

Somerset Market Towns Forum Building the Network

Evaluation Report



Executive Summary

Somerset Market Towns Forum brings together market towns and larger villages in one network to share concerns, exchange learning and help in the economic, social and environmental regeneration of these communities. In autumn 2006 SMTF was awarded funds from Somerset Rural Renaissance Partnership to develop organisational capacity and services to the network.

Over a sixteen month project SMTF embarked on an ambitious “Building the Network” project which included

- Developing networking opportunities
- A website
- Email bulletins
- Community Ventures training
- Consultancy support
- Business planning process and development of a business plan
- Raising the profile of SMTF
- Extending the network to new organisations
- Developing the SMTF Steering Group
- Working towards a sustainable funding strategy

This report considers how far SMTF has achieved the aim, objectives, outputs and longer term outcomes set at the beginning of the project. Evidence considered included documentation, evaluation material from events, quarterly reports to Somerset Rural Renaissance Partnership, discussions with SMTF staff and Steering Group members as well as

telephone interviews with a selection of member organisations, community groups not members of SMTF and Local Authority officers.

SMTF delivered four networking events across Somerset which were well attended by a range of community groups from across the county and have been a catalyst for collaboration and exchange of information for these groups. Community Ventures training was delivered through two major events in June 2007 and March 2008 as well as eleven consultancy/training sessions tailored to the needs of individual groups. These initiatives have extended the reach of SMTF to many new groups and feedback suggests that the capacity and confidence of the groups has been enhanced by their contact with SMTF.

The range of services provided by SMTF to Somerset groups during this project has increased. A new website has been set up as a hub of information on issues related to market town regeneration and a forum where good practice and innovation can be shared. Monthly email bulletins are now produced by SMTF and are highly regarded as a key source of information on funding, policy and training opportunities by member organisations, other community groups and Local Authority officers.

Significant work has been undertaken to raise the profile of SMTF with the use of the website above and also new publicity materials. Considerable effort has been made to widen membership of SMTF including the redrafting of the Terms of Reference. At the end of the project 17 out of a possible 24 eligible groups were SMTF members and five towns were represented on the Steering Group.

A major piece of work undertaken during the project was the business planning process which involved extensive consultation and the writing and adoption of the business plan at the SMTF AGM in November 2007. The business planning process was particularly helpful in defining the key roles for SMTF and feedback indicates that the organisation is perceived as having a clearer focus as a result.

Development of a sustainable funding strategy proved more difficult and regional policy changes meant that SMTF had to rethink its strategy, work to new timescales and begin new funding negotiations just as the project was coming to an end. Nevertheless SMTF were able to sign a Service Level Agreement with Somerset County Council and are in final negotiations with SWRDA for three year funding.

The report concludes that despite the tight timescale and limited resources SMTF has delivered against the aim, objectives, outputs and milestones of “Building the Network” and has gone some considerable way to also delivering the longer term outcomes. SMTF has emerged as a stronger and more focussed organisation and a key player in the regeneration of Somerset towns and larger villages.

Introduction

Somerset Market Towns Forum (SMTF) is a project hosted by the Community Council for Somerset. SMTF was formed in 2003 to bring together representatives of all Somerset market towns and larger villages in one network to share concerns and exchange learning on issues of common concern and help in the economic, social and environmental regeneration of these communities. Core membership of SMTF has been the community planning groups in market towns set up as a result of the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative or the Parish Planning process.

Aims

In autumn 2006 following the production of its action plan SMTF secured funding from Somerset Rural Renaissance Partnership to fund a new phase of development known as the “Building the Network” project. SMTF also received funding from Somerset County Council, the Market and Coastal Towns Association and DEFRA. The aim of the project was to **increase the capacity of communities in Somerset market towns and large villages to deliver a rural renaissance**. This project was delivered between 1st December 2006 and 31st March 2008.

Objectives of the project

By April 2008 “Building the Network” was to have:

- Extended the network services of the SMTF to all market towns and larger villages in Somerset
- Extended the range of services provided by SMTF to members and to groups and individuals involved in community led regeneration of market towns
- Supported collaboration between market towns on specific projects
- To have developed and implemented a sustainable funding strategy for the SMTF
- To have learnt and built on good practice elsewhere for the benefit of Somerset’s market towns and larger villages.

Outputs

Core output

- Skills – 80 people to be assisted in skills development (six hours or more) Including 30 people receiving training at Community Ventures day. 50 people referred to Community Ventures support programme from field work activities.

Activity Specific Outputs

- Business Plan to be written
- Community Ventures event
- Interactive website

SMTF structure, governance and staffing

SMTF is hosted by the Community Council for Somerset which is the accountable body. The two staff members are line managed by the Community Council for Somerset. Policy and direction of SMTF is overseen by a Steering Group. During the “Building the Network” project the Steering Group has included representation from Somerset County Council, the Market and Coastal Towns Association, the Community Council for Somerset and representatives from a number of member organisations. In 2007 SMTF changed their Terms of Reference to clarify “voting membership” and “standard membership” and this has been a catalyst to promote SMTF to a much wider range of groups and individuals. Voting membership was widened from community planning groups to “groups and elected bodies that have been involved in a recognised community planning process in their own town or large village”. This has enabled eligible parish and town councils to apply for membership.

Staff

“Building the Network” enabled the hours of the existing Forum Officer to be increased to 24 per week and a new post of Information Officer also 24 hours per week was created. The Information Officer joined the organisation at the end of February 2007.

In any organisation staff are an important resource and this is especially true in a small organisation. It is important to note the immense contribution of SMTF staff recognised in the telephone survey.

Comments from the telephone survey include

“staff have delivered, seized the opportunities....worked very hard to very high standards”.

“skilled staff know how to encourage people and enable them to become further involved”.

One member organisation commented that staff were unfailingly *“knowledgeable, friendly and accessible”.*

Previous evaluation

SMTF has undertaken systematic ongoing monitoring of all its activities and evaluation forms are routinely used at all SMTF events. There is regular analysis of this feedback which is used to improve services. Monthly statistics for use of the website are kept. As yet there is no system to record and analyse responses to telephone or email enquiries. Monitoring information and emerging trends have however been regularly provided to the Steering Group through the Forum Officers reports and to Rural Renaissance via the quarterly project reports. A final project report was submitted to Rural Renaissance in April 2008.

Methodology

In line with the project brief this independent evaluation report was prepared by an external consultant Liz Simmons (Aravah Associates). Following discussion with SMTF staff and the Steering Group the following was undertaken:

- SMTF staff made an initial contact with representatives of Member Groups both voting and standard members
- The consultant made contact with 6 groups which fitted the criteria for membership but were not members
- The consultant conducted telephone interviews with 10 of the 17 SMTF Voting Member Groups (including two new groups)
- The consultant made contact with one Standard Member.
- The consultant spent time with SMTF staff members and had contact via telephone and email
- The consultant undertook telephone interviews with some of the Steering Group
- Telephone interviews also took place with 8 contacts in total from Somerset County Council and the District Councils
- The Consultant had access to all the documents relevant to the project including details of all training, lists of attendees, reports, business plan, quarterly and final reports for Rural Renaissance, examples of all publicity information, the marketing and communications plan, website information and

all feedback and monitoring information collected by SMTF during the project.

This report takes each objective of “Building the Network” and assesses how far these and the agreed outputs were met. The outcomes and wider impact of the work are also considered from the perspectives of member organisations, potential member organisations as well as key local authority officers from Somerset County Council, District and Borough Councils, SMTF staff, Steering Group and the documentary evidence provided to the consultant.

Objectives 1 and 2

- **Extend the network of services of the Forum to all market towns and larger villages in Somerset**
- **Extend the range of services provided by the Forum to members and to groups and individuals involved in community regeneration of market towns**

Outcome

- **Accessible network and communication channels**

Increasing the Membership

A full list of current SMTF members is given in Appendix 1. At the end of the “Building the Network” project 17 Community Planning groups were members of the SMTF, an increase from 13 at the beginning of the project with Castle Cary Town Council, Wedmore Parish Council, Vision for Frome and Wiveliscombe Area MTi all joining.

As a direct result of the project five towns are now represented on the Steering Group of SMTF which will ensure a continuing close alignment between the needs of member groups and the work of SMTF.

Seventeen of a possible twenty-four Somerset market towns are now members of SMTF.

Following the change to the SMTF Steering Group Terms of Reference in 2007 there has been a concerted effort to reach out to new community groups both to encourage membership and to make them aware of SMTF services. The business planning process resulted in the

production of a leaflet summarising SMTF services. In January 2008 120 information packs using the new publicity material were sent out to contacts across Somerset. Although there is no record of the number of responses received there were a number of follow up contacts and SMTF now have a growing standard membership and are developing contacts with non- member large towns and villages. The outreach with the Minehead group and training delivered in response to consultation with Mendip groups are two examples of this initiative. There is also evidence of groups attending the network meetings who had not previously attended SMTF events (see Figure 1)

As part of the drive to extend the network of services to all market towns and large villages SMTF have also attended the South Somerset Towns Investment Group.

As part of the telephone survey, contact was made with 6 groups who received the January 2008 mail shot. All but one of these groups had decided not to join SMTF. The following reasons were given:

- Groups were unsure what SMTF did and confused by what they perceive as numerous other groups working in the same field e.g. Community Council for Somerset, MCTA, South Somerset Market Towns Investment Group, etc
- Groups admitted that they had spent little time discussing membership between themselves due to pressure of other business
- Concern that joining SMTF would mean attending lots of meetings
- Groups unaware of services offered by SMTF and how these could benefit them
- All would be receptive to a personal approach from SMTF in the future

The new website www.somersetmarkettowns.co.uk was launched at the Business Planning Workshops held on 11th and 12th July 2007. It has been a key new service offered to groups and individuals to aid community regeneration of market towns in Somerset. This service

has been promoted through flyers, leaflets, use on all publicity materials and press releases.

Development of the email bulletins has also been a key new service available to groups and individuals and is widely valued. (See Fig 1 and information on email bulletins page 8)

The business planning process enabled SMTF to survey unmet need and inform how its services should be extended.

A particular success was the attendance of five Chambers of Commerce at the Axbridge network event held in October 2007.

Publicity

Establishing a brand identity for SMTF and increasing publicity have been key tasks for the Information Officer.

The Information Officer has tackled the task of publicising SMTF with enthusiasm and attention to detail, despite the fact that much of SMTF work is not obviously “newsworthy” to the local media. The capacity of member groups has been raised through advice on publicity and techniques and whenever possible relevant member groups are asked to acknowledge the role of SMTF in their own publicity.

New leaflets have been designed to detail what SMTF can offer, highlighting recent work and giving information on how to join. Mail shots have been undertaken with particular reference to groups across the county seen as potential new members.

- New member groups and some of the potential member groups commented that the name “Somerset Market Towns Forum” caused some confusion and possibly put off some eligible groups from seeing the organisation as having something to offer them because they were not a market town. The changed terms of reference of SMTF to include “large villages” is not reflected in the name of the organisation.

- Recognition of the SMTF logo was low with only 25% of Local Authority officers able to describe it and 45% of member organisations. Whilst this may seem discouraging it is important to remember that for a membership organisation such as SMTF it takes time for such initiatives to bed down. The logo needs to be in widespread use over a longer period of time to ensure good recognition.

Output

- **Accessible network and communication channels**

Website

The SMTF website was developed in conjunction with Project Cosmic and was launched in July 2007. The website contains news and events, case studies, a resource library and an archive of email bulletins. A key feature of developing the website had been to encourage member organisations to “post” news and develop their own town/village page. Very few member organisations have taken up the opportunity to do this commenting that they found it difficult to find the time to keep their own website up to date. Groups generally felt that the SMTF website was good but did not really use it actively. They felt that if anyone wanted to know about a particular town or organisation they would search for it by name rather than via the SMTF website.

Within most groups one person monitors the SMTF website and receives the email bulletins, they then forward items of interest onto others within the group or to other organisations. Lack of time to browse the website was certainly an issue for many groups.

Two member groups benefitted from website training from Project Cosmic as part of “Building the Network” as well as from additional one to one support from the Information Officer. This has directly helped these groups to develop their own websites and to submit news/information to the SMTF website.

Local Authority officers were also ambivalent about the usefulness of the website, acknowledging that there needed to be one but not sure of its real value to member groups or whether it was worth devoting resources to develop it further.

Email bulletin

The first bulletin was produced in August 2007 and by the end of March 2008 it was being sent to 126 individuals and groups each month. The email bulletins were seen as an excellent resource by all groups. The email bulletins are read, acted on and forwarded to others. Most groups had found information of direct use to them in the bulletins including funding opportunities. The bulletins were also felt to be more focussed to the needs of members than other local and national bulletins and groups recognised that they could save a lot of time by simply reading this one source of information.

Local Authority officers all commented that although there are numerous other email bulletins both for Somerset and others covering regeneration issues the SMTF bulletins are particularly *“succinct and good”*

“email bulletin extremely useful, speeds up the process for many groups to get info on training, courses, funding, etc”

One Local Authority officer said they were much more likely to signpost groups to SMTF now that there was a website and the email bulletin system in place.

Output

- **Improvement in the capacity of groups in market towns to participate in and achieve market town regeneration**

Networking

Networking has been a key role of SMTF since its inception. During the “Building the Network” project this has become increasingly focussed, professional and attuned to the needs of member and

potential member organisations. Member organisations overwhelmingly see facilitating networking as the most important function of the SMTF and what it does best. (see Additional Information)

Comments from member organisations include

“having a theme is good, a chance to find out from others the pitfalls and what’s achievable”

“collaboration is a real benefit – often unseen – to learn from what others have done”

“It provides a network, systems, a chance to talk, compare notes and join forces. We might be too parochial otherwise”

One group commented that a hidden benefit could be the opportunity at network meetings to “benchmark” the effectiveness, capacity and initiatives of an individual against other similar groups across Somerset.

Newer member groups felt more uncertain, wondering if networking would be too time consuming for their already busy membership. It was also suggested that newly formed groups and groups in an active development phase may be more interested in networking and exchanging ideas than long-standing groups or those groups in a consolidation phase.

Local Authority Officers

This group felt there was real benefit in the networking opportunities for groups and this was supported by the consistently high numbers attending. Most SMTF networking events attract 20 – 25 people. The Wincanton Networking Event was followed by a quick dissemination of workshop information and follow up information by email which enabled some groups to make rapid progress with priority work. One hidden benefit was felt to be the opportunity for local authority officers to network with one another.

The only negative comments about networking meetings were the difficulty of attending them as they move around the county travelling time and distance being a real problem for many people.

Training and consultancy

The majority of training delivered under “Building the Network” was through Community Ventures. The direct costs of Community Ventures were funded by DEFRA through the Rural Action Partnership. The Rural Action partnership is a partnership of rural organisations in Somerset which is led by Vista. SMTF is a member and was responsible for the Community Ventures project. Community Ventures delivered capacity building training through two conference style training events in June 2007 and March 2008 which were organised by SMTF with input from their partners the Community Council for Somerset and Vista and through ad hoc capacity building training and support. The ad hoc training and support was provided to rural community groups by specialist consultants and trainers. The SMTF officer publicised this service, considered applications and allocated Vista approved trainers to groups.

In total 159 individuals representing 71 rural groups received training or support through Community Ventures and 81 learning outputs were recorded.

The June 07 and March 08 events were well targeted with groups attending including member groups, regeneration groups contacting SMTF for the first time and other community groups. Evaluation forms were completed on the day and the groups surveyed felt the events had been worthwhile and met the specific needs of their organisation. (See Figure 2 for details of numbers attending and a breakdown by locality).



In telephone interviews several existing group members commented on how they had encouraged other community groups in their locality to attend both networking and training opportunities. This type of peer recommendation is a key way for SMTF to reach out to new groups

- The Community Assets training at Shepton Mallet was directly beneficial to Shepton 21, giving them a timely opportunity to

get the information and advice they needed to assist in a local initiative.

- Wiveliscombe sent four delegates to the training in June in Bridgwater and found the session on “Community Buildings Viability and Sustainability”, as well as the opportunity to share learning with other groups, of direct use to inform work they are currently undertaking.

Eleven learning opportunities were delivered to community groups tailored to a specific need. Evaluation forms (not available for all sessions) and feedback during the telephone survey also indicated a very high degree of satisfaction with the sessions. For a full list of the sessions brokered by SMTF see Figure 3.

There is no doubt that the Community Ventures training has been well received by participating groups who have appreciated it being free, having SMTF broker the arrangements and identify high quality trainers/consultants which saves them time and effort. Two small groups commented that there was a real benefit to them being able to attend good quality free training which they would otherwise be unable to afford. For most groups a key benefit was that the training could be tailored to their specific local needs.

The successful delivery of Community Ventures has enhanced the reputation of SMTF amongst member organisations and local authority representatives.

Over the next year or more as the learning is used by the groups it should be possible to track the “added value” that Community Ventures has provided. At present for many of the groups it is still a work in progress.

Objective 3

- **Support collaboration between market towns on specific projects**

Outcome

- **Partnerships built**

There are a number of ways that this objective has been met through “Building the Network”

The business planning process highlighted a number of key issues and common themes for members and community groups.

SMTF worked with both Wiveliscombe Area Partnership and Shepton Mallet 21 to design a communications course to meet their specific needs.

The SMTF website included the details of projects local groups are delivering which will increase awareness amongst groups and aid learning transfer and collaboration.

SMTF has facilitated fact finding visits between groups e.g. Minehead Hospital Development Group visited Langport Area Development Trust. SMTF put a number of groups in touch with Axbridge Action Group re their Highways scheme.

See Figure 5 for additional examples of collaboration between groups.

Objective 4

- **Develop and implement a sustainable funding strategy**

“Building the Network” provided financial support for a major business planning exercise which was carried out with the help of external consultants between March and November 2007. Steering Group members were extensively involved in the process including surveys, consultation events and the business plan launch at the SMTF AGM in November.

Member groups were all aware of this process and some were directly involved; five groups returned questionnaires and eight community groups attended the business planning events held in July 2007. The planning events were a good opportunity for groups to get together but still didn’t reach quite as many as might have been expected.

Member groups surveyed felt that the process had been useful in clarifying the purpose of SMTF and all felt that this had contributed to a clearer focus for the organisation.

Local Authority officers were well represented at the business planning events and were also surveyed by postal questionnaire.

The consensus seemed to be that the process had been useful, the business plan contained many strengths although there was some concern at a number of the assumptions made about levels of future funding in particular from local authority sources. In speaking to the local authority officers and reading their original responses to the business plan survey it is difficult to see an evidence base for the business plan funding strategy which relied so heavily on District Council finance.

SMTF followed up the recommendations from the business plan by circulating proposals, holding a joint meeting with local authority officers in November 2007 and undertaking individual follow up discussions with the key local authority contacts. A three year Service Level Agreement was negotiated with Somerset County Council.

When however it became apparent that the funding strategy proposed by the business plan would not be realised and when fundamental changes to SWRDA funding to market and coastal towns was announced, SMTF took a leading role with the Chair of the SMTF Steering Group supported by the Forum Officer leading the negotiations for Somerset.

Outcome

- **Strengthening the long term capacity of SMTF to support market town regeneration**

From the member group survey there is a clear sense of the organisation having significantly built its capacity during the “Building the Network” project. Groups commented that SMTF is much more proactive, more visible, quicker to respond to requests from them,

much broader based in its approach and with a developing reputation for delivering quality services/support.

The Steering Group has undergone some changes bringing new opportunities with a new Chair and Vice Chair and there is greater involvement with five market towns now active participants in directing the work of SMTF.

The Chair of SMTF is leading the regional negotiations on the development of the South West Market and Coastal Towns Network. One Steering Group Member is now a representative on the Somerset Rural Renaissance Partnership thus increasing the organisations awareness of wider developments, policies and funding opportunities. Steering Group members also attend SMTF outreach events and are developing a greater representational role than before.

Objective 5

- **Learn and build on good practice elsewhere for the benefit of Somerset Market Towns**

SMTF staff and the business plan consultants compiled information on a number of different market town networks including Devon Towns Forum and Market Towns East and SMTF staff visited Gloucester Market Towns Forum. All of this information informed the development of the business plan.

A key feature of the SMTF website is the dissemination of good practice to member groups including information and case studies from across the region. For example Exe Valley MCTi made a presentation at the March 2007 Network event as part of a workshop on good practice in community consultation and this information was posted on the SMTF website. At the SMTF AGM in November 2007 Langport Area Development Trust and ECOS Trust shared their experience of the development of Great Bow Wharf with other groups attending.

The SMTF website and email bulletins have been used by groups and other fora outside Somerset. The expertise of SMTF in website development has been recently recognised with SMTF being asked to manage the development of the new regional (South West Market and Coastal Towns Network) website.

The revised membership criteria of SMTF have enabled a wider range of groups in Somerset to get involved. In addition the Community Ventures training/consultancy has encouraged wider participation from community groups not previously in contact with SMTF.

Good links have also been established with officers and member groups from Bath and North East Somerset.

The comments made in the telephone survey as well as evaluation forms from training/consultancy and business planning events run during “Building the Network” clearly support the view that many groups both members and associated community groups have directly benefitted from the services of SMTF. (See Figure 5 for a sample list)

Some responses highlighted the value of the support offered to their group by SMTF, either the opportunity to talk through an issue, be signposted to another agency or linked to another group with the experience to help.

There was also a comment from two groups that being able to attend training and networking didn't always provide them with new information but it gave them confidence to feel they were on the right track.

Challenges

- There is no doubt that all involved with SMTF have seen “Building the Network” as a vital phase of the organisation's work undertaken at a pivotal point in its development. Changes to the wider regeneration/market town funding context that happened during the life of the project was outside the control

of SMTF but nevertheless resulted in time and attention being diverted from delivering the project to undertake complex negotiations.

- It is due to the expertise and drive of SMTF staff and Steering Group volunteers that so much has been achieved during “Building the Network”. At the same time it is important to remember that there are limits to what can be achieved by an organisation with a wide geographical remit and yet limited financial and staff resources.

Conclusions

Building the Network was a sixteen month project and during this time SMTF had to recruit and induct a new member of staff as well as develop briefs for and oversee the delivery of a website and business planning process.

In conclusion after reviewing the project documentation, evaluation material, speaking to SMTF staff and telephone interviews with a range of people involved with SMTF during the project I feel able to conclude that the “Building the Network” project has successfully met its agreed objectives, the outputs and milestones set at the beginning of the work and has made considerable progress in relation to the longer term outcomes.

PROJECT MILESTONES	TARGET DATE	DATE ACHIEVED
Information Officer in post	End Feb 07	End Feb 07
One networking, training or consultation event each quarter	End March 07	End March 07
Community Venture training event	July 07	Two events held 06/07 and 03/08
Website in operation	July 07	July 07

Business plan event with members	July 07	July 07
Complete business plan	End Dec 07	Nov 07
Event to showcase and promote services offered	End Dec 07	November 07
Implementation of business plan recommendations	End March 08	Staged implementation End March 08

Community Ventures training, networking opportunities and email bulletins are seen as models of best practice. SMTF undertook a successful business planning process and engaged with a significant number of groups and key people as part of this. A sustainable funding strategy is not yet in place but this is largely due to strategic decisions outside SMTF control. However SMTF is playing a leading role in the development of the emerging South West network of market towns fora. The development of this new organisation may well provide opportunities for SMTF to further develop its expertise and attract funding for specific work.

SMTF have increased the reach of their organisation to new groups from all parts of Somerset, extended their membership and increased market town representation on the Steering Group. The profile of the organisation has undoubtedly been raised although the impact of this work really needs to be evaluated over a longer period of time.

A significant number of community organisations are able to make a direct link between their contact with SMTF and increased capacity to effectively deliver services/change in their communities and opportunities for collaboration between groups has been enhanced. Such partnerships take time to develop and to establish the full impact of this work will take time and needs to be kept under review.

In the survey both member groups and local authority officers were clear that SMTF has emerged a stronger organisation.

One respondent commented

“Over the last 18 months SMTF have found their place, gained the trust of member organisations and shown they can deliver”.

Recommendations

ST – short term, MT – medium term, O – ongoing

Key areas of work

- Review the website in the light of feedback in the survey **ST**
- Create forward plan of events and check duplication with other organisations in Somerset **ST**
- Consider different networking needs of groups at varying stages of development **ST**
- Develop the data base of town projects **ST**
- Consider setting up a “consultation panel” which could be used by statutory agencies **MT**
- Develop involvement with wider economic issues e.g. continue engagement with Chambers of Commerce **MT**
- A need to continue to develop clearly defined services **O**
- Continue to build a reputation as the experts in market town regeneration in Somerset and the organisation that statutory agencies will want to consult with **O**
- Email bulletins to continue as seen by so many as valuable **O**
- Continue to provide high quality training/consultancy opportunities for members and linked community groups **O**
- Continue successful networking events focussed around a particular theme with follow up information and notes provided as quickly as possible to enable groups to make progress **O**

Profile

- Review name of the organisation given the confusion amongst some community groups **ST**
- Work to improve understanding about the aim of SMTF with an emphasis on the services it provides and the added value membership will bring to groups **MT**
- Work on defining what makes SMTF different from other organisations working in the same field (e.g. SALC, Community Council for Somerset) **MT**

- Continue developing the brand identity at all opportunities **O**

Resources

- Recognise the limits of what can be achieved by part-time staff and plan accordingly **ST**
- Develop the capacity of the membership by brokering paid consultancy from an experienced group or group member. A lot of knowledge already exists within the membership. **ST**
- Develop role of steering group e.g. as “peer ambassadors” to promote SMTF to potential members **MT**
- Multiple funders for any project result in time-consuming and complex reporting requirements. SMTF should not underestimate the time required to undertake this and ensure that adequate resources are dedicated to this in any forward planning process. **O**

Membership

- A need to segment membership and consider its different needs **ST**
- New member groups need more information about SMTF services and this would be best done via a personal “induction” meeting **ST**
- Plan use of the SMTF 10 minute Power point presentation at town council or parish council meetings as part of membership recruitment **ST**
- Potential member groups also need to be considered by category and their different needs and interests assessed (e.g. a parish council will have different requirements from a civic society) **MT**
- Invest time in meeting potential member groups personally, task could be shared by staff and Steering Group **MT**

Accessibility

- Review the pattern of moving meetings round the county, consider holding all meetings in one central point – equally accessible/not accessible to all e.g. Langport **ST**

<p>Local Authorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule regular meetings ST • Explore what specific opportunities there might be for SMTF to undertake contracted work for statutory agencies ST • Make sure key contacts have SMTF publicity information to give to groups ST • Work on continuing to develop a close working relationship with local authority partners O
<p>Monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop one simple standard template for monitoring which asks for participants to link their contact with SMTF to an outcome for their group ST • Use an annual impact audit to track the long term added value SMTF brings to member organisations work MT
<p>Future of the organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although at a difficult stage in securing funding and in defining its role within the new South West Market Town Forum structure there is a need for SMTF to consider its future as a stand alone group or other options including a closer integration with the Community Council for Somerset its current host agency O

Appendices

Appendix 1 – SMTF Member Organisations March 2008

- Axbridge Town Council
- Burnham and Highbridge Regeneration Partnership
- Castle Cary Town Council
- Action for Chard Town
- A Better Crewkerne and District
- Vision for Frome
- Ilminster Forum
- Langport Area Development Trust
- Martock M3 Community Partnership

Norton Radstock Brighter Futures
 Shepton 21 Regeneration Partnership
 Watchet Regeneration Regeneration Partnership
 Wedmore Parish Council
 Wellington MCTi
 Williton Regeneration Forum
 Wincanton Peoples Plan
 Wiveliscombe Area Partnership

Fig 1 Uptake of services provided by SMTF

From the telephone survey and documentation

CATEGORY	ATTENDED NETWORKING 01/07-03/08	ATTENDED TRAINING/used CONSULTANCY 01/07-3/08	ACTIVELY USE WEBSITE	ACTIVELY USE EMAIL BULLETIN
Member groups surveyed (10)	9	8	All aware, 3 actively used	10
Potential Member groups surveyed (6)	0	0	None	0
Other Community Groups	11	26	-	Note Sent to 128 individuals March 08
Local Authority Officers surveyed (8)	6	2	3	6

Fig 2 Community Ventures Training

DATE	THEMES	NUMBERS	AREA	NOTES
Bridgwater June 2007	-Start-up guidance -Community Buildings -Income generation	38 from 28 groups	3 Taunton Deane 7 Mendip 13 South Somerset 3 West Somerset 4 Sedgemoor 5 Other	Held at SRCC Funding. Advice and Guidance Conference
Shepton Mallet March 2008	Acquiring Community Buildings	23 from 17 groups	2 Taunton Deane 10 Mendip 4 South Somerset 4 West Somerset 2 Sedgemoor 1 Other	

Fig 3 Community Ventures Ad hoc Support to Groups

DATE	THEME	Individuals attending
Feb 2007	Company Directors duties workshop Business plan workshop and advice	12
Jan 2007	Work with management committee on engaging the community and community consultation	6
Feb - Aug 2007	Advice on funding application and business plan	8
Dec 2007	Marketing Communications workshop	4
Dec 2007	Joined workshop above	1
Jan - Feb 2008	Governance training for management committee. Communications training for town centre group and others who wished to join them	11
March 2008	Street and Parking Options Appraisal	10
Jan - Mar 08	Facilitation of joining together of a	16

	Hospital Development Group, workshops, visits, briefings to explore options	
Mar 2008	Hosting visits from donated advisory sessions. Consultant to write brief for Feasibility Study and advise on funding sources for feasibility study	16
Mar 2008	Marketing and Communications workshop	12
Deferred May 2008	Roles, duties and responsibilities of a director/trustee of a charity subsequent to the Companies Act and Charities Act	5

Fig 4 Networking opportunities

DATE	LOCATION	THEME	NUMBERS	AREA
March 2007	Wellington	Wellington presentation Community Strategic Planning Process	18	2 Taunton Deane 0 Mendip 3 South Somerset 1 West Somerset 0 Sedgemoor 11 Other
Oct 2007	Axbridge	Involving local businesses in your town	25	0 Taunton Deane 3 Mendip 1 South Somerset 1 West Somerset 13 Sedgemoor 7 Other

Nov 2007	Langport	AGM Great Bow Wharf Tour. Plans into reality Business Plan launch	17	3 Taunton Deane 1 Mendip 5 South Somerset 0 West Somerset 2 Sedgemoor 6 Other
Feb 2008	Wincanton	Wincanton presentation Sustainable tourism. Organising successful events	25	0 Taunton Deane 2 Mendip 16 S/Somerset 2 West Somerset 1 Sedgemoor 4 Other

Other includes Local Authority Officers, MCTA, Somerset Community Council and attendance from outside Somerset.

Fig 5 Some examples of how SMTF has made a difference to/assisted collaboration between member groups and associated community groups during ‘Building the Network’

Ilminster – “networking enables us to look outside the box, we do bring back ideas to discuss and action”
Wiveliscombe were able to use the learning and networking at the Managing Community Buildings Community Ventures training to inform their approach to acquiring a building in their town
Enhancement Project in Ilminster helped by being able to network with another group who had innovative ideas to share

Wiveliscombe and Wellington both benefitted from website training
One group able to use information from the email bulletin to make successful funding applications
Wincanton networking event on organising an event – information used by a South Somerset group to enhance their planning of a new public event
Helped Crewkerne locate and commission a specialist consultant to work on traffic plan
Axbridge Networking event has helped develop communication between local groups including the Chamber of Commerce. Better networking is the ongoing result.
Help and advice on from one group to another on traffic management and shared space studies
Langport Area Development Trust has worked with two other member groups to develop an event organisation checklist – would not have happened without SMTF. Information will be shared amongst groups.
Help on the town plan from one group to another.
Burnham and Highbridge successfully used information/advice from SMTF in preparation of a funding bid

Additional Information

What does SMTF do best?

The following are comments from member organisations in priority order

- Providing networking opportunities through the regular meetings held around the county
- Email bulletins
- Keeping us informed
- Advice on funding
- Website in particular the resources section
- A focus for Somerset based groups to find info on a range of issues unique to them

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