

South Kesteven Local Strategic Partnership
The journey towards a Sustainable Community Strategy
With help from DiCE

I was familiar with DiCE – well actually I wasn't – I was familiar with DCD (Doing Community Development) and I'd used it to help frame a youth project in South Kesteven following a two-day training course with Changes. The whole principal had moved on significantly between then and when Changes asked if there was anything happening within South Kesteven that they could tap into – not a project this time - but how the five empowerment dimensions and the newly created planning circle could be used within the public sector to perhaps help shape strategies or policy documents etc.

The timing couldn't have been better. I'd just been tasked with refreshing the Sustainable Community Strategy for the Local Strategic Partnership. At this point, even having been familiar with the framework, I hadn't considered using DiCE for this process. It hadn't entered my head that I could use a community development tool to help form a new strategy.

A little background to the partnership might be useful at this stage. Although not a statutory requirement within local government, each authority is 'expected' by central government to have a Local Strategic Partnership to work in a joined-up fashion within the district/county it serves, avoiding duplication of effort and adding value to existing and emerging projects which will improve an area for those who live, work or visit there. The partnership is made up of representatives from public bodies (district/county councils, police, health authority, PCT etc) voluntary and community sector

(CVS, parish councils, civic trusts, environmental groups etc) and the private sector (local business, chamber of commerce, etc). Although the local authority is the accountable body for the partnership the role of an LSP is to bring everyone's agenda to the same table and work together. However, policies and procedures are still all written and developed in isolation so the joined up approach is sometimes easier said than done - and holding partners accountable is difficult to say the least!

In the past the Community Strategy had been written by an Economic Development officer of the District Council using consultation material the authority had carried out by means of a residents' survey. The plan this time was to have a greater overview of priorities and plans of all the other agencies sitting at our partnership table in order to engage them in the process more effectively. In a nutshell – what we wanted was a strategy that would give direction to the partners but which also empowered the community (at this point this is the generic term for the population of South Kesteven and the people who travel into the district for work or leisure). We wanted the strategy to be about how we would deliver on the needs and requirements of the community we serve and about how, within that delivery, we could give communities the power to go through the process themselves.

I had an initial meeting with Sal Hampson of Changes to discuss what it was we were trying to achieve and also to plan the process. In order to get a wider perspective and also to actively involve the partnership I invited a civilian colleague from Lincolnshire Police, Jo Toomey. This meeting was really to give us both – Jo and I an insight into DiCE and introduce us to the planning circle. At this stage we discussed the agreed priorities for the LSP and the

consultation material that had been provided from around the partnership. This material was collected using:

- SKDC Residents Survey
- SKDC Local Development Framework consultation - Issues and Options
- PCT – Shaping Health for Lincolnshire
- Lincolnshire County Council – Big Skies, Big County, Big Future
- Neighbourhood Policing Teams consultation
- Community Lincs – Parish Planning Consultation
- CVS – Voluntary and Community sector consultation
- District/County consultation into issues faced by people with disabilities

We started to look at the circle (which looked a bit different back then) and we attempted on that first day to make a journey around it. What was frustrating for us all was that we could get so far – maybe three or four points around the circle and we hit a wall – all creativity dried up – none of us could see past this point – did we need to look at it differently – did we need it to be worded differently – did we just need to walk away, park it for a while and come back refreshed. We chose the latter.

What we needed to do from this point was map what we already knew (from the consultation) to form the evidence base for the priorities. Of course, this kind of exercise can evidence gaps too so we needed a robust methodology which would provide focus and purpose. Enter DiCE – the five empowerment dimensions and the planning circle!

I should probably admit to being a bit of a butterfly at this stage. I dot about a lot – it's a chore to keep focused – I get there in the end but quite often I have no idea how. If I was asked to back up a decision with proof of a journey I would struggle – flounder around until I finally found the information stored in the back of my head – not the most convincing approach to take and, when one is dealing with a variety of agendas not the most productive either.

I needed to get back to it – I was on a deadline - so I started the journey around the planning circle again – this time on my own – if I could get some background information maybe it would make the rest fall into place – get rid of the block. I spent a considerable amount of focussed, determined effort on reading, collating and assessing the findings within the consultation material I had collected. I asked a colleague from another service – the arts in fact – if she could spare me an hour or so to go through the priorities and consultation with me (actually it took a whole day) – I had by now admitted my butterfly tendencies and also come to the realisation that its easy to make the things you need to fit sit beautifully in your plan – you know what you want to achieve and you can manipulate things to fit – but not if you work alongside a completely impartial colleague and you have a planning circle and five empowerment dimensions to keep you on the straight and narrow! DiCE had given me focus!

Now please don't think that DiCE cured me completely of being a butterfly – it didn't. If you check out the planning circle you'll see (based on the principle that we were being encouraged to start at the top of the circle – '**Reflect and Learn**' – and work around in a clockwise direction) that we moved about a lot. We already had our '**key priorities**' – Community Cohesion, Sustainable Growth and Healthy Living and our '**vision**' was shared with the Local

Development Framework so that too already existed: all we had to do now was see how all of this fitted into '**others' agendas**'. This is where we got down to business with a flip chart and lots of different coloured pens.

Claire, my colleague from the Arts service, and I took over a meeting room and set to work. We took each priority and the outcomes to be achieved and we aligned them with the evidence contained within the consultation material. For example: with Community Cohesion we wanted to:

- Develop Community Pride
- Celebrate Cultural Diversity
- Improve Local Neighbourhoods
- Develop Safer Communities

Beneath all of these broad outcomes we placed the evidence – each organisation's consultation mapped out in a different colour to make the path easy to follow. We worked through the other priorities in exactly the same way. This was great – we could see what we wanted to do – we could see why we wanted to do it (although not always – these outcomes had been written by a Corporate Director and for some there was just no evidence at all – so rather than having a map – we had a gap – but we could justify either the need for further investigation or the removal of the outcome all together) – what we needed now was the how – or, in planning circle parlance – '**community wellbeing outcomes**', '**Indicators of community wellbeing**', '**community empowerment outcomes**' and '**indicators of community empowerment**'. This is where the five community empowerment dimensions entered the picture.

Each outcome – of which there are twelve spread across the three priority areas was taken through each of the empowerment dimensions in turn – this was quite a laborious process but it led us

to being able to break down the over-arching outcomes and turn them into actions which would achieve our priorities (you might say we just created a circle within the circle – although that’s only just occurred to me which is interesting). We could also align each of these actions with the priorities of the partners – we had their consultation material – this puzzle was starting to look like the picture on the front of the box! This, of course led us to **‘putting it into action’** and the **‘doing it’** or, as we in local government would call it – the Action Plan which supports the Sustainable Community Strategy and the individual delivery plans from within the three priority areas which highlight the resources available and/or required to follow this through to completion.

Which leads us right back to the beginning of the circle **‘reflect and learn’**. It’s useful to look at this element at both ends of the process – on reflection, this whole DiCE process gave us a very clear path to follow – what we learned was that even if you don’t always start from the same place, if you follow the circle, you’ll end up with the same outcome.

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