WORKING TOGETHER

South East
Community Development Networks’ Strategy

Incorporating:
Ards Community Network
East Down Rural Community Network
North Down Community Network
To maximise the benefits of community development for the people of North Down, Ards and Down.
Introduction

The Three Networks in the South East region have agreed to embark on a collaborative journey which aims to maximise the benefits of community development for the people of North Down, Ards and Down.

The Networks have developed a set of aims and actions to build on the experiences, skills and resources of the three organisations. We aim to address identified needs in relation to community development, health and well being, education and training and ultimately to build sustainable communities in the South East.

The South East Community Development Networks work in partnership with Government, local councils and funders to deliver a more efficient community development support service for many years in this area. We acknowledge the feedback received during a series of community events highlighting the need for community development support agencies to co-operate fully across the sub region. This co-operation is essential in tackling the underlying inequalities in our society which have led to ongoing poverty, disadvantage and rural and urban isolation.

Collectively, we can have a greater impact on the issues identified by communities and provide a greater range of services and access to those services, thereby creating opportunities for communities to take more responsibility for their own well being.

At a time of change and uncertainty, the three Networks have taken the opportunity to evaluate how they currently work together and to realise the benefits of a more co-ordinated approach including:

- Avoidance of duplication through increased partnership working;
- Better communication between communities, networks and public;
- The sharing of good practice experiences and learning;
- The more effective and efficient use of resources by improved collaboration;
- Establishing a stronger voice for the better community when lobbying service providers and decision makers.

To date the South East Community Development Networks have co-ordinated a range of projects, for example:

- Hosted three joint Community Planning events in association with the Ards and North Down Councils and the support of Community Places;
- Publication of a Community Directory;
- Sharing of information through three linked websites and community newsletters;
- Co-ordinated application to PEACE III on anti-sectarianism, building positive relationships and ethnic diversity;
- Implementation of a range of health and well being programmes under the Investing of Health agenda.

These and other projects have enabled the networks to utilise existing resources, avail of new resources and develop a greater working relationship with each other for the benefit of the local community. Building on this experience, this strategy will enhance opportunities for the South East Community Development Networks through a more co-ordinated approach to collaborative working in the future.

The South East Community Development Networks acknowledge the many stakeholders and other agencies and organisations with whom we interact. These organisations are complementary to the work of the South East Community Development Networks, who value the excellent working relationship and partnerships which exist.

This document summarises the work of the management boards and staff of the three Networks since early 2009.
Ards Development Bureau and Community Network

Ards Development Bureau and Community Network is based at 43-45 Frances Street in Newtownards town centre provides community development support services and facilities to the entire Ards Borough Council area with additional support and weak infrastructure work targeted at areas of greatest disadvantage. The Network is managed by a voluntary Board of Directors consisting of community representatives and currently has 120 member groups and organisations.

The support services provided by ADBCN to the local community and voluntary groups are summarised below:

- Training / capacity building;
- Administrative Support;
- Room users;
- Strength to Strength;
- Networking Centre;
- Support local residents (four outreach centres);
- Training office - IT to group development community planning (needs based analysis);
- Facilities - Physical location, shared office facilities for community and voluntary sector groups and organisations and resource facilities;
- NI Lobbying Workshop on themed issues;
- Peace Building.

Current Ards Development Bureau and Community Network Projects:

01 Community Development
Outreach and community development support service for member groups to promote self help activities and increased volunteering.

02 Practical Support
Practical support and help to local community groups to enable them to address development, governance and resourcing / sustainability issues.

03 Development and Support
Identify gaps in community infrastructure and develop and support new groups, providing advice, signposting, interpreting and dissemination of information through regular Network News, Websites and daily community contact work on the ground (e.g. through the Community Investment Fund Programme).

04 Support for Local Residents
Support for local resident groups through estate based outreach community resource centres. Develop and facilitate skills training and capacity building programmes with an emphasis on weak infrastructure work in areas of high social need and exclusion to build and strengthen local communities (e.g. Areas at Risk Projects in Scrabo and Beechfield communities).

05 Programme of Personal Development
Delivery of a range of Health and Wellbeing courses, awareness raising, workshops and social activities through a programme of personal development with an emphasis on tackling health inequalities within local communities (e.g. Joint IFH / Council and Networks Partnership Project).

06 Network Opportunities
Networking opportunities and providing an interface with key statutory agencies and other organisations - providing a locus for lobbying, consultation and local community planning in the Ards Borough Area. With an emphasis on building more cohesive and sustainable communities, actively targeting social need and social exclusion (e.g. Local Community Planning Projects and Cluster Community Engagement Project with Community Places and PEACE III).

07 Promotion
Promotion of a cohesive and transparent vision of community renewal, aiding the transformation of communities by dealing with the past and supporting communities out of conflict. (e.g. PEACE III Capacity Building Initiative).

08 Community Network Centre
A community networking resource centre providing infrastructure support to local groups, shared accommodation, meeting rooms, administrative services, IT, training and conference facilities and back room services. (e.g. Ards DSD Modernisation Capital Project).

09 Community Development Network
Strategic promotion of community development support services across the region through Community Development Networks Forum (CDNF).
East Down Rural Community Network

East Down Rural Community Network is based in Downpatrick and has an office in Newtownards town centre. EDRCN was formed in 1995 and has expanded to cover most of rural County Down. It is the umbrella body for over 100 rural community organisations such as town and village committees, youth and senior organisations and other voluntary bodies. In particular, EDRCN provides development support to its members and others in the rural area of the Ards borough and it manages a wide range of community health, rural development and social economy projects.

The support services provided by EDRCN to the local community and voluntary groups are summarised below:

- Ongoing technical, legal and funding support to rural groups;
- Facilitate training opportunities tailored to groups needs e.g. capacity building, financial management, committee skills;
- Networking opportunities for groups;
- Office services, free or at cost price to member groups;
- Advocacy, research and consultation on issues affecting rural communities;
- Regular news bulletins to over 140 groups across Co. Down;
- Support for community activities e.g. fun days, press launches, health fairs, etc.

Current East Down Rural Community Network Programmes:

01 Rural Development
EDRCN is one of nine rural support networks across Northern Ireland funded by DARD and coordinated by RCN (NI). We have dedicated rural development staff supporting groups to identify needs and develop projects. EDRCN promotes the Rural Development programme and helps groups to make funding applications to the Down Rural Area Partnership (DRAP). EDRCN supports community representation on partnerships and focus groups such as Peninsula Community Network, Mid down Forum, DRAP, Community Safety, Ards Intercultural Forum, Peninsula Healthy Living Forum etc.

02 Community Health Development
The Government’s Investing for Health Agenda is supported and implemented across rural Ards by EDRCN. A range of physical activity, mental health promotion and programmes for all age groups is delivered in locations across rural Ards.

03 Minority and Ethnic Community Support
PEACE III funds EDRCN to deliver a support service to minority and ethnic communities across the three council areas of North Down, Ards and Down. This collaborative project is a result of the strategic development work by the three Community Networks.
North Down Community Network located in Central Bangor is an independent organisation who supports the development of community / voluntary organisations within the North Down Borough. Established in 1999 the NDCN moved into its Resource Centre in 2000 providing a one-stop-shop for the community and voluntary sector.

NDCN is a registered Charity and its main funders currently are the DSD through their Community Investment Fund, Investing for Health, North Down Borough Council’s Multi Annual Grant and PEACE III. NDCN has a management committee which comprises of representation from 6 community, 6 voluntary and 4 statutory organisations, ensuring it is always community and voluntary lead.

The support services provided by NDCN to the local community and voluntary groups are summarised below:

- Support community and voluntary sector groups around all issues relating to good governance and best practice;
- Provide contact point and facilities for local groups who do not have a base;
- Provide local base for IFH throughout North Down;
- Through the Resource Centre we offer meeting facilities, funding support, IT suite and training;
- User (Resource Centre): community and voluntary groups, statutory organisations, individuals.

North Down Community Network Projects:

01 Community Development
Develop structures at a local level to empower groups to initiate solutions.

02 Capacity Building / Skills Training
Assist local groups to increase their skills and develop strong, confident communities through community based learning.

03 Health Promotion
Work to the IFH Strategy through the Community Development and Health Worker by providing a series of programmes for local communities aimed at improving health and emotional well being.

04 Support TSN Areas
Through the Community Investment Fund programme support the growth and development of groups in areas of weak infrastructure, by information sharing, administration, good governance, training and practical assistance.

05 Equality and Good Relations
Development of joint initiatives between communities, to explore prejudices, tolerances and understanding of their own and other cultures through PEACE III Programmes.

06 Networking / Good Practice
Bring local communities together and provide opportunities to network, build working relationships and share good practice. Highlight regional support provided through the Community Development and Networks Forum. Provide information on relevant topics to the community, voluntary and statutory sectors.

07 Community Arts Projects
Develop community arts projects with individuals and local communities to explore and highlight local issues, develop talents and skills and build personal self esteem and confident communities.

08 Resource Services
Provide access to administrative support, newsheet production, signposting, funding information, use of equipment, IT suite and meeting rooms are available in North Down Community Resource Centre.
Aims and Action Plan

This strategy will give a more structured approach to how the three Networks collaborate together in the future. The aims, together with a number of initial actions are outlined below:

Aim 1: To provide effective community support and infrastructure to local communities and people.
- Build a joint process and effective mechanism to deliver community development support.
- Identify areas / communities which need additional support and develop ways of addressing these gaps.

Aim 2: To create stronger partnerships with statutory service providers for the benefit of local communities.
- Strengthen relationships between the three Networks and their stakeholders in the public and voluntary sectors.

Aim 3: To create better linkages between local communities in building a shared future and ensuring effective local input to Community Planning.
- Host three community engagement events (jointly) per year on issues and themes agreed by the three Networks.
- Develop a model and process which enables communities to inform Community Planning.

Aim 4: To promote the value of community activity and the three Networks.
- Co-ordinate / host joint events and programmes which showcase and evidence the benefits and impacts of local community activity.

Aim 5: To ensure good communication between the three Networks and community groups and with the local councils and all public bodies.
- Maintain and develop linked websites for all three Networks.
- Share details of all partnership and stake-holder development work at each meeting.

Aim 6: To create greater impact by sharing existing resources and skills and drawing in additional resources.
- Develop and publish this joint strategy and promote its aims and purpose to communities, voluntary organisations and public bodies.
- Submit joint, co-ordinated funding bids in line with this strategy and any future priorities agreed by the South East Community Development Network.

Aim 7: To improve each network by drawing on the strengths and best practice of all.
- Each Network to share examples of innovative projects and activities that work well to improve our support service.
Meeting Format

The aims and actions identified within this strategy will be taken forward through regular meetings of the Networks. This will be facilitated through a structure including:

**Representation from each Network**
Network Manager, Chair (or nominee) and 2 Management Committee representatives.

**Chair and Secretariat**
Position of Chairperson will be rotated between the three Networks for each meeting. Secretariat support will be provided by the Network chairing the meeting.

**Quorum for meetings**
No fewer than two representatives from each Network at a meeting.

**Code of Conduct**
This will be modelled, developed and agreed on the East Down Network’s Code of Conduct.

**Frequency of meetings**
Quarterly meetings (4 per year)

**Location**
Meetings will be rotated between the three Network areas.

Decision Making
This strategy was agreed and implemented by the management boards of the three Community Networks.

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