table above were partially addressed by questions on the application forms (see Appendix two), others were not. This illustrates that many more attributes of the projects and organisations were used to evaluate the applications than can be accounted for in the application form, therefore placing great reliance upon the local knowledge and perceptions of the panellists in reaching a decision.

Observation indicated that panellists tended to use score criteria most diligently after a consensus had been reached around the table on whether or not to fund certain applications. When this happened, effort was taken to produce a score from the relevant criteria that would be consistent with and therefore justify the decision made. This 'defensive' approach seeks to avoid the possibility of complaint by having watertight decision-making processes and is resonant with previous research on expectations of 'danger' from potential objectors (Walker et al., 2010).

Taken together, our observations of these practices of evaluation indicate how panel decisions were informed by but not determined by the scores on the criteria, constructed flexibly and pragmatically amongst panel members as a collective, rather than emphasising any absolute rigour or objectivity in the evaluation process.

Recommendation: The application form should be designed to better reflect the range of criteria actually used in the evaluation, in order to facilitate initial scoring of applications by the evaluation panel and transparency in decision-making.

Recommendation: EirGrid should be clear about the objectives of the community fund to make it simpler for evaluation panels to determine whether or not an applicant fits with 'the spirit' of the scheme.

3.3.4 Equal status amongst panel members

Particularly at the beginning of meetings, there was some evidence that panel members paid close attention to the opinions of the EirGrid representatives before expressing their own views on the merits of a particular application. Moreover, there were few if any lengthy deliberations in which panel members took issue with the opinions expressed by the EirGrid staff. The quality of deliberative discussion in the evaluation panels will be higher when all panel members feel assured of the equal status of their opinions, even when they are not from the funding organisation.

Recommendation: If EirGrid representatives are to sit on the evaluation panels for future funds, they should be aware that their opinions will guide those of others around the table. The Chair of the panel should ensure a consistent process of deliberation on each applicant, for example other representatives could be given the opportunity to express their opinions before the EirGrid representatives, in order to ensure equal weight in the discussions and final decision-making.

3.3.5 Relative impartiality of local panel members

The panels used by each delivery organisation differed both in size and composition. There were eleven members of the small grant committee (formed of eight local councillors, one independent community representative and two EirGrid representatives – as well as three council staff members who did not participate in the evaluation), who drew on knowledge of the local area and of the community and voluntary organisations there. The large size of the panel, where locally based panel members outnumbered EirGrid representatives, also contributed to a dynamic within the group where support for a particular application by one panellist was challenged by others. This encouraged debate, leading to collective decision-making based on a higher degree of impartiality without favouring one part of the geographical area or one community in particular. There were five members of the large grant committee (formed of two independent panel members, two EirGrid representatives and a chair). Selection criteria for the panel included the requirement for representatives from both Mullingar and Kinnegad; as a result, there was little evidence of discussion of choosing someone from one of the more rural areas impacted by the power line. In addition, the independent panel members had close links to many of the applicants, and in one case, their organisation had assisted in the application submission process.

Recommendation: Panel members should be selected to minimise conflicts of interest with the applicant groups. If some involvement exists, this should be openly declared prior to the evaluation meetings to ensure procedural fairness and impartiality. Panel members with an interest in specific applications should be requested to leave the room when those applications are discussed.

3.3.6 Exclusion of certain applications

Certain applications were ruled out by the panels. Two applications were judged to pose a reputational risk to EirGrid. Both evaluation panels considered that if a membership fee had to be paid to access facilities provided by the fund then the project was not appropriate for EirGrid funding. However, there was nothing in the criteria about this.

Recommendation: EirGrid should clearly communicate from the outset that certain projects are not eligible for award (e.g. those only accessible via membership fees).

Recommendation: EirGrid should discuss beforehand with local and regional stakeholders whether certain types of project (e.g. energy related, such as addressing fuel poverty; or technology related, such as addressing computer skills and capacities) should be more strongly sought and valued by the fund in given geographical areas. Even when this is the case, EirGrid should also be responsive to the needs of local areas, as perceived by local groups.

3.3.7 Desire to ensure spatial equality of grant distribution

Both panels considered not only the quality of the application, but also their spatial distribution. There was an aspiration to spread the benefits throughout the geographical area defined by the boundary map. This was most apparent when it was observed that a cluster of small grant applications came from a single village, Milltownpass. As a result, some applications were ruled out, not on grounds of quality, but on grounds of spatial over-concentration in a single area.

3.3.8 Availability of match funding

Interviews with applicants suggested that grant schemes were usually assumed to require a certain degree of local funding,

> 'that's how it works, really, with most of the grants, they won't give you 100%' (A6)

yet applicants were not aware that evaluation panels would be reluctant to fund applications where only a relatively small proportion of the total project cost was sought from the fund;

> 'Nowhere, that we saw, was there any indication from EirGrid that they wouldn't fund partial projects' (A3)

Evaluation panel members judged that some of the groups applying to the fund wouldn't have the capacity to raise additional funding, which was presumed to come through fundraising in the local community or other local funding sources, for reason of socio-economic disadvantage. Consensus around partial funding in evaluation panels centred on the recognition that it was acceptable to give out 100% of funds requested yet this was not reflected in any of the application documentation. Furthermore, there was some uncertainty around what percentage of a total project EirGrid was willing to fund. Amongst stakeholders there was the general feeling that project applications needed to be assessed on a case-by-case basis when it came to deciding whether or not to award 100% of the amount requested or a smaller percentage. Yet this pragmatic approach may be viewed as inconsistent by applicants.

Recommendation: Applicants should be eligible to apply for 100% of project costs from the fund, particularly when submitted from groups in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

Recommendation: Guidance for applicants should make clear that the majority of project funds will stem from the group's application to the fund. It should be clearly communicated that applications piecing together small awards from several sources are discouraged.

3.3.9 The role of expectations

The research revealed a plethora of expectations (Walker et al., 2011): what stakeholders think about communities and what communities think about themselves and stakeholders/decision-makers. These expectations emerged through the research process and were found to influence all stages of the fund from pre-application to post-evaluation. We consider them to be relatively stable beliefs that are brought to bear in contexts of funding application such as this one. They deserve explicit scrutiny since they may influence key parameters of the engagement process (Walker et al., 2011).

3.3.10 Stakeholder expectations of applicants

When discussing the application process, stakeholders characterised applicants in a variety of ways. Communities were viewed by one stakeholder as resourceful and wily, capable of raising funds for themselves and grasping an opportunity that might present itself to benefit the locality:

> 'people who are looking for funds are very resourceful ... I wouldn't underestimate the wiliness of the community sector in Ireland' (S1,2)

In addition, stakeholders expected applicants to inflate their applications. This was presented as a natural phenomenon, characteristic of human nature generally, and therefore only to be expected in the context of a community fund. This echoes previous research on stakeholder beliefs about 'NIMBY' objections, which have revealed assumptions of self-interest (and deficits of public mindedness) as motivating community objections (Burningham et al., 2015):

> 'He just saw the pot of money there so to speak and reached out you know' (S3T10)

> 'these groups are inclined to slightly inflate their ... Absolutely, sure that's human nature isn't it' (S3, S2, T10)

> 'everybody's looking to have their own little building but (laughs) we'd all like to live in palaces ourselves you know' (S3T10)

For example, it came into play when stakeholders discussed the merit of an application by a small group to have a building of their own. This was viewed as not a good use of funds, with the view taken that multiple groups sharing a single building was more advantageous. One outcome of this way of thinking could be that small groups (for example based in under populated rural areas) restrict themselves to small grant applications, if they assume that stakeholders are only willing to fund large capital projects in large villages or towns.

Evidence was also found of a tendency to view incomplete applications as revealing applicants that were failing to put in sufficient effort to merit award. Metaphors are revealing, with stakeholders drawing analogies to students doing homework or job applicants preparing for interview. The implication is that applicants must show that they have made an effort in order to be fully deserving of an award:

> 'there will be applications where certainly there, perhaps be a lack of effort had been put in ... if they fail to demonstrate something where they haven't submitted the documentation ... they won't get the marks as it were as part of the evaluation' (S3T10)

> 'it boils down to them not fully doing their homework' (S1,1)

This idea was closely associated with an additional expectation of applicants that was held by one of the stakeholders – that they were unwilling to read and digest simple information, a belief that was used to make sense of how applicants could submit applications that omitted key information:

> I think it's people just can't be <u>bothered</u>, or they don't <u>read</u> the criteria properly because we get it a lot. Like if they <u>read</u> the criteria they'd see that that's <u>asked</u> for you know what I mean. I don't think it takes a genius to understand you know' (S1T10)

These expectations seem to be self-serving. If applications are submitted that are ineligible, blame is attributed to the deficiencies of the applicants themselves, not to the stakeholders that are managing fund administration or their procedures of application.

3.3.11 Expectations of stakeholders and other applicants held by applicants themselves

Connected to these stakeholder views are the expectations that the communities have of those same stakeholders and of other applicants. Applicants spoke of the need to be honest or straight when applying for funds, both to raise their chances of success and to avoid being labelled as greedy:

> 'I just find that it's generally being honest; if you have something in mind, go to them, they'll do what they can' (A5)

> 'Well you can't be too greedy because you have to show the paperwork' (A4)

> 'we were very straight about what we were looking for' (A7)

Applicants also spoke about the process, showing clear expectations of how evaluation panels operate. Similarly to other stakeholders, applicants presented difficult choices about how best to award funds as 'either/or' dilemmas (e.g. funding everyone a little bit, so that there are no losers versus funding only the best applicants).

> 'the people who are evaluating generally have to go in one of two directions, they either have to say, "Well we can't fund everyone 100% so we'll either fund a limited number

100% of the way or else we'll try to give each body some element of it and hope that that will bring them along some of the way", and sometimes that can work against proactive organisations because these people are determined to make it happen themselves and if they don't get all the money they'll make it work' (A3)

Applicants also distinguishing 'proactive' from 'lazy' applicants that were used to funds being simply 'handed to them':

'other organisations don't have an expectation that they'll have to fundraise, don't have an expectation that they have to help themselves because they are almost used to it being handed to them' (A3)

The research suggests that applicants know that stakeholders have certain expectations of them and they work around it in their applications. One example concerns the size of the award sought:

'but it probably wouldn't have registered with me that we would have had something to qualify for it because typically those kind of projects tend to favour larger villages and larger areas' (A3)

The combined impact of these expectations held by stakeholders and applicants might serve to limit the growth of smaller organisations. These expectations may also influence how much time is allocated for the application process (a matter that stakeholders differed in opinion on) and the level of assistance provided to applicants. If there are expectations by stakeholders of a lack of competence in applicants, this could be taken to suggest that providing them with more time or assistance will not substantially improve the quality of applications.

By contrast to these expectations, evidence was found for a final expectation of applicants that characterised them more empathically as 'busy volunteers':

'just at the back of it you have to keep in mind as well that all of these people are doing it in a voluntary capacity. They're people who usually have jobs and busy lives and it's usually a busy person that's the person that's asked to put this application in and they're doing it at home at night so you know, so you have to just keep that in the back of your mind as well you know' (S3T10)

This provides a more kindly explanation for any omissions in the applications to the scheme and was used as justification for giving applicants more time to prepare their applications and more assistance in doing so.

Recommendation: Steps should be taken to ensure that any assumptions held by fund stakeholders about the applicants, which reveal habitual ways of thinking and implicit biases, are made explicit and constructively challenged prior to the evaluations taking place, in the interest of procedural fairness and justice. These steps should include trialling the use of exercises by panel members that promote perspective-taking and empathy with applicant groups (e.g. role play). The impact of these exercises should be carefully monitored and evaluated.

4 Outcomes and impacts

This section focuses on the outcomes and impacts of the fund in the post-evaluation stages. It discusses the effect of the delayed response after the evaluation panels, the effect of the fund on EirGrid's reputation and relationships, multi-annual versus once-off funds, and the need for a defined project evaluation mechanism.

4.1 Providing feedback to applicants

The effect of the 'standard' letters or emails received by the applicants following the evaluation panels left a bad impression for some applicants. The letters contained very little detail about their applications, despite that information being available:

> 'I got no feedback, I had an email, that's it' (A2)

> 'a simple enough letter. ... but literally it's just saying there was sixty…ahead of you and hence your application wasn't successful, pretty standard one … it's fine but you would like to know did you miss – was your application just not suitable or it would be nice to get a little bit of feedback on it, … but to wait until September for a standard letter, I think they could have got that out quicker' (A4)

> 'but we did have a system in place to (provide) that feedback if necessary' (S3,2)

Recommendation: Detailed, tailored feedback – in writing or verbally as appropriate – should be provided for both successful and unsuccessful applications in future community fund provision. The resource required to ensure this takes place effectively should be factored into the cost of the community fund from the beginning.

4.2 Delayed response after evaluation

Following the evaluation panels both applicants and stakeholders anticipated notification of the outcome sooner than it happened. The potentially moveable deadline arising through connection of the fund with energisation and agreements between EirGrid and intermediary organisations for the transfer for funds both need to be addressed in future funds.

> 'we need to be very clear that the awarding of the funds aren't fixed, it is moveable … or we need to have a discussion with the CER on whether we can release funds before a project is energised' (S2,2)

This is one of the key beneficial learning points arising from the pilot that will be useful to inform procedures in future funds. EirGrid, as a semi-state company, required more extensive processes of ratification to sign off the panel decisions and to transfer the funds than would be the case for a private company. Coupled with this, the voluntary sector organisation was unwilling to communicate decision outcomes to applicants until the funds had been transferred to them from EirGrid.

The impact of both factors led to delay in announcing the results of the fund, which for applicants resulted in uncertainty not only about their success or failure but about the fund more generally.

> 'we had been told, again, some of this informally – we had been told that both strands were going to be released at the same time and there was obviously a huge difference between when both strands were released … So everyone was kind of – what's happened to the bigger round? And there was no word as to why there was a delay and then they were thinking it's not going to happen at all, maybe there's going to be no funding from this stream … there was nothing ever said about what happens after the evaluation, what the evaluation committee was going to do, how they were going to ride with their decision and – or what those potential decisions – or when that decision would happen' (A3)

Keeping to the dates was important to applicants because some of them had projects ready to start. In addition, applicants may have submitted applications to more than one funding body for the same project, or at least could resubmit a failed bid to another scheme, but only once they had been told about their success/failure first time around.

> So it was a bit unclear, let's keep to the dates and don't mess around!' (A2)

> Because there's a lot about - are you applying for the project to a couple of other funds or not? … but you need to be able to take yourself out of it quicker and if something else comes that you would know … you shouldn't be waiting until September if on your deadline you were saying you were hoping to start this in October' (A4)

The potentially moveable deadline arising through connection of the fund with energisation and agreements between EirGrid and intermediary organisations for the transfer for funds both need to be addressed in future funds.

> 'we need to be very clear that the awarding of the funds aren't fixed, it is moveable … or we need to have a discussion with the CER on whether we can release funds before a project is energised' (S2,2)

Recommendation: A longer time period should be communicated in future funds to inform applicants and other stakeholders (e.g. local councillors) when the outcome of decisions will be made public. If delays take place in future fund administration, these should be communicated quickly to the relevant groups and intermediary bodies.

4.3   Spending grants

There was some uncertainty and risk felt by successful applicants about the deadline of the fund and how best to claim the money. There was an incompatibility between organisation size and funding conditions. Some smaller organisations with minimal assets didn't have funds to pay for the project in advance and had to obtain loans to cover the grant award, paying interest until the grant was received.

'On the application it has said "if it's not spent in Year 1 it may be taken off you", but it already asked you for Year 2 and Year 3 evaluation of what you are going to do. So it had me thrown' (A2)

'tell me, "what is the lead time between us, for argument's sake, paying for the goods or getting invoices for them and how long will it take, approximately, for the monies to come through"' (A7)

'little organisations like that wouldn't have the money to purchase the stuff ... that with organisations that don't have the money in the account, is it possible for them to get a statement or an invoice of what it's going to cost to get the money'(A1)

4.4   The community fund as means of benefiting EirGrid as well as the applicants

As the fund progressed through the application and evaluation stages, it became clear that EirGrid were attempting to benefit not only local communities impacted by the power line, but also to develop positive local relationships from the fund and deliberating on how this value could be maximised. Applicants recognised the reputational benefits of the fund for EirGrid, which were clear from goodwill expressed at both launch and award events, and commended the company for having put the fund in place.

'Only one person said to me, "This is just a PR thing because they are putting in the pylons"... and I said, "Yeah, but would you rather a poster campaign and a letter-drop thing "We're all really nice"?" or we're actually prepared to say – put it out there, "what can we do in the community?"' (A1)

'...I think it is good that they are showing a bit more and for community development funds I think it's great ...they can do a lot more into community groups like ourselves and others as well' (A5)

'it's for the greater good but it does impact on the local people etc. And I think if, in some way, that the local people's lives are made better, their quality of life, that term we all use, in some way they are compensated' (S3,2)

'This, to me, was a major – they were really showing that they were putting their money where their mouth is about the whole community and environmental side and, as I said, I was really surprised that they put that amount of money into it. So, no – yes, I think my opinion of EirGrid went up on that level' (A5)

EirGrid staff on the evaluation panels were also positively received as individuals interested in building relationships with the community. In this way, EirGrid changes from being a national and distant organisation to a local one with tangible, concrete presence in the community.

'he came across very well and he didn't come across as an engineer and all this other stuff ... but he came across very friendly and wanting to do the right thing, not like "I'm ticking a box"' (A1)

'EirGrid is in at the ground level, so they are associated with the entire project for whatever duration' (A3)

However, there was an awareness that spending a lot of money on community funds could be criticised as a 'waste of money' when compared to making power lines and electricity bills cheaper. In a sense, there was a recognition that this could leave EirGrid vulnerable to criticism.

'Someone could say very simply "What are you wasting all that money…and the price of electricity and people can't turn on their electricity…" it gets caught up in all this type of stuff.' (A5)

Despite the generally positive feedback about the fund, ultimately the delay in notifying applicants meant that the 'good news' story about the community fund was affected:

'I suppose the problem is it's lost a little bit of its good news story… Well just maybe community groups maybe might feel that "look, we were meant to be told", so it takes a little bit of the good out of it, you know, they get a grant all right but they get it a month later than they thought they were going to get it. It just takes a little bit away from it' (S3,2)

and again:

'It breaks a little bit of trust perhaps with the community groups that the delays – they don't understand delays caused by external sources … Perhaps trust is perhaps the wrong word to use there, it's more just take a little bit of the good away from it in that they didn't get the grant when they expected to get it'. (S3,2)

Using intermediary organisations to administer the fund was of some concern for EirGrid given a desire for direct engagement with the community rather than one mediated by stakeholders. However, there was no evidence from interviews with applicants to suggest that EirGrid were not recognised as the originators of the funds.

'we're one step removed from the successful grantees, I guess, rather than being the people who are directly handing out the funds. So there might be a little bit of maybe confusion out there as well, "The [voluntary sector organisation] and [local authority] are handing us over the funds, aren't they great?" rather than us getting the full kudos for having the fund available that we might get' (S2,2)

In addition to recognition by the local community, it was important to EirGrid for the fund to be recognised at the national level, both by government and the regulator.

'ultimately we may only have one real opportunity to speak to them and that's if we have an awards type event which we are planning to have – and just to let you know on that the Minister for Energy has expressed some interest in attending that … so we will have that opportunity obviously to be front and centre of that sort of handover process' (S2,2)

4.5   Spreading the benefit – geographical spread and multi-annual funds

Within the idea of spreading the benefit across the impacted area and amongst applicants, two sets of choices were presented as dilemmas. The first contrasts the desire to see all applicants above a certain quality threshold benefitting from the fund, thereby maximising distribution, and is set against selecting the highest quality projects by merit, creating both winners and losers. The second dilemma concerns whether to fund a large number of small projects or a small number of large projects. As already mentioned, modifying fund procedures (e.g. to encompass multi-annual awards) would present a way of accommodating options seen by some stakeholders to be mutually exclusive.

4.6   Multi-annual funds

Spreading the benefit of the fund was discussed by stakeholders not only in terms of aiming to benefit many communities of locality today but also in terms of distributing benefits over a number of years rather than in a once-off fund. Both approaches to community funds present challenges, particularly for a power line which, once constructed, remains in the landscape for decades. Pressures on once-off funds included unfamiliarity with the local area and uncertainty regarding what kind of projects, and how many, might be applied for. For applicants, a once-off fund can leave little time to respond compared to a multi-annual scheme.

> 'it is very different to a wind farm scheme where you might have a wind farm that's going over twenty years, ... But it does put a pressure where it's a once-off fund' (S1,1)

> 'It's something that came out of the blue, the scheme, to some extent, it was something perhaps the community group hadn't budgeted in at the start of the year, you know' (S3,1)

A once-off fund may provide more opportunities to support larger projects. This contrasts with the

> 'casting the net' type of approach over the first year of a two- or three-year project where you make smaller grants available across the board, nearly on a goodwill basis, and then pick up on a few more honed strands in the later years, learn maybe from some of the good projects that came through' (S1,1).

Another aspect of once-off funds is that they decrease the potential to build longer term relationships with local stakeholders.

> 'Perhaps from the applicant's point of view and giving them perhaps more time to develop their own thinking and their own proposals, if they weren't ready the first time round ... It is ... how do you say, a comfort to know – if we miss this application, if we don't get it in now we'll have a future opportunity, that certainly is better perhaps from the community's point of view' (S3,2)

A possible advantage of a multi-annual fund could be that community groups that typically do not apply for grant funding – first timers, small groups – may benefit. There is a sense that certain larger organisations have become good at making applications over time – they are already big and stay big, in contrast to smaller organisations that stay small in part due to the requirements of these kinds of funding programmes. Smaller funds released over a number of funding rounds may help address this potential funding bias. They may allow local groups to learn more about what EirGrid wants to fund and how the fund works as well as enabling

EirGrid to get to the know the area, making better award decisions. It could enable EirGrid to present themselves as longer term good neighbours in the local area, and to release some funds pre-energisation, thus providing tangible local benefit 'sooner rather than later'. Finally, multi-annual funds could give EirGrid the opportunity to vary the way the fund operates over time, for example initially placing a small amount of funds in year one with low thresholds on the award criteria (a 'casting the net approach') and then applying more rigorous criteria for larger awards in subsequent years.

However, multi-annual awards may also bring disadvantages, being more costly to administer over time, reducing the size of each individual award, and potentially negatively affecting EirGrid's reputation, if the fund is poorly governed and receives complaint. Taking these points into account, it is our view that the advantages of multi-annual distribution outweigh the disadvantages.

Recommendation: Multiple rounds of award provision should take place in future power line contexts that are higher voltage (i.e. 220 or 400kV), longer length (>25km) and cross local authority boundaries.

a: The aims and criteria for each round of award could differ. An initial round can be viewed as capacity building, providing small sums to many groups to enable applicants to prepare for larger applications in a subsequent round.

b: Timing of future award provision should ensure that there is a balance of fund distribution across time. This should take place after planning consent has been secured, but before and after a new line is energised. Agreement for the release of funds pre-energisation should be secured by EirGrid from national stakeholders (e.g. CER) prior to the launch of a fund. The rationale for doing so should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders, since it enables EirGrid to benefit impacted communities at the time of local impact (i.e. line construction) instead of only afterwards.

4.7 Size of the fund

Applicants considered the fund to be either very large compared to other funds or felt unable to comment on the size of the fund because of not knowing how it was being divided up and across what area. There was little or no understanding among applicants interviewed about how the exact amount of the fund was calculated.

In thinking about the size of the fund, applicants considered the number of years across which it could be spent, in a multi-annual fund for example. Ten years was considered too long for €360k but something like €120k across three years was considered more favourably.

> 'To me it sounds huge but if it's being divided up into how many and what area and what they are hoping to achieve with it, it's a little bit meaningless for me at this end' (A4)

> 'and the other major difference [between this fund and others] is the amount of money that was actually available then, that was very different, very…I'd say that's at least a *factor (of ten)*' (A5)

> 'I think if it was distributed over a couple of years or whatever, it would have put a lot of work on the ladies in the council and it would become fragmented' (A7)

'Oh no, I think the right thing to do was what they did. They are going to make a serious difference to a lot of groups' (A6)

4.8 A project evaluation mechanism

The intention, as stated in the application criteria, was for the larger grants to have a medium- to long-term impact. However, there was little evidence found regarding what type of projects EirGrid might encourage. If the development of 'strategic' projects (see SSE, 2012) means considering longer term developmental potential for the affected community or a broader geographical area, then this should be clarified in future community funds.

This evaluation has focused on the process of application and subsequent evaluation of applications. This process-driven approach suggests that the outcomes or impacts of the community fund itself lacks a formal mechanism of purposeful evaluation. EirGrid will carry out follow-up reports on small grant awards at 12 and 18 months and the voluntary sector organisation fund administrator will follow-up large grant awards after 12 months. Applicants recognised the need to clearly feedback how awards had a positive impact on local people:

> 'The reporting back on it is how many people benefited from it. ... it's the human story. How many people were affected and if it wasn't there...I would ask the question in a reporting thing to say "if you didn't have that funding...what difference did that funding make? If you didn't have it, would this have gone ahead?"' (A1)

One potential approach to evaluating impact was proposed:

> 'maybe in three year's time the chances are that most projects will be completed, that we could go back and maybe do an interview with them and just to try and get an understanding as to how the money was spent, how the project has gone, has it been a success, what benefit it's brought, even just for our own learnings I think that would be useful, particularly I think on the larger expenditure' (S2,2)

Recommendation: A project evaluation mechanism should be devised that will clearly identify the impacts of fund awards. Impacts should be judged not only in terms of delivering concrete facilities, but also in terms of less tangible outcomes such as raising skills, empowerment and esteem. Evaluation should be conducted by an organisation that is independent of EirGrid and local groups to ensure impartiality, and be based on both quantitative (e.g. financial data, equipment use data) and qualitative data (e.g. interviews with applicants, project users) to ensure rigour. EirGrid should carefully consider what data is required from applicants in order to inform the independent evaluation. This should be communicated clearly at the time of award, and if necessary data collection should be supported by EirGrid as part of the award process.

Recommendation: EirGrid should devise an online and publicly accessible 'community fund register' that transparently records the funds distributed over time for different power line projects. This could be linked to a broader community benefits register associated with renewable energy projects, as recommended by the Energy White Paper (2015).

5   Comparing the two methods of fund administration

EirGrid chose to split the Community Fund pilot into two funds administered by two different delivery agencies, a local authority (small grants, <€10k) and a national voluntary sector organisation (large grants, €10–50k), with the aim of learning lessons about fund delivery when working with contrasting types of organisation. To minimise potential confusion for applicants, both agencies worked together and with EirGrid to help define and agree the boundary map and were bound by the same launch date, application deadline and tentative date of energisation for delivery of the grants.

Despite good collaboration by the agencies and attempts to harmonise delivery of each fund, it is the case that running two separate funds proved confusing to some community groups. Nevertheless, within this defined process each agency devised their own methods to specify application and evaluation criteria and the way in which the evaluation panels were run. Although individually decided, these methods were based on previous experience and developed in collaboration with EirGrid.

This section draws on previous analysis to bring together aspects of fund administration through which the delivery agencies can be compared. These include availability of personnel to administer the fund, how application and evaluation criteria were used, expectations of the applicants and the structure of evaluation panels.

In the evaluation panels, similar methods of evaluating the applications emerged despite differences in the criteria used (see section 3.3) and structure of the evaluation panels. The main difference was the use of applicant presentations by the voluntary sector organisation. The presentations were considered to be a useful way of meeting the shortlisted applicants and for providing an opportunity to ask for more information. However, better use could be made of the presentations by requesting a more specific emphasis upon the application project rather than the applicant organisation.

In terms of the similarities that emerged in both evaluation panels, both delivery agencies had a limited time for discussing the applications and found ways to systematically and efficiently work through them. In particular, benchmarking – dealing with similar applications together and comparing them side by side – was used as well as discussing whether or not projects could be part-funded. Panellists in both delivery agencies talked about the quality of the applicants and the suitability of projects for meeting EirGrid's objectives. There was a shared understanding around distributing projects across the impacted area which drew on an initial objective to spread the benefit of the community fund but this was balanced against the perceived quality of the application.

The evaluation panels for both delivery agencies had to balance the relative status of panel members as well as the relation of the panellists to the local area and the organisations applying for funding. Weighing up the perceived objectives of the fund with information provided on the application form and knowledge provided by panellists about the community groups was a common issue for both delivery agencies.

5.1 The local authority

The local authority chosen to administer the smaller grants had previous experience of delivering grants to local voluntary organisations. Through this experience they were familiar with a range of local charitable organisations throughout the area. We found that their familiarity with community groups who were applying to the fund revealed an empathic view of applicants and their experiences with grant applications. This in turn led to a willingness to extend the time period for applications and to provide additional support to those wishing to apply to the scheme.

Despite the interaction with voluntary organisations, local councils are necessarily bound by territorial restrictions and are required to respond to the requirements of their community, whatever this is and whenever it arises. This preoccupation with locally relevant and sometimes unexpected demands (e.g. flood emergencies) is a key difference between the two delivery organisations and can give rise to competing interests where demands on the local authority may divert staff attention away from commitments to deliver the community fund. Nevertheless, staff in the community development section of the council, despite not being involved from the start, provided support to applicants throughout the application process and proved to be very effective communicators and administrators of EirGrid's community fund.

The local council's evaluation panel comprised eleven representatives: eight local councillors, one independent community representative, two EirGrid representatives and three council staff members who were not part of the committee. As already discussed, the large size of the panel, where locally based panel members outnumbered EirGrid representatives, contributed to a dynamic within the group where support for a particular application by one panellist was challenged by others. This encouraged debate, leading to collective decision-making based on a higher degree of impartiality without favouring one part of the geographical area or one community in particular.

The council's familiarity with the local community stems, in part, from their geographically bounded nature. Councils are defined by boundaries and are used to working within them. This presents an opportunity to contribute local knowledge to fund administration, but may pose challenges for any requirements to work in another council area. In the case of the Mullingar–Kinnegad line, 2km of the line fell within a neighbouring county and a decision was taken to administer the fund through the council in which the larger area of line was located. The split between the two counties was reflected in the structure of the evaluation panel where there were two representatives from the neighbouring county (one councillor, one senior executive officer) to provide local knowledge on applications from their council area. The relatively small number of applications submitted from the neighbouring county may reflect the inherent limitations of the geographically bounded nature of the administering council's remit and focus.

5.2 The voluntary sector organisation

The voluntary sector organisation chosen to work with EirGrid to deliver the large strand of the fund was a national organisation with extensive experience in handling small and large grants. This experience enabled the organisation, during the pre-planning stage of the project, to produce a scoping report and embark on intensive engagement with EirGrid to set out which

criteria and eligibility requirements would apply in order that the fund was not significantly oversubscribed and the limited time and resources of the community and voluntary sector were not further stretched. The scoping report built on EirGrid's strategy for corporate social responsibility and specifically recommended a two-stage application process and the creation of a boundary map. A dedicated member of staff was allocated to oversee the administration of EirGrid's community fund and communicate regularly with EirGrid staff. The organisation's principles of operation were based on clear planning and efficiency with strict timelines applied and kept to where possible.

As in the council, support was offered to applicants throughout the application process. The organisation welcomed queries (by email or phone) around potential eligibility for the fund and queries in relation to filling out the application form in addition to offering advice on which strand of the fund to apply to, and ensuring that eligible applicants provided the necessary documentation to meet eligibility criteria. As part of wider engagement activities not linked to the pilot fund, the organisation hosted a number of free regional workshops for grant seekers giving insight into how to apply for grants. Nevertheless, in comparison with the local authority, empathy with applicants was less apparent in the interviews. This led to less willingness to consider extending the time period for applications.

The national remit of the organisation meant that staff members were less able to draw on local knowledge of the area defined by the boundary map. The evaluation panel consisted of five individuals, with a similar number of local and EirGrid representatives (two independent representatives from the local area, one independent chair and two EirGrid representatives). While two members of the voluntary sector organisation were present to facilitate discussion, they did not participate in the evaluation of the applications. This meant that they were dependent on recruiting two people from the local area who had knowledge of the charity and voluntary sectors in that area. The difficulty arising from this process was achieving a balance between knowledge of and involvement with the local community sector. The independent panel members nevertheless provided the local knowledge considered necessary for evaluating applications to the fund. The evaluation process benefited from an independent chair who was able to bring in experience from administering grants in other areas to the community fund evaluation process. This ensured consistency and efficiency throughout the evaluation process.

An unexpected delay in notifying applicants of the outcome of their applications can be attributed to governance issues around the transfer and receipt of funds from EirGrid to the voluntary sector organisation. Unlike most private sector donors, EirGrid was unable to transfer the community funds to the voluntary sector organisation until the outcome of the panel decisions had been taken and ratified internally. In turn, the voluntary sector organisation was unable to feedback the outcomes of panel decisions to community groups until funds had been transferred to them from EirGrid. The outcome was a delay, which led to some concern by the applicants about the merits of the scheme. However, there is no reason why this delay cannot be learnt from in future contexts of community fund provision, using a longer estimate of the time required for decisions to be approved within EirGrid, for outcomes to be communicated back to applicants and for funds to be released.

5.3 Future community fund administration

Delivery of a community fund involves multiple stages including planning, scoping and boundary setting, publication and launch, screening and evaluation of eligible applications, award giving and finally, evaluation of implemented projects. Successful fund delivery requires each stage to be conducted fairly, equitably and transparently, as well as cost effectively. Given that the context of delivery will vary for each future power line, involving different technical, social, economic and geographical aspects, delivery could also vary, with different organisational models and approaches employed for different stages and contexts. Choices open to EirGrid include in-house delivery of all stages of fund administration, external contracting of all stages to a voluntary sector or local authority partner or some mix of these options. Key issues that would inform this choice include cost (given that funds spent on fund administration and evaluation reduce the resource available to impacted communities), capacity (which organisations possess the knowledge, skills and experience required to deliver funds), control (whether EirGrid would remain distant or closely involved in decision-making during specific stages of fund delivery) and legitimacy (what structures and procedures would be seen as impartial, fair, equitable and transparent by stakeholders).

For the sake of brevity, we consider two contrasting scenarios. First, a short power line that falls within the territory of a single local authority. In this case, our findings suggest the merit of EirGrid working closely with the council to administer the fund. Delivery, particularly phases of planning, boundary setting and evaluation of applications would benefit from the council's local knowledge and experience of grant administration including the presence of councillors on large evaluation panels that are used to making decisions on funding applications. Other phases could be contracted out to an external intermediary or delivery agency, for example the voluntary sector organisation involved in the pilot, or conducted in-house by dedicated EirGrid staff.

Second, a long power line that crosses the territories of multiple local councils. In this type of case, local councils could still be involved in order to input local knowledge at certain stages, as described above. But there will be a need for effective coordination across institutions and territories, presuming a pro-rata allocation of funds along the length of the line across local council jurisdictions. Two options exist for delivering this broader coordinating role: an external intermediary, for example the voluntary sector organisation involved in the community fund pilot or EirGrid directly. Outsourcing this coordinating role would benefit from that organisation's national remit and networks, experience of administering grant applications and efficient operation. Additionally, it is often considered good practice in third party administered funds for the intermediary organisation to play a facilitative and support role in such an evaluation process. This is not on the basis of incapacity to evaluate projects but in order to safeguard the process and not to seek undue influence on the outcome.

Were EirGrid to take on this role directly, it would benefit from a more direct role in controlling fund administration and the potential for closer engagement and relationship building both with the local councils and the applicants themselves. Resources that would have been allocated to the voluntary sector organisation could be redistributed towards the employment of staff with suitable skills and experience to establish and run an efficient coordinating agency. This would include convening evaluation panels that combine local knowledge and national,

strategic experience of the community and voluntary sector. However, in a context where power line siting is controversial and there is low trust in EirGrid amongst local stakeholders, direct involvement by EirGrid in fund administration may not be seen as legitimate, with communities choosing to disengage from a process that might be characterised as bribery and regarded as an instrumental attempt to 'buy' social acceptance. In this case, drawing on an external intermediary organisation to deliver the fund, while ensuring that local knowledge contributes to decision-making, may prove the most efficient, effective and legitimate option to ensure benefits are distributed to impacted communities.

Recommendation: The choice of delivery mode for future community funds should be determined according to the best 'fit' with the context of the specific power line. Choices open to EirGrid include in-house delivery of all stages of fund administration, external contracting of all stages to a private, voluntary sector or local authority partner or some mix of these options. Key issues that would inform this choice include cost (given that funds spent on fund administration reduce the resource available to impacted communities), capacity (which organisations possess the knowledge, skills and experience required for fund delivery), control (here referring to whether EirGrid would opt to remain distant or closely involved in decision-making during specific stages of fund delivery) and legitimacy (what structures and procedures would be seen as impartial, fair, equitable and transparent by stakeholders). In the case of a lengthy power line that crosses multiple council boundaries, a consistent and coordinated process of application and award along the entire length of the line should be devised by EirGrid, and either contracted to an external agency or delivered in-house. Local councils could be a valuable partner in fund administration, in order to provide local knowledge that feeds into specific stages of fund delivery, notably scoping and boundary setting, as well as application evaluation. If EirGrid play the role of coordinating local councils on this body, sufficient resource must be made available to do so, in particular the human capital skills and capacities required for effective liaison with local stakeholders.

6 Conclusions

Our approach to the evaluation has sought to provide findings that are both insightful and useful. The report has been written mindful of the fact that the context of the pilot – a relatively short transmission line characterised by little social controversy, negative media coverage or community objections and a community fund operated by different types of organisation in two separate administrative modes – is unlikely to be repeated in future contexts where longer length, higher voltage lines are proposed. We are aware that high levels of mistrust and acts of protest are likely to provide a far more challenging context in which to distribute funds and avoid accusations of bribery, as already found in studies of wind farms (Cass et al., 2010; Rudolph et al., 2015).

This report has three aims: first, to provide an assessment of how the fund was framed, governed and interpreted by different stakeholders; second, to comparatively assess the two methods of fund distribution; third, to share the findings of the research with key stakeholders in Ireland and internationally, informing and fostering good practice by energy sector stakeholders. Given the novelty of the pilot, widespread interest amongst stakeholders in Ireland and elsewhere, and the potential to learn lessons for future funds, this research has brought a qualitative mixed method approach to bear on the community fund.

The findings indicate that the fund was successful in providing much needed grants to local communities, learning opportunities for EirGrid, and positive public relations benefits to the company. In this sense, the findings support the view that the distribution of community funds in future contexts of energy infrastructure siting should become the convention, as encouraged by the 2015 White Paper (DCENR, 2015). The study reveals that the fund was viewed positively overall, welcomed by applicants and stakeholders alike. When scrutinised in detail, it is clear that aspects of the fund were evaluated in different ways by different stakeholders, some more positively than others, indicating the value of employing the qualitative method.

We draw seven key conclusions that are intended to inform and guide the planning and future implementation of community funds.

First, governance of the fund led to situations when different values came into conflict and difficult choices had to be made. This was most visible concerning whether to award funds to the 'best' applications (the meritocratic principle) or spread funds as widely as possible across the area impacted by the power line (the 'casting the net' principle, which also has the merit of producing only winners, not losers from the process). The necessity for fund stakeholders to confront and resolve clashes in values highlights why fund administration will always involve value-based decision-making rather than a purely objective or rational analytic process. This is a key conclusion of the research. Modifying fund procedures can offer solutions to potential dilemmas. For example, moving from a single to a multi-annual award process would offer EirGrid the possibility to combine both approaches within a broader and longer-term benefit strategy in which different awards had different goals and criteria (see Recommendation 1a below).

Second, we conclude that local knowledge is critical to the successful delivery of a fund of this kind. The input of social, spatial and economic knowledge about the impacted area should inform fund delivery across all stages of the process. Local councils could provide this knowledge and connections with community groups to form key partners in future delivery of a fund of this kind, as we found that council representatives have detailed local knowledge, empathy with local communities, and experience of grant administration. However, councils are constrained by other responsibilities and concerns outside of fund delivery, and are territorial institutions with clear boundaries. As such, they are less suited to the delivery of funds in line contexts characterised by the crossing of institutional boundaries. In such contexts, an agency is required to ensure consistency in decision-making across the length of the line. This role could be outsourced to a voluntary sector organisation that has the knowledge, experience and skills to deliver this role. However, if EirGrid wishes to use fund administration as a means of constructing positive relationships with local stakeholders, this role could be taken by the company itself, provided that sufficient and suitable resources, human as well as financial, were put in place to ensure effective delivery of this coordinating role.

Third, boundary setting serves many useful functions as an instrument of governance. The boundary used in the pilot was collectively agreed upon by the stakeholders that delivered the funds for EirGrid, aided decision-making and for the most part was accepted by local stakeholders without complaint. Nevertheless, the assessment of those impacted by a new power line could be improved. We recommend that EirGrid consider other methods of

constructing boundaries for future funds, taking account of both objective and subjective data, including measures of population density, concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage and zones of visual impact as well as local residents' views about where their community lies and what its boundaries are. The combination of these attributes would produce a useful tool that will enable better decision-making by stakeholders in future cases.

Fourth, we endorse the discourse of 'pragmatism' that was applied by stakeholders in this pilot across the stages of the fund, including evaluation, while also recognising that this poses the risk of contravening wider principles – such as equity and transparency – in pursuit of the aim of timely and efficient decision-making. While pragmatism in evaluation led to the successful identification of applications worthy of award, observation of panel meetings and interviews with stakeholders suggest several useful lessons that can increase the quality of evaluation in future funds. If EirGrid staff continue to be involved in decision-making about awards in future cases (and this is not always the case across the energy sector, Rudolph et al., 2015), we recommend that clearer guidance is provided about what kinds of kinds of applications are more likely to be favourably assessed, as well as those not likely to be funded. We also recommend that more consideration is given to the interpersonal dynamics among panel members, particularly when panels are small in size, in order to ensure that panel members' opinions carry equal weight in deliberations. These measures will guarantee greater transparency, which is also likely to benefit EirGrid in being less open to complaint and post-hoc challenge by unsuccessful applicants.

Fifth, our research reveals how expectations of applicants played a significant role in how funds were framed and administered. The methodology was successful in revealing a set of beliefs and assumptions that may typically be latent or implicit in grant management. These expectations were positive as well as pejorative, informing judgements about incomplete or low quality applications as well as the degree of support that should be provided to applicants. We believe there is value in making explicit these assumptions to constructively challenge habitual ways of thinking. We recommend that organisations involved in future fund delivery make explicit these assumptions to constructively challenge pre-existing ways of thinking. For example, engaging in perspective-taking exercises such as role play prior to the launch of a scheme can make explicit pre-existing beliefs. This can also help to establish a collective approach based upon pre-existing beliefs that will maximise the potential for constructive engagement with applicants (as recommended in community engagement with energy projects, cf. Regen for DECC, 2014) and fair scrutiny of submitted applications.

Sixth, the pilot was affected by an unexpected delay in announcing the outcomes of the evaluation panels. This, together with the ways in which fund outcomes were eventually communicated (i.e. using standard emails and letters), negatively affected some of the potential benefits of the scheme. We recommend that a longer period of time is provided in future funds to make decisions on awards made, to inform applicants of the reasons for any delays, and ensure that communications are tailored to applicants to provide effective feedback. We also recommend that EirGrid investigate the potential to release funds in at least two rounds in future cases, particularly when larger amounts are available for distribution. In our opinion, the advantages of multi-award processes outweigh the disadvantages, not least enabling EirGrid to

distribute awards prior to or during construction phases when impacts on local communities are likely to be greatest.

Finally, given the stated aims of the scheme, particularly for large grants, for funds to have significant local impact, we agree that EirGrid puts into place robust mechanisms of evaluation that return to successful applicants three years after awards were provided to investigate the impacts of community funds in the locality, taking both objective and subjective indicators of impact into account. This evaluative research should be conducted independently, to guarantee that findings are perceived as robust and impartial.

To inform and guide actions arising from these conclusions, we make 24 specific recommendations. These are listed below.

7   Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1: Multiple rounds of award provision should take place in future power line contexts that are higher voltage (i.e. 220 or 400kV), longer length (>25km) and cross local authority boundaries.

1a: The aims and criteria for each round of award could differ. An initial round can be viewed as capacity building, providing small sums to many groups to enable applicants to prepare for larger applications in a subsequent round.

1b: Timing of future award provision should ensure that there is a balance of fund distribution across time. This should take place after planning consent has been secured, but before and after a new line is energised. Agreement for the release of funds pre-energisation should be secured by EirGrid from national stakeholders (e.g. CER) prior to the launch of a fund. The rationale for doing so should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders, since it enables EirGrid to benefit impacted communities at the time of local impact (i.e. line construction) instead of only afterwards.

Recommendation 2: The choice of delivery mode for future community funds should be determined according to the best 'fit' with the context of the specific power line. Choices open to EirGrid include in-house delivery of all stages of fund administration, external contracting of all stages to a private, voluntary sector or local authority partner or some mix of the these options. Key issues that would inform this choice include cost (given that funds spent on fund administration reduce the resource available to impacted communities), capacity (which organisations possess the knowledge, skills and experience required for fund delivery), control (here referring to whether EirGrid would opt to remain distant or closely involved in decision-making during specific stages of fund delivery) and legitimacy (what structures and procedures would be seen as impartial, fair, equitable and transparent by stakeholders). In the case of a lengthy power lines that crosses multiple council boundaries, a consistent and coordinated process of application and award along the entire length of the line should be devised by EirGrid, and either contracted to an external agency or delivered in-house. Local councils could be a valuable partner in fund administration, in order to provide local knowledge that feeds into specific stages of fund delivery, notably scoping and boundary setting, as well as application evaluation. If EirGrid play the role of coordinating local councils on this body, sufficient resource must be made available to do so, in particular the human capital skills and capacities required for effective liaison with local stakeholders.

Defining the boundaries of communities impacted by future power lines:

Recommendation 3: Multiple sources of data should inform how 'impact' boundaries are devised. This can include materials already collected for the planning application (e.g. topographical information, social impact assessment, landscape and visual impact assessment) as well as additional objective and subjective information about the context of the power line (e.g. population density, areas of socio-economic deprivation, local residents' views on community boundaries and spatial patterns of socio-cultural and economic activity). The stated aim should be to spread the benefits of high quality applications as widely as possible across the impacted area.

Recommendation 4: The process of devising impact boundaries should begin at an early stage once the preferred power line route corridor has been selected. An initial proposal for the boundary should be constructed by EirGrid and shared with stakeholders to gain their feedback and acceptance. Any revisions arising from stakeholder input should be documented and their rationales clearly recorded. This will ensure transparency and legitimacy (procedural justice) prior to the actual distribution of funds.

Recommendation 5: Once the impact boundary is agreed, an assessment should be undertaken of the different communities that lie within (see also Recommendation 7 below). This could be included within, or build from, the social impact assessment conducted as part of the planning application. If a group(s) is identified that would likely be excluded by the conventional application process, EirGrid should provide targeted support measures for potential applicants from this community(s). The purpose of this activity is to ensure equity in opportunity to apply for funds (i.e. distributional justice). Both the process of targeted support and its outcome should be set out transparently. The effectiveness of providing this support should be evaluated afterwards.

<u>The process of application:</u>

Recommendation 6: Conditions of eligibility should be laid out clearly from the beginning of the process. These should be easy to find and read on web and print documents related to the fund. The preconditions should also be clearly communicated to local intermediaries (e.g. councillors, community networks) that publicise the fund to potential applicants. The rationales for organisational criteria should be clearly explained (e.g. PPN, audited accounts).

Recommendation 7: Judging the 'locality' of an application (and therefore whether it is judged eligible or ineligible for award) is complex. Initial assessment of the eligibility of the applications should therefore consider the following broader criteria:
- Where will the project be based?
- Where are the majority of the users of the project based?
- Where is the applicant group based?

Application forms should be structured to produce this information and answers to these broader questions should determine applicant eligibility in conjunction with the map. When applications mix 'inside' and 'outside' across these criteria (e.g. when the project straddles a boundary line; when users come from both inside and outside of the designated area), applications should be favoured where a majority of these answers are 'inside' and the rationale for a decision on eligibility should be set out transparently.

Recommendation 8: The application form should be designed to better reflect the range of criteria actually used in the evaluation, in order to facilitate initial scoring of applications by the evaluation panel and transparency in decision-making.

Recommendation 9: Small and recently formed groups should be provided with assistance to meet the preconditions of application, either indirectly (e.g. by signposting them towards existing sources of community support) or directly from fund stakeholders.

Recommendation 10: When small groups enter into partnerships with larger organisations in order to qualify for application, this partnership should be transparent in bid documents and representatives of the larger organisations should not play a role on the evaluation panels.

The evaluation process

Recommendation 11: Presentations should be included in the latter stage of evaluation of large grant awards, as they give voice to applicants, and enable direct contact between applicants and decision-makers. The purpose and content of the presentations should be clearly communicated to shortlisted applicants in advance. Presentations should focus upon the application project, including financial aspects, and be strictly time limited. Support should be made available to applicants who have little prior experience of presenting proposals.

Recommendation 12: The evaluation process for future funds should have several stages. First, applicant eligibility should be determined, including the assessment of 'locality' referred to above. Then, evaluation should begin with assessment of the merit of each application. It should produce two outcomes: first, a rank order of eligible applications from strongest to weakest; second, an acceptability threshold, i.e. a level above which all applicants are considered 'good enough' in principle to fund on merit alone. A second stage of evaluation should then focus on all of the applications lying above the acceptability threshold and take any other relevant considerations into account, for example spatial distribution and socio-economic disadvantage of applications. Panel members should be provided with clear information (e.g. coded maps) that communicate this information to them in a format that will support their decision-making. The outcome of panel deliberations should be a decision taken on the final applications for award. The reasoning behind any altering of rankings between the two stages should be recorded transparently.

Recommendation 13: EirGrid should be clear about the objectives of the community fund to make it simpler for evaluation panels to determine whether or not an applicant fits with 'the spirit' of the scheme.

Recommendation 14: If EirGrid representatives are to sit on the evaluation panels for future funds, they should be aware that their opinions will guide those of others around the table. The Chair of the panel should ensure a consistent process of deliberation on each applicant, for example other representatives could be given the opportunity to express their opinions before the EirGrid representatives, in order to ensure equal weight in the discussions and final decision-making.

Recommendation 15: Panel members should be selected to minimise conflicts of interest with the applicant groups. If some involvement exists, this should be openly declared prior to the evaluation meetings to ensure procedural fairness and impartiality. Panel members with an interest in specific applications should be requested to leave the room when those applications are discussed.

Recommendation 16: EirGrid should clearly communicate from the outset that certain projects are not eligible for award (e.g. those only accessible via membership fees).

Recommendation 17: EirGrid should discuss beforehand with local and regional stakeholders whether certain types of project (e.g. energy related, such as addressing fuel poverty; or technology related, such as addressing computer skills and capacities) should be more strongly sought and valued by the fund in given geographical areas. Even when this is the case, EirGrid should also be responsive to the needs of local areas, as perceived by local groups.

Recommendation 18: Applicants should be eligible to apply for 100% of project costs from the fund, particularly when submitted from groups in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

Recommendation 19: Guidance for applicants should make clear that the majority of project funds will stem from the group's application to the fund. It should be clearly communicated that applications piecing together small awards from several sources are discouraged.

Recommendation 20: Steps should be taken to ensure that any assumptions held by fund stakeholders about the applicants, which reveal habitual ways of thinking and implicit biases, are made explicit and constructively challenged prior to the evaluations taking place, in the interest of procedural fairness and justice. These steps should include trialling the use of exercises by panel members that promote perspective-taking and empathy with applicant groups (e.g. role play). The impact of these exercises should be carefully monitored and evaluated.

Post-award fund administration

Recommendation 21: Detailed, tailored feedback – in writing or verbally as appropriate – should be provided for both successful and unsuccessful applications in future community fund provision. The resource required to ensure this takes place effectively should be factored into the cost of the community fund from the beginning.

Recommendation 22: A longer time period should be communicated in future funds to inform applicants and other stakeholders (e.g. local councillors) when the outcome of decisions will be made public. If delays take place in future fund administration, these should be communicated quickly to the relevant groups and intermediary bodies.

Recommendation 23: EirGrid should devise an online and publicly accessible 'community fund register' that transparently records the funds distributed over time for different power line projects. This could be linked to a broader community benefits register associated with renewable energy projects, as recommended by the Energy White Paper (2015).

Evaluating and communicating project impacts

Recommendation 24: A project evaluation mechanism should be devised that will clearly identify the impacts of fund awards. Impacts should be judged not only in terms of delivering concrete facilities, but also in terms of less tangible outcomes such as raising skills, empowerment and esteem. Evaluation should be conducted by an organisation that is independent of EirGrid and local groups to ensure impartiality, and be based on both quantitative (e.g. financial data, equipment use data) and qualitative data (e.g. interviews with applicants, project users) to ensure rigour. EirGrid should carefully consider what data will be

required from successful applicants (e.g. number and type of users of a facility) in order to inform the independent evaluation that will take place several years post-award. This information should be communicated clearly to applicants at the time of award so that they are fully clear about what data EirGrid will subsequently need for evaluation, and if necessary support for data collection (e.g. use of robust monitoring methods) should be provided by EirGrid as part of the award process, in order not to over-burden community organisations.

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10   EirGrid documents

EirGrid Mullingar–Kinnegad Community Fund details http://www.foundation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Criteria-EirGrid-Community-Fund- Mullingar-Kinnegad-110-kV-Line-1.pdf

Details of the Mullingar–Kinnegad project http://www.mullingar110kvproject.ie/index

11   Appendix 1: Stakeholder and applicant interview questions

11.1   Stakeholder interview questions– June 2016

How do you think that the pilot has gone so far?

What in particular do you think has gone well?

What do you think has been more challenging?
(Probes: For whom? In what way(s)? With what effects or impacts?)

Have any issues arisen so far that were unexpected or a surprise to you? If so, what?

How well do you think that the different stakeholders have worked together on the pilot?

Have any particular challenges arisen so far? If so, what were these? What impact do you think they have had?

What learning do you think has arisen so far in implementing the fund – for you and your organisation? For other stakeholders?

Standing back from what has happened so far, are there any learning points you would identify for implementing a Community Fund of this kind again in the future?

11.2   Applicant interview questions

EirGrid's community fund

Why do you think EirGrid are providing the community fund? Do you think it is a good idea?

How did you hear about the fund? And when … (i.e. how much time before the deadline? Was this considered sufficient for preparing your application, looking back?)

What interactions, if any, did you have with the intermediary organisations? How would you describe these, in terms of any support you received?

To what extent to you feel that this community fund provides benefits or drawbacks to the local community?

Spatial boundary

Views on the spatial boundary/map? (local boundaries)

Why do you think this boundary was chosen?
>   *Do you think the area is too large/too small/about right?*
>   *Did you or others in your organisation look at the map?*
What did you or others in your organisation think of the boundary line?
>   *How close is your organisation to the power line? (can you see it?)*

> *How close are your project activities (if somewhere else from where the org. is based)?*
> *Thoughts on the community defined by the boundary line?*

Application and evaluation process

There were two organisations delivering the grant. Did you have previous dealings with both of them? How did you choose which organisation to apply to?

How did you come to decide what size grant to apply for?
> *How did you determine the costs requested for your project?*
> *Did you go for the maximum amount available? If so, why?*
> *Do you think co-funding is seen to be important when it comes to funding success? Do you think that applicants might be seen to be 'too greedy' when costing up their proposals?*

Can you describe how you put your application/project together?
> *What did you think of the choice of categories? (broad/narrow/reflecting need)*
> How did the timing of the launch of the fund and the application deadline work for you?
> > *sufficient time?*
> > *gathering required documentation?*
> > *Westmeath – applying for a PPN?*
> > *experience of grant writing?*

Looking back, what might have assisted in preparing your application?
Would more support/guidance/time have helped?

Beforehand, did you have any specific ideas about the kinds of projects that EirGrid were keen to support? If so, what were these? Where did these ideas come from?
> *How well do you feel your project met the criteria?*

Do you know how the applications were evaluated by EirGrid, who was involved etc? Any expectations of the evaluation process?
> If some knowledge, how fair do you think the evaluation process was? How could it be improved? Value of presentations?

How were you informed of the outcome of your application?
> *What level of feedback did you receive about the decision taken on your application?*
> *What about the timeliness of the response to your application?*

How does this application process compare with others you've applied for?

Looking back, do you think your views about EirGrid have changed in any way as a result of the application process?

Benefits/drawbacks of the power line and the community fund (from Cass et al., 2010)

Local authority – Appropriate for the fund to be administered by the county council?

Is there anything you'd like to add?

12   Appendix two: Evaluation scoring criteria

12.1   Criteria used by the voluntary sector organisation to evaluate applications

Criteria 1 - Strategic Fit

- The proposed project of work must fit into the current grant making priorities
- The proposed project must serve an identified need
- The organisation has demonstrated their capacity for carrying out the project

Criteria 2 - Realistic Budget

- The proposed project must include clear, detailed, realistic costs and timescales

Criteria 3 – Reach

- The proposed project is not internal to the organisation but has a wider community reach
- The proposed project has the potential for wider impact within the sector
- The proposed project has potential for long term impact in the area

Criteria 4 - Measurable results

- Applicants must be prepared to track programme results throughout the duration of the project
- Applicants must be prepared to evaluate and learn from their work

Criteria 5 – Collaboration

- Commitment to working in partnership with other organisations must be demonstrated
- A willingness to share project learning and outcomes.

12.2 Criteria used by the local authority to evaluate applications

Ref:	Stage 1 Eligibility		Eligible YES/NO
C1	Is the project located within the geographical area outlined by EirGrid?		
C2	Does the project proposal meet one or more of the EirGrid criteria listed in the literature (as listed below at **C4** below)?		
C3	Is the project promoter a member of the PPN OR - A charity or social enterprise?		
	If C1 and C2 and C3 is Yes then project proceeds to Stage 2		
Stage 2 Evaluation			
Ref:	**Assessment Criteria**	**Objective**	**Weighting**	**Score**
C4	Compatibility with local authority and EirGrid criteria	The extent to which the project proposal demons positive potential impact on the community in it vicinity by one or more of the following: a) The enhancement of community ameniti b) The provision of leisure amenities; c) The provision of environmental awarene measures; d) The provision of amenities for children and young people; e) The provision of amenities for older people; f) The provision of additional educational facilities and initiatives; g) Assisting an arts, language, local heritage or cultural initiative; h) Assisting an initiative led by a sporting organisation i) Assisting particular local needs.	**30**	
C5	Requirement	Does the project meet an identified need?	**10**	
C6	Promoter experience	Does the promoter have the training/skills, track record or experience to deliver?	**20**	
C7	Financial viability	Are the project costs justifiable and is adequate funding available to co-fund the project?	**20**	
C8	Sustainability	Is the project viable and will the service continue to be delivered?	**20**	
	TOTAL		**100**	