West of England Community Learning Partnership

Update on progress: March 2013

Through our CLT we have piloted a number of neighbourhood planning exercises to shape community learning. The aim of this approach is to involve community based organisations and local people from priority neighbourhoods in the identification of community learning priorities.

Since September 2012, we have trialled this approach in 2 areas of Bristol and 1 area in South Gloucestershire.

We have completed neighbourhood planning exercises in a number of ways.

- In Bristol, we planned our local process in collaboration with the local authority Neighbourhood Partnership team and with support from ward councillors – this has ensured that community learning is included into wider area planning.

- We have produced joint community learning data reports showing the current map of provision and the profile of learners taking part.

- We have prepared and circulated an electronic and paper-based community learning survey.

- We have held community consultation workshops so that people have been able to work together to consider options and identify future community learning priorities.

What worked well?

These local planning processes have helped raise the profile of community learning in local areas. Community learning is now established in local neighbourhood plans and we have been able to identify how community learning can support wider priorities, e.g. improving local play facilities. The local workshops brought a good mix of key stakeholders together. It was empowering to hear the views of local people and learners, particularly in relation to issues such as course fees. The whole process provided us with a timely opportunity to update people about our CLT!

Challenges/ barriers

One of the biggest challenges to this approach is the capacity and time available for community learning staff to prepare and organise surveys and consultation events. One way to overcome this barrier is to link with other community focused teams so that the workload is shared from the start. Only a relatively small number of learners were able to take part in the workshops, so learner 'voice' has to be supported through other mechanisms.

What will happen next?

As a result of the planning exercises community learning staff have been able to build stronger working relationships with neighbourhood teams and have made contact with new partners. Action plans have been produced and new provision is already underway, for example:

- In Kingswood Job Centre Plus are now working more closely with the local authority Community Learning and Library Service to pilot intensive IT and employability courses.

- In East Bristol, the lack of community based IT learning facilities have been identified and this is now being addressed through collaboration with the University of the West of England and Hewlett Packard.

- In North Bristol, the local authority Learning Communities Team is running a community development course with a group of residents to help them develop as a group and to develop play facilities in and around the community flats.

We are in the process of reviewing our neighbourhood planning processes to identify the best way to roll these out within available resources in the future. We feel the approaches we have trialled can be replicated in other areas. The advice we would pass on to others is:

- Link up with local neighbourhood planning teams and colleagues to ensure that your planning process fits with wider local planning processes and that the workload is shared out across partners – if possible, 'piggyback' on another community event!

- Make sure there is some baseline information available about community learning provision to inform planning discussions.

- Be clear about the resources available and what is and isn't open to negotiation.

- Make sure you agree a clear and achievable action plan at the end of the process – this will enable everyone to stay focused on the main priorities.

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Photographs