

**Review of communication, and development of a
communications strategy for East Lothian Community
Planning Partnership**

Stage report and forward proposal

25 August 2008

Milestone dates

May/June: Assimilation and secondary research (completed)

June 26: Primary research – internal / external stakeholders

July: What is being done elsewhere, what works and what doesn't. (completed)
Please attach the report on this stage of the work

August: Primary research external stakeholders (include: testing out messaging ideas)

September 4: Update report to CPIG

September (date TBC): Consultation with managers and communications staff from across joint planning organisations

September (date TBC) Review of draft proposal and ideas with communications group (Internal/external stakeholder group from the initial workshop – see report below)

September / October Discussion of amended draft by CPIG partners

December 4 Presentation of amended draft to CPIG

December 8 - Strategy finalised

Background

Design Links was invited to prepare a communications strategy for the East Lothian Community Planning Partnership to help facilitate its future success.

The philosophy behind the Community Planning Partnership is simple - better and more enduring decisions are made about local services when agencies work with each other and with the residents who receive those services. This represents a move by government to revitalise local democracy and galvanise citizen involvement in the planning and delivery of services.

Yet, as our research has already shown, for many people living in communities and working in the public services this represents a significant cultural shift in the way they behave and think. Success requires professionals and citizens to act in a way that for many is counter intuitive. This has been borne out of discussion already held with representatives of partner organisations and by research from other parts of the UK. Yet, where it has worked in East Lothian and elsewhere the results are highly impressive – better services, higher resident satisfaction, less duplication and more efficient use of resources and impacts that are genuinely sustainable.

Against this background, the communications strategy will focus not just only on engaging people, but on instilling new approaches and beliefs among all audiences. In essence, the message is: The Community Planning Partnership is the way forward – let's do everything in our power to make the right things happen.

Objectives garnered so far from discussions are:

- Clarify for all audiences what the Community Planning Partnership is and present it in a more exciting and accessible way
- Instil real confidence and belief in the ethos of the Community Planning Partnership model and its positive impact on the quality of services
- Define and cascade among agency staffs a culture of working with other agencies and with local people to deliver better and more enduring local solutions
- Involve people of all ages in communities across East Lothian in making decisions that impact on their lives – today and in the future
- Publicise and celebrate achievements
- Build and maintain momentum - encouraging more involvement and more success
- Recognise and reward good practice and delivery

The review so far

Workshop with a group of internal/external stakeholders:

Representatives of partner agencies attended a workshop yielding some great ideas and forming the basis of a group that will oversee implementation of the strategy. A synopsis of their feedback follows. This is merely an early indication of perspectives, but provides a useful marker at this stage. (include list of delegates which I will attach)

Summary of key points

Unwieldy: The name East Lothian Planning Partnership is too unwieldy. It implies bureaucracy and the concept hasn't yet become local currency. There is a need to package it in a way that is clear, understandable and motivating to all audiences.

Name and identity: Give the partnership a name and identity that captures the imagination of young and old. Words that people suggested as right in tone were: People, Together, Focus, and Action

Need more buy-in: Partner agencies may talk partnership but don't always deliver. There are varying levels of commitment and belief. Staff at all levels should be encouraged to work differently. They must be prepared to listen and change. First they have to be persuaded of the benefits and to feel confident that they will also gain from a different approach.

Simplify: Too many words and the use of formalised language and structure is a barrier to involvement. We need to make the partnership fresh, open and accessible using words, images and icons that are clear and inspirational.

Other voices need to come through: Existing community activists will and have to become involved – but there is need to spread the net much wider and seek the views and ideas of a broader spectrum of the population. This requires real imagination and effort. The external consultation workshops will focus on prime motivators and prompts. What words, images and descriptions will excite and involve people of different ages, backgrounds and interests? Testing options and approaches and gathering ideas will be the main focus of the residents' workshops. From these sessions we will produce name and brand ideas as work in progress, test and amend them in situ.

Insular outlook: There was a feeling that organisations have a tendency to be insular in their thinking. This results in constrained innovation (banker mentality). Listening to people's voices is not embedded in their cultures and the communications strategy must address real attitude change among staff at all levels and grades. Buy-in is key and, to achieve that, there has to be strong elements of recognition for those people that embrace and practise the ethos of joint planning.

Rationalise Budgets: Make better use of shared budgets – avoiding duplication and using resources more imaginatively. In an over audited culture this may be difficult to manage, but with will and effort that can change.

Tailor messages: There are different age groups, backgrounds, interests and locations. Each audience segment has to be addressed in a way that speaks directly to them. A message that suits an older person may be wide of the mark for a teenager. Communications have to address this by taking a 'horses for courses' approach. There was talk of a young people's entry point for example which would provide interactive opportunities to participate.

Communication mechanisms: To galvanise different sections of the community there needs to be imaginative use of different media and mechanisms – from digital through to word-of-mouth. Vehicles should include face-to-face communication in clubs people belong to – golf/bowling/lunch club/ social club/ care homes. Schools, local pubs, doctors, dentists and libraries were also mentioned. The web – provided the site is welcoming, friendly, and accessible and has entry points that interest people. Also use leaflets, posters, SMS texting and imaginative advertising.

Humour works: Serious decisions can come out fun. We should use elements of fun and humour if we are going to involve people. Events and meetings don't have to be formal – if we make them fun and attractive we get more people along and hear more voices in the process.

Issues attract people: There are things that really matter to people. To get their involvement we need to tap into their passions and concerns. These should form entry points and prompts to involvement. Each population segment and local community will have unique concerns and building involvement around these seems to have a more positive effect than the more amorphous.

Be positive: For the Community Planning Partnership to make maximum impact all partners have to be positive and 'can do' in their approach. Participants wanted to see an end to phrases such as: There's no money, It's a resource issue, that's not my department, we can't do that and it's not in my job description.

Measure and evaluate: Communication should be measured against agreed targets. Did it work? Did it attract enough people? How many people responded to the call to action? We need to have a sufficient handle on what we expect from each communication to be able to measure its effectiveness.

Report on successes: Success begets success. Motivation, momentum and encouragement will come from success being regularly reported to partners and residents – that means labelling each positive outcome that comes from partnership in a consistent way and the Council using its own newspaper to promote its work with other agencies and local people

Young people: Reaching and involving young people will be critical for a number of reasons. They are the future, they are creative, they see fewer barriers to progress and they have a direct stake in shaping their communities. They also provide a powerful influence in their own homes, where they can be persuasive towards siblings and parents. They can be prime movers in developing the Community Planning Partnership and we should seek to use imaginative ways of involving them – using Bebo, Facebook and MSN Messenger, getting them to make short videos to post on the website and using schools as debating chambers around some big issues.

Words are powerful: Words participants want to see associated with ELCPP were – action, people, make it happen, fun, focus, my place, better, future, success, easier, together, team, and winning.

Website: an exciting interactive website was viewed as an essential touch point. It should be easy to access, give people compelling reason to explore and revisit and allow for contribution and feedback. Icons and simple descriptions will help to ease navigation and make people feel more motivated. Key words that were recommended included Healthier, Safer Wealthier, Fairer, Smarter, Greener and Easier.

These notes are not a comprehensive record of the discussion and specific illustrations and words not included in the summary will form part of the final mix used to assemble a finished strategy.

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