

THE EGAN REVIEW, APRIL 2004: SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

SUMMARY FOR THE GSNW TRAINING WORKING GROUP

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_urbanpolicy/documents/page/odpm_urbpol_028549.hcsp

The Egan Review set out to look at the skills needed to deliver sustainable communities, with particular focus on the built environment. To tackle the issue of skills, the report has to consider wider implications of sustainable communities.

The report proposes a definition of sustainable communities, it models the components that are necessary for a sustainable community, it proposes benchmarks for these components before considering the processes required to ensure that these components are in place. From this proposals are made concerning skills required to facilitate these delivery mechanisms.

Definition:

Sustainable communities meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, their children and other users, contribute to a high quality of life and provide opportunity and choice. They achieve this in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity.

The components of a sustainable community

The report considers aspects of the following list that contribute to sustainable communities.

- Social and cultural
- Housing and the built environment
- Economy
- Environmental
- Services
- Transport and connectivity
- Governance

Measuring progress

A number of performance indicators are proposed, relating to each of the components above. Some of these are new others are already recommended for use by local authorities and are taken from the Audit Commission's Library of Local PIs.

The report recommends that authorities select locally relevant indicators and identify mechanisms for establishing baselines before regularly tracking and reviewing progress. Poor performance should be rectified and there should be feedback to the community.

Process Delivery

'We should not just assume that people have the skills to contribute to more holistic, collaborative approaches to sustainable communities simply because this is now the preferred model.'

The report concludes that local authorities should take the lead in delivering sustainable communities and that this agenda should be considered in every area of service delivery.

No other institution has the same responsibility for long term success of one locality and is as directly accountable to the residents of a locality.

Local authorities should not however work in isolation. There should be cross-cutting partnerships with service providers, key players and the community. Local Strategic Partnerships are a potential model. To achieve this more integrated approach, not only requires new skills, it needs more integrated processes (particularly planning) and a different set of attitudes and behaviours from those involved.

Many local authorities have a vision for their area that sets out intended future direction. The report states that this must be a shared vision developed with partners and the community. Although sectors in a community may have very different ideas about what they want, a strong vision developed in conjunction with them is essential. All the components necessary to deliver a sustainable community should be taken into account and the definition should be a common goal. Manchester City Council has developed a three tier model to achieve this. The result should be a *Sustainable* Community Strategy with as sense of purpose and direction.

The report identifies core occupations and associated occupations that are relevant to delivering sustainable communities.

Shortages of People

People with the technical skills are needed. The report reviews research measuring the demand for people in the core professions. The Sector Skills Council has responsibility for assessing skills availability for the occupations they cover. There are difficulties with auditing some occupations, in part due to role definitions. These problems need to be addressed if we are to drive the skills agenda forward.

An awareness raising campaign is needed to increase understanding about the importance to society of this agenda and highlight the essential role that the core occupations play in delivering it. This includes clarifying entry routes and career paths and also looking at integrating with the school curriculum.

Financial reward is often given as a reason for not entering certain core occupations and also working for local authority. Rewards impact recruitment to a sector and retention of skilled staff. Efficient use of the time of the most skilled people by ensuring processes are streamlined will reduce numbers required and therefore allow better financial reward. Other incentives (such as flexible working) are also important in recruitment and these should be considered. Career change people, return to work and early retirees from other sectors are often strong in generic skills.

Generic Skills Shortage

The Urban Task Force concluded 'the teaching in basic professional technical skills is excellent. The main problem is a lack of cross disciplinary learning with a strong vocational element. The evidence is that it is generic rather than technical skills that are in short supply.'

Both vocational and academic training and career development should include more generic skill sets such as project management and leadership skills. They should also encourage people to have the collaborative outlook needed to deliver sustainable communities. For example cross-boundary working should be introduced into training to ensure professionals interact with other sectors as a matter of course.

Influencing the existing workforce will have the most immediate results. Training can give some skills, but most are gained on the job. This must be promoted by managers by encouraging staff to work in a variety of projects and jobs working in multi disciplinary teams. This may include encouraging secondments to successful teams in the public and private sector (Regional Centres of Excellence to play a brokering roll) and by using members of successful cross-sector teams as mentors. Continuous professional development training has a role to play in this.

They recommend that the government sets up a national centre for sustainable community skills whose first task will be to take forward implementation of the report's recommendations. They suggest that it be called the National Centre for Sustainable Community Skills.

'Collaborative learning through both physical and virtual networks ... will enable practitioners and leaders in core and associate occupations to talk to each other, to question national and international experts and policy makers and to share resources and practical experience of what works and what does not.'