



ARTICLE NO 1D

CORPORATE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

MEMBERS UPDATE: 2010/11

Article of: Executive Manager Regeneration and Estates

Issue: 3 November

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Adrian Owens

Contact for further information: Paula Huber (Extn 5359)
(E-mail: paula.huber@westlancs.gov.uk)
Alice Grieve (Extn 2601)
E-mail: alice.grieve@westlancs.gov.uk)

**SUBJECT: REGENERATION PROJECTS MANAGED BY WEST LANCASHIRE
BOROUGH COUNCIL - EVALUATION REPORTS**

Borough Wide Interest.

1.0 PURPOSE OF ARTICLE

1.1 To apprise Members of the outcome of the evaluations of Council managed projects, funded by the recently completed West Lancashire "Investing In Business" Regeneration (liB) Programme.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Members will recall that the Council has been managing the North West Regional Development Agency funded liB Programme since July 2003, on behalf of the West Lancashire Local Strategic Partnership (the LSP).

2.2 The Council successfully applied to the liB Programme to manage and deliver a number of projects across West Lancashire. This included the West Lancashire Inspire project and its pre-cursor, the Land and Property Enhancement Pilot scheme, Enterprising West Lancashire (EWL), Market Towns and Connecting People to Jobs. It was a requirement of the Grant Offer and Funding Management Contract Letters that independent evaluations be undertaken for these projects, i.e. someone not directly involved in the project must undertake the evaluation. The evaluations included reviewing the project activities and outcomes and producing a report on the conclusions.

- 2.3 EWL delivered a programme of support for business and business start ups across West Lancashire. Through the project one to one support was delivered for individuals looking to start a business or running an existing venture by two qualified business advisers. This was complemented by workshops delivered on a range of topics from Health and Safety to business planning and marketing.
- 2.4 Networking and cluster activity was also developed to support organisations develop their supply chains and build useful business to business relationships. Where additional expertise was required specialist advisers were also engaged as making introductions to other relevant support partners such as the Manufacturing Institute for manufacturing sector or Creative Lancashire for business with digital and creative industries.

3.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 Evaluation reports have been completed in accordance with the funding offer letter and a copy of each report has been placed in the Members' library.

3.2 Land and Property Enhancement Pilot

- 3.2.1 The essential purpose of the pilot scheme was to 'road test' and trial some of the processes and procedures to ensure that they were fit for purpose before launching the West Lancashire Inspire project.
- 3.2.2 The overall conclusions were that the systems were working well and with some minor improvements suggested to improve their effectiveness. The scheme was "run very professionally", with a recommendation to improve the marketing of the project to make it available to a wider range of businesses.
- 3.2.3 One main difficulty for the individual businesses was the obtaining of at least three quotations for works to improve their premises and more so in terms of comparable quotes for security measures. Unfortunately this was a necessity to access funding, although project officers did work closely with any business having specific problems to try to assist locating suppliers.
- 3.2.4 A number of practical improvements were recommended for the Inspire project in connection with guidance and application forms, the scoring system for applications, reviewing the terms and conditions for grants, membership of the Decision Panel, recording of specialist advice and the need for an asset monitoring and recording system.

3.3 West Lancashire Inspire

- 3.3.1 The overall conclusions are very positive, with stakeholders expressing the view that the project had been well managed with positive results.
- 3.3.2 With private sector match funding exceeding expectations by nearly 100%, at just under £10m, significant numbers of jobs being created and safeguarded, and 159 businesses advised with 44,000 sq. metres of new or improved floor space, most of these exceeding expectations, local businesses and enterprise received a significant boost which also helped local people's prosperity.

- 3.3.3 The Crime Prevention Officer from the Lancashire Police Authority was also interviewed and she commented that the security grants were launched at exactly the right time as this coincided with the creation of the Business Watch schemes for Burscough and Skelmersdale. The availability of grants assisted in encouraging businesses to become involved and helped to establish the Business Watch schemes as a useful way to engage with businesses and the Police particularly welcomed being involved in visiting every company that expressed an interest in a grant.
- 3.3.4 One of the key aspects of the project was that it covered the entire borough and had resulted in not only grants offered to businesses, but also environmental improvements, including work on Gateway and Transport Corridors, Employment Area Improvements and Town and Village enhancements.
- 3.3.5 Finally, the creation of the project team was recognised as a major strength and highlighted how important a multi-disciplinary team was to the success of the project. Having professionally qualified expertise within the team ensured that businesses received the maximum support possible and that the project was delivered to budget and to timescale. For example having a qualified planning officer within the team enabled businesses to receive advice on whether their particular grant application would require planning permission beforehand.

3.4 Enterprising West Lancashire

- 3.4.1 The report was very positive with the following areas worth particular noting:-
- Project was adapt in filling gaps in provision and this included commissioning additional expertise where relevant
 - Project management was well designed and applied
 - Provision was well co-ordinated and flexible
 - Work built stronger links exist with partners
 - Work with the social enterprise sector has been key and resulted in a sustainable model to supporting the sector
 - Project provided sustainable legacy for supporting local businesses
- 3.4.2 The overall conclusions and recommendations identify the emergence of a range of good practice with which the project model can be used as a strong basis for delivering business support in the future within the Borough. It also identifies that it provides a strong evidence base to inform future economic development and enterprise development strategies.
- 3.4.3 The report makes several recommendations regarding broadening the outlook when planning future activities to consider West Lancashire's position within the wider region with an opportunity to toll out the EWL approach and experience within the sub region.
- 3.4.4 Finally, however, it notes the networks and infrastructure that the project has built which provide a strong basis for future local impacts, and the extent to which the staff involved in the project, who have developed a range of skills and knowledge, are central to taking the agenda forward.

Market Towns & Rural Study Initiative

- 3.5.1 This project was managed well and, although much delayed, the project eventually achieved a much wider set of outputs and outcomes than could have been envisaged when it was first proposed.
- 3.5.2 The Action Plans, the Rural Economy Study and the Linear Park Study are being used to inform the Borough's Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Development Framework, and strategic intervention policy documents such as an emerging Local Enterprise Partnerships. It also resulted in the Council taking lead role in the development of a Local Action Group on behalf of West Lancashire and neighbouring authorities and has since helped secure Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) monies for projects in the Borough.

3.6 Skelmersdale Vision Connecting People to Jobs

- 3.6.1 The main conclusion was that the project's role of providing strategic facilitation of a greater integration between agencies, deliverers and employers was achieved. Partnerships have been set up and built upon, demonstrated by employment and training schemes and the development of the Skills and Worklessness Strategy and Action Plan for the LSP's Employment, Learning and Skills thematic group.
- 3.6.2 The networks and infrastructure created provide a strong basis on which to deliver future maintenance and development of projects and partnerships to ensure that the Action Plan is continually updated and delivered where possible.

4.0 ISSUES

- 4.1. It is highly unlikely that external funding of this nature will be available in the near future to deliver capital activity similar to the Land and Property Pilot and Inspire.
- 4.2 Budget constraints limit the Council's ability to take forward EWL. As new emerging government policy regarding the enterprise agenda emerges there is a need to consider funding sources available.
- 4.2 The changing external funding environment, together with the current financial climate, means that a number of the actions identified within the Market Towns and Rural Study will not be progressed in the immediate future or as quickly as hoped.
- 4.3 There are pockets of deprivation within Skelmersdale that will continue to have worklessness problems and although the work of the Connection People to Jobs project identified many of the gaps and barriers to employment and training opportunities as well as the local providers of many of the much needed services aimed at supporting these individuals, without significant funding and/or changes to the skills, education and benefit systems, it is not possible to address all of these issues.

- 4.4. External funding has significantly reduced and is likely to continue reducing over the next few years to come, but the Council will continue to highlight the pockets of deprivation and the worklessness issues for Skelmersdale and the lack of interventions available, through Government consultation exercises (i.e. Regional Growth Fund) and by continuing to work with our partners on funded programmes, such as the current Future Jobs Fund.

5.0 PROPOSALS

- 5.1. The recommendations and proposals arising from the Land and Property Pilot evaluation were subsequently incorporated into amended processes and procedures developed effectively to deliver the Inspire project.
- 5.2 The Council will continue to work with partners to ensure businesses within West Lancashire benefit from national programmes of activity where possible. The Business Watch schemes initially set up through the Inspire project, continue to be jointly facilitated by the Council and the Lancashire Police Constabulary supporting those businesses on the two large employment areas of Skelmersdale and Burscough.

The Council will continue to work with its partners to ensure that project's benefits can be fully utilised for enterprise and economic benefit both sub regionally and regionally, as well as locally for West Lancashire people.

That the Council continues to monitor emerging government policy in the enterprise agenda and considers funding sources available in this area to maximise the services available to support businesses in the borough.

The Council will continue to work with its partners to ensure that EWL's project outcomes can be fully utilised for enterprise and economic benefit both sub regional and regionally, as well as locally for West Lancashire people.

- 5.3 The Council will continue to work with its partners to ensure that the market towns and rural study can be fully utilised for the benefit of the community with activity currently generated primarily through the RDPE programme.
- 5.4 A key element of the Connecting People to Jobs project was to develop a Skills and Worklessness Strategy and Action Plan for the LSP's Employment, Learning and Skills thematic group. The Council continues to work with its partners through this thematic group to ensure that the activities and outcomes initiated by this project continue to benefit the local community through enterprise and economic development initiatives.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The sustainability of enterprise and economic development and growth continues to remain a priority for the Council and the evaluation work will inevitably be a key consideration of any future regeneration projects that are taken forward. There were many lessons learned from these projects and by retaining some of the professional project delivery and management expertise within the

Regeneration and Estates Division this will ensure that the lessons learned form the basics of any new project development.

The Connecting People to jobs project delivered activity at a local level to support local communities and through the appointment of a dedicated project officer, was also able to identify the gaps and barriers to securing employment and training opportunities within the locality. The sustainability and growth of communities were key considerations of this project, and will continue to be in the future through the work of the LSP Employment Learning and Skills Thematic Group and subsequent projects the members are involved with.

7.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 All the costs undertaking these evaluation exercises were met from within existing resources or by the projects themselves.

8.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

8.1 There are none associated with this report since the projects are now concluded.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The recommendations contained in the evaluation reports formed a basis on which to compare the projects throughout their lifetime and provides an evidence base which can be used in future schemes.

Background Documents

The following background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) have been relied on to a material extent in preparing this Report.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Document</u>	<u>File Ref</u>
February 2005	Land and Property Scheme Pilot Project 2003-4 Evaluation Report	liB/P100/1
March 2010	Market Towns & Rural Areas Initiative - Project Evaluation - March 2010	liB/P/200/2
March 2010	Evaluation of the West Lancashire Inspire Project	liB/P/100/4
April 2010	Skelmersdale Vision - Connecting People to Jobs - Project Evaluation - April 2010	liB/400/5

Equality Impact Assessment

There is no evidence from an initial assessment of an adverse impact on equality in relation to the equality target groups.

Appendices

None.