



# Strengthening the capacity of Wychavon Community Plan Core Group and Local Strategic Partnerships – Annual evaluation report

## 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.

The findings were divided into national and local findings. It is useful to remind ourselves of some of the national learning:

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.

The original study combined the findings of the national review of what makes partnerships work with extensive local consultation with partners about the strengths and weaknesses of the Wychavon approach to make a series of 17 recommendations to the Wychavon Core Group and three LSPs. These were discussed and turned into an action plan at a full partnership meeting in April 2008.

It was always intended that progress would be reviewed after 6 months and this evaluation was therefore commissioned to test progress against the agreed actions and give partners an additional opportunity to review progress and make further recommendations for action. The evaluation was carried out through a combination of desk review, self-completion questionnaires and a stakeholder workshop on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2009. The initial evaluation resulted in a progress update against the 17 recommendations which was then used to provide the basis of discussion at the January workshop. The progress report and areas for improvement outlined below are the output from the evaluation and workshop.

## Progress

The evaluation identified a range of progress across all the areas of the partnership:

- The three LSPs (Market Towns Partnerships) are now better informed about Core Group and partner activity – standing agenda items
- Networking sessions have been introduced before Core Group Meetings
- Links with WP Theme Groups have been strengthened (though there are still some gaps)
- Core Group Minutes and “Communicate” were felt to be very helpful communication tools and were being used as agenda items at some of the LSP meetings
- Some partners circulate “Communicate” to colleagues/organisations in their sector or extract relevant information from it to use in their own publications
- LSP Chair reports are being produced at the Core Group, though it was felt these needed to be provided in advance of the meetings to ensure they were able to be circulated
- The three LSPs were networking more through events like the Christmas event
- Pershore LSP held a celebratory “What has the Partnership Done?” event and produced a report

## Areas for improvement and responses

The evaluation identified the following areas where recommendations from the initial study had not been progressed as fully as anticipated. These are outlined below alongside the response of the Core Group / LSPs as to how this could be addressed.

- Audrey Steel and Cherrie Mansfield to attend a meeting of each LSP
  - *This has not happened but is still planned*
- Identify minute takers from within the LSP membership to support the LSP Managers during meetings
  - *This depends on the ability of people to take effective minutes. However the principle of partners providing support to the Core Group and LSPs remains*
- Identify potential news stories as a part of each LSP / Core Group meeting and target these to different audiences.
  - *Some of this happens already (e.g. the Pershore event) but the Partnership Managers and/or Chairs still need to consider this on an ongoing basis*
- The links between the Core Group and LSPs are still unclear in some cases
  - *Invite LSP partners to Core Group meetings*
  - *LSPs felt that the Core Group needs to take on the issues that they don't have the capacity to deal with (to include cross cutting issues)*
- Links between action plans (Core Group & LSPs)
  - *This was felt to be a Core Group role with the suggestion that the Core Group links the LAA Action Plans with the LAA and use this as the basis of their own Action Plan*
- Partner input / information could be stronger
  - *Remind partners that their contribution is valued and impacts the effectiveness of the partnership*

- *Try to engage partners early in emerging issues*
- Theme Group links need to be stronger – the feedback role between the Worcestershire Partnership Theme Groups and Wychavon could improve
  - *Ensure Theme Group links are aware of their role and given support in this*
- Links with 3 LSP Managers
  - *The Managers recognised that despite the time pressures they face they needed to make the time to co-ordinate action and communicate*
- Annual event involving all stakeholders & annual report including all actions
  - *Annually was felt to be too frequent but the idea of a bi-annual or three yearly event was felt to be positive*
- Develop a Web based message board / discussion forum
  - *This has not been progressed*
- Partner agencies to work with the support of partner communications officers to develop a simple communications framework
  - *A decision on whether to proceed with this needs to be made at a future Core Group meeting*
- The LSPs and Core Group should discuss with CALC and Parish and Town Councils their potential involvement in annual parish meetings or meetings of groups of parishes
  - *Some work has taken place with the Parish and Town Councils but this is an ongoing task*
- The idea of a Rural Road-Show to enable better engagement outside of the Market Towns should be discussed by the LSPs

*Work is ongoing to reach out to the rural hinterland of the three LSPs and this needs to continue.*

Following discussions the workshop participants agreed to take forward the following three priority actions:

1. **LSP managers** to meet regularly to co-ordinate action, share common issues and best practice.
2. **Core Group** to look at the three LSP action plans to identify strategic issues and to demonstrate how the Wychavon partnerships are contributing to the LAA.
3. **All partners** on the Core Group and LSP to provide regular feedback to and from their organisations.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that the three priorities identified at the workshop, plus any of the other actions outlined above that are still relevant are used as the basis of an ongoing partnership action plan for the Core Group and LSPs. It is fairly easy to attribute responsibility to the various actions and though some are ongoing tasks, many are discrete areas of work that can be given a deadline.

It would be helpful to review progress against these actions in 12 months alongside and additional review of partner buy-in and whether the existing structures remain fit for purpose.

## Conclusions

Progress has been good and many areas of improvement have been addressed by Wychavon's partnerships. In addition, there is widespread commitment to the principles of effective partnership working and to the aim of making the Wychavon model work effectively and the actions outlined above will enable the partnerships to achieve that aim.