

East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership



From Recession to Recovery - Borough Council of Wellingborough ▾

East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership Case Studies

The East Midlands Improvement & Efficiency Partnership is committed to celebrating the successful, innovative and imaginative project work that exists in the East Midlands region.

The EM IEP Support Team publish case studies showing how East Midlands councils are improving services, and delivering significant improvements and efficiencies.

The case studies are intended to inspire councils in the region, and indeed nationally, to transform services and benefit from the processes developed by those councils that have pioneered the way forward.

Summary ▾

The economic downturn is impacting employment, communities and businesses up and down the country. Local authorities are addressing their responsibility to respond to the challenges the recession brings in different ways.

The Borough Council of Wellingborough (BCW) has developed a unique way of responding proactively through the introduction of a Member-led initiative designed to provide raise awareness of the advice and support available and signpost residents and businesses to sources of help.

The initiative, 'From Recession to Recovery', is an innovative example how a local authorities can successfully collaborate with a broad range of partner agencies to address the economic downturn and its effects. BCW have used two key events to proactively engage with residents and businesses to establish their priorities and needs, and most importantly tangible actions to delivering results.

The Issue ▾

The Wellingborough Partnership – the Borough’s local strategic Partnership wanted to look at how it could support its 76,000 residents and businesses through the recession and ensure that the impact on the local economy is minimised. Although helping the local economy through a recession and assisting with the subsequent recovery will be a priority for all local authorities, it is particularly important to Wellingborough due to the significant ongoing growth of the town.

BCW felt it was critical to ask residents and local businesses what they wanted via consultation, which

What you did? ▾

BCW took active steps to enhance its partnership with local organisations and work together to drive responsive change. BCW’s partners include Business Link , Jobcentre Plus, Citizens Advice Bureau, Wellingborough Homes, Northants Police, Tresham Further Education College, Northamptonshire Enterprise Ltd, North Northamptonshire Development Company, Wellingborough Innovation Centre and various Voluntary sector organisations to name but a few.

the BCW believes strongly in. By listening to residents’ concerns, BCW were confident that their planning was customer-focused and responding to their priorities.

Rising unemployment figures were one of the many factors alerting BCW to the increasing effect the recession was having on its community. Through an increase in the number of enquiries being received by BCW, Jobcentre Plus and other partner agencies it soon became apparent that there was a lack of awareness of the services/ support available, such as CV writing, taking up benefits etc.

Find Your Way Back to Work - Event

In January 2009, the BCW hosted a ‘Find your way back to work’ event, in conjunction with the local Jobcentre Plus. As well as BCW’s Benefits section, partners such as Business Link, Tresham College, Wellingborough Innovations Centre, Citizen’s Advice Bureau, representatives from the voluntary sector recruitment agencies and local businesses (with vacancies) gathered to explain all the help and advice that exists to help anyone affected by redundancy.

The event also enabled each organisation to become even

more familiar with the work and services provided by partner agencies, allowing customers to be signposted and made aware of a variety of services available to them, no matter which partner they were seeing.

The event, advertised through the local press and media, was immensely successful and attracted over 400 people, 15 people registered onto Business Link's 'Start your own Business' workshop which was a real milestone. However, the scale of the challenges that local residents and businesses were facing was becoming all too apparent.

Recession to Recovery - Event

For this reason, the Wellingborough Partnership, led by the Council, hosted a "Recession to Recovery Conference in March 2009, which sought ideas regarding the additional steps that could be taken to strengthen the local economy. The ethos of the conference was that 'all ideas will be considered'.

Attendees included representatives from local businesses, educational establishments, housing associations and voluntary sector organisations, as well as delegates from partner organisations such as Business Link East Midlands and the County's Chamber of Commerce.

The event was well attended, with over 70 people present, including

representatives from the Council and a wide variety of businesses and partnership organisations.

Attendees participated in two workshops. The workshops which covered the following themes:

- Business Support; Business Infrastructure
- Business Needs
- Employment & Skills
- Housing and Homeless
- Finance & Benefits

A wide range of ideas were put forward. Literally hundreds of suggestions of possible actions and interventions were forthcoming.

The ideas put forward at the conference were collated and are being prioritised for consideration and discussion. It is hoped that an action plan will be formulated and budgets re-aligned to assist the businesses and people of the Borough. It is important that by investing in Wellingborough early, the long term future of the Borough is one that is economically stable. Suggested actions put forward for consideration included allowing businesses to spread their business rate payments over 12 months instead of 10, to give them longer to pay, paying local businesses invoices more quickly to ensure they have a sufficient stream of cash flow and placing tenders on the BCW's website to that they're accessible to businesses.

The 'Recession to Recovery' initiative is groundbreaking and designed to benefit the whole Borough. Its objective is to ensure that Wellingborough starts its journey from "recession to recovery" as quickly as possible, but more importantly in consultation with residents and businesses. It aims to make sure the Borough is 'ready' to provide the job opportunities for housing, and education and preparing for the future.

It was apparent that people wanted to see real actions, real customer-

focused change and response to the suggestions they've put forward.

BCW has also set up a dedicated section on their website acting as a one-stop-shop to provide advice about how to access help/funds through the recession. The main partner agencies in the economic development theme group have been given a page to summarise their services and a link to their website.



The Impact ▾

The Wellingborough Partnership values the feedback they have received from residents and businesses and have listed every suggested action into a plan that has been categorised according to theme and cost and time implications.

The Wellingborough partnership's theme groups, most of which are chaired by Councillors, are currently prioritising the key actions that it is felt should be taken forward first.

Councillors play a pivotal role and have been involved from the very beginning. Their support and commitment has helped drive the initiative forward. They have been completely engaged and keen to come up with new ways of tackling

the recession's effects.

From 'Recession to Recovery' is delivering real benefits predominantly from the increased awareness and take-up of the services available from partners.

The initiative's impact is being measured through the increased number of hits BCW's website and particularly their dedicated 'Recession to Recovery' pages. BCW is keen to strengthen its two-way communication with residents and businesses to assess the support provided and its effectiveness and is seeing a marked increase in media interest in the Council's activities.

Lessons and risks ▾

- Make sure you're open and transparent
- Have a two-way discussion – people want to be listened to
- Be open to all suggestions – welcome all ideas to be considered
- Communicate – keep people informed about actions and what you're doing.

Data / evidence ▾

Specific actions have not yet been identified, but one of the criteria is their relevance to the individual theme group's action plans, which are based on the Local Area Agreement outcomes. Examples of the Economic Development theme group's aims are: a reduction in the number of people of working age without formal qualifications; an increase number of working age population qualified to at least

Level 4 (degree) or higher; an increase in number of people in employment - particularly in occupations requiring higher technological and educational skills; an increase in the average earnings of local employees; a reduction in the percentage of 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET); a vibrant town centre.

Role of EM IEP ▾

The East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership have assisted Wellingborough Borough

Council through the provision of ongoing support and advice.

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