

End of Project Summary Report –‘Learning Laboratory’ 5 Town Network

Background to Learning Laboratories Pilot

In 2006, the 5 Town Network was approached by South East Excellence to become a second pilot in the South East Region to develop and deliver a bespoke training programme for Councillors and Officers around the agenda of Sustainable Communities.

As part of developing the bid for the programme, two workshops took place with key stakeholders across the Coastal West Sussex strip in order to identify the relevant skills gaps among the members of the 5 Town Network in relation to delivering the sustainable communities agenda. The ideas and recommendations were taken forward to deliver a bespoke training & development programme, a range of events and activities using a wide range of learning styles.

On the 21st of June 2007, the 5 Town Network was awarded £50,000 by South East Excellence as part of a funding package from the Academy of Sustainable Communities. The key aims of this pilot were:

- To facilitate further shared learning and capacity building across Coastal West Sussex
- Influence the existing Officer and Elected Member training programmes within the local authorities budgets of partners so that post March 2008, a legacy of training and commitment to training for those with the responsibility for delivering the sustainable communities agenda is in place.
- Sharing best practice and collaborative working across the coastal local authorities and how this fits into the wider Sustainable Communities agenda.

Project Management Structure of Pilot

In October, a project support officer was recruited to help support and administer the training programme.

The project support officer put the following structures in place:

- Development of a ‘Training Facilities’ spreadsheet detailing available venues across the CWS strip.
- Development of a 5 Town Network Email Distribution List to use for promotion of the 5 Towns training programme. There are currently 164

contact names on this list and was built over the period of 6 months to include new beneficiaries of previous training.

- Development of a 'Training Course' spreadsheet to keep track of the events and listed important information such as dates, trainer details, technical and refreshment requirements and the attendees for each event giving their name, locality, job role and email address. There was also a 'to do' column listing outstanding issues that needed to be finalised.
- Production of a flyer by Wilson Design to advertise the 5 Towns training programme.
- Development of a Monitoring Log to keep track of how each event was advertised and the response to this.
- Production of Certificates were also printed and sent to each attendee to recognise their attendance to the event and support to the 5 Town Network programme.
- Development of a 'Training Record' to keep a record of all attendees and the training they undertook.
- Collation of evaluation forms and feedbacks for each of the events. Evaluation summaries were produced for each event and comments were added to the website under each event.
- Development of a training demand list detailing a waiting list of attendees for certain courses
- Evidence files were collated after each event to support the quarterly claim process. These consisted of...
 - Signed attendee lists
 - Hotel confirmations
 - Invoices from trainers/consultants and hotels
 - Emails/logs relating to the promotion of the event
 - Speaker biographies and presentations
 - Monitoring Reports
 - Completed Evaluation Forms

Details of all of the events and feedback for each of these are available in Appendix 1.

Impact of Training Programme

To date, we have trained 205 people across the 5 Towns and beyond. These primarily included local authority officers and Elected Members from Chichester, Worthing, Bognor, Shoreham and Littlehampton and also included officers from Dover District Council, East Sussex County Council, Hastings and Brighton & Hove. In addition to this, a number of people from organisations such as University of Chichester, University of Brighton, Business Link, SCDF and LSC have also attended the sessions.

We have engaged 136 people through the 12 events held over the life of the project. Within this we have engaged 11 Elected Members across the 5 local authorities.

The local organisations and businesses that we have engaged with are listed below...

A.E. Parker Ltd
AH Design Development Ltd.
Arun & Adur Enterprise Gateway
ATCM
B & M Prince Ltd
Berkeley Homes Southern
Boxall Sayer Construction Consultancy
Broome Jenkins
BURA
Business Link Sussex
DSM designs
English Partnerships
Farm Fresh Express
Goodheart Signs & Designs
Hunter & Partners Limited
I&DeA
Learning & Skills Council
Lime Marketing
Mansell Construction Services Ltd
Portsmouth City Council
Retail Exchange – Centre of Vocational Excellence
Rocket 88
Russ Drage Architects
Solent Centre of Architecture & Design
Seal Events Limited
Sensible Media Limited
Solutions Inc
South Coast Design Forum
Southlanders Community Forum
Tribal Group Plc
TPT Planning Consultancy
University of Chichester
University of Portsmouth
University of Brighton
Waghorne Design
Wordsearch

Range of officers that attended included:

Architects, Area Highways, Business Advisors, Business Development, City Centre Management, Coastal Business Parks Co-Ordinator, Community Development & Community Wellbeing, Corporate Policy, Cultural Development, Designers, Directorate Change & Projects Manager, Programme Managers, Economic Development Managers/officers, Elected Members, Enforcement, Engineers, Events Services, Interior Consultants, LDF Project Leaders, Planning Assistant/Officer, Regeneration officers, S106 Projects Engineer, Seaside Network Manager, Senior Consultant Designer, Senior Environmental Assessment Officer, Tourism, Transport Planner and Web designers.

Final Feedback

On conclusion on the pilot project, we received the following final comments as positive feedback:

- As a new participant in this type of forum – I have found all the events that I have attended well run, friendly and very informative
- Thanks for all your help, and really useful seminars. Its been really great to learn from others and to share best practice
- I enjoyed the series and thanks for organising
- I have been lucky enough to be involved in both the Urban Design Course and the PRINCE2 Project Management Qualification. I feel these courses will undoubtedly benefit my career progression beyond a level which I had anticipated in my employment in WSCC. I'd like to thank the 5 Town Network team for these wonderful opportunities.
- I would just like to say thank you to you and your colleagues for the training you have organised through the 5 Towns programme. I have found the seminars that I have attended have been very useful and informative and would support the need to continue with the programme.

Legacy of Learning Laboratory

As a pilot, it is therefore important to assess whether the project achieved its aims and objectives set at the outset of the project. To summarise, the pilot training programme ran for 6 months and was made up of 12 different instances of learning activity of which were varied to draw in the best possible audience at all times and accommodate different demands on Officers and Member's time. It overachieved on the original number of learning outputs that were forecasted at the outset and engaged more individuals than were previously forecasted, it spent to profile but overran by 1 month due to the delay in starting the project. The wider membership list of the Network increased substantially due to the interest from varying parties and now consists of over 200 members. As part of ongoing monitoring and evaluation, it was recorded that the knowledge of the majority of participants had improved on the sessions attended stating there were of value.

However it is too early to expect local authorities to change their training programmes in light of this pilot because there is still much work to be done to address this case. There also needs to be the understanding that in order for a capacity building programme like this to make bigger impacts into the training provision and induction process within a local authority, more senior officers and leaders need to be involved to help shape the culture of learning.

The pilot was an extremely useful activity for us to undertake in order to pave the way into new areas of focus. Although the Network previously did develop and run ad-hoc training, this pilot became a main focus of the Network's

activity and was on a much larger scale than had previously been undertaken. The pilot helped to uncover some of the issues and challenges around training and development such as engaging the right people, catering for a wide audience and communicating effectively with partners. To balance that, it highlighted positive successes and outcomes around partnership working and the progress that has already been made along the Coastal strip in collaborative cross boundary working and joined up thinking.

Below are some of the highlighted lessons learnt:

- Communication and awareness on the future training programme needs to be disseminated more widely engaging different departments
- Attendance faltered during certain periods of time, i.e. in the lead up to Christmas, end of financial year, half term breaks. Keep events outside of these times to encourage maximum attendance.
- In order for the 5 Town Network Training Programme to continue in a successful manner, it is recommended that each authority engaged with their internal departments to discuss what type of training they could benefit from in relation to the aims of the 5 Towns Programme. It needs to be felt that the training is beneficial to their role and team.
- The online invite for SCDF event worked extremely well, was more expensive but easier to manage attendance from an administrative element
- Seek to develop an online evaluation form, which is easy to fill in and links from our website.
- Need to use different ways in which to reach out to Elected Members by building on established relationships that officers have with their Members
- Uptake & Interest for courses - need detailed info on the content of course and interesting email heading to make people read it or an interesting speaker to draw people in
- Website has been used as useful tool in terms of advertising and retaining information on the events that have been organised and feedback collated on these.
- Having 6 months to spend £50,000 and run a programme of events is not long enough, in the end the pilot ran over into April as there was not enough time to run everything in.

The project also enabled the 5 Town Network to generate an income stream from charging for attendance for those outside of the Coastal West Sussex strip. This income was put back to the Network to provide further capacity building opportunities. Overall this helped raise the Network's profile in terms of promoting the model of best practice in other coastal areas and lead the way in this type of pilot. Based on our pilot, the East Kent area are now looking to implementing a similar programme for their officers and Members.

Next Steps

The 5 Towns Network has secured transitional funding in principle for the next financial year to build on the Learning Laboratory pilot and capacity building programme;

- To facilitate further shared learning and the building of the capacity of the Local Authorities councillors and officers to deliver a quality built environment and sustainable communities across Coastal West Sussex
- Influence the existing Officer and Elected Member induction and training programmes within the local authorities
- Sharing best practice and collaborative working across the coastal local authorities and how this fits into the wider Sustainable Communities agenda

By using the lessons learnt and the legacy of the pilot, it is envisaged that the Network will continue to build on established partnerships to continue to embed a culture of learning and development within the local authorities over the next 11 months. This will be achieved by;

- being able to try new and innovative ways of learning through the Network
- engaging with the key decision makers to influence thinking along the coast
- to continue to deliver beneficial training on the ground that has a real impact on the day to day activities of Network members

To set about achieving this, a follow up event 'Effective Democracy for Sustainable Communities' facilitated by IDeA has been arranged. The first event of this kind took place in March 2007 and was received very successfully. This event is aiming to bring together a range of officers and Elected Members together across the Coastal West Sussex strip to:

- Raise awareness of the place shaping agenda and a clear knowledge of the policy framework for place shaping
- To learn about best practice in cross boundary working to build sustainable communities
- To share priorities and begin to develop a shared understanding of the potential next steps in collaborative working in this agenda
- To develop a shared understanding of the next steps in cross boundary working in this agenda
- Networking and partnership building opportunity

It is recognised that there is still much work to be done around this agenda both in the short and long term but with the commitment and enthusiasm of key partners within the Network, this is achievable.

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