

Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership

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Report of Task and Finish Team

Improving Communications

24th September 2009

REPORT: TO LSP BOARD
DATE: 24 SEPTEMBER 2009
**SUBJECT: IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS TASK & FINISH
FINAL REPORT**
AUTHOR: LSP MANAGER



1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 To review the current communications performance of the LSP and make recommendations to raise awareness and open up and improve two-way channels of communication between the partners and stakeholders.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That members:

- i) note and endorse this report,
- ii) give guidance or proposals for progressing the joint magazine and Citizens' Panel,
- iii) set targets for press relief production from Theme Groups,
- iv) confirm that all activities/materials produced by Theme Groups or partners using LSP grant aid should effectively carry the LSP logo,
- v) record their thanks to the staff from the PCT, Council and College who supported the Task and Finish team,
- vi) produce an annual report at financial year end to give partners, stakeholders and the public, information on key achievements, future priorities and expenditure.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The LSP Board members have been concerned at the low level of awareness of the general public and key stakeholders about the work of the LSP and its objectives. This has obvious impacts on accountability and the ability of the partnership to demonstrate that its work was open and transparent, meaningful and important to local people. In addition, this makes effective development of the partnership, and engagement with key sectors, problematic. The partnership concept is now becoming increasingly important to the planning and delivery of local services. As the LSP has recently reorganised its structures to meet this need, it was agreed that this offered a good opportunity to enhance its communications performance. Given that the 'joining-up' of services is a key role of the LSP, the Task and Finish team was asked to look at opportunities for better joint working.

3.2 The LSP was anxious that the team should bring together a small number of key partners working in the communications field and report its recommendations quickly.

A Task and Finish team comprising the LSP Manager and communications staff from the PCT, EFDC and Epping Forest College was established and has met 3 times in order to produce this report.

4.0 OVERVIEW

4.1 The team discussed the profile of the LSP and its current methods of communicating and the following points were agreed:

- i Very little public or key stakeholder awareness of the role, composition or achievements of the LSP. However, better awareness of the role and success of key parts of the LSP e.g. Safer Communities Partnership which both publicises its work and engages with communities very well and delivers practical programmes on the ground.
- ii Little evidence of schemes in other LSP Theme Groups promoting LSP involvement carrying the logo.
- iii Current LSP logo was seen as not visual enough comprising 37 letters and a leaf. The name was felt to be capable of being shortened and better reflecting what the partnership was seeking to achieve allowing more scope for a better logo.
- iv The website, as an increasingly important communications tool, was tired and badly out of date with a very poor hit rate.
- v There was little evidence of joined-up consultation or communication activity between all of the partners. Other LSPs had worked together to provide common vehicles for consultation (Citizens panels) and communication (LSP magazines.) These gave residents a better product/experience and allowed partners to coordinate activity and achieve efficiency savings.
- vi Perception that the LSP didn't engage effectively at a county or regional level, or that the success of the partnership was celebrated effectively in these fora, or these bodies were actively made aware of the challenges the district faced and how it was addressing them. This had clear impacts in terms of securing external grants.

5.0 ACTIVITIES ALREADY UNDERTAKEN/COMPLETED

5.1 The Task and Finish team has attempted to identify problems and suggest improvements to the Board to be made on an on-going basis. This has meant that a number of communications improvements have already been agreed by the Board and a number of operational changes made in discussion with the Chair and Steering Group.

- i A new name and logo has been designed and approved and will be launched with the consultation programme for the SCS.
- ii The current website was updated early in the process and preparations are now at an advanced stage for a refresh allowing potential for more interactive functionality.
- iii 'Partnership Briefing' has been established as a Team briefing system. Published after every Board meeting and sent to all key partners and a widening

mailing list, it identifies the decisions made by the Board and highlights key partner contacts for further information.

- iv Webcasting of Board meetings. This has been agreed and the Board meeting of 9th June was the first to be webcast. This reinforces the message that LSP Board meetings are open public meetings which everyone can attend. The team was unaware of any other LSP that webcast its meetings so at the LSP is leading good practice in this area.
- v Post Board press releases are now produced to encourage wider media coverage of the LSP's role and decisions.
- vi Preparations for an Annual Stakeholder Conference which will be held on 11th December are ongoing. This will give key stakeholders from the statutory, voluntary and business communities opportunities to find out about the role of the LSP and influence its plans contained in the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- vii Introducing the LSP leaflet produced, highlighting what the LSP is about and who is involved in it.
- viii New display boards and banners produced to provide backdrops for community events, workshops, stalls etc. This has been designed on a modular basis to allow other partners to use with their own identity panel.
- ix Identification of a lead communications support officer to help raise the profile of each Theme group and promote the wider 'One Epping Forest' brand.
- x LSP manager has made a number of presentations to county-wide groups and other county LSPs on the developing work in Epping Forest and new plans and programmes. The LSP manager will be presenting/ supporting the Annual Review Awaydays of Uttlesford and Maldon LSPs providing details of the emerging Epping Forest Strategy. A special tour of the district with senior officers from the Audit Commission has been arranged by the LSP for 28th August. This tour, supported by several key partners, will seek to raise awareness of the issues facing the district and work of the partnership.
- xi The West Essex LSP Forum has been established to raise the profile of LSPs in the West Essex corridor and help them to engage and lobby more effectively at a county and regional level.
- xii The consultation and publicity plans for the development of a new Sustainable Community Strategy have been designed to give a major opportunity to raise the LSP brand and profile. High street and supermarket stalls, video projects with young people, articles in the Forester newspaper, survey work on the tube and the stakeholder conference are all being used to highlight the LSP and its work.
- xiii Epping Forest LSP has championed the idea of a District Lead Officers Forum. This brings LSP leads from all the district partnerships in Essex together to discuss best practice and problem solving but also offers an opportunity for One Epping Forest to showcase its work. The first meeting will be held in Uttlesford in September.
- xiv A regular feature is now written by the LSP Chair in Fairs Fair, the magazine produced for the voluntary sector in the district.

6.0 FUTURE PRIORITIES

- 6.1 Much good work is already underway; however, the two major areas that could improve channels of communication between the LSP and its stakeholders are the joint magazine and the Citizens Panel.
- 6.2 While these projects have been approved in principle by the LSP Board, there remain operational issues around how these projects can be taken forward given capacity constraints within the LSP team. It is recommended that the LSP Board provide guidance on how these projects might best be taken forward.
- 6.3 The media remains a very useful, cost effective way of the partnership publicising its work. It is recommended that targets are set for press releases for each of the theme groups and the Board.
- 6.4 Commitment is required from all Theme Groups to brand their outgoing work with the 'One Epping Forest' logo. This is already happening within the Safer Communities Partnership. It is recommended that all publicity material produced by the LSP and its Theme Groups carry the LSP logo with the words 'supporting the work of' or 'part of' to show that these groups work together in a coordinated way under the wider LSP banner. This is particularly important when the LSP has played a key role in securing grant aid e.g. Performance Reward Grant. All projects funded by £450k PRG must carry the 'One Epping Forest' logo on material, vehicles, literature etc.
- 6.5 The Task and Finish team have found working on the team a useful experience in that they were able to exchange information in their general communications activity and keep each other abreast of new local developments. It is suggested that at an operational level, a communications group should be established to provide an informal opportunity to share best practice and explore opportunities for joining-up services. This would also help in generating agreed key messages about the district and the issues it faces and ensure these were reflected in the communications output of all the partners.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 Prior to the Task and Finish scheme, the communications performance of the LSP in comparison to other areas was patchy. The Board recognised that in order to encourage greater involvement and awareness of its role and programme this would need to be addressed. With the support of the partners, a large number of quick and practical initiatives have been put in place to address this.
- 7.2 There remains, however, some other initiatives e.g. Citizens' Panel and joint magazine that if implemented would move performance on to another level. However, while the steps that have been taken to improve communications are important they only provide a framework for enhancing the awareness and perception of the LSP. Major improvements in both these areas can only be achieved by the LSP 'delivering' real improvements to quality of life and 'delivering' a range of respected interventions and improved activities on the ground.