

Commissioned by the  
**Regional Infrastructure Consortium (RIC)**  
facilitated by **VONNE**

Funded by  
**One NorthEast (ONE)**

**FUNDING INFORMATION  
NORTH EAST (FINE)**

**Independent External Evaluation  
Summary**

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## Summary

1. Funding Information North East (FINE) aims to provide good quality and up to date funding information to support the voluntary sector in the North East. This involves: providing sources of funding and funding opportunities via bulletins, publications and databases; providing mentoring, support and training to Funding Advisors; developing and maintaining links with funders and regional agencies and making national links with similar projects.
2. This independent evaluation of FINE was commissioned by the Regional Infrastructure Consortium (RIC) and funded by One NorthEast (ONE).
3. The evaluation objectives included: reviewing the quality of FINE's present services; identifying service gaps and income generation opportunities; considering how best to support funding advisors; assessing what future developments are needed to help Third sector meet funding challenges in the region; evaluating advantages/disadvantages of different structures and governance arrangements for FINE; assessing FINE's added value through the relationship between FINE's services and the amount of money levered into the region by the Third sector; and providing a list of options to assist FINE in developing its capacity and becoming more sustainable.
4. The evaluation methods included: desk-based review; questionnaire survey; telephone interviews; consultations and a review meeting. The total response rate for the evaluation was 25%.
5. 95% of respondents thought information provided by FINE was very good or good; more than 90% agreed that other FINE services were very good or good.
6. 92% of the funding advisors who completed the survey strongly agreed that FINE's services had benefited them; benefits mentioned included networking opportunities; information and advice; training; funder presentations; support; influence; and benefits to Local Authority Funding Officers. Overall they were satisfied with FINE's services.
7. Funding advisors expressed concern that if FINE's services weren't available to them, it would be harder and more expensive to find services such as training elsewhere.
8. 97% of respondents stated that FINE's services had benefited their organisation, benefits mentioned include saved time and effort; accurate, up to date information; access to funding opportunities; income generation; working together; networking; advocacy; training; and a collective voice.
9. 59% of third sector organisation respondents felt that FINE had helped to lever funding into the region.
10. The future of FINE: a number of suggestions were made including maintaining its position; a role in reviewing the impact of changes in local authorities in relation to funding opportunities for the third sector; operating the Funders Forum as an advisory body; funded through the consortia to continue as it is; developing training on income generation for the third sector; and providing more training on legal structures.

11. Income generation suggestions included: running seminars; holding master classes; more training (self-financing); offering consultancy days to groups on funding issues; charge local authorities etc. for training; providing services to local authority funding officers and other agencies; increasing charges for the core services; extending the training programme; extending the geographical area of FINE's services beyond the region; and providing advice to the corporate sector in working with charities.
12. Subscriptions: funding advisors were receptive to the idea of introducing subscriptions but were concerned about meeting the cost. Infrastructure organisations supported the need for subscriptions to secure FINE's future, but again there was concern about finding the money for this.
13. Structure and governance of FINE: respondents identified the following options: FINE's governance structure remaining as it is now; the same structure but with an expanded Development Group; FINE becoming part of VONNE; and FINE becoming an independent organisation.
14. Local Authority Funding Officers were positive about setting up a network for them (similar to FAWN); however, doubts were expressed as to whether Local Authorities would be willing and able to contribute financially.
15. Review meeting: all respondents were fairly positive that there were income generation options for FINE. The most appropriate options the group agreed were recharging and developing the existing services, while maintaining a strong regional and specialist focus.
16. Recommendations were made in relation to:
  - Needs of funding advisors: funding advisors emphasised the importance of FINE and recommend FINE continues to provide the services to enable them to carry out their role;
  - Regional gaps and challenges in the third sector: respondents were concerned introducing new services for FINE could impact on time/resources for the core services, however a number of suggestions have been made in the findings that can be explored;
  - Income generation: services should be priced appropriately to contribute to core costs;
  - Subscriptions: respondents were receptive to the idea and recommend this is explored further;
  - The structure and governance of FINE: the FINE management and Development Group should meet to discuss expanding the group and a way forward;
  - Working with Local Authority (LA) Funding Officers; FINE should explore the levels of commitment of all LA Funding Officers to being part of a network.
  - The future of FINE: FINE should continue to provide the same core services as a priority.
  - Funding FINE: no ideas of funding streams were identified in the evaluation. However, suggestions were made for FINE to increase marketing and promotional activity, speak the language of potential funders, and diversify into other areas.

## Conclusion

- This evaluation has revealed a very positive response from 3<sup>rd</sup> sector stakeholders regarding the work that FINE currently does. As well as fulfilling its remit by providing high quality information, services, training and representation, respondents also described various ways in which FINE has brought added value, and played a role in leveraging funding into the region. Many respondents expressed concern that without FINE, the task of accessing funding in the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector would be a great deal more time-consuming and difficult.
- Sustainability is a key issue for FINE right now, as future funding for the project is in doubt. A number of ideas for ways to address this problem have been raised and discussed over the course of the evaluation, including more income-generating activities and the introduction of subscriptions for infrastructure organisations. However, the need for core funding to sustain the project was outlined by a number of respondents.
- The evaluation identified a number of gaps, needs and challenges within the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector. Some of these are issues that could be addressed by FINE - as discussed in the previous section - but others would need to be taken up at a strategic, regional or national level. Firstly, lobbying may be appropriate at a national level to highlight the worsening situation regarding funding for the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector in general and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector infrastructure organisations in particular. More specifically to FINE, a number of respondents stressed the need for funders like Capacity Builders to recognise that ongoing funding for successful projects is just as important as financing innovative new work. Finally, a respondent based in another region suggested that co-operative and partnership working within the sector is not as well developed in the North East as in some other regions, and that this could be improved upon through a strategic regional approach. FINE may be able to exercise some influence through its close links with the Regional Infrastructure Consortium (RIC), emphasising the importance of maximising links between the RIC sub-regional infrastructure consortia, and the Infrastructure Development Group.