

## **DEFRA Early Spend**

### **Island Infrastructure Group**

**Project:**

**Lead Organisation: Isle of Wight Rural Community Council**

**Partner Organisations: Age Concern Isle of Wight  
Isle of Wight Citizens Advice Bureau  
North Medina Community Development Trust  
Ryde Development Trust**

## **1. Background and Need**

1.1 As a response to the Voluntary and Community Infrastructure consultation the Isle of Wight Rural Community Council took a lead on the Island in drawing together a core group of organisations believed to be defined as infrastructure bodies.

1.2 Island Infrastructure Group (IIG) comprises the five main voluntary and community sector infrastructure bodies on the Island.

- Isle of Wight Rural Community Council
- Age Concern Isle of Wight
- Isle of Wight Citizens Advice Bureau
- North Medina Community Development Trust
- Ryde Development Trust

1.3 Strategic links are made as IIG members sit on the Island Futures Partnership (LSP) and Area Investment Framework Board. The Isle of Wight Rural Community Council also, through its capacity as CVS, supports the voluntary sector forum and voluntary sector cabinet on the Island.

1.4 Initial discussion within the IIG has recognised the need to ensure that there is a consistent and quality approach to service delivery particularly adopting the key principals of community development: participation, working and learning together, social justice, self determination, sustainable communities and reflection.

## 2. Developing the Plan

2.1 During the period March to June 2004 the IIG organisations have worked collaboratively to develop this project plan. Over this period the following activities have been carried out:

### i. Formation of the IIG

The IIG is fully formed as a collaborative VCS Infrastructure group, this has developed understanding of each others aims and greater trust between the organisations. The coming together and the partnership between the members of the IIG has been a success. The members have developed greater trust, as evidenced by the sharing of confidential information such as funding and remuneration details, and are now better placed to serve the needs of the community and voluntary sector on the Island in a more co-ordinated and consistent manner.

- The members of the IIG have agreed common principals. Appendix 1.
- Members of the IIG have agreed through consensus the principal of full cost recovery and are working to implement the principal.
- Five members of the have IIG group have met consistently and have fully embraced a joint project entitled Skills Build. Appendix 2.

### ii. Regional and National Networking

Individual members have represented the group at regional and national events. The aim of such attendance has been:

- To raise the profile of the IIG
- Disseminate findings from current project work
- Absorb best practice

- Forge links with key VCS organisations – particularly across Hampshire and the South East in order to consider sub regional issues

iii. Developing the project plan

To develop the full project plan members of the IIG organisations have undertaken a visioning exercise to consider collaborative project work.

Much discussion has taken place around the Skills Build Research project and its findings. Two key discussion points developed through the research have been:

- Communication: the key skill area, highlighted by all workers across all the IIG organisations was communication in its widest sense and more specifically oral communication.

In seeking to address the need to consider communication skills the IIG have developed a draft-training programme that seeks to draw the individual members of the IIG together to facilitate support around communication needs. In drawing the organisations together the IIG are consolidating the consistent approach to community development work.

- IT needs: the strategic use of IT was recognised as an issue across all IIG organisations. Specifically across the organisations there is an ad-hoc approach to IT training and there is a lack of technical IT support skills within each IIG organisation. This is also consistent within the wider VCS across the Isle of Wight and in order to deliver the infrastructure support for IT, it is therefore crucial to address this need among the IIG organisations.

Other issues that have been discussed include:

- Feelings of isolation among VCS infrastructure workers.
- Developmental support for emerging social enterprises.
- Issues around sustainable funding.
- Equality of access, given the rural nature of much of the Island and the high costs of transportation both on the Island and across to the mainland.

In developing the project plan for the main DEFRA spend project the IIG have focussed on the communications IT issues. Through investment in the Information Communication Technology Infrastructure the IIG also believes it will be able to address some aspects of the professional isolation of rural infrastructure workers. The aim is to extend the DEFRA Early Spend project into the main project; using a mix of IT developments to support wider VCS communication.

iv. Infrastructure Worker Support Network

Through the RAISE Early Spend Skills Build project the members of the IIG have been able to identify workers within their organisations who are carrying out infrastructure support activity/delivery.

In order to facilitate and support a quality and consistent approach to community development work and infrastructure support activity the IIG organisations will establish an electronic newsletter. This work will link to an IIG web site and technical IT development. The aim is to develop a communications portal and systems of networking that provides support without adding to workloads.

v. Training Fund development

Through the Skills Build Research project 2) members of the IIG are clear as to their immediate (short and mid term) training needs.

Given the importance of training and skills development the IIG organisations are seeking funding to set aside for the development of a collaborative communication/IT training budget across the IIG organisations.

vi. IIG Web Site and Technical IT development

Web Site Development ([www.islandinfrastructure.org](http://www.islandinfrastructure.org))

The IIG will initiate the development of a web site. This is being developed as the portal for communications, it will support:

- A bulletin board
- Details of shared resources and means of access
- The dissemination of best practice documentation
- Further consultation

The site will be implemented as an intelligent learning tool that can develop common language and understanding.

vii. Support Bases

In considering the wider issues relating to the strategic use of IT the IIG note that across the VCS IT is often a barrier to working rather than a useful tool. The use of IT is seen as a limiting factor rather than a tool to aid development and sustainability. In seeking to challenge these views the IIG will seek to establish three information/communication Support Bases on the Island, Newport (Isle of Wight Rural Community Council), East Cowes (NMCDT) and Ryde (RDT) and one outreach service across the Island<sup>1</sup>. In this way it is envisaged that all voluntary and community organisations will have relatively easy access to a range of high quality ICT tools and information.

The aim is to create small libraries of IT equipment that will support the local VCS across the Island to communicate in smarter ways.

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<sup>1</sup> The BEST Bus service delivers IT training across the Island in all rural areas.

At each centre there will be:

- The development of a wireless network of either two desktops and two laptops; or three laptops. The individual set-up for each base will maximise the use of flexible working space. However the equipment will be mainly used on a library basis across the Island from the three bases and the outreach service.
- The establishment a range of telecommunications for conferencing calling facilities.
- The establishment of voicemail services and data projectors facilities.

At each of the bases the equipment is to be made available to all members/organisations of the VCS. The aim is to provide technology that is currently beyond the norms of the sector in order to remove the barriers to use. Through purchasing advanced equipment the IIG will enable inexperienced users to engage with ICT intuitively rather than through learning new skills sets.

This network of Support Bases and their ICT infrastructure will have a wider value as local drop-in bases for outreach infrastructure workers. The ICT equipment will enable them to communicate easily with their HQ with the added value of peer group support.

Each Support Base will also offer VCS infrastructure workers another tool to support the development of new voluntary sector organisations. Investing in appropriate technology creates the opportunity for the growth of more 'Virtual', and therefore administratively less burdensome, VCS organisations.

### 3. Budget to Date

3.1 To meet the costs of developing the full project plan the following costs have been incurred.

Main Task	Elements	Cost
Formation of the IIG	Meeting costs	£ 1728
	Report writing	£ 300
	Admin costs	£ 400
	General	£ 200
Regional and National Networking	Meeting costs	£
	Travel expenses	£
	Officer costs	£ 207
Developing the project plan	Awayday visioning – venue/refreshments	£ 90
Infrastructure worker support network	Awayday - venue/refreshments (funded by Skills Build project)	£
	Officer costs	£
Training Fund development		£ 1000
IIG Web Site and Technical IT development	Web site development	£ 1000
	Wireless networking @£500 per centre	£ 2500
	PC and laptops (3/centre)	£ 9000
	Telecommunications (3/centre)	£ 1500
	Conference tools	£ 2000
<b>Total</b>		<b>£17000.00</b>

## 4. The Project Plan

4.1 The DEFRA Early Spend project plan builds on the strategic use IT and seeks to provide a means by which the VCS can being to meet is technical IT support and training needs. It also aims to address the specifically rural issue of access, by having several bases from which services can be delivered, at minimal costs to the VCS.

4.2 The aim of the project is to employ an IT technical assistant and trainer to work collaboratively across the IIG organisations and wider within the VCS of the Island to support IT needs.

4.2.1 The Skills Build research project highlighted the need for IT training across each of the IIG organisations. Further the research highlighted the perceived need across each of the IIG organisations to make better use of IT for strategic development.

4.2.2 It is noted that in supporting the Island research evidence national evidence indicates that the 4<sup>th</sup> most common skills gap is strategic use of IT while the 8<sup>th</sup> most common skills gap is basic use of IT<sup>2</sup>.

4.3 The objectives of the project are:

- i. Provide technical IT support to each IIG member organisations  
The appointed technician will work within each IIG organisation to provide training to a dedicated member of staff within that organisation. In so doing each IIG organisation will have a staff member capable of meeting the everyday technical IT support required.
- ii. Training and cascade basic ICT skills development

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<sup>2</sup> Futureskills 2003 A skills foresight research report on the voluntary sector paid workforce. Commissioned by the Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation

In addition to providing technical support for the IT needs of the IIG organisations the appointed technician will also provide training across the IIG organisations.

The aim is to ensure that all IIG staff are trained to a basic standard. As with the technical support a key member of staff within each IIG organisation will be charged with cascade training.

iii. Capacity of each organisation.

Through developing skills within the IIG organisations they will be better placed to support the capacity of the VCS across the Island.

iv. Spreading of IT across VCS

With cascade training and the appointed technician supporting key staff within the individual IIG organisations it will become possible to provide IT support (technical and training) across the Island VCS.

4.4 The linkages from the development work to this project are clear. The aim is to use the equipment located at the three information/communication support centres and used in the outreach centre as the means by which to raise the importance of quality IT usage and how it can aid to effective and efficient working by supported facilitation.

4.5 In considering the forward strategy for the project this project will develop into a social enterprise. The Island has a high percentage of business start up, a percentage of which is social in nature. The project will seek to make links with the Isle of Wight Enterprise Agency and Business Link Wessex to provide support services to new start up businesses targeting those with social aims.

- 4.6.1 The emerging Social Enterprise Network facilitated by the Isle of Wight Rural Community Council will also be made aware of the support available.
  - 4.6.2 It is to be noted that this forward strategy aims only to cover the salary and on costs of the appointed technician. On this basis the 'charge out rate' for support work will be set accordingly.
- 4.6 Funding for the project is sought for an 18-month period and the project costs have been developed accordingly.
- 4.7 The members of the IIG recognise that this project is a truly collaborative project. Seeking to recruit a member of staff who works across all organisations is a major step forward in collaborative working. It will save costs for each organisation giving a real economy of scale.

## 5. Outcomes

### 5.1 The key outcomes are

- i. Supporting the IIG members to become more efficient and effective in their work.

This project will accrue real cost savings to each IIG organisation. In so doing it will help the IIG organisations to become more financial sustainable.

- ii. Training support

- It is estimated that skilled training will be delivered to 5 key individuals across the IIG organisations.
- Further basic IT training needs of all staff members (67 in total currently) of the IIG organisations will be delivered.
- Further training with other VCS organisations will take place.

- iii. Capacity development within the VCS

The project will be capacity within the VCS on the Island enabling them to become more effective and efficient.

- iv. Specialise business support to the VCS and emerging social enterprise sector.

- v. IIG will be enabled to deliver consistent infrastructure support to the wider voluntary/ community sector across the Island, irrespective of issues of access.

## Project Budget

6.1 The project costs have been developed to show total costs over the 18 months.

<b>Main Task</b>	<b>Elements</b>	<b>Cost</b>
IIG support	Meeting costs	£ 3000
	Travel expenses	£ 500
	Report writing	£ 500
	Materials and photocopying	£ 500
	Regional and National representation	£ 1000
Recruitment costs		£ 1000
Salary costs		£ 45000
Accommodation costs		£ 1500
Training budget		£ 7500
<b>Total</b>		<b>£60500.00</b>