

South Derbyshire Local Strategic Partnership

Report to Board

Date of meeting: 25th March 2009

Agenda Item: 11

Local Strategic Partnership Communications Peer Review

Issue

This review was to assess the impact of South Derbyshire LSP's communications, identify the profile that its members want for the Partnership, options for PR support and the opportunities for dissemination of messages.

Background

At the LSP Visioning Day the issue of communication was identified as a key area of review and improvement for the LSP. It was included as an action in this Groups Improvement Plan. On the 24th September 2008, the Board supported a proposal to review the Communications function of the LSP.

Details

This peer review was undertaken by Fiona Narburgh, Head of Strategy and Communications at Wychavon District Council and took place 16-18th March 2009 and ended with a presentation to the Sustainable Community Strategy project team on the 18th March.

The purpose of the review was to look at what happens now to communicate achievements and progress of the LSP and identify improvements for the future so that the LSP gets the credit for the work of the partnership in local quality of life improvements. As part of the review Fiona interviewed key partners and the media to look at what happens now, what the opportunities are and what needs to be improved in the future. A report with recommendations is attached at **Appendix A**.

Financial Implications

A budget of £2,500 was allocated for the project and the review was delivered within these limits. The allocation came from the Partnerships budget reserve of £33,000.

Recommendations

That the Board notes the recommendations of the peer review and the Sustainable Community Strategy Working Group incorporates these recommendations into the arrangements for the new Sustainable Community Strategy

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South Derbyshire Local Strategic Partnership

Report to Board

The Partnership Communications MOT: a health check to improve your communications and performance

Initial Feedback to the Sustainable Community Strategy Working Group, 18th March by Fiona Narburgh – then LSP Board.

Introduction – My brief and what I've done

My brief is to offer an independent perspective on the work of the LSP as you move into the development of your new community strategy when leadership of place is ever more important - and offer some suggestions for improvements, particularly regarding communications. The purpose is to take stock of what's been achieved so far and to make sure key audiences know about the many improvements being made through joint working.

My findings are based on the documents reviewed and interviews with partners, media and relevant district and county staff. **My thanks go to all involved** – people have been willing to offer perspectives and have been very open – a credit to the strong partnership working and the want to build on current successes in the new structure and strategy.

Here I pull out some key messages then pull out some of the comments made, then some quick wins to improve. Finally I ask for feedback so I can include in my final report.

Overall messages

1. There is widespread consensus that the **LSP is “adding value”** – meaning that things are happening (or further and faster) because of the strong relationships in place at the Board and theme groups. **Better together** was how one described the benefits. Indeed a useful strapline **Trust, openness, challenge, leadership, involvement** were words used throughout the interviews. People make the time to contribute because they see and make things happen that wouldn't without working together.
2. The process (from current plan to mark 2) is **robust and thorough** – developing the detailed evidence base of the area and challenges and needs, the various and innovative consultation events eg, visioning day at Toyota and the review of what's been achieved through the current strategy. It's all great ground work – done properly. How it is turned into a great plan that stretching yet deliverable will be key.
3. There is **much support for the new ‘model’** – with the leadership board level “driving” the strategy/ overall work and the “engine room” of revised theme groups at the doing level. The right people seem to be contributing at the right level. There is however a need to share across the structures more – **communications between theme groups** for example.

South Derbyshire Local Strategic Partnership

Report to Board

4. All feel that **improving communications is important** and indeed is needed to share achievements wider and in an accessible form – but most agree this should focus on the **benefits to residents** – rather than promoting the LSP as a goal in own right. While suggestions for new products are welcomed, so it tapping into existing communications tools better like parish magazines – as well as taking messages to groups rather than hoping people 'come to us'.
5. Some feel there could be an even **better balance between strong council leadership and discussion** at the Board level. The Board is big (inclusive) and well run yet at times is viewed as too council dominated, to 'council committee like' – getting through the business at times rather than checking for understanding, contributions or agreement.
6. ***It's not just what you do but the way you do it*** – how you engage, involve and communicate is as important as the right processes and plans. The Community Strategy "cake" is well made with all the right ingredients but the "icing" is now needed (complete with cherrie!). **This review suggests some useful toppings and extra ingredients!**

What people said – quotes to give a flavour, non are attributed

On the Board and theme groups...

"I wouldn't get involved if it wasn't worthwhile"

"we simply achieve more through working together"

"we have powerful people round the table – spenders and decision-makers and we build understanding between us of the issues we face and need to address"

"It's (i.e., the Board) the key driver for all partnership working"

"the benefits are all about building trust and strong relationships – that's the added value. If something needs doing I can pick up the phone and get things sorted"

"strong leadership, the right people round the table and all get a chance to contribute...but a little too formal at times"

"the council is much better now at listening...there's been a huge change in openness by the statutory organisations"

"people used to say (to vol sector) we're not working with you if it's linked to the council – not true anymore, there's the knowhow to get things done"

"it's a sensible, considered approach, there's a willingness to listen and take stock"

"less presentations please and more discussion"

"the LSP is good at making things happen, the board is business like but it feels like speed dating!"

"it's a great bunch to work with, officers listen, people are experienced in partnership, it's non-political and there's an understanding of what's needed – and the limitations"

"it's like a family here – we all have the district at heart – we're passionate about the area"

"The Deputy and Chair could work together more – share their skills to lead the partnership"

"there are always improvements we can make – we're open to ideas"

"Is there a need for more independent secretariat? One that we all pay for?"

"we need to do more celebrating and less overly bureaucratic approaches like performance management – it turns people off and we lose people in the detail"

South Derbyshire Local Strategic Partnership

Report to Board

"a slower pace at times might make for greater ownership – we risk losing people otherwise"

On the new Strategy...

"Let's do fewer things really well"

"let's only put in the things that are the new and innovative – not what we do already – it should be the innovative, risk taking and piloting, the new and beyond the norm – that's the unique selling point"

"let's not assume every theme group needs ten actions – lets prioritise"

"Do we need to link to LDF more – massive development and population pressures"

"Do we want to have the fastest growing label in times of recession?"

"Let's balance the big stuff – LAA outcomes – with the local needs in the new strategy"

"Let's change how we do performance management – the traffic lights are subjective and detailed so we lose the impact"

And on communications ...

"there is no product at the moment that covers all LSP activities but specific initiatives that are the work of the theme group are promoted"

"we lack the confidence and we're rather reserved here to shout about successes"

"we are reluctant (to communicate) because people think it will raise expectations we cannot meet"

"it's not about making the partners be seen to be doing a lot – it's about the benefits of the work to residents"

"it's not the ..aren't we wonderful, aren't we great, but what does it mean for the person on the ground."

"could we do the 'what's the partnership done for me' type communication?"

"we need to get out to where people meet rather than expect them to come to us"

"we could live a little more dangerously and just do stuff, don't need to be perfect"

"don't forget to use elected members more – they know their communities and can directly communicate too"

South Derbyshire Local Strategic Partnership

Report to Board

Quick(ish) wins

1. **Celebrate what the current plan has achieved.** Eg, could Sue Grief's review and the brilliant achievements set out in the performance management reports be turned into a 'did we deliver for you?' summary product– with the benefits residents get – ideally with real quotes. Use the new jigsaw of centre with photos of examples around. Basically create the readable, colourful, down to earth, and targeted at non specialists. It could be as simple as adapting the post card with 'did you know...' facts and stats.
2. **Do a really good launch event for the new Strategy** – linked to above. People remember the event that shared benefits of actions at Toyota a few years ago – community awards type approach where people shared the benefits.
3. **Put in mechanisms to make it routine to share success** – communications as regular item on board and theme groups agendas for example. What are the 3 things from the group/meeting that we need to get wider – pull into a partnership newsletter. There's 2 versions needed –one for internal use **between theme groups** (so people know the key stuff) and for use within partners own organisations AND **a public facing version** showing the benefits/ actions, contacts, new services etc.
4. **Set up a web site** – as the public face AND for the detail eg, performance reports, meeting notes in one place, events, what partners need to know – again making time and who's time? Start small and build up. Links to partners. Council could host.
5. **Review what products already exist that we could tap into** –Parish newsletters, member bulletin, partners products etc – use those mechanisms better.
6. **Develop a communications plan (that's not a consultation plan!)** to sit alongside the new Strategy – key messages, methods, target audience, mechanisms – treat like a council campaign? Can be a one sider, needn't be onerous.
7. **Use the jigsaw**, ditch the LSP reference but **South Derbyshire Partnership** – Better Together...

What's next – please have your say for the final report.

Do you agree or disagree with these initial findings? If you want to contribute please do give me a call/ drop me an email so I can incorporate into the final report with firmer recommendations (costed where possible). **Please get in touch by 1st April.**

Fiona Narburgh, 17th March 2009
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Fiona's Engaging Film
www.bit.ly/tgim