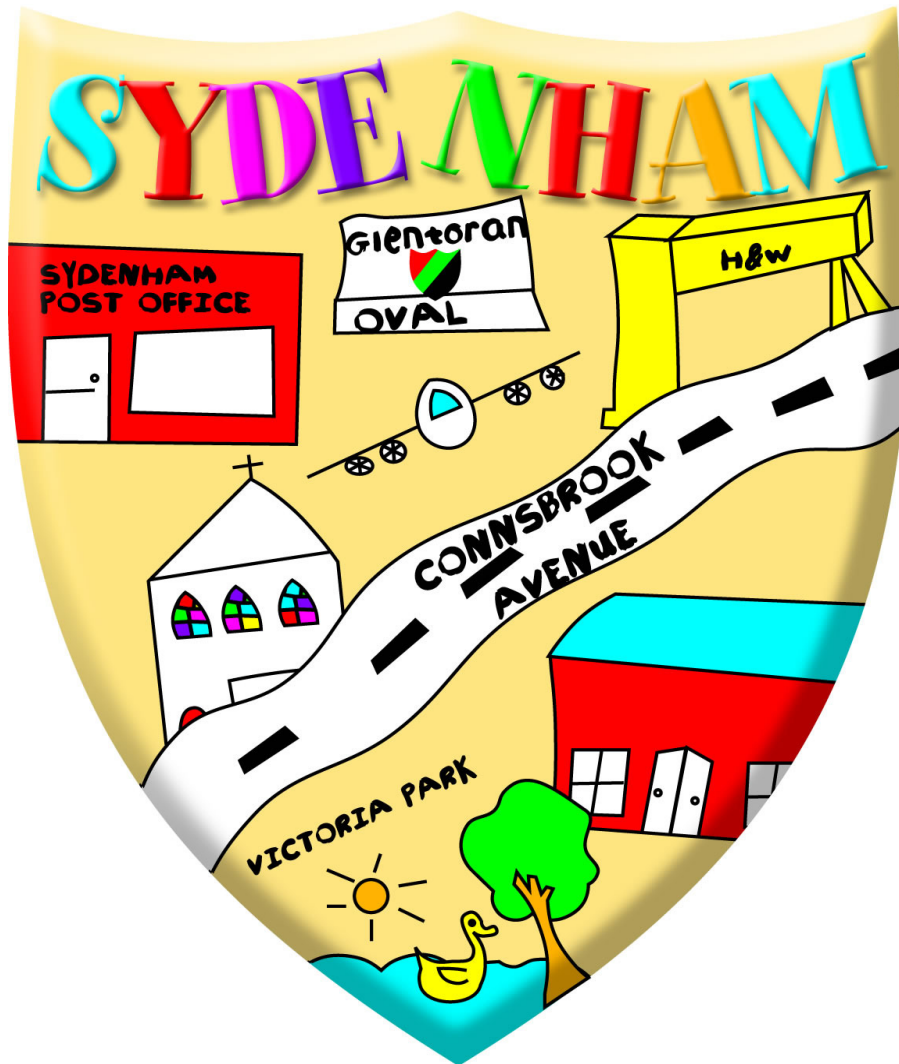


Interim Evaluation



Sydenham Areas at Risk Programme March 2009

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Sydenham Community Partnership was established after extensive community consultations and a series of away days, facilitated by EBCDA, including those voluntary and public sector organisations most involved in delivering services to and with the people of the Sydenham area.
- 1.2 The Partnership devised a development plan that formed the basis for successful submission to the Department of Social Development Areas at Risk Programme. The development plan focussed on two years – 2007 to 2009 – and identified local delivery structures, visioning an identity for people in Sydenham, youth and older people as key issues and needs.
- 1.3 After a year of implementation the Partnership is seeking to independently review its delivery to date, and identify recommendations for its further improvement.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 The review of the work of the Sydenham Areas at Risk Programme and action plan was carried out within a limited timeframe and budget. It included:

- o Meetings with East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA) and the Area at Risk Community Support Worker;
- o Distributing and analysis of a pre-review questionnaire to Sydenham Community Partnership members to inform the review meeting;
- o Facilitation of a review meeting with members of the Sydenham Community Partnership;
- o Production of a draft report that was further considered.
- o Production of a final report for publication.

2.2 The meeting with the Community Partnership was attended by 14 members. The Area at Risk staff and members of EBCDA did not attend the meeting to allow more open discussion about activities to date.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 The Department of Social Development, recognising the potential for Sydenham to enter further decline in social, economic and community terms, designated the Sydenham area in East Belfast as an Area at Risk in 2006.

3.2 The Department was keen that the area developed its own response to the outstanding issues impacting on the area that both accelerate decline and inhibit development of the local community. The East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA), as the umbrella group supporting the community sector in East Belfast as a whole, co-ordinated the Sydenham areas response to Area at Risk status. It helped to establish the Sydenham Community Partnership (of which EBCDA is now a member) and produce the Development Plan for the Sydenham area.

3.3 The Development Plan is still current, running from 2007-2009. The review is taking place at a mid-point in the development plan. The Plan has at its core the common aims to:

- Shape policy and practice application in the Sydenham area;
- Build the local community with a combination of empowerment and quick wins;
- Promote active citizenship;
- Prepare the area for advocacy on its own behalf and explore the possibility of it becoming part of a Neighbourhood Renewal Area.

The themes of capacity building, working together and resourcing the community are constant reference points in the Plan.

- 3.4 The Sydenham Community Partnership, an active amalgam of statutory, voluntary and church organisations from the area and EBCDA devised the Development Plan. The Sydenham Community Partnership collectively agreed the Plan as the way forward for the immediate future in the Sydenham area. The Partnership was aware of the poor community infrastructure in Sydenham and subsequent lack of community representation on the Partnership at the start. It had identified that as an immediate issue for the Plan and project worker.
- 3.5 The recruitment process for a Community Support Worker for the Programme and for implementation of the Plan was undertaken in September 2007.

4 REVIEW FEEDBACK

- 4.1 The review process included engagement with the officers and workshops with the Partnership members. However, while relatively limited the workshops with the Partnership members was thorough and facilitated honest, detailed and extremely relevant discussion about the achievements to date, adherence to the development plan, structures and operation of the Partnership, and future need.
- 4.2 The review feedback is summarised below related to each of the aims of the development plan with an additional section to cover other issues raised during the consultation.

Local Representative and Lobbying and Delivery Structures

- 4.3 The consultation demonstrated that the Partnership has genuine engagement from all stakeholders including local community representatives through the community organisations established in the area, churches and other faith-based organisations, and voluntary organisations, and public bodies. The area has traditionally had a weak and dislocated community infrastructure which the Partnership has started to change. The nature of the dialogue between sectors at meetings to date, and during the review workshop, demonstrated significant advance in shaping a common community agenda and delivery.
- 4.4 However, the Partnership recognised that more was still required to build an understanding between participating sectors, and as a result develop trust and interdependent working. This included further sharing of information, highlighting the existing work of participating sectors and organisations, and ensuring greater joint lobbying on areas of mutual agreement.

- 4.5 The first year of the operation of the Partnership had included the identification and inclusion of community representatives through local community associations. While a significant development on its own, the growth of the Partnership to include traditionally disparate sectors, would inevitably present challenges of synergising working methods, strategy and activities. A challenge for the Community Support Worker and EBCDA will be to manage that process in the second year. The Partnership members themselves will have some responsibility in constructively engaging with other sectors and working collaboratively.
- 4.6 The Partnership members believed they do not know each other well enough, although all agreed with the overall aim and vision of the Partnership was the betterment of life in Sydenham for all people and areas, and especially for those most in need.
- 4.7 The Partnership members also believed that as the Partnership became a stronger and a more assertive identity in its own right it needed to demonstrate leadership from within its own membership. This may have implications for the appointment of a chairperson although while also ensuring that there is continued respect and support for all sectors and for all parts of Sydenham.
- 4.8 The launch of the action plan was positively regarded by the Partnership who believed they could build on the successful start made to the action plan. They were highly supportive of the work of the Community Support Worker and keen to reinforce progress made to date on the action plan.

Vision and Identity – Environmental Improvements

- 4.9 The Partnership still regarded the Sydenham area as divided, manifested sometimes by young people not being willing to move from one part of Sydenham to another, or the area still lacking an acceptable neutral base for young people.

4.10 The continued diversity of the area may also be a strength for both the area and the Partnership. The Partnership, as a body and in how it operates, may need to be cognisant of that diversity and ensure differing stakeholders with different agendas (albeit bought in to the overall community vision) are recognised and accepted.

4.11 However, significant steps had been taken in implementing the action plan and a number of initiatives were ongoing. These included:

- o Schools competition and agreement on a Sydenham logo;
- o Provision of community notice boards in the area;
- o Production, development and updating of a Sydenham website;
- o Increasing numbers of volunteers being identified in the area through existing community and church provision, new groups and activities;
- o Ongoing efforts to secure hanging baskets and additional greenery and several environmental projects undertaken;
- o Organisation of remembrance celebrations in the area including a cross border link and linkage to after schools activity;
- o Titanic festival at Inverary;
- o Development of a British Isles football tournament for youths "George Best Testimonial Cup, to be staged in Sydenham;
- o Successful application made to Translink to adopt Sydenham Train Station;

- o Exploration of a second Re-Imaging Communities project to remove a contentious mural;
- o Increased membership of Sydenham Community Partnership to include local residents groups, schools, senior citizens groups and Northern Ireland Housing Executive representation;
- o Several successful Health Events ran in the area
- o Numerous environmental projects completed in the area in conjunction with Conservation Volunteers;
- o Additional funding of £30,000 has been acquired by the Community Support Worker and Sydenham Community Partnership members for various community based initiatives;
- o Provision of training courses in the last 12 months for community organisation staff and volunteers including Child Protection, First Aid, Funding Application, Committee Training, Website Management;
- o Strong links and relationships established with MLAs, Councillors and public bodies who support the vision and work of Sydenham Community Partnership;
- o Design and creation of a “Famous Faces and Heritage Tour” in area involving plaques to acknowledge famous families and individuals from Sydenham including James Ellis and Stuart Parker and Smiles family.

4.12 Sustaining a vision and identity for the Sydenham area would be more likely to have long term success through the Partnership, if the Partnership can take on more ownership of the overall strategy.

The Partnership needs to look within itself to agree on the strategy post-2009 and find common ground and methods of working agreed by all of its stakeholders. The disparate nature of community delivery in Sydenham in the past will make such a unified approach by the Partnership a significant challenge for its members.

Enhancing Youth Provision

- 4.13 The Partnership believed youth provision to be the key delivery issue in the Sydenham area, and believed that youth provision continued to be under-provided. While there was limited provision of youth clubs through the various churches and faith-based organisations, all believed this was still inadequate and wished to see the former Sydenham Youth Club reopened for youth activities. The Partnership believed that while it had, through constituent parts, lobbied for the reopening of the Youth Club, it could improve its lobbying efforts.
- 4.14 Working with young people, and older people from the area, also included working through a number of interface and related issues according to the Partnership. This was partly caused by general community issues and by the relocation of people from interfaces to the Sydenham area. As a result some of the residual issues still existed and it was therefore more difficult to build a united community spirit around a Sydenham identity. The lack of services and facilities for younger people, it was thought, may contribute to a deterioration of the area.

Health and Isolation

- 4.15 A number of specific health initiatives had been held under the Partnership umbrella in the preceding year including:
- o Engage with Age facilitation of older peoples' groups through Hope and both the Presbyterian and Methodist churches;

- o Facilitation of a Salvation Army health day;
 - o Health awareness sessions for Ashfield Boys High School and separately also for Ashfield Girls High School;
 - o “Knights” Senior Citizens Men’s Group now being supported by Community Support Worker for Sydenham and Partnership;
 - o Organisation of a basic first aid session in the Church of Ireland hall which was over-subscribed – plans are being made for a second session.
- 4.16 In addition a men’s group operates (the Knights) in Sydenham and also through Sydenham Cultural and Historical Society.
- 4.17 Isolation of older people was still considered by the Partnership to be a significant need in the Sydenham area.

Resources On-the-Ground

- 4.18 The support to the Sydenham Community Partnership offered by both the Community Support Worker and EBCDA was highly regarded and appreciated. The Partnership was extremely positive about the contribution made by the Community Support Worker and concerned to see continuation of funding to further support the project worker role. Indeed, the Partnership were worried that unless further funding was received damage would be caused by both a rolling back of successes to date, and by a loss of morale or increased resentment given the raising of expectations to date.
- 4.19 There was acknowledgement of the potential for over-dependence on both the Community Support Worker and EBCDA, and that their role may also make the Partnership less pro-active.

Members thought that if the project worker or/and EBCDA were to stop providing the support they give, the Partnership would cease to exist and the disparate and unconnected nature of the work within Sydenham would revert to type before the establishment of the Partnership.

- 4.20 As a result, members recognised the need to increasingly provide leadership from within the Sydenham Community Partnership and reduce over-dependence on either the Community Support Worker or EBCDA. However, there was also awareness that it will take time for the Partnership to develop the trust and togetherness necessary to contribute to successful leadership.
- 4.21 The financial support offered through the Areas at Risk programme – both for a project worker and support to individual initiatives – was recognised as critical to the progress that had been made to date.

Other

- 4.22 It was identified that a lack of involvement of ethnic minorities in the Partnership or in the development plan was a gap that could be addressed during the review and future delivery.
- 4.23 Belfast City Council stresses the need to empower local communities to identify their own needs and solutions to those needs. The Council have been supporters and advocates of the Partnership and wish to see the Partnership further develop its capacity.
- 4.24 Funding for the Sydenham Community Partnership, and activities within the development plan, has been essential in supporting both the establishment of the Partnership, activities on-the-ground that have made a difference in Sydenham, and in improving relationships and collaboration between organisations.

4.25 Further lobbying to increase investment in the area in health related matters was also considered important by the Partnership, linked by some to the campaign against extension to the runway and flight volume at Belfast City Airport.

5 OUTPUTS ACHIEVED

5.1 In order to help provide focus for the remainder of the action plan the outputs identified in the action plan are highlighted below with an indication, at this half way point in the process, whether they have been fully, partially or not achieved to date. Comment is also made regarding their status.

Note:

- Not achieved;
- Partially achieved;
- Fully achieved.

Create local representative lobbying and delivery structures			
No	Outputs	Status	Comment
A	Invite community representatives to sit on the Sydenham Community Partnership	■	Achieved. Representatives from four local community associations are represented, including two (Palmerston Road Residents Association and Sydenham Cultural and Historical Group) that have been established with the help of the Community support worker
B	Agree working relationship between all involved in physical redevelopment projects in the area	■	Achieved. While some redevelopment work has been delayed including the plans for the Strand Presbyterian Church, a working relationship has been developed and continues to be built on, involving the churches, school and Belfast City Council.

No	Outputs	Status	Comment
C	Elect a chairperson/deputy chairperson	■	Not achieved. The Partnership has instead agreed to rotate the position of chair as meetings take place concerned to continue ownership and involvement across all organisations. However, community representatives also believe a chair and vice chair should be elected and be a local person.
D	Host an open meeting/launch the strategy	■	Achieved. The action plan was launched at Inverary Community Centre in Sydenham, attended by over 60 local people, elected representatives and public bodies.
E	Identify volunteers	■	Achieved. New community associations involved in the Partnership that have themselves involved local people in activities.
Create and Sustain a Vision and Identity			
No	Outputs	Status	Comment
A	Facilitate the provision of hanging baskets and greenery	■	Work is ongoing with Palmerston Road Residents Association.
B	Organise a schools competition to design a Sydenham logo	■	Achieved. Entrants were displayed at Connswater Shopping Centre and the winner selected by special guests. Logo is used on all Partnership communication and is being considered as a potential design for a mural in a Re-Imaging Communities application to remove a more contentious symbol.
C	Agree on an area “centre” and mark with a symbolic landmark artwork or planting	■	Partnership revisited the idea of identifying a centre to the Sydenham area but is keen to introduce more greenery to the area. Work is ongoing with local groups. There is no agreement locally about the location of a “centre” in the area.

No	Outputs	Status	Comment
D	Ensure appropriate and informative signage and on arterial routes	■	Work is ongoing with local groups and public bodies
E	Enhance commercial and community signage	■	Not been a focus of the activities in the area to date given concentration on establishing and involving community organisations. However, work is ongoing with Belfast City Council.
F	Produce and deliver a quarterly community news publication	■	The first year has concentrated on the creation of a web site and other methods of communication including schools competition and open meeting. The newsletter is available on the website and may be printed out on request.
G	Embark on a series of meetings with elected representatives	■	Links established at and subsequent to the launch of the plan. Further meetings held but Partnership recognises the need to be more co-ordinated about their lobbying.
H	Produce and update a Sydenham website	■	Achieved. Updated regularly by the Community Support Worker
I	Support volunteering by residents	■	Substantial progress through supporting the establishment of local community organisations. The next year will embed these organisations and support the extension of their local work including with local volunteers.
Enhance Youth Provision			
No	Outputs	Status	Comment
A	Support the physical development and presence of the churches in the area	■	Churches continue to deliver direct provision themselves and through 166 House, and development plans are continuing at the Strand Presbyterian Church

No	Outputs	Status	Comment
B	Support the re-use of the Sydenham Youth Club for youth provision	■	The Partnership has supported the re-use of the youth club but could be better co-ordinated between its component members. The youth club has not been brought back in to community usage. The local groups would prefer the Partnership to be more assertive in its support for bringing the youth club back in to community use
C	Establish a youth working group of the Partnership	■	Achieved but in abeyance. A youth working group was established but identifying a regular time for the meetings led to meetings being suspended.
D	Continue to develop specific youth initiatives	■	Specific youth projects continue to be organised by all youth oriented members of the Partnership.
Improve Health and Reduce Isolation			
No	Outputs	Status	Comment
A	Link a health project to EBCDA's Healthy Living Centre	■	Several related projects have been organised. These include first aid training (so oversubscribed that two further sessions have been organised) and health awareness days in schools and for older people in the area.
B	Support a local men's group	■	Achieved. The Knights and Sydenham Historical and Cultural Society established and now work in the area.
Resourcing On-the-Ground			
A	Identify base and management support	■	Provided by EBCDA and well regarded by the whole Partnership
B	Undertake recruitment process	■	Managed by EBCDA, inclusive of the Partnership.
C	Provide support to a Community Support Worker	■	Community Support Worker well regarded by the whole Partnership and support offered to Community Support Worker and partnership by EBCDA.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 The conclusions that follow are drawn from the consultation with EBCDA, the Community Support Worker and the Sydenham Community Partnership.
- 8.2 This report is intended to provide “food for thought” and make recommendations for the future of the Area at Risk development plan and activities in Sydenham.
- 8.3 The need for a unified approach to community support from statutory agencies and the voluntary and community organisations and support networks is important.
- 8.4 The Sydenham Community Partnership model provides a good model for intra agency and community co-operation in the Sydenham area, and should be built upon.
- 8.5 However, there will continue to be healthy contention between the various sectors involved in the Partnership, which is a constructive part of the partnership and development process, if managed appropriately.
- 8.6 The process of building relationships with communities takes time and resources, especially if the process of development in which they are expected to engage is challenging.
- 8.7 The Partnership, however, recognises the successes to date and the role played by Areas at Risk, EBCDA, the Community Support Worker and the Partnership itself. However, it is concerned that the successes to date, and the partnership approach, are fragile and that further funding is needed. It believes expectations have been raised to the extent that damage would be caused to the community support infrastructure and attitudes to public sector support locally, should further development funding not be realised.

8.8 Recommendations are made under each heading in the development plan. Two points are relevant as generic precursors to other recommendations:

- o The Community Support Worker, EBCDA and Sydenham Community Partnership have made significant and impressive progress to date in actioning the outputs in the development plan, energetically involving the local community and other stakeholders, and garnering goodwill from all stakeholders;
- o The development plan should continue to be implemented including those elements already being actioned and those still to be achieved.

Other recommendations include:

Local Representative Lobbying and Delivery Structures

- o Given that the Sydenham Community Partnership now involves a number of new members it should have an away day to cement relationships and build an understanding of who is delivering what locally. The focus of the away day should not be on developing further the plan – there will be further need for that toward the end of Areas at Risk funding – but on trust building and knowledge acquisition within the Partnership;
- o The Partnership should nominate a chair and vice chair from within its own membership to provide additional leadership within the Partnership. The chair and vice chair should be from different sectors recognising the contribution made to the area by organisations and individuals living, working and providing services in the area, and should rotate annually. The chair and vice chair should give a clear commitment of time – we suggest two days per month – and voluntarily undertake training in relevant skills for example through NICVA or EBCDA.

It is suggested the vice chair may become chair after a year with a rolling process involving a new vice chair. We suggest the Partnership review how this system works after three years.

- o The Partnership should meet formally once per month, with a regular date, time and venue agreed. We suggest the venue may most usefully be at EBCDA offices to start with. While frequency of meetings has been a discussion item for the Partnership in the past, it is achieving sufficient maturity and seeking to take such responsibility on to itself that monthly meeting, at least for the foreseeable future, is important.
- o A formal agenda is agreed for Partnership meetings to include headings linked to the development plan.
- o During the year a membership and nomination process is agreed for the Partnership, culminating in an AGM. We suggest the nominating process takes account of previous dislocation of services within the area and maintains the existing membership of organisations and stakeholders including local community representatives, churches and faith-based organisations, public bodies and voluntary organisations.

Vision and Identity

- o Continued support for greenery initiatives, including applications for funding to Awards for All and Belfast City Council and continued support from Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland;
- o Further enhance and promote the continued development of a “Heritage and Famous Faces” trail to further increase shared pride in area;

- o Greater use of the logo including the potential for a Re-Imaging Communities mural of the Sydenham logo designed by a local child as a replacement for an existing more contentious mural.
- o Production and delivery to all households of at least three news sheets during the remainder of 2009 outlining the existing successes of the development plan, and the future work of the Partnership.

Youth

- o Resume Youth Sub Group activities in the area to exchange information, organise events for this years Titanic Festival and develop a lobbying plan for the whole Partnership regarding the re-opening of Sydenham Youth Club.

Health/Isolation

- o Continue organising the health events planned for the area in accordance with Sydenham Community Partnership's Action Plan.

Resourcing

- o Partnership should start to develop a forward planning proposal for the continuation of funding for a project worker post and continued support from EBCDA. This should help to plan for greater sustainability and enhanced leadership within the membership of the Partnership.

8.9 The continued implementation of the action plan will be a significant challenge as well as the main recommendations above.

- 8.10 Given the nature of the recommendations we suggest the Partnership, in its second year, needs to take more ownership of the development plan and its implementation, and start a process of both growing in confidence and developing its leadership capacity, to reduce dependence on EBCDA. However, it should be recognised by the Partnership, EBCDA and funders that such a process will take time and an investment of money and moral support.
- 8.11 It is clear that Sydenham Community Partnership believes it has a role to play in the regeneration of Sydenham, and that they have made a start to rebuilding relationships and trust between various community and other organisations involved in working for people in Sydenham. They appreciate the commitment required but if appropriately supported the Partnership and those associated with it may make change happen in a sustainable way for people in Sydenham.

East Belfast Community Development Agency
269 Albertbridge Road,
Belfast, BT5 4PY
Tel: 028 9045 1512 Fax: 028 9073 8039
Email: info@ebcda.org Website: www.ebcda.org

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