



## **“Making North Yorkshire an Even Better Place” NYSP Wider Partnership Conference - 17 October 2008**

### **Conference Evaluation Report**

#### **1 Introduction**

1.1 The 2008 annual Wider Partnership conference continued the success of recent years by attracting the highest number of delegates yet. Feedback indicated that the event was found to be highly informative and interesting and again an excellent opportunity in particular for smaller organisations and voluntary groups to engage with the key NYSP players and share expertise. The year-on-year growth, whilst highly positive, also poses challenges for handling and management of this event in the future and as such this report outlines some of the issues faced this year and identifies areas where the Executive may wish to consider changes for the 2009 event.

#### **2. Representation & Administration Issues**

##### **2.1 Representation**

2.1.1 Over 200 delegates attended the conference, largely from the public, voluntary and community sectors. There were gaps in representation from the business and independent sector (particularly local industry) and, whilst officers attended from the District Councils' Policy/Performance and Community Safety departments, there were few senior or Chief Officers or Council Members from the local authorities. The most highly-represented grouping at the conference was the voluntary and community sector.

##### **2.2 Managing Attendance**

2.2.1 Invitations were sent out to the full Wider Partnership group (around 300 in total) on 4<sup>th</sup> September and invitees were asked to respond if they wished to reserve a place by 26<sup>th</sup> September. Some late responses were accepted subsequently but a number of interested parties had to be turned away by the 13<sup>th</sup> October as final catering numbers had to be given to the venue and because the maximum limits for workshops were close to their target points. However, a number of respondents made contact after this date, both from within NYCC (Councillors and officers) and externally, seeking a confirmed place and at least ten additional delegates arrived at the venue on the day without having made any contact to reserve a place in advance. These late notifications rendered final planning very difficult in terms of catering numbers and workshop capacity. Around 15 delegates who had confirmed a place did not turn up on the day – some additional late apologies were also given due to sickness absence etc.

2.2.2 In terms of interest expressed, the conference could easily have reached 250 delegates if all latecomers could have been accommodated. Interest in the conference has grown year on year and recent efforts to promote and extend the Wider Partnership group have reinforced this. A few issues to consider here are:

- a) the manageability of an annual event if it continues to expand;
- b) further mitigation against accepting late respondents or people simply turning up on the day (e.g. consider how conference communications can be developed further to reinforce the need to respond etc).

### **3. Key Feedback from Evaluation Forms**

3.1.1 On the evaluation forms provided at the conference, delegates were asked to score against general aspects of the day (registration, refreshments etc), individual workshops and were also given an opportunity to comment on the whole event and provide ideas for future workshop topics. See the appendix for a breakdown of the figures which, as a cross-section of the views of those attending, highlights a very positive response.

3.1.2 In terms of more general comments provided, delegates felt the event to be very well-organised and informative. A number of very positive comments were received on the evaluation forms, including the following:

- “Very informative and enjoyable”.
- “Very good event”.
- “Refreshments very good”.
- “Length of event good – hard work but kept focus”.
- “TP presentations useful”.
- “Key note speaker – excellent, inspirational”.
- “Good use of stands during coffee and lunch times to promote services that weren’t covered in workshops but are very important within the local community”.
- “Sets mind thinking – challenges ahead!”

3.1.3 The only salient criticism focussed around the feeling that the event was slightly rushed due in part to the movement of large numbers of delegates between the plenary/workshop and coffee areas. Consequently in some cases workshops had slightly less time than had been anticipated for discussion and the development of ideas. Other, specific, comments included:

- “Plastic delegate pack and ‘glossy’ contents bad for the environment”.
- “Too early a start to encourage partners from across the County to attend”.
- “Venue not easily accessible by rail”.
- “Too much food ordered for lunch”.
- “Useful to have highlights on thematic partnerships in pack but the presentations on this front were too rushed and did not add value”.

3.4 All of this feedback is valuable in moulding next year’s event. These issues and others are picked up below (see also ‘Attendance’ above).

### **4. Length of event**

4.1 Whilst many delegates felt that the event was slightly too short/too rushed, a high number still scored the length of the event as being either very good or excellent

(see appendix). Previous conferences have trialled a full-day event but it was found that many delegates left after the lunch break. One option may be to extend the conference to a mid-afternoon finish rather than a full day. The workshop sessions could certainly have benefited from slightly more time to develop discussions and ideas, so it is proposed that these become one hour long rather than 45/50-minute sessions in future.

4.2 Whilst a few delegates noted that the conference was a very early start, the feedback generally suggests that most did not have difficulties with a 9.45/10.00am start. In fact, most delegates had arrived at the venue well before 9:30am and as such the 45-minute period for registration could be reduced and the conference could commence by 9:30am to enable more time for the workshops subsequently.

## **5. Accessibility**

5.1 Some delegates felt that the venue was not sufficiently accessible via public transport and was too 'car-orientated'. However, a free shuttle bus was provided courtesy of Little Red Bus between the venue and the train station and advertised within the conference invitations but unfortunately only half a dozen people took up this offer. The Pavilions is one of the best venues for events of this nature as it is purpose-built to accommodate conferences and workshops. It is also the most easily accessible for those with physical disabilities and wheelchair users.

## **6. Delegate packs and conference materials**

6.1 All printing was double-sided to minimise environmental impact and plastic packs were provided for delegates to reuse, although a couple of delegates fed back that they thought this was slightly wasteful. One previous conference implemented cardboard delegate packs but these were found to not be very robust and materials easily came out of them. There may be other ways in which we could minimise environmental impact at future conferences, such as by not providing pens and by ensuring that where printouts are provided that they are printed from recycled paper etc.

## **7. Format, frequency and type of event**

7.1 The manageability of the Wider Partnership conference is a key issue for consideration for future events if the trend of recent levels of interest is to continue to grow. This in turn prompts the question of what kind of event we want it to be? The event is currently an annual event for both practitioners and non-practitioners to share expertise and encourage the input particularly of smaller groups and voluntary/community organisations who would not normally have the opportunity to engage at one time with senior representatives from key NYSP partner organisations and to hear about the key strategic issues. Notes taken from the ten workshop groups this year suggest that the groups became fora for discussions around the key themes but few concrete actions were developed in the time given.

- do we need to develop the event to become more outcomes-focussed or maintain it as a useful forum for discussion for partners?
- Who do we want to (continue to) attract to these events?

7.2 Making the event more frequent – e.g. biannual – would not necessarily make the conference more manageable and would incur greater expense than currently. If this approach were to be adopted, it may also necessitate developing the event into

more of an 'extended meeting' of key players, perhaps without a key note speaker – and at the risk of excluding a number of partners who would otherwise be interested in becoming involved.

7.3 Delegate feedback highlighted that the inclusion of a marketplace area was welcomed this year and hence it is planned that this is developed further as a feature next year.

7.4 The keynote speech is a key feature of the conference which delegates find an interesting way of being informed of issues which draw together some of the other strands raised through the workshops for example. Paul Johnstone's speech was no exception in 2008 and certainly well-received. Planning within the NYSP Executive for the 2009 conference will require consideration about a topic and potential speaker to fill this slot. Additionally, it may be useful to consider the possibility of moving the keynote speech to the beginning of the conference, partly to mitigate against some of the issues around large numbers of delegates having to move frequently between the plenary room and the workshop session areas. The workshops would then all take place directly before feedback and lunch.

## **8. Workshops and suggestions for future topics from delegates**

8.1 Delegates fed back that the variety of workshops provided this year led to many interesting topics and discussions, but that these could also be reduced in future and that it may be useful to make some of the themes more cross-cutting in their approach.

8.2 We need to bear in mind again that reducing workshop subjects but encouraging greater numbers of delegates would not address some of the manageability issues already described. A few comments received on evaluation felt that the conference could benefit from being more 'cross-cutting' in its treatment of issues.

8.3 The following topics were also suggested by delegates on their evaluation forms for potential areas next year:

- Biodiversity / more on the environment;
- Contribution of the voluntary sector;
- Contribution of Armed Forces;
- More on vulnerable groups – not just Older People – and on disability/role of carers etc;
- Private sector engagement.

8.4 Additionally, consideration needs to be given to the role of Thematic Partnerships (TP) at the conference as the move towards SCS-themed priorities meant that the verbal TP updates lost context and meaning to a degree, particularly for those Wider Partnership members who have little or no other interface with some of the other NYSP components for the rest of the year. This could be developed through the marketplace idea with TP-related stands, or alternatively by returning to including workshops focussing on the TP areas. Delegates will be keen to see that progress has been made against at least some of the SCS priorities in 2009 though, so a reasonable approach may be to have a mixture of TP-themed workshops and just a few SCS-themed or cross-cutting topic workshops.

- should we reduce the number of SCS workshops and focus on just a few each time (or combine some issues to take a cross-cutting approach)?
- Do we need to include workshops on TP areas?

## 9. Recommendations

The NYSP Executive are invited to consider:

- o the type of event that the Wider Partnership conference should develop into (its desired outcomes);
- o the frequency of the event;
- o how to format the event into potentially becoming more 'cross-cutting' in its treatment of topics; and
- o intended representation and particularly the involvement of the private sector.

To assist early planning in 2009, it is recommended that the NYSP Executive agree that:

- o the conference start time be brought forward to 9.30am;
- o workshop sessions be lengthened to one hour;
- o the keynote speaker present at the beginning of the conference;
- o workshops are grouped around a combination of SCS and TP areas.

Diane Parsons  
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**Appendix – Break-down of Scores Against General Conference Aspects****1 = Excellent/Very Useful****5 = Poor/Not at all useful****Registration and delegates' pack**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
50%	32.4%	8%	6.8%	2.7%

**Venue**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
55.8%	28.6%	6.5%	3.9%	5.2%

**Refreshments**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
52%	27.4%	16.4%		4%

**Length of event**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
36.4%	37.7%	14.3%	9%	2.6%

**Thematic partnership presentations**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
13%	36.4%	36.4%	14.3%	

**Key note speaker's address**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
35.5%	35.5%	15.8%	13.2%	