

Communication

"Communication leads to community, that is to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing."

Rollo May

Communication has been highlighted as being key to ensuring that the programme is a success. Effective communication is required both internally and externally to the programme.



It's good to talk

Partnerships can only succeed if there is transparency in what everyone is doing. It is vital that all the partners in the worklessness programme are kept up to date with what each project has achieved; have an understanding of how they operate; and how they link into the overall strategy. This is important to establish how everyone is contributing and working towards the overall objective i.e. reducing the level of worklessness in Wigan Borough. It may be appropriate to set up networks within the programme to allow similar projects to share good practice and support each other.

Appropriate methods of communication need to be explored to establish which would be best suited to the projects involved in the programme. Ideas include quarterly newsletters, officer working groups, online forums etc.

A commitment to communicate

However, it is all very well having a communication / marketing strategy, but even the best strategy will fail without a commitment to it. Often projects, especially those with few staff, do not view marketing, publicity and communication as a priority, especially when they are managing a heavy workload. It is however key to the success of the programme and therefore requires a commitment from all projects to contribute to all communication, publicity and marketing exercises.

Shouting about it!

It has been acknowledged that promotion of previous programmes needs to be improved. It is important that the target market is aware of what is available and how it would benefit them. Probably most importantly the "Better off in work" message needs to be communicated in order to get people to sign up to the programme. At this stage it is unclear whether there will be a national campaign or whether this will need to be handled at a local level. It is also important to let people know, regardless of whether they live in the target areas or not, what has been achieved and how the money is being spent.

Methods of publicity and communication need to be explored to establish what would be the best way to raise awareness amongst our target market. An appropriate budget will need to be allocated to ensure that publicity is as thorough as possible. A comprehensive communications / marketing strategy needs to be drawn up to detail exactly how publicity will be conducted both internally and externally to the programme.

Key Note Speaker - Bishop Stephen Lowe

Bishop Stephen Lowe agreed to be the key note speaker at the What Makes Wigan Work conference on 23 May. He proved to be a truly inspirational speaker and gave us a lot of food for thought.

Bishop Stephen was appointed the Church of England's first Bishop for Urban Life and Faith. He promotes the communication and the implementation of the Faithful Cities report. His genuine enthusiasm for, and considerable experience of urban issues makes him exactly the right person to fulfil the strategic and national role in the Church of England.



Bishop Stephen laid out 'ten commandments' as a framework for Wigan Borough's worklessness strategy.

These were as follows:

- 1 We must be wary of generalisations and treat each individual as valuable in their own right.
- 2 We must recognise that illiteracy is a major issue within our communities.
- 3 The raising of self-esteem is a vital part of the process.
- 4 There must be an assumption that services and training should be delivered at as local a level as possible.
- 5 The issues of health, particularly mental health, are directly related to poverty. Breaking the cycle is very difficult, but essential.
- 6 We must look at what is already available to avoid unnecessary duplication of services.
- 7 This work must be delivered on a partnership basis.
- 8 We have to acknowledge the existence of targets and outputs and work with them.
- 9 Local neighbourhood planning is vital to deal with the issues of worklessness.
- 10 It is important that we continue meeting together to learn from one another and discover new possibilities and fresh ideas.

For more information about Wigan Borough's worklessness strategy, please contact Kevin Walsh, Senior Strategy Officer on 01942 828954 or kevin.walsh@wigan.gov.uk

What Makes Wigan Work ?

Working to tackle worklessness

Although it only seems like a few weeks ago, it was back on 23 May that we held the What Makes Wigan Work conference at the JJB Stadium. The conference was a chance for people from a variety of backgrounds and agencies to come together to discuss the best way for us to tackle the issue of worklessness in Wigan Borough. The event proved to be a huge success and has created a great platform for creating Wigan Borough's strategy.

Over eighty people from a variety of backgrounds and agencies attended the conference and found it a very enjoyable and worthwhile event. There was a real energy and enthusiasm bounding round the room and there is now an eagerness to get to work.

This newsletter summarises all the comments and suggestions that were made at the conference. If you would like a copy of the full feedback, please contact Claire Walsh on 01942 828996 or claire.walsh@wigan.gov.uk



The strategy itself is currently in a draft format and is undergoing a rigorous consultation process. The final version of the strategy will be submitted to the Local Strategic Partnership for approval in September. We will start commissioning activity shortly after this.

I hope you find this newsletter interesting and informative.

Joyce Redfearn
Chief Executive - Wigan Council

Did you know ...

- Wigan Borough is 77 square miles, of which 70% is green or open space
- 14 towns make up the Borough of Wigan
- The population of Wigan Borough was 305,500 in 2006.
- 62.5% of the total population is of working age, of which 34,530 are classed as workless
- The three main benefits claimed by people who are workless are Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Lone Parents (LP) Benefit.
- 59.9% of workless people claim Incapacity Benefit, of which 33.8% state mental health as their primary condition
- 1,000 young people aged 16-24 claim working age benefit
- 80.2% of Incapacity Benefit claimants have been claiming for 2 or more years



Building the **future** together

The Workshops

There were two workshop sessions held at the conference. During the workshops, the ten tables were tasked with discussing a variety of different topics. A number of themes emerged, all of which are summarised below. It was positive to see that everyone was aware of how they not only fit into the strategy, but also how they can work with each other to effectively tackle the issue of worklessness in Wigan Borough.



Working together

"We are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided!"

Albus Dumbledore - Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

A spirit of partnership was very strong throughout the conference, with everyone agreeing that we all need to work together in order to meet the aims, objectives and targets of the strategy.

Co-operation not competition

All agencies must be treated as equal partners irrelevant of whether they are from the public, private, voluntary or community sectors. Everyone has an equal and valid part to play in tackling worklessness in Wigan Borough and the goals can only be achieved if everyone works together. There needs to be a focus upon co-operation rather than competition.

It is important that the contribution that the voluntary and community sectors can make to tackle the issue of worklessness is acknowledged and valued. They often know their local areas better than statutory services and already have links and relationships with the local communities. It is important that they receive support to deliver their services and that they can see how they can be involved in the strategy.

Taking a long term view

Short-term funding has made it impossible to sustain relationships and continue work in areas of high need. This has several impacts upon service targets. Primarily it means that relationships with communities are undermined because support is withdrawn when short term funding concludes. This focus on community relationships should be at the heart of all mainstream services and funding – and not something that only happens with short term project funding. It is therefore important that longer term funding strategies are put into place to help with continuity and consistency of service.

Understanding each other's roles

In order to establish a successful partnership it is vital that there is a clear understanding of what each project / service is trying to achieve and how it operates. This is important when devising an individual's plan or pathway; for sharing good practice; and establishing support networks within the programme.

Engaging with Communities

"People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed and redeemed; never throw out anyone! "

Audrey Hepburn

It was acknowledged that methods of engaging with the communities need to be improved. It was felt that in order to do this, engagement needs to take place in the actual communities.

The personalised approach

To facilitate successful engagement, it is important to take a personalised approach and treat each person as an individual. It is vital that the individual's needs, issues and barriers to work are addressed and understood to enable a successful relationship to be built. It should be acknowledged that these will vary from person to person and that the chances of formulating a successful "one size fits all" scheme are very slim.

Breaking down barriers

It is important that barriers to engagement such as bureaucracy are removed to build trust between the worker and the individual. Engagement needs to be on quite an informal basis to remove the risk of intimidating the individual and it should also be non-judgemental.

In order to identify successful methods of engagement it is important to look at examples of good practice from past experiences in Wigan Borough or in other areas of the country.

Education – the key to tackling worklessness?

"Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being."

Goethe

A low level of basic skills has been identified as a common problem amongst Wigan Borough's workless.

The glamorous option

Often people will be embarrassed by their lack of basic skills and may be apprehensive about acknowledging that they need help. It is therefore important to make educational opportunities seem attractive to encourage people to access them, but once people have been signed up, they must be managed sensitively and without judgement or patronising the participants.

Breaking the cycle of worklessness

Addressing the issue of low level basic skills was seen as a vital step to "breaking the cycle of worklessness". Worklessness seems to cross generational boundaries e.g. grandparents, parents and then kids are all workless. It was felt that the key to breaking this cycle is to link having a career with having an identity, making a contribution to society and high self esteem.

Being in work needs to be seen as a better option than being workless. Positive role models are needed to set a good example.

Vocational vs academic

It was suggested that in school, more emphasis is placed upon vocational study and preparation for the work place / applying for jobs in order to equip students with skills and experience for the world of work. Unfortunately, it is perceived that vocational study is not a valid equivalent to academic study and is considered to be a "soft option". A re-branding exercise is required at a national level to help change these perceptions.

Managing the life change

It was acknowledged that entering the "world of work" will be a huge life change for many people. They therefore may require ongoing support from services, not just for when they are trying to enter / re-enter the workplace. They may need help in managing their work / life balance. This can be a major barrier and maybe the reason for some people being workless in the first place. It is important that these issues are addressed and solutions offered to help put people in a position where they could access work.



A learning experience ...

"Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it!"

George Santayana

Whilst previous regeneration programmes have been successful, it was felt that there are things that could be done to improve upon them and make them run more smoothly.

A mapping exercise

It is important that current provision is mapped in order to establish what is already available to avoid duplication of services. In order to establish successful, new services, it is important that examples of good practice from Wigan and surrounding areas are identified, copied and developed upon. There also need to be links forged with similar services in different areas to allow a support network to be developed and facilitate the sharing of good practice.

The long not the short of it

There is a need for longer term schemes and programmes. Even three to five years is considered too short term. Wigan Borough is losing excellent projects and services because of the short term nature of previous programmes. It was identified that there needs to be more robust planning, exit and sustainability strategies to avoid this.

Hitting the target

"The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it."

Michaelangelo

In order to monitor the success of the programme, both tangible and intangible outputs need to be captured and measured.

Understanding where we are going

There needs to be a very clear understanding of what the plans and targets are and how each project fits in with them. We need to have a shared understanding of what constitutes success and acknowledge that levels of success can be different for different individuals. It is important that these are acknowledged and celebrated.

Local delivery

It was suggested that an emphasis is placed upon using local people to deliver the services to benefit from their local knowledge and relationships.

Building flexibility to meet needs

"If the shoe doesn't fit, must we change the foot?"

Gloria Steinem

There needs to be greater flexibility in order to meet the needs of the target market and effectively tackle the issue of worklessness.



Same destination, different journey

Pathways should be drawn up for each individual, which reflects a range of needs provision and are developed according to ability. It is understood that different people will have different needs and requirements. It is therefore likely that no two pathways will be the same. The overall programme needs to be flexible enough to accommodate this.

Understanding the target market

There needs to be a greater understanding of the target market to establish exactly what their needs are and the help they require.

Slow and steady wins the race

It needs to be understood that changes will not happen over night and that it may take a long time before anything tangible happens. It is important that support is not time limited, as this can run the risk of rushing an individual into work before they are ready for it. **Realism is the key here.**

