

REPORT TO SSP BOARD

PAPER B

SUBJECT: SSP & Voluntary Sector Manager's Report

Date of SSP Board meeting for discussion: 2 April 2009

Approximate time to allow for discussion: 10 minutes

KEY ISSUES:

There has been a good opportunity to meet and listen to board members and other stakeholders since the last board meeting. This report is informed by the views and opinions expressed in these meetings.

WHAT ARE THE SSP BOARD BEING REQUESTED TO DO? e.g. make a decision, recommend, consider options etc.

- Support a facilitated away-day for SSP board members to help prioritisation.
- Support a significant and engaging event to focus on "accessibility".
- Develop and improve communications across the network.

ARE THERE RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS TO THE SSP BOARD?

Yes.

CONTACT DETAILS OF AUTHOR:

Richard Catherall, SSP & Voluntary Sector Manager, 01473 260869, richard.catherall@suffolkcc.gov.uk

Body of Report

The SSP is working in uncertain times. As a whole system, the SSP is both a strategic decision maker and a delivery body. The identity of the SSP as a whole system is incomplete and most people refer to the SSP board when discussing “what does the SSP do?” The roles and responsibilities of the board include:

- Maintaining an oversight of how well the LAA framework is helping partners to implement Transforming Suffolk.
- Develop relationships between board members and those involved across the partnership it can make countywide responses on topical matters.
- Support, influence and endorse partner’s strategies using the community strategy as its basis for opinion.
- Seek to open doors to a wide range of partners so that the SSP assists in consultations and is able to stimulate action and innovation.
- Be involved in the appropriate launch of new partnerships and activities which it knows will help implement the community strategy.
- Provide space and the media to share information and best practice with all its partners.

The SSP as a Network

The partnership is a network of many organisations, but most board members do not believe it is yet working as an effective network organisation. Those board members who have benefited from involvement in the Lives we Lead, Leaders we Need programme, really appreciate this and what sort of leadership is required to develop a network organisation.

A network is an organised group of connected parts. Like a spider’s web or a bicycle wheel. Break any part of it and it normally stops working altogether. This does not mean that all parts of the network always need to agree. If this was the case it would be hard to change anything. Some board members for example believe that while the community strategy is a fantastic achievement, it is so broad that it may not lead to the transformation we need.

Each part of the SSP network should be able to derive meaning from the strategy to enhance what they do and if necessary add more detail and focus through delivery partnerships for example. One of the roles of the SSP board is to bring people together to refresh this strategic direction as appropriate and all board members would like a greater focus on this task, especially the prominence of its cross cutting themes.

It is unrealistic to expect everyone to be in agreement all of the time. Some board members believe that the SSP needs to be more effective reaching decisions where everyone does not agree in order to prioritise and members need to be more flexible, not fixed on a particular agenda in order to be influential.

Understanding this will influence the support offered to the SSP as a network organisation by the manager, partnerships team and by member organisations. This is not the same support that might work for another type of organisation and this has been highlighted by the Lives we Lead, Leaders we need programme. So the support will have to be flexible too.

It may also inform how the SSP board chooses to invest in a future innovative project. There is a perception among members that the SSP “funds and forgets” and that those projects funded, do not contribute to helping the SSP explain and communicate how it is transforming services and society. A future opportunity may include ensuring the projects chosen “showcase” both intentions and outcomes as part of communicating what the SSP is for and what it does; as a network and not something perceived to be separate and in competition with its members. This would help the SSP tell its story.

Perceptions and Positions

The cross-cutting themes of Transforming Suffolk cover a broad area and the opportunity to engage board members individually reveals two significant positions that board members have and consider to be the right strategy for the future. These are summarised below.

Economic development	Societal and community led development
Partners who believe that the way to transform Suffolk is to focus on economic development, skills and growth potential, to generate the prosperity needed to tackle inequalities and stimulate aspirations.	Partners who believe that Suffolk has high levels of contentment and social capital and inequalities which can only be overcome by enabling communities to become more actively engaged as leaders in solving issues and providing services.

These positions do not have to conflict but there is a definite tension if either one feels that the priority has been watered down by a strategic consensus. The partnership needs to achieve a win, win, progress real progress on both and solutions which link the two, i.e. you can't have one without the other.

SSP board development should focus on generating this interdependency, through increasing understanding and providing creative spaces to develop each position and trust between the two. The majority of board members recognise that structural solutions on their own can exacerbate tensions and reduce confidence. Members don't want this to happen and instead want to release capacity, recognise the need for flexibility and more effective leadership across the network.

The SSP is a network of its connected parts, so the people who can make it work are those involved and how well are they connected. If those involved change how they connect and how they work across the SSP, the partnership will transform itself.

Action Focused

There are three areas which board members and other parts of the SSP suggest should be the focus of action in the months ahead:

1. A facilitated away-day for SSP board members to develop understanding and priorities and if appropriate shape the structure of the network to suit.
2. A significant event to provide strategic leadership on one of the key issues raised by the delivery partnerships: Accessibility across the county.
3. Improve communications across all parts of the network through more effective use of multi-media so members feel more informed and know how to improve their understanding easily.