

## **Member Champions End of Project Review**

### Introduction

The purpose of this report is to

- summarise the key stages in the conception, planning and development of the members' champion project
- describe processes at application, monitoring and delivery stages
- clarify outcomes and provide an update

The project has been led from the start by Graham Russell, firstly in his capacity as Head of Democratic Services at Bath & North East Somerset Council and latterly (following his early retirement) as an external adviser to the council.

The project has been supported throughout by Lauren Rushen, recruited as part of her university studies as the project administrator.

The project leader (Graham Russell) wishes to record his personal thanks to Lauren, to Fay Edwards (SWPE) and to Ian Long (GoSW) for their unstinting support and constructive involvement along the way.

### The start and the bidding process

Bath & North East Somerset Council had recruited a number of councillors to act as 'member champions' in a range of interests – ranging from human rights to children and procurement to older persons. While the council initially had a fairly clear idea that it wanted these members to act as a catalyst for representing these interests or community groups and advocating their needs, it became apparent that in organisational terms the council was ill-prepared to accept the role and support the members concerned in the way they were entitled to expect.

Using the 2005 round of (then) ODPM capacity building bids, Graham Russell devised and put in a bid for funding to develop regional guidance and support material for this developing member role. He aimed to use his own council as a beacon in view of their own emerging experiences of member champions. Following earlier discussion with Fay Edwards of SWPE and other regional colleagues, it was decided to submit this as one of 5 linked bids to promote various aspects of member development – each element sponsored by a different local authority in the south-west region. Those local authorities came together as the Partnership for Elected Member Support (PEMS) – a desired element for the bidding process.

It is perhaps worth stating at this point that the initial discussions and submission would have had little success had it not been clear from the outset that the Leader of the Bath & North East Somerset Council was fully behind the project. Indeed it was he who signed the application for the bid.

The bidding process was a little fraught. This was due in part to what seemed like a mid-term change in criteria once a very large slice of the “cake” had been allocated. This necessitated a review of what we were planning and how we proposed to explain it in bidding terms that matched the revised criteria. The necessary application form was completed for each of the 5 bids and the composite bid was duly submitted.

In the event, despite strong linkages between all 5 projects, only the member champions project received funding, in the order of £105,000.

Sadly, despite assurances to the contrary, our PEMS partners left the fold once their own component bids had been unsuccessful. The core partnership remained as Fay Edwards (SWPE), Hayley Scott (N/Somerset and later private consultant) and Graham Russell. There are perhaps lessons there in managing expectations of support and in extolling the regional benefits of such a project in a way that makes other councils want to come/stay on board.

### Achievements:

This project has had a number of key achievements throughout its two year lifespan. We feel that the most significant outcomes for the project were

- (a) the writing of the first national guidance publication on member champions,
- (b) the development of the level 3 BTec qualification,
- (c) the first conference about the role of member champions and
- (d) the establishment of a regional support network.

In addition to this the project has been able to promote wider partnership working within the South West region.

This section of the report briefly outlines these achievements and in the next section there is an explanation of how they were achieved (“Project timescales and Objectives”).

- **Member Champions: Guidance and Advice**

The first major achievement for the project was the publication of a support document entitled “Member Champions: Guidance and Advice”. This offered support to both serving member champions and officers who were being asked to support the role. The content of the book was based on extensive research across the South West region in the form of a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative facilitation evenings with three local authorities.

In essence it provided information and practical guidance for those

- acting as member champions
- supporting the role as an officer
- seeking understanding of the role in the community
- members of independent member remuneration panels who were being asked to value the role
- external bodies who were either promoting the championing role within their service or interest or who were generally interested in supporting this new member role

As has been stated, this was the first ever comprehensive attempt to focus guidance on this specific role that members perform. In this context the guidance has been warmly welcomed around the region and beyond.

The guidance was drafted by the project leader with input from the project support officer and SWPE who also designed and branded the guidance. We initially ordered 500 copies of the guidance to be printed and distributed copies to all regional assemblies and to Chief Executives of all South West local authorities.

The guidance book was formally launched at the Pump Rooms in Bath in February 2007. The event was well attended by serving Bath & North East Somerset Council champions, council officers from around the region, Beverley Young from LACORS and representatives from GoSW and SWPE.

Since the guidance document has received such a positive response, the project team are now looking to do a second print run before the official end of the project in November which will be distributed by South West Provincial Employers.

- **BTec Level 3 Qualification**

Integral to the success of the project was the creation of a meaningful qualification linked to the specifics of operating as a member champion. Graham Russell undertook much of the practical drafting of learning material related to the skills and knowledge development that would be required to support members in the champion role and to make it effective. For specialist aspects of the learning material, Hayley Scott came up trumps.

Fay Edwards, Head of Learning and Development at SWPE then designed the learning pathways and applied her professional expertise to designing appropriate learning opportunities.

Accreditation for the qualification took several hurdles but in the end Edexcel granted accreditation at level 3. In some respects this course will complement the level 4 BTec member qualification in local governance being offered through SWPE. The level 3 course will grant certain exemptions from the level 4 learning.

The project worked with Learning Pool to provide the authoring software for on-line access to the learning.

It is important that the qualification is available in a variety of delivery options – distance, tutorials, on-line etc. to suit all styles of learning. Discussions have taken place with a number of local authorities about the possibility of in house delivery options also.

The qualification has been widely advertised around the region and take up is being monitored.

- **Conference for Member Champions**

A significant achievement was the hosting of the first national conference about the role of Member Champions. The event was held on 17<sup>th</sup> July and was seen in time terms as the culmination of the project. The project team spent much of the second year of the project planning material for the event and sourcing key speakers and a suitable venue.

Feedback from the conference was encouraging and supportive of developing ongoing networking opportunities. Discussions are being held with individual councils about possible events next year involving champions with common interests. The possibility of developing on line networking has been explored but is not being pursued in view of the ongoing costs for the host organisation and the absence of dedicated funding for this.

- **Partnership working**

As well as producing a number of physical outcomes, this project generated a partnership between Bath & North East Somerset Council and South West Provincial Employers. The two organisations were part of the original Capacity Building Fund bid and links between the two organisations remained enacted throughout the project, with SWPE undertaking a lead role in developing the qualification and managing the conference and B&NES providing budgetary management and project support role throughout the lifetime of the project.

It has set in place a solid basis for similar partnerships in the future.

Further more detailed information about the initial phases of the project follow:

#### Project timescales and objectives

The project set out eight key objectives in order to help promote and develop the role of the member champion over a two year period from November 2005- November 2007.

The objectives of the project were:

- To promote the concept of the Member Champion in order to improve long-term services and secure long-term benefits for local communities
- To improve member capacity for championing particular interests as part of the community leadership role

- To assist “champions” and relevant agencies to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role
- To provide “champions” with a programme of training events and distance learning opportunities to suit both their particular subject “interest” and the general role of a champion
- To create a culture of mutual support among appointed champions
- To create a database/resource pack of contacts and core information for “champions”
- To provide councillors with transferable skills in advocacy and championing
- To provide feedback and updates to an annual member conference

The initial project timescales and milestones are attached although in practice the timescales for individual project objectives varied and so for the purposes of this report have been summarised in phases, outlined below.

### **Phase One (November 2005-April 2006):**

The first project milestone involved scoping out the project and designing a specification for the project. At this stage in the project, the project team received support from the Devon Improvement Programme and set up a steering group that consisted of the project leader (Graham Russell) two Member Champions (one from Bath & North East Somerset Council and one the Forest of Dean Council), Fay Edwards (SWPE) and Hayley Scott (North Somerset).

Initial financial reporting and management processes were agreed with ODPM.

Because of the nature of the project, it was not possible to confine a period's activity under a single milestone as work on all milestone target deliverables proceeded simultaneously on a phased basis.

### **Phase Two (April-July 2006):**

Following on from the initial steering group meetings, the second phase of the project was focused on evidence gathering. The project team designed a questionnaire in order to establish the number of Councils in the South West which currently appointed Member Champions, whether champions receive a special allowance, the level of support provided from officers and the whether the champion role had been promoted both within the Council and the local community.

The questionnaire was distributed to 51 local authorities within in the South West region and received 30 responses. The key points drawn from the questionnaire analysis were:

- 22 out of 30 Councils appointed champions
- Majority of champions are non-executive Councillors
- Only 3 Councils paid their champions a special allowance (one of those has since withdrawn the allowance)

- Very little promotion of the champion role had occurred both within the Councils or externally
- Support for champions from officers was limited due to a lack of understanding about the role and a perceived duplication with other Council functions

Once the questionnaire analysis had been completed, the project team undertook three focus groups to explore in greater depth the issues raised by the questionnaire. These facilitation events took place throughout May-July 2006 and are summarised below:

- Local authority 1 was a district Council with 8 Member Champions who were all non-executives who had approached the project to host a facilitation evening with their Councillors and officers.
- Local authority 2 was a County Council that had 7 Member Champions, the majority of which were non-executive Councillors. The main issues identified by this Council were:
  - A lack of awareness/understand of the role both within the Council and in the community
  - Champions were seen as a largely informal role elected by political groups, champions wanted more formality to the role e.g. appointing champions at Full Council meetings
  - Champions were keen to point out that they need to be prepared to make themselves heard and be passionate about their subject
- The third local authority was a unitary authority with a directly elected mayor. The key issues that were highlighted during this facilitation evening were:
  - A lack of recognition and public awareness
  - A need for a formal protocol to guide the role of champions
  - Uncertainty about whether champions should be Executive or non-executive Councillors

The model protocol developed for this Council featured as an appendix in the guidance document (see below).

### **Phase Three: Guidance Document (August-December 2006)**

Drawing on the issues raised through the consultation period, the project team set about drafting a comprehensive guidance book on the role of Member Champions. The guidance book was aimed at both Member Champions and the officers who support them.

The guidance set out to define what the role of a Member Champion was, building on the research that had already been conducted by organisations such as English Heritage and The National Service Framework for Older People but unlike these organisations, the guidance aimed address the role



in general terms, rather than from the point of view of specific interest groups and, crucially, suggest how the role can operate within the existing local government frameworks.

The guidance goes on to make a number of suggestions about the role of the champion and how it can work within the existing local government framework. These are summarised below:

**Appointing Champions:** The guidance suggests that Councils should seek to have a formal arrangement for appointing champions which should include a clear remit of what is expected of champions including reporting arrangements, express that the champion role is to help the Council achieve its objectives and priorities and set out a scope for the role including which client groups are relevant to the champion role.

The guidance also suggested how the member champion role can work with other, already established, functions within the local government setup, although the project team were keen to emphasize that Councils should adapt the champion role to suit their own working arrangements. Below is a summary of how the member champion role can work with key functions in local authorities:

### **Working with...**

**The Executive:** Member Champions who are not executive members need to have an understanding of how the executive functions and should seek to make themselves known to relevant executive members.

- Understand how the Executive works
- Seek to have meetings with relevant portfolio holder
- Formalise working arrangements in the constitution
- Monitor the forward plan
- Serve on local interest groups

### **Overview and Scrutiny:**

The Member Champion function can be complementary to the Overview and Scrutiny function. Champions should seek to gain an understanding of the Overview and Scrutiny function in their Council, the research found that there was a perceived duplication between the two roles but the points below aim to delineate between the two roles:

- Monitor Overview and Scrutiny work programmes. Champions can investigate whether programmes are covering topics relevant to their interest and whether reviews may impact on their interest, possibly seeking to get involved as a contributor
- Attend Overview and Scrutiny committees. Champions could speak at Overview and Scrutiny meetings about their interest in their capacity as a Councillor or, with the Chairs permission, as a Member Champion
- Liaise with the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Chair
- Undertaking specific research at the request of Overview and Scrutiny

- Submit a regular report to Overview and Scrutiny

### **Regulatory functions:**

- Work with/contact LACORS who have promoted the role of Regulatory Champions
- Champions should ensure a balance between effective enforcement and sensitivity to individuals rights in the delivery of regulatory functions
- Understand new legislation and work with portfolio holders and Chairs to ensure Council procedures are effective
- Keep up-to-date on legal/policy implications that might have implications for local authority regulation work
- Work with other local government colleagues to co-ordinate policy development

### **Officers:**

A Council that commits to the role of Champions will expect officers to work in support of that role e.g. allocating a senior level officer to advise champions. The senior officer may be either a function or professional lead for the champion and both require different levels of interaction.

A functional lead may help a Champion to:

- Help the Champion understand the role and its limitations
- Explain Council procedures where they may impact on the Champion role
- Be a point of contact for information
- Identify support issues
- Work with the Champion to identify key Executive and Overview and Scrutiny members and officers to help integrate Champion work

A professional lead may help a Champion to:

- Identify key service priorities
- Offer a professional steer in interpreting the scope of the Champions remit
- Draw up a Champion work programme
- Give professional advice and support
- Help to build effective working relations between the Champion, Executive and Overview and Scrutiny

### **Partner/Outside Bodies:**

The role of Member Champions has both an internal and external focus. Champions should contact main service providers and other agencies whose work impacts of their interest. Champions should:

- Identify key players in organisations
- Understand the impact those organisations might have in meeting the Champion's aims and objectives related to the interest. This can be

- done by studying relevant service plans and annual reports of relevant organisations
- Take steps to influence the decision making process of those organisations e.g. by attending meetings
- Identify Council representatives on relevant bodies and ensure they are aware of the issues that impact on the champion interest
- Consider seeking to represent the Council on such bodies

By writing this guidance the project team were able to contribute towards completing three of the projects key objectives. The guidance itself helped to promote the role of the member champion and hopefully lead to long-term services and benefits for the local community. The guidance also improved member capacity for championing by setting out clear guidelines on how the champion role can be carried out in different local authority set ups and thus promote the community leadership role and finally the guidance included a list of useful contacts as an appendix to the main guidance which fulfils the projects aim to create a database and resource pack of contacts and core information for champions.

In addition to covering these main points, the guidance also included two case studies from current Member Champions and two role descriptions for an Executive and non-executive champion.

#### **Phase Four: Designing and Formatting of Online and other Training Material (Nov-Jan):**

The project leader prepared much of the learning content text and Fay Edwards initiated the design of the learning modules. This was a time consuming element of the project.

By designing this qualification the project team was able to complete two of its key objectives. Firstly the qualification would provide champions with a programme of training events and distance learning opportunities to suit both their particular subject interest and the general role of a champion. Secondly, once achieving the qualification champions would have gained transferable skills in advocacy and championing.

#### **Phase Five: Launch of Guidance and Qualification (Jan-Feb)**

The guidance book and qualification were officially launched on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2007 at the Pump Rooms in Bath. At the launch the leader and chairman of Bath & North East Somerset Council were in attendance and spoke about the progress of the project, the project gave a presentation about why the guidance document had been produced and the Head of Learning and Development at South West Provincial Employers guided people through a demonstration of the BTec qualification and training material.

All of Bath & North East Somerset's Member Champions attended the event as well as Councillor Marion Winship from the Forest of Dean Council who sat on the project steering group.

The launch of the guidance received publicity in a number of publications including the local newspaper, The Bath Chronicle and national publications such as Local Government First and the Local Government Chronicle. At the time of writing, the project has distributed over 300 copies of the guidance document to local authorities around the country and has received positive feedback from both Councillors and Officers, including the adoption of the model protocol by Torbay Council.

### **Phase Six: Conference (June 2006-July 2007):**



Planning for the conference took up the majority of the second year of the project. The aim was host a national conference on the role of the Member Champion within the South West. Initially the project team hoped to host the conference within the B&NES region but preliminary research was unable to source a suitable venue.

The project team decided to outsource the event management side of the conference and went through a tendering process to find a suitable candidate. After compiling a briefing for the conference, three companies were approached to tender for the event management contract in accordance with Bath & North East Somerset Council's tendering process.

Two were local events management organisations that had been used by the Council previously and the third was a partner in the project, South West Provincial Employers.

Each of the organisations submitted a proposal detailing the services they would offer to the project and the expected costs they would incur.

The project team decided to commission South West Provincial Employers to provide events management services for the project as it was felt that they had the greatest understanding of the aims of the project and had a comprehensive understanding of the local government environment which could be utilised to maximise attendance at the conference.

The event management team identified two venues that met the project teams' brief for a conference venue capable of accommodating a maximum of 200 people, within the South West and with three break out areas for workshops. The Winter

Gardens at Western-super-Mare and Cadbury House, Congresbury were the most suitable venues found by the events managers. The project leader viewed both of the venues with the staff and decided that Cadbury House would be the most suitable venue due to its location and facilities it offered to delegates.

The event was scheduled for early July to allow for time to elapse after the May 07 elections. The project team were keen to have a variety of workshops sessions on offer to ensure that delegates had to opportunity to engage and explore the role of the member champion. Deciding on topics for workshops took a number of months and the project team approached a number of groups and eventually decided to run three workshops which would build on key issues highlighted within the guidance document and demonstrate the good relationships that had been built with other organisations by the project team.

In order to address the aspect of working with outside organisations the project team approached LACORS to host a workshop about the role of regulatory champions and how they have been supporting the role of regulatory champions in local authorities. The project leader attended LACORS conference about Regulatory Champions in May 2006 and lead a session about the project and how the aims for member champions in general complemented the work of LACORS on the specifics of regulatory Champions.

The guidance book touched on the issues raised by the Strong Prosperous Communities White Paper which was published shortly before the publication went to print, in order to build on this further and specifically to look at how member can act as champions in their local communities the project team invited Government Office South West to host this session.

The third workshop focused on Councillors personality and the local community and was hosted by IDeA and aimed to address the issues Member Champions might experience when trying to engage with the groups they are champions for and how to overcome this.

On the day 65 delegates attended from across the region as well as 5 exhibitors from local organisations including English Heritage, Ricability and the Bio Diversity Network. The event was chaired by Councillor Paul Crossley from B&NES who had been Leader of the Council at the time the bid for capacity building funding was successful and was a keen supporter of the project and the champion role.

The key note speech was delivered by Richard Sheard from Government Office South West who commented on the overall success of the project, the concept of LIFT funding and the links between the project's work and the Government's own community leadership agenda.

The project leader presented the findings of the two year project to delegates and outlined what the conference hoped to achieve. As well as attending their chosen workshops, delegates had the opportunity to visit an interactive section during networking sessions to find out more about the BTec qualification and they had the opportunity to ask questions to the project team at the end of the day about all areas of the project and member champion role.

Delegates were keen to attend the regional support networks which would be set up by SWPE after the conference and said they would be interested to be kept up to date with any future progress with the project.

It is hoped that the Member Champions conference will be incorporated into the Annual Member Charter Conference that is being launched next year by the South West Regional Assembly/South West Provincial Employers.

#### Evaluation questionnaire:

The questionnaire was designed by the project team and distributed by SWPE within their roles as event managers on the day of the conference.

Questionnaire was completed by 45 out of the 65 attendees, representing a response rate of 69%. The key outcomes identified by the evaluation form were:

The content of the event was identified as good by an average of 39% of those that attended.

There was a mixed picture for the conference venue, with an average of 46% of delegates saying the venue was good. On the whole, (60%) said they thought the conference rooms were either good or excellent and 51% thought that they geographic location was either good or excellent. However 31% of people graded the food and refreshments as poor which brought the overall average down considerably. This issue is discussed further under the 'lessons learnt' section.

In terms of events management and organisation an average 69% of delegates rated this as good or excellent. Delegates commented that they were given plenty of notice for the date of the conference which they liked although some did feel that the conference may have been scheduled too soon after the May elections as some Councils had not yet allocated member champions to specific roles.

For a full evaluation of the questionnaire please see appendix 1.

#### **Phase Seven: Support Networks (Aug-Oct):**

At the conference a number of attendees expressed an interest in attending a support network; this was also reflected in the evaluation forms returned by delegates. Originally, the project team had hoped that this support network would be based online but were unable to do this within the time constraints of the project. Instead, it was decided that South West Provincial Employers would set up and run a Member Champion's support network, similar to other networks they already run for Member Support Officers.

The first support network meeting will be hosted by a local authority in the region and will be offering a facilitated discussion about the role of the member champion. The support network will be open to all member champions from the South West region and will run on a self financing basis, with attendees paying a small charge to cover the cost of room hire and refreshments.

### Challenges faced:

DIP (Devon Improvement Programme) Involvement was temporary due to the retirement of the key administrative support available to the project. However, this involvement was sufficient in time terms to conduct and analyse the initial questionnaire of local authorities.

There were a number of personnel changes throughout the two year life span of the project and although dedicated support was available throughout, this did present an additional challenge to the project.

Initially this position was filled on a temporary basis but in May 2006 the project team recruited a placement student from the University of Bath until the end of the project, scheduled for August 2007, who would be based in the Overview and Scrutiny team.

In addition to this, the project manager retired from his role as Head of Democratic Services at Bath & North East Somerset Council but continued to act as project leader by working from home. The project team had to adapt to this which meant that the manager for Overview and Scrutiny would act as a signatory and monitor the financial progress of the project and the project support officer would provide a link between the Council and the project leader.

Initially the project leader, project support officer and Overview and Scrutiny Manager would have monthly meetings to discuss the progress of the project and the financial profile of the project. As time went on the project support officer assumed the role of monitoring the projects finances and liaising between the project sponsor and Overview and Scrutiny manager.

### Budget management and monitoring arrangements:

In the original bidding process the project requested £265,000 however the eventual amount of funding received for the project was £100,000 plus an additional £5,000 to cover the cost of allowing Councillors to attend the conference free of charge meaning that the totally budget for the project was £105,000.

The original project plan (see appendix 2) indicates that the majority of the funding would be spent on developing the qualification and learning material and the conference.

The main outcomes from the project were the qualification, guidance, conference and support networks and the cost of developing these outcomes have been estimated as follows:

Cost of developing qualification (including time spent by SWPE developing the qualification, project sponsor time writing learning material, steering group meetings, subscription to Learning Pool Software, testing by project team and accreditation with EdExcel): **£14,100\***

Cost of guidance (including costs of steering group meetings, designing and printing, distributing, project sponsor time writing the guidance, project support officer writing guidance, facilitation events, questionnaire design, distribution and analysis): **£15,000\*** + second print run

Cost of conference (including venue hire costs, event managers contract, design, branding and marketing of the conference, project leader time designing conference content, steering group meetings, project support officer research into tendering process, speakers costs, cost of allowing Councillors to attend the even free of charge): **£17,000\***

Cost of support networks: self financing initially.

\*Rounded figures

The project financial quarters ran from January to December rather than in traditional financial quarters.

Quarter	Nov 2005- Jan 2006	Feb-Apr 2006	May-July 2006	Aug-Oct 2006	Nov 2006- Jan 2007	Feb-Apr 2007	May-Jul 2007	Aug -Oct 2007
Amount	£8,002	£22,519	£10,284	£15,414	£4,300	£16,360	£15,380	

The project is looking to make its final grant claim once the first support network meeting has taken place at the beginning of October.

In order to monitor the financial progress of the project, the project support officer assumed the role of tracking financial expenditure and compiling quarterly grant claims which would be checked and authorised by the Overview and Scrutiny manager at Bath & North East Somerset Council and then submitted to Government Office South West. The project leader and project support officer also had quarterly meetings with Ian Long from Government Office South West to monitor the progress of the project and to finalise grant claims.

### Lessons learnt

Although the project came to a successful conclusion, there were a number key learning points to come out of this for the project team. As this report is largely a reflective report on the lifespan of the project we have detailed what we feel we could have done better and points we will keep in mind for future working.

#### Working in partnership:

Although the project was ultimately a partnership between Bath & North East Somerset Council and South West Provincial Employers, the original Partnership for Elected Member Support did not survive after only one of the bids was successful, this perhaps should have been anticipated and prepared for prior to embarking on the project.

#### Online support network/web issues/technical issues:

In the original brief for the project, the project team stated that one of the objectives would be to provide “electronic sharing of information and best practice”. It was hoped that the project would be able to establish an online support network via a website and message board however once the project investigated this further, the cost and expertise needed to run and sustain this were not within the capacity of the project.

However the project was able to host an electronic copy of the guidance notes on the South West Provincial Employers website and set up a series of regional networking meetings to share best practice and training on the member champion role and thus fulfilling what the project set out to achieve.

#### Guidance and Launch:

The timing of the guidance launch being a few months away from the local elections made the issue more politically contentious than usual, we should have anticipated this and made sure to feature representations from all political parties within the guidance.

We should have booked out a dedicated photographer for the launch event so that we would have a selection of images to use on future press releases and for future publications about the project. We relied heavily on media providing their own photographic support which in the event was not forthcoming.

#### Conference:

More round table meetings with those involved in organising the conference would have been beneficial to ensure that a comprehensive set of aims and objectives were developed and understood by the project team.

One of the points raised on the evaluation forms were that delegates did not fully understand how the conference related to the aims and objectives advertised on the conference promotional material.

Having additional meetings may have also helped to develop conference workshops were more relevant to the aims and objective set out for the conference.

The conference was probably scheduled too soon after the May Elections which resulted in:

- a) those attending mainly being new councillors who were unsure about their role and may not have been familiar with the issues the conference was focusing on
- b) lower attendance rates as some Councils might not have allocated specific Councillors to Member Champion roles and
- c) lead to the impression that this workshop would be more of a training session for new councillors; this was not helped by the aims and objectives in the conference material.

The food served at lunch time for the conference was not up to the same standard as the rest of the rest of the facilities provided by the venue. The event managers should have asked to see a catering menu or sampled the options available as a number of delegates commented that the food was poor and unhealthy and may have contributed to some of the negative feedback received about the conference.

Conclusion and closing comments:

The project leader would like to thank the following:

Ian Long from GoSW for his continued support and guidance in monitoring the project along the way

Lauren Rushen, the University placement who became fully involved in all aspects of the project including the financial administration arrangement and conference planning.

Fay Edwards (SWPE) for her continued support and expertise in guiding the project team through the technical minefields in designing on-line learning opportunities and generally in managing the conference tender for event management.

Councillors Sarah Bevan and Marian Winship who as serving member champions gave us some invaluable insight into the world of the champion and contributed to the design of the learning.

Moira Anderson of SWPE who worked closely with Fay in planning and managing the detailed administration of the conference.

All the staff of the Bath & North East Somerset Overview and Scrutiny team for supporting this project as part of its mainstream work for the duration.

Councillor Paul Crossley (then) Leader of Bath & North East Somerset Council for his high level support for the project and his active participation in the conference and in monitoring progress of the project in general.

Graham Russell  
Project Leader

August, 2007.