

1. Meeting: - Cabinet Member for Community Planning and Social Inclusion and Political Advisors

2. Date: - Friday 16th April 2004

3. Title: - Benchmarking Community Planning

4. Originating Officer: - Phil Rees, Planning and Development Manager, ext. 2896

5. Issue

To inform the Cabinet Member and Political Advisors of work undertaken to ensure that benchmarks can be applied to Community Planning, to measure progress year after year.

6. Summary

The report outlines the steps taken to train staff on a multi-agency basis to implement the Active Partners Framework and evaluate community involvement in the process of Community Planning.

7. Clearance/Consultation

The use of the Active Partners Framework in the context of Community Planning has been supported by the Community Development and Involvement Partnership of the Rotherham Partnership and is referenced in the draft Community Planning Model. The Active Partners Unit in Leeds (part of the Yorkshire Forum supporting the voluntary and community sector at a regional level) has helped to apply the framework to Community Planning and has welcomed our initiative in doing so. The way we have approached the training on a multi-agency basis is to be cited as best practice in Active Partners Unit publications.

8. Timing

The Active Partners Framework is essentially about benchmarking and, therefore, is best applied at the early stages of development of an organisation or project. For this reason the C.D.I.P has built it into Part One of the Community Planning process, where community representatives first come together to plan Community Planning activities. The methodology, however, requires people to look back, to evidence strengths and weaknesses and acknowledge successes and problem areas. In this respect it can also be of service to established community partnerships and groups, and agencies involved in community engagement.

9. Background

There are different ways of evaluating community involvement. The main evaluation systems were summarised recently in a report commissioned by the South Yorkshire Coalfield Partnership. Despite the existence of these different systems, however, there is little evidence on the ground of their application to community groups and partnerships. This may be because selecting a suitable system can be difficult for communities, when they are already engaged in a wide range of other activities. The lack of easy-to-use tools to implement the evaluation systems - moving from the theory to the practice - has also proved a problem.

10. Argument

The Active Partners Framework was developed for Yorkshire Forward to assess community involvement in regeneration projects such as SRB. In view of this, it made sense for the Community Development and Involvement Partnership to explore the Active Partners Framework as a means of assessing community involvement in Community Planning. Negotiations with the Active Partners Unit in Leeds, led to the development of a range of practical tools to facilitate the implementation of the Active Partners Framework in the context of Community Planning.

To ensure that this evaluation system can be rolled out across the borough, the Council's Planning and Development Manager organised a series of training events to develop a pool of skilled facilitators. This training was paid for by external funding drawn down by

Voluntary Action Rotherham, and enabled representatives from a variety of organisations to attend between November 2003 and March 2004. A list of the organisations represented appears as Appendix A to this report.

The aim is for these facilitators to work as teams of three or four, supporting the application of the Active Partners Framework. The outcome of these evaluation exercises will be a self-assessment of community strengths, in terms of four key dimensions:

- Influence
- Inclusivity
- Communications and
- Capacity.

Action Plans will also be developed to identify steps to bring about improvements in the course of the year ahead. The facilitators will encourage the communities to share this information with the C.D.I.P. so elements of support for the community sector can be strategically planned to address identified needs.

The Active Partners Framework can be applied to a range of organisations and regeneration projects, in addition to Community Planning. Having trained a large team of facilitators, therefore, will help in applying Active Partners across a variety of organisations and settings, in step with the move towards performance management.

11. Risks and Uncertainties

The Objective One Directorate requires the implementation of a different evaluation system, the Community Economic Development Framework, which uses a series of building blocks to assess a community's readiness to lead on economic regeneration. Work is currently underway, however, to join together this system and the Active Partners Framework. The Objective One Directorate has shown a willingness to explore this proposal and the Active Partners Unit in Leeds is currently looking at suitable benchmarks to assess a community's readiness to lead on economic regeneration. We are hopeful, therefore, that the two evaluation systems can be spliced together to avoid confusion for our local communities.

12. Finance

The training was externally funded.

13. Sustainability

By gathering a picture of the level of development through Active Partners and preparing Action Plans for improvement, the Community Development and Involvement Partnership will be better placed to consider the support needs of the community sector in a strategic manner. This should help prioritise resources and contribute to the sustainability of the sector.

14. Wards Affected

All Wards.

15. References

Active Partners – Benchmarking Community Participation in Regeneration – produced by Yorkshire Forward;

A guide to Frameworks and Tools for Community Involvement, Participation, Capacity Building and Development – produced by COGS for the South Yorkshire Coalfield Partnership.

16. Recommendations

The Cabinet Member and Political Advisors are asked to note the report.

Appendix A.

List of organisations attending the Active Partners and Community Planning training – November 2003 – March 2004.

13	VAR Community Development Workers
7	Area Assembly Officers
6	Community Planning Officers
6	Rotherham PCT staff
3	Voluntary and Community Sector representatives
2	Community Police Officers
2	Community Partnership Managers
2	Training providers
2	Housing Officers – Tenant Involvement Unit
2	IDP staff
2	Social Inclusion Managers
1	Borough Councillor
1	Crime Reduction Programme Officer
1	Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance Officer
1	Churches Together for Regeneration Officer
1	Young People's Service Officer
1	Vol. Sector Research Officer.