



Strengthening the capacity of Wychavon Community Plan Core Group and Local Strategic Partnerships

Introduction

In January 2008 the Wychavon Community Plan Core Group commissioned Patrick Clark Consulting (PCC) to review the effectiveness of communications between the Core Group, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and partner organisations. Using external resources from the Learning to Deliver programme, this review was intended to identify current strengths and weaknesses and make recommendations for the future development of partnership communications and joint working across Wychavon's partnerships.

This summary gives the results of the first two stages of this review:

- A review of national best practice in partnership communications
- 14 Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders

These findings and the recommendations arising from them will be explored in greater depth and developed at a facilitated Stakeholder workshop on April 1st 2008.

Findings

The national picture

The importance of communications in ensuring effective partnership working is well documented. However, this is more than just a simple case of ensuring everyone knows what is going on. Research by PCC in 2006 and 2007 identified seven communication priorities within effective partnerships. These were:

1. **Partnership successes** need to be communicated to build a positive image of the partnership based on its delivery.
2. Communicating the **rationale** for partnership working i.e. why we do it?
3. Communicating the **competencies** required for effective partnership i.e. what is required of us to make this work?
4. Raising awareness of the different organisational cultures / **aims and objectives** of different partners. Building understanding and breaking down barriers.
5. Developing and communicating a **common vision** of the partnership – what it does, why it exists, where it is going?
6. Building and communicating the organisational commitment to partnerships from the top (within individual partner organisations).
7. Building relationships and opportunities for **informal networking** and communications.

Successful partnerships tend to use their own internal communications tools such as community strategies, newsletters, web-pages and summaries of meetings to keep partners engaged in the process and ensure everyone is clear about progress. Effective partnerships also spend time engaging stakeholders in agreeing priorities for their partnerships and developing agreed work-plans and where it makes sense to

focus these on smaller geographical area, arrangements to support this are put in place.

Clarity about what aims and objectives can best be achieved in partnership and how they will be achieved is also a key feature of more effective partnerships, as this ensures maximum focus of effort and resources on these issues.

Partnerships have proved effective in delivering funding programmes within a locality but at the same time many have struggled to change the way mainstream resources are focussed to meet the challenges facing local communities.

The Local Picture

Things that work well

- There is a lot to be proud of and notably the fact that all partners supported the Core Group / 3 LSP model approach and felt that this offered the best way of delivering partnership working across Wychavon District. *“Now we just need to make it work”* (Interviewee)
- Partners accepted their role in feeding back to and from their organisations or sectors to the Core Group and/or LSPs*
- The paperwork supporting the work of the various groups is felt to be of a high quality and it is accessible to partners.
- The officer support at both Core Group and LSP levels was considered good.
- Some partners (e.g. Voluntary Sector, Police, Parish and Town Councils) have recognised they need to do more to engage and are actively seeking to find ways to engage effectively in the Core Group and/or LSPs.
- Partners were clear about the purpose of the bits of the partnership they were involved in.
- The Core Group works effectively in linking the work of the LSPs and the Local Area Agreement.

Issues

- Some partners felt that feedback between the Core Group and LSPs is inconsistent and is too dependent on the role of the Chair. It should be noted that two of the LSP Chairs had sought to overcome this by providing written summaries for both Core Group and LSP members.
- * Though partners accepted their role in feeding back to their organisations and/or sectors, some struggled with this role due to the complex nature of the organisations they represent.
- The relationship between PACT, Parish and Town Councils and other mechanisms needs to be strengthened.
- Greater clarity is required about the LSP role and in particular their role in engaging with the wider community.
- Communication between LSPs could be made stronger, particularly when sharing best practice. Some partners felt the Core Group needed to be more dynamic in this role to ensure better co-ordination.
- More partners need to engage more proactively in the work of the Core Group and LSPs.
- There is still some confusion about the terminology being used to describe the LSPs – are they Local Strategic Partnerships or Market Towns Partnerships? Some partners felt that the Core Group should be considered the LSP with the three town partnerships being “Area Partnerships”.