

Evaluation of the Devon Strategic Partnership 2004 Community Strategy Full report

1. Context and methodology

A new Devon Strategic Partnership Sustainable Community Strategy, together with its evidence base, is about to be developed, for publication by mid 2007. A plan for the production of these documents has been written, and a detailed work breakdown structure is being written. However, any new plan should be informed by the old; without a clear idea of the best practice developed, and lessons to be learned from the current strategy and the work of the Devon Strategic Partnership over the life of that strategy, the new plan would be missing an opportunity and the current plan would be devalued. This paper reports on the outcomes of the evaluation.

The evaluation

Evaluation is all about hindsight, looking back at both positive and negative and bringing the learning from it to the next thing. This report covers evaluation of three aspects of work:

- Outcome – what happened, what was achieved
- Process – how was it done?
- Context – overall was it the right thing to do, and what learning points can be identified for the next strategy?

Methodology

The basic methodology for this work has involved collecting information from key people in each theme and using it to inform the evaluation and the conclusions drawn. Evidence included statistical data and factual information, and for certain parts informed opinion, such as continued relevance of the action. Thanks are given to all those who participated in providing evidence.

2. Outcome evaluation – what happened? What was achieved? What wasn't?

The Community Strategy was structured in such a way that various themes were shown, and each theme had three different types of proposed action in it:

- Actions the Devon Strategic Partnership itself would promote which would add value
- Actions that should be done by others in order to meet the challenges presented.
- Performance indicators that could be measured to show progress

This evaluation has looked at each of them in order to establish what progress has been made, together with reports produced and other outputs and outcomes. The evaluation has not attempted to detail every action that has taken place in Devon which supports the strategy either unknowingly or knowingly, as that would be unrealistic; instead it has aimed to provide an overall picture of progress under different themes and challenges.

2.1. Progress on actions in the strategy that the Devon Strategic Partnership itself would promote which would add value.

The Community Strategy for Devon produced in June 2004 identified actions that were only able to be achieved by the Devon Strategic Partnership itself adding value to the process of meeting the challenges. Monitoring of these Devon Strategic Partnership tasks is complete and attached as Annex 1

Generally progress is very good, although frequently work is towards meeting a challenge rather than overcoming it fully – it can be summarised as follows:

- **Homes for all: Building for the future** – good level of activity and progress is being made; intermediate housing only area where work is still proposed rather than happening. Work has been co-ordinated on most actions by the Devon Strategic Housing Group, which includes Torbay and Plymouth too; other input from Devon County Council and Environment Agency. Nearly all action considered to be still relevant. Example of progress:
 Challenge: Develop an evidence based profile of housing need and homelessness to inform strategic planning
 Actions: Devon Homeless stats produced regularly
 Devon's Housing Evidence first draft produced
 Housing Market Area groups formed and work beginning
- **Improving the life chances of children and young people** – relatively few (10) actions for Devon Strategic Partnership. 9 had action associated with them, 1 had not; the issues had been mainstreamed into strategies in most cases. Example of progress:
 Challenge: Support the development of a set of Entitlements for Parents and Carers
 Actions: Part of the core offer of Extended Schools
- **Protecting and improving our outstanding environment.** 24 actions identified, only 2 had no action identified with them, 6 had been addressed in part, 16 of the actions were happening. A lot of activity is happening as part of the mainstream work of the Environment Agency, Devon County Council and English Nature. Example of progress:
 Challenge: Lobby for the readjustment of agricultural payment regimes to encourage the enhancement and protection of Devon's biodiversity and landscape
 Actions: Undertaken through the Sustainable Farming and Food action group of the Devon Rural Network. Also regional and national influencing being undertaken by Natural England partners
- **Working for sustainable wealth creation** – elements of this work have been completed or progress has been made by initiatives co-ordinated by Devon Rural Network, Devon County Council, and Community Council of Devon. Some elements are being tackled but are in their early stages, for example some of the work around using the environment as an economic driver
 Example of progress:
 Challenge: Further improve the database of participation rates, levels of achievement and retention rates so that more valid, local data is available
 Actions: Being undertaken through the LPSA2 skills theme, incorporated into the Economic Development and Enterprise block of the LAA
- **Making Devon an even safer place to live.** The Safer Devon Partnership coordinates the work in this field and progress is being made in much of the work, although some of it is just starting. Example of progress:
 Challenge: Lobby at national level for the criminal justice process to support specialist domestic violence service provision, through domestic violence courts, domestic violence solicitors etc.
 Actions: Part of adva strategy and approval of Exeter as one of the first 21 pilot areas for specialist DV Court from April 2006
- **A County For Everyone** – the Common Ground Partnership has been created as a Task Group for the Devon Strategic Partnership and has created

various sub groups to tackle the issues raised in the Devon Strategic Partnership Community Strategy. Good progress has been made in all areas undertaken so far, and work is now commencing in the area of improving access to services for excluded people. Example of progress:

Challenge: Develop a resource library of good practice and make recommendations about how community development activity can be supported

Actions: Library of toolkits and good practice examples starting to build up and be circulated. Common Ground NASP project is about sharing good practice around social inclusion projects in Devon.

- **Promoting a healthy and caring Devon.** This is being addressed in that it links with the mainstream activities of the health service and social services. Work can be classed in most cases as work towards rather than achievement of a target. Example of progress:
Challenge: Provide 'joined up' information about housing and support issues
Actions: Supporting People agenda, district Housing groups linking with LSPs, DSHG

2.2. Progress on principal actions in the strategy to be taken by organisations and partnerships other than the Devon Strategic Partnership in response to the challenges 2004-7

The Community Strategy, as well as detailing action to be taken by the Partnership itself, also listed actions that needed to be undertaken in Devon generally by organisations not connected directly with the Devon Strategic Partnership. Many of those actions, following the principles of subsidiarity, were to be carried out by various organisations within Devon completely independently of the Devon Strategic Partnership. Much of this work was believed to be going to happen anyway, but its progress has never been monitored as a whole. Annex 2 highlights some of the action that has taken place; it has not been possible to make this table an exhaustive list of everything that has happened as the actions are too diverse and may not have come to the attention of the Devon Strategic Partnership. The table does however give a flavour of what has been happening, and the results can be summarised as follows:

- **Homes for all: Building for the future** – Good progress made in nearly all actions through the work of Devon Strategic Housing Group and district councils; in most cases, the area of work is still considered relevant, with further work needed, developing the action to the next phase. Example of progress:
Challenge: Raise awareness of housing problems in Devon
Actions: Newsletters (and media coverage); development of an evidence base; member training; seminars and events.
- **Improving the life chances of children and young people.** All areas being addressed. Mainstreamed strategies such as the Children and Young People's Plan, the Raising Attainment Plan, together with initiatives such as the creation of Children's Centres and the Safeguarding Children Board are ensuring this work is taken forward. The work is still relevant and the issues being addressed in e.g. the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) should be included in the next Sustainable Community Strategy. Example of progress:
Challenge: actions about support for parents and carers

Actions: the CYPP contains a series of developments around parenting support, including the 4 main actions under this challenge. Since 2004 the Children's Trust has developed and the Children and Young People's block of the LAA is addressing issues.

- **Protecting and improving our outstanding environment.** A lot of progress has been reported in this sector, particularly by the 3 agencies of Devon County Council, Environment Agency and English Nature. Diverse nature of the sector makes it difficult to monitor all the activity that is happening.
Example of progress:
Challenge: invest in walking and cycling routes, through 'Devon on the Move', the Devon Local Transport Plan, and including the national Cycle Network
Actions: The new Devon local Transport Plan 2006-11 is being implemented; many activities including work with Sustrans; Exeter is a Cycling Demonstration city.
- **Working for sustainable wealth creation** Good progress being reported in most challenges; Challenges 4.5 and 4.6 relating to ensuring the right mix of skills and access to vocational learning are the areas where progress is less obvious to date, and is now a priority –Example of progress:
Challenge: Provide support for affordable transport which improves access and social inclusion, particularly for those without a car
Actions: wheels to work and fare care schemes. Plans for new settlements include sustainable transport plans.
- **Making Devon an even safer place to live.** Good progress reported in all areas except where the inception of the LAA and the Safer Devon Partnership has superseded the action. Example of progress:
Challenge: Design out crime, consider the implications for new developments and infrastructure
Actions: The BCUs now employ Architectural Liaison Officers. This action is a standard function of their role
- **A County For Everyone** A lot of progress has been made in the past 18 months with the creation of the Common Ground Partnership. They are working to the "County for Everyone " report that was developed directly from the chapter of the Community Strategy. This is an area where much of the work has happened directly as a result of the Community Strategy; also the LAA has focussed attention on the Stronger Communities element of this chapter – Example of progress:
Challenge: Improve economic inclusion... and access to financial services
Actions: Creation of Community Banking group, which is leading to the creation of the Devon Pound enterprise to tackle financial exclusion.
- **Promoting a healthy and caring Devon.** Good progress reported. Notable work in the field of carers. Example of progress:
Challenge: actions under the challenge of Improve mental health and well being including reducing harm from drug and alcohol misuse
Actions: All are key objectives within the LAA for the promotion of emotional wellbeing. The Local Implementation team across Devon and Torbay and the 7 PCT level Implementation Groups are taking forward the mental health actions. The Devon Drugs and Alcohol Team are addressing the other actions.

- 2.3. Progress measured against performance indicators as detailed in the Community Strategy.** As well as listing actions to be undertaken in every theme, the Community Strategy sought to identify ways of measuring the effect of action by listing performance indicators designed to monitor progress. These have not been monitored as a whole although individual indicators are monitored by different agencies as part of their internal reporting processes. The indicators were monitored as far as possible for this evaluation and the full results are shown at Annex C; the key points are:
- Out of 131 indicators, 51 are showing an improvement. Examples of significant improvement included take up of broadband, no. of 16-19 yr olds in structured learning, % of social service assessments carried out within 4 weeks and % of the population able to access ICT facilities within 3 miles of their home
 - 9 indicators are not showing any significant change
 - 18 indicators are showing a regression. Areas of regression were diverse, and included indicators about care leavers, water consumption, conditions of SSSIs, number of weekday trains to London, training and employment, Neighbourhood Watch and road casualties
 - 31 indicators have no information - some have changed and are not collectable, others were not collectable at this time.
 - 16 indicators were shown in the Community Strategy but with no baseline figure put in to act as a comparator.

2.4. Reports produced and progress against report recommendations. The task groups commissioned by the Devon Strategic Partnership have produced the following reports:

- Welfare Benefits Implementation Group – October 2002
- Domestic Violence report – October 2002
- MORI poll findings re Quality of Life in Devon
- Renewable Energy and Energy Reduction report and draft Strategy and Action Plan - 2003
- Devon Rural Strategy Report –July 2003
- 'Devon Rural Network' Foundation paper – Sept 2003
- Voluntary Sector Infrastructure report – March 2003
- Effective Transport Links report – Nov 2003
- Focus on Devon – June 2004
- Community Strategy for Devon – July 2004

2.5. Other outputs

- Formation of Devon Rural Network
- Formation of Common Ground
- Formation of ESSG (Equality Strategy and Scrutiny Group) – papers relating to Older people's issues and LGBT issues
- Formation of Domestic Violence task group
- Website www.devonsp.org.uk went live in 2002, revamped in 2006
- Newsletters produced in Summer 2002, Winter 02/03, Summer 2003, Autumn 2003 and July 2004 ('conference special')
- INput emagazine published monthly from December 2005. Email distribution and lodged on website

3. The process – how the Community Strategy was produced

- The process was 3 stage – a large MORI poll of residents, statistical analysis and the development of the Community Strategy.

- Two documents were produced – both are available to view on www.devonsp.org.uk :
 - Focus on Devon provided an informed critical analysis of the challenges facing Devon, based on expert knowledge, statistical evidence and the findings of the MORI poll.
 - A Community Strategy for Devon took each challenge developed in Focus on Devon, and identified the actions that were necessary to address it, either by the Devon Strategic Partnership itself or other organisations. It also identified some indicators to monitor progress.
- Both documents were launched following endorsement by a large conference held in July 2004
- The history of the Devon Strategic Partnership and how it worked during the period 2001 – 6 can be viewed on the website www.devonsp.org.uk/ other documents.

4. Context evaluation :

Assessment of outcomes and learning points

- Alongside the monitoring of the actions in the strategy was a request that those responding highlight which issues were still 'live' or any modified or new issues that we needed to consider in the next strategy. It was notable how many of the issues are considered still current, although many have evolved following action. It is a tribute to the quality of the current strategy that it continues to have resonance over time. (In particular, many people referred to the dedication of Eddie Farwell in pulling the document together as a factor in its success.)
- Similarly, the amount of activity that has taken place that supports the strategy is very impressive and demonstrates the relevance of the actions proposed. However, three points should be made in relation to this:
 - The amount of activity that has taken place is not well known, and further consideration should be given to communicating what has happened.
 - Much of the activity has taken place because it coincides with the aims and strategies of various organisations. Many respondents were not very familiar with the actions in the DSP strategy, and the DSP appears incidental to much of the work. The exceptions to this are the excellent work of task groups set up in support of the Devon Strategic Partnership, such as Common Ground.
 - The LAA, which was based closely on the Community Strategy, has successfully picked up some areas of work, and has brought a robustness to the performance management of the actions it has included.
- The Community Strategy showed a very logical 'linear' path between identification of the challenges and actions to overcome those challenges, providing a clear audit trail and justification. Since then, changes in Govt thinking, and resultant changes to partner working means that the next strategy will find it difficult to be as linear, as themes become cross cutting and have to be interwoven to demonstrate such concepts as economic, social and environmental sustainability. Both methods have benefits, but for the Devon Strategic Partnership the method is likely to change.
- The performance indicators in the strategy have been of less success as it was not possible to monitor many of them for various reasons. Since the introduction of the Local Area Agreement in 2005, Govt focus is firmly on performance management, and the next LAA due to commence in 2008 is planned to be the delivery vehicle for much of the new Sustainable

Community Strategy. The amount of action taken that supports the current Community Strategy demonstrated how well it fulfilled its aim. Any future strategy is likely to have to follow more rigorous project management and performance monitoring regimes.

- At the time the Community Strategy was being prepared, Community Strategies had not been prepared by all the districts, and it was not possible to take them all into full account. The revised strategies produced by all districts will be able to be fed into the preparation of the new Sustainable Community Strategy, thus enabling a closer integration of all the key issues.

Conclusion

This piece of work has given rise to two major conclusions:

1. The strategy brought together the major issues for Devon as identified thematically by a wide range of stakeholders, and outlined actions that should be taken to meet the challenges raised. In this respect it was a unique document in Devon, and it has been very successful – most actions have been undertaken, indicators that were measured have improved, and issues deemed still relevant.
2. There is not a recognised link between much of the work undertaken and the Devon Strategic Partnership. This has not seriously undermined the success of the current strategy, but various factors highlighted here (including the new emphasis brought by the LAA on performance management; the future integration of the Sustainable Community Strategy with the LAA; the emergence of more cross cutting themes including sustainability; and the increased ability of district strategies to inform the county wide one) mean that strengthening the link would be desirable in a future strategy. An improved link between the work done and the Devon Strategic Partnership would strengthen the ability to add value by working together.

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