



WUC Phase Two Pilots Project Managers Interview Report

31 March 2002

Introduction

Over the course of January 2002, Rob Campbell of Halcyon Consultants conducted a second round of research interviews with project managers working on the DfES funded Wired Up Communities initiative. The first round interviews took place in September 2001 when Halcyon Consultants interviewed six project managers. At the time, a report of the interviews was produced and this formed the basis of the presentation given at the Wired Up Communities conference on 7 November 2001. This presentation and these reports are available for download from the website at www.halcyonconsultants.co.uk.

Similarly, this second report provides material for the presentation that Halcyon Consultants will give at the Wired Up Communities conference on 18 & 19 April 2002. A third and final round of interviews is scheduled for August 2002.

The research questionnaire for the second round of interviews was framed to obtain responses to 27 questions over the eight key measures being tested by DfES, but again expanded to include other issues of relevance.

- 1. Impact of the WUC pilot on the community**
- 2. Integration of the WUC pilot with other initiatives & synergy links**
- 3. The technology used in offering access to ICT**
- 4. Nature of the public/private sector partnerships**
- 5. Services provided by a WUC pilot project**
- 6. Training offered to users**
- 7. Content development**
- 8. Schools link and the relationship with the E-Learning Foundation**
- 9. Decision making/management**
- 10. Funding and charging Policy**
- 11. Sustainability**
- 12. Feedback to DfES and good practice recommendations**

1. Impact of the WUC pilot on the Community

(i) Selection Criteria & User Take Up

It is clear that project managers are still utilising a ‘blanket coverage’ approach, as opposed to working to a selection criteria. This reflects the lower levels of take-up than expected across four of the seven pilot projects. The exceptions have proved to be Liverpool and Framlingham, where strong demand was choked off with the strict use of closing dates for receipt of applications and Newham, where the service is yet to be operational.

By way of positive measures to improve take-up, Blackburn was considering ways to extend the geographical boundary of the WUC catchment area, and taking care to cross-reference applications because the LearnDirect database did not, for example, include accommodation above shops. Extending the geographical boundary also meant harmonisation with the school catchment areas.

Manchester belatedly recognised that charging for the equipment is probably acting as a deterrent, but were unable at that juncture to effect any changes without the risk of further confusion in the minds of the end-user. Brampton was looking at the introduction of pcs to offset the lack of interest in ITV Digital Set Top Boxes and Alston was allowing applications to the end of February 2002.

(ii) Levels of Take-Up – January 2002

WUC Project	Estimated	Applications
Alston	1,200	500
Blackburn	1,200	700
Brampton	1,200	650
East Manchester	4,500	700
Framlingham	2,000	2,000
Liverpool	2,000	1,870
Newham	750	0*

** The Newham project offers its services to all households - take-up can only be gauged where residents actually opt out.*

(iii) Pre-Installed Equipment

A factor for five of the WUC projects supplying computers was that some WUC scheme participants might already have access to a computer at home. Liverpool was still, in the first instance, targeting households with no computer while Alston ignored a household’s computer if it was more than a year old. Suffolk’s benchmark was a Pentium 2, but Suffolk and Alston were strongly relying upon potential recipients to declare that they already had a computer with those benchmark specifications (or better). Blackburn

simply opted to go for blanket coverage, while Manchester formed a view that end users were paying for the equipment and it was not an issue.

Brampton, Manchester and Newham distribute set top boxes, but face more competition from Sky TV than On Digital (later re-branded ITV Digital). Indeed, Brampton marketed the set top boxes as offering additional services such as a discount to premium channels and e-mail. Manchester had only supplied a handful of set top boxes by January 2002, reflecting a much keener interest in new or recycled computers.

(iv) WUC Project - Community Outreach Programme

Alston held a couple of information events in the town and are aiming at concentrating on younger people and 'special needs'. Liverpool has utilised the NDC Community Roots to Success team for work with the community and ran an 'e-champions' workshop towards the end of 2001, following on from the first 'e-champions' meeting in February 2001. In Manchester the residents' panel is acting as advisers to the project plus there is some input from local champions, but recognition that there is more work needing to be undertaken with youth projects in the area.

Suffolk is utilising a rolling programme of community awareness involving roadshows, open days, workshops and linking to local projects such as the amateur dramatics club and the neighbourhood watch. In Newham, the Media Trust is signed up to do community outreach with a focus on the Community Channel and 'video-on-demand'.

Brampton has had to rely on access to Rotherham Council's community development worker, but the new content manager is expected to take on the community engagement, while trying to generate content for the portal.

(v) Role of ICT Champions Locally

In Brampton, the role of the champions has tended towards advising project staff and acting as a link with the community through the local community forum. In January 2002, a key issue for project staff was the potential introduction of pcs in May/June 2002 and how this might be relayed to the community. There was recognition that the ICT champions are important for a project that is poorly perceived in the local community.

In Alston, the volunteer champions are directed towards their interest area – for example, community editor, computer trouble-shooter or member of the broadband working group. A significant number of volunteers have expressed an interest in being community web masters.

The Manchester pilot aimed to recruit about fifty ICT champions, but now has about twenty people, who tend to be involved in other voluntary work in the NDC area, thereby limiting the time and effort they can make for the Wired Up Communities initiative. The champions tend to be utilised more for technical support by the social enterprise ITEM, with training from MANCAT. Getting written agreements with the ICT champions has

taken longer than expected, but involves police checks and developing a volunteers policy, especially in relation to responsibilities when entering people's homes.

In Liverpool, it is recognised that the ICT champions need a dedicated staff member to work with them on a range of local initiatives and this has resulted in an application for funding under the European funding programme for a web content editor.

In Suffolk although the aim was to recruit fifty ICT champions, the core numbers twenty-two people who are trained by the project team and Web Sites UK – the portal development company.

In Blackburn the pilot suffered a setback when the 20 ICT champions recruited locally and referred for training at the local college found that the college could no longer offer the same level of support. It was felt that Beach Partnership would pick up on this locally and offer support to the ICT champions.

In Newham the project plans to utilise the fifty ICT champions to market test the service. Some training by the Media Trust is taking place in January 2002 with a view to the service going live in March/April 2002.

2. Integration with Other Activities & Synergy Links

The Brampton pilot project is based above the local Miner's Welfare club and is linking with the local employment service to get an 'employment adviser' on hand to provide job advice. The Phoenix Trust is also undertaking its "Action In the Community for Employment" initiative through the WUC pilot and Dearne Valley College is offering a 'community classroom' for ICT training courses.

The Manchester pilot is aiming to be a significant part of the developing 'broadband network' through the East Manchester ICT strategy in the areas of network connectivity, portal content and technical support services.

The Liverpool pilot is registering as a UK Online centre and is looking to link to the funding available through the new ICT strategy initiated by the Government Office. The local Education Action Zone initiative is linking to the local e-learning Foundation which links to the WUC project.

The Suffolk pilot is linking with the employment service for Worktrain and the Volunteer centre acts as a front office until the project moves to its new project base. The project also has links with Thomas Mills High School and Framlingham College, Framlingham Technology Centre, Suffolk Acre and the various village halls and parish councils.

The Blackburn project is closely tied to LearnDirect, which handles all registration applications and Beach Partnership, as well as Bootstrap Enterprises for the development of the community enterprise. The Newham pilot is linking with the Media Trust and the

University of East London, as well as the local Carpenter's Estate Tenants' Management Organisation.

The Alston pilot is working with the Countryside Agency on rural transport, the Media Lab and a multimedia group on a multimedia project and the North West Broadband Strategy working group on the broadband infrastructure covering Alston.

3. Technology

Each WUC pilot project manager was invited to highlight any issues faced over the choice, sourcing, acquisition, and installation of the technology, as well as broader themes such as connectivity.

The Manchester pilot is aiming to wire up all 4,500 homes in the community using a variety of technologies including new and re-cycled PCs and set top boxes. Demand for set top boxes is very low, with a clear preference for computers. Of the 700 applications received, one third indicated an interest in a recycled pc for £30, with the other two thirds interested in a new pc for £200. ITEM do the installations locally, but they have experienced some down-time.

The supplier of the new pcs is Quantum Computers, based in Southport and they have a tendency to make some minor changes to the computer specification without advising the project staff, which creates some difficulties for the technical support volunteers. Manchester also had difficulty with their ISP provider, Nutshell, which went out of business, resulting in the project opting to utilise BT Openworld. These developments have slowed up the project's intention to migrate people to faster connection speeds and achieve a £10 a month surf deal. The introduction of a broadband network, however, is still on course for May 2002.

The Alston pilot is aiming to wire up around 1200 of the 1300 homes in the community by providing new PCs, again supplied by Quantum through G-Cat. It was felt that G-Cat were not very quick to deal with the order and in the delay period, the price of RAM increased. The project manager considered using PLATO for online learning, but the initial package offered was too inflexible and too expensive. In the end a revised, cheaper package was negotiated with PLATO.

A local firm is co-ordinating delivery of the pcs and the project manager is managing the relationship between Quantum and the local delivery agent, recognising that there have been some tensions already. Quantum is doing a help-desk, but there have been some complaints from WUC participants unable to get through to the number provided. The community ICT champions are trying to sort out problems people have with software configuration.

On the broadband infrastructure that is being introduced in May 2002, the fixed cost of equipment is apparent, but the project has yet to consider how to price the package on offer to WUC participants and local businesses.

The Brampton pilot is aiming to wire up all 1,200 homes in the community using set top boxes from ITV Digital. Of the 450 set top boxes installed to date, about 10% were faulty and this was traced to the Nokia model. The project manager felt that the installation team through the ILM project should have had better training before going into people's homes to configure the set top boxes.

Some negative feedback about the installation team and the way they did things had been reported to project staff. Phoenix Enterprises are now offering management support to the installation team, but the project manager felt that criticising the installation team was just another way for local people to 'put the boot into the WUC scheme'. The project is likely to introduce pcs in the second phase from circa April/May 2002.

The Blackburn pilot is aiming to wire up around 2,500 out of the 2,800 homes in the community using computers supplied by Quantum Computers. The project experienced some major difficulties over the ISP. The BT reseller is Airtime, but NTL considers itself an ISP and refused to allow their cable customers to use the Airtime ISP. Indeed, NTL wanted WUC participants to sign up to a year-long contract for Internet access through a set top box. The project therefore had to add an Ethernet card and cable for NTL cable customers.

NTL also refused to negotiate with the project over the 3 months free package, so 220 NTL cable customers were offered a 'start-up' kit to the value of £45, which includes print paper, floppy disks and ink cartridges. The project had to write to all 220 households and make this offer in writing since the original loan agreement stated that the WUC participant was entitled to 3 months free surf time through the designated ISP.

The Framlingham pilot is aiming to wire up about 50% of the 3,000 homes in the community by providing a pc, with connectivity through a basic 56k modem dial-up and ISP. In the roll out of equipment, the project has experienced some difficulties with conflicts due to virus software and the need for the Cyber Sentinel to be installed and configured for passwords on each pc in each home. The project is offering Windows XP and there are a number of patches required, as well as a security patch for Internet Explorer 6.

The upsurge of activity in the area has created some capacity problems for the BT Wickham Market exchange with the ISP offering a contention ration of 15:1. The project also needs to harmonise its user database with Web Sites UK, which is developing the community portal.

The Newham pilot is aiming to wire up all 750 homes using set top boxes with ADSL and wireless links. Connectivity is being achieved via a 1Gb fibre backbone connecting switches that provide CAT5 (10/100mb per second) connections to the home where residents will use the services via a set top box. The project is undertaking trenching work to wire up the three tower blocks and six low rise blocks, but has still to deal with the problem of stand-alone houses in the community. It is difficult to estimate the cost of

the trenching until it is opened up. There is still an underlying concern about 'state aid' implications in the telecommunications field.

The Liverpool project has had major problems with the recycled pcs. Due to the age of the pcs, when they break, it is very difficult to get replacement parts and this puts the onus on the project to try to fix the broken parts. Toward the end of the contract for the supply and installation of 2,000 recycled pcs, the project had to change suppliers and the installers. The latter failed to fulfil their contract.

The project is still dealing with the legacy of trying to install 2,000 recycled pcs in 5 months – an approach that required short-term 'quick fix' contracts with various suppliers. The project also has some difficulty accessing the web portal site due to server problems.

4. Public Private Sector Partnerships

(i) Active Partners & Their Impact

In Framlingham, Suffolk County Council and the two district councils help with the education and lifelong learning programme and training. The councils also support the project by sending representatives to the steering committee meetings. In Manchester, Network East Manchester Ltd still has the formal remit for working with the private sector. Informally, the City Council tends to lead on developing private sector partnerships. MCIN worked hard to help develop some Christmas related content in December 2001.

In Alston, Eden District Council contributes by offering some staff time from the Alston information centre, which is based in the town hall. The County Council was heavily involved in the tendering process for the selection the community portal supplier. The parish council helped to organise a 'fact finding' mission to Ennis in Ireland and the local historical society is interested in the use of the digital whiteboard. There is also some interest in a Vital Villages online survey.

In Brampton, the Employment Service is providing a staff member to advise on job opportunities and Dearne Valley College is running some classes at the project base. Phoenix Enterprises is also providing support to the project's installation team and will offer support on project management too.

In Blackburn, the local authority is the 'accountable body' for the project, which is also supported by the activities of the Beach Partnership Ltd. In Newham, the local council provides support through the secondment of its Network Manager for one day a week. The project also gets support through the council's ICT strategy group, Newham College and the University of East London.

In Liverpool, the Learning and Skills Council support the project with a funding commitment to support the training of the ICT champions. Everton Development Trust

also helps out, as well Liverpool Hope University and its UK Online centre in Kensington.

(ii) Suppliers

The WUC project managers were asked to differentiate between suppliers and active partners from the private sector. Manchester is continuing to use the following suppliers - BT, NTL, Clicks & Links, Nutshell, Net-Gen, Quantum Computers, ITEM Community Enterprise, NIC Computers and Team Net Sol, but does not have a private sector partner.

Alston is using the following suppliers – Clicks and Links for portal development, Quantum Computers for computers and a local firm for installation of the pcs. The project does not have a private sector partner, having previously rejected BT and ICL's offers on the grounds that they both wanted a significant degree of ownership of the project.

Brampton is using ITV Digital for the supply of set top boxes and Prime People Consultants. It was intended that Granada Media/ITV Digital would repurpose web sites for viewing over the set top box medium, but this has faltered on the grounds of cost. The project does not have a private sector partner.

Blackburn is using the following suppliers – Splash Plastic, Quantum Computers, Aircom for the ISP, but spending a disproportionate amount of time with NTL. The project manager observed that the project might in fact have helped NTL to capture at no cost a new market from WUC participants.

Framlingham is using the following suppliers - Websites UK and Tiny Computers, and has the support of Business Link. Framlingham Technology Centre is undertaking an audit of local businesses in the Framlingham and district area. A local computer supply company, Chip Support, also provides some products.

Newham is using the following main suppliers – NEOS Networks, Blick, Lefarge and Mase for the infrastructure, PACE for the set top boxes, NCube, Dell and Sun for the servers, Internet Vision for system integration. The Media Trust is leading on multimedia development and community outreach.

The project distinguishes between partners and suppliers with the former required to demonstrate continuing commitment and favourable pricing. The project manager described Microsoft as a partner in the project on account of the supply of MS Windows for set top box – but the details are subject to a 'non-disclosure' agreement".

(v) WUC Support and Services to Local Businesses

Brampton previously considered looking at getting local businesses such as the chip shop, newsagent, car-dealer, general store and pubs online through the web portal, but

recognises that it has been able to offer little or nothing so far. The project will consider introducing free adverts to local businesses.

Manchester is still intending to offer web space on the community portal to local businesses, via East Serve Ltd, plus some local advertising. The project manager feels the project may be better placed to offer services with the launch of the broadband network.

Alston is interested in offering an online catalogue of business services in the area, plus web space on the community portal and some e-commerce services for local businesses from February 2002.

Newham still regards the WUC pilot as test-bed for businesses to undertake market research on their products and services. The University of East London is doing business support and an ERDF bid has requested funding for a broadband network.

The Blackburn project manager is helping to develop a business plan for the WUC project that will detail the range of services on offer to the local business community. Liverpool. The Liverpool project manager felt there has been insufficient investigation of the potential marketing of WUC services due to a lack of baseline data on the local business community.

The Suffolk project is thinking about developing re-seller services as part of the Suffolk Online business model, but the project manager feels that the project needs more investment in the technology infrastructure – (web ports, ADSL and wireless) – to achieve this. The project manager also thought that there is a gap in the training market and a strategic alliance could be forged with some private sector providers.

(vi) Local Businesses Affected by WUC Pilot

The Brampton pilot has been able to employ a local firm to help with the renovation of the project base above the Miner's Welfare club. However, when project staff wished to install Digital TV in the Miners Welfare Club, this was refused on the grounds that the pub next door is paying the full commercial rate for its digital TV service.

The Alston project engaged a local firm resident in the area for the last 15 years to undertake the installation of the pcs, but found that they struggled a bit to meet the demand. The local business was not keen to go above the five employees threshold and they had to store up to 50 pcs at a time. Another local business is interested in the market for people wishing to upgrade their pcs.

The Blackburn project manager expressed some disappointment that no local companies had expressed any interest in selling consumables to people participating in the WUC pilot scheme. However, it was recognised that the Beach Partnership Ltd may be in a position to pick this up as part of its remit to operate as a social enterprise running the WUC project.

The Suffolk project has faced the ire of a local company, Chip Support, which prior to the WUC initiative sold IBM clone computers, peripherals and consumables in the town of Framlingham. Chip Support was considering legal action against the WUC project to seek compensation for lost business. The project manager felt it is too early to assess, for example, the impact of Amazon on local companies selling books but there is some interest in the idea of a local online food-co-op.

The Newham project manager felt there was little or no impact on local businesses. There are no set top box suppliers in the area. However, the competition for the services offered by the Newham WUC project comes from Sky TV and ITV Digital, although it is too early to see if there is any potential impact locally on the market for premium packages offered such as Sky Box Office. The common ground is the 'free to air channels'.

The Manchester project manager does not think that local businesses have been adversely affected by the WUC project. However, there are some opportunities offered through the 'Splash Plastic' model adopted in Blackburn. Dealing with the Credit Union, local people can purchase on the pay point system a credit value on a named card for online purchases and in local shops.

The Liverpool project manager felt that local businesses had lost out on the potential for employing some local people trained in the use of ICT's through a process of 'skills transfer' through the WUC project.

5. WUC Service Provision

(i) Determining the Needs of the Community

Initially, the Brampton project used a register of interest and the input from the community forum in the stages leading up to the project launch. However, plans to use the portal to encourage responses on community need did not come to fruition. There is recognition that the project base is important as a community facility and so capital funding was spent on refurbishing the premises. There are provisional plans to develop a 'comfort area' with tea and coffee available for people who drop into the project base. A questionnaire was distributed in late 2001 to try determining community needs and this is being analysed in February/March 2002.

The Blackburn project has continued with leaflet drops and the distribution of information packs to raise general awareness. The LearnDirect call centre handles enquiries from local people and this helps to determine training needs. The local Community Forum plays a pivotal role in expressing community need.

In Framlingham, the project manager would like to undertake a 'proper customer survey' on the WUC project to augment work already undertaken such as the Suffolk Acre survey in 2001, which highlighted, for example, that a reasonable proportion of people in the area already have Internet access.

The Newham project is using the Tenants Management Organisation to get community views and those of the Cyberangels. In Manchester, the pilot used the resident's panel, various New Deal for Communities groups, 50 ICT champions and a survey.

The Alston project started off with the BT survey on the needs of the local community, but there is a wider purpose in looking at the broadband picture for Alston and how community needs will change as a result of the implementation of the broadband infrastructure.

The Liverpool project made an effort to e-mail all WUC participants in the community asking their views, but there is perceptions that a number of people have probably shifted allegiance to other ISP's and are using those e-mail addresses. In effect, those participants are lost via the e-mail channel and other methods need to be utilised to determine community needs.

(ii) WUC Facilities, Services and Support - Offered to Users

In terms of *facilities*, each of the WUC projects operate from a project office base, but in the case of Newham and Blackburn and Alston, this is not open to the general public. In Newham, the local TMO handles public enquiries and in Blackburn, all contact is routed via the LearnDirect call centre. In Alston, the information centre staff deal with public callers.

In Liverpool, the project is situated in a high street location in Kensington, and the Suffolk project is near to the local supermarket. The Brampton project is now situated above the local Miner's Welfare Club and the Manchester project is adjacent to the local market in Beswick.

In terms of *services*, the Suffolk project offers free installation of a pc and printer, an ISP service and a community website portal, as well as extra training for ICT Champions. Manchester offers a recycled or new pc or set top box, a community portal and a broadband network later in the year. Alston offers a new pc and printer, a community portal an ISP service for Internet dial-up and a wireless broadband network that will be available later in the year. Brampton offers an ITV Digital set top box , while Liverpool offers a recycled pc and new printer, and access to the Kensington community website.

The Newham project offers a set top box with interactive services such as e-mail, Internet access and video on demand. The Blackburn project offers a new pc and printer, an ISP for dial up Internet connection and a local community website.

In terms of *support*, the Suffolk project offers initial training and a technical helpline (through the computer suppliers) and this is the model followed by Manchester and Alston. In Brampton, ILM project staff provide some technical support. In Liverpool, a local firm on contract to the NDC provides technical support and some training is available at the Cyber Training Centre. In Newham, the project will offer training and

online technical support. The Blackburn project offers technical support through the supplier contract and training sessions.

6. Training Offered to Users

(i) Assessing Training Needs

In Blackburn, each potential recipient has a 'lifelong learning' assessment and interview with the LearnDirect call centre staff to assess training needs. Referrals to training providers are then co-ordinated by the project staff. In Brampton, each recipient is supposed to complete a form, but this has been patchy and possibly reflects a high level of illiteracy. Where the procedure is followed, a recipient will get a follow-on call from the project staff to go over the completed form and help organise some training.

In Newham, the potential recipient will have an induction session with the installer and then various courses will be run at community locations on the Carpenter's Estate. In Manchester there is no training assessment, but there is a compulsory 3-hour training course provided by MANCAT in four locations pitched at people with different skill levels.

Liverpool is concentrating on the 50 ICT champions for training, reflecting their problems resourcing the project. In Suffolk, a letter is sent to recipients welcoming them to the project and asking that they complete a 'training needs' form. This form is then sent to the local Learning and Resource centre to be added to their database, although it is felt that the Learning and Resource centre is not very pro-active in approach to this information.

In Alston, applicants filled in a form with a section identifying their training needs. This information is collated and sent to Cumbria Credits, which co-ordinates local training. There is more of a focus on the community web editor's training needs, since they are responsible for helping to generate and post content to the community portal.

(ii) Raising Awareness About the WUC Scheme

In Brampton, the project initially held public meetings and sent mailshots to households, but this has tailed off since November 2001. A consultant has been engaged to assist the project with its marketing strategy. In Manchester, the approach has been to use leaflets, and posters that are distributed locally in the community. Awareness days are held in public meeting places and advertised through the East Manchester news. Blackburn too has followed this model, with features in local newsletter and the local paper.

In Suffolk, the project manager looks to Suffolk Acre to provide some expertise on marketing the WUC project locally, and is opting for leaflets, posters and 'open days'. All the computers supplied by the WUC project are branded with Suffolk Online labels.

In Liverpool, awareness raising is low key because there is already such a strong demand for the recycled computers to the extent that the project is running a waiting list. In Newham, the TMO leads on raising awareness about the project and is aiming to use the new community channel to keep people in the community up to date with project developments. In Alston, the project initially used posters and leaflets to raise awareness, but can rely on word of mouth because the town itself is small and there are a large number of local volunteers interested in the project.

7. Content

(i) Content Development & Management to Meet Local Needs

In Alston, community web editors are working to develop content for the Alston portal, which was designed by Clicks and Links. The project staff have not found the content editor easy to use and the web editors appear to be struggling too. The project manager is curious to find out the experience of the other WUC pilots currently using Roundabout from Clicks and Links/Team NetSol.

In Blackburn, the project has a Content Manager and 16 web editors using Roundabout from Clicks and Links who did a scoping study on portal content in June 2001. There have been problems with the web site portal and the project staff are due to meet up with Clicks and Links shortly to address some of these difficulties. The contract for web site development and content management is out to tender.

In Framlingham local company, Websites UK is helping to develop the web portal's content. Some areas of the portal are delegated to the ICT champions to develop such as village news, events and online forums. These areas are moderated. Content is submitted in plain text or HTML. Web Sites UK have some software tools available for publishing the web content, but it is not a dedicated web content management system. The project has also opted not to use Web Sites UK's "flexi-sites" online web build tools, preferring instead to use MS FrontPage.

In Liverpool, the project manager stated that the project is not spending as much time as it should on content generation for the Kensington portal, but this is due to devoting staff time and effort on the computer roll-out, in terms of installations and technical support. The project needs another dedicated member of staff and the project has applied for further funding.

In Newham, Internet Vision is developing Carpenter Estate's community portal and the specification of the content management software is under consideration. The project manager has identified different types of content that will be available, such as the DKTV TV service, PLATO online learning, PC on TV (via Windows XP and Office XP) and video on demand services.

In Rotherham, Clicks and Links are utilising the Roundabout software. In common with the other pilots using Roundabout, the Brampton project gets the software on free licence,

but is expected to meet the 'support' costs for customisation and training. Clicks and Links have had to move quickly on web site development for Brampton, but the project manager feels that the web site should be updated daily and not when Clicks and Links have the time to do so. The Brampton project manager feels that a full time content manager is required to get the community more involved in content generation and to make the website portal more interactive. The concern is that recruiting a new member of staff usually takes a few months. An ILM team member may be interested in the post of Content Manager.

In Manchester, Clicks & Links developed the content for a portal in the early stages of a NDC funded initiative when 300 recycled pcs were distributed in the area. This scheme was widened out with DfES funding to form the WUC pilot. In terms of content, the portal site is reconstructed and remixed so it is suitable for viewing through a pc or a set top box. Certain sites are also targeted to younger viewers. MCIN is working with the target groups on developing content so that it is an organic process. There is currently a debate about the level and extent of 'moderation'. The project manager is interested in developing links to DfES sites such as LearnDirect and Worktrain.

(ii) Potential Improvements to the Community Web Portal

The Blackburn project manager has noted the problem of poor community perception of the WUC project due to the problems with the community website, although there is a belief that these things are being addressed by Clicks and Links. The site will move to XML and this is in keeping with the government's IEG targets. The contract for web development is out to tender.

In Brampton, the future development of the portal is not yet clear. Team NetSol hosts the portal, but Rotherham Council may decide to host it instead. Although the content Manager is to be trained on Clicks and Links's Roundabout software, Rotherham Council may look at its own internal system and integrate the community portal with it.

In Suffolk, the project manager would like to see more interesting multimedia things on the community website, but there is no broadband infrastructure to deliver such content. There is some interest in e-commerce sites on the portal, but not for banner advertisements and certainly no e-mail spamming of WUC participants.

In Alston, the project manager would like to see it made easier for people in the community to publish content on the website portal. When the broadband network is introduced in the early summer, delivery of multimedia rich content will be possible and offer interesting possibilities for the project and WUC participants.

In Liverpool, the project manager would like to see a re-launch of the Kensington portal when the project has dedicated staff able to work with the ICT champions to generate content relevant to Kensington. In Newham, the project manager is keen to help develop a good menu driven interface to allow a seamless integration of the content that will be on offer to WUC participants.

In Manchester, the project manager is interested in getting more public service content on the portal from the police, housing agencies, the city council, social services and education. Some themes around the Silver Jubilee celebrations and the Commonwealth Games will be of interest too.

8. Schools Links

(i) Local e-Learning Foundation - WUC Project Manager Involvement

In Newham, the project manager is in regular contact with the local education representative and head teachers. There are monthly face-to-face meetings and the e-LF staff are very interested in working with the local primary school on the Carpenter's Estate. The e-LF staff member attends the WUC project management committee meetings. The school now has a fibre connection due to the WUC project's trenching.

In Blackburn, local education representatives are invited to attend the WUC steering committee meetings and the WUC project is closely connected to the schools. There has already been recognition that the geographical areas covered by the WUC project and the e-LF do not match up and how this might be addressed in future by extending the boundary of the WUC project.

In Framlingham, the project manager sees the e-LF as an opportunity to link in with the schools and schoolkids to encourage family based learning with the parents. A lot of progress has been made since September 2001 and the local e-LF co-ordinator is also an ICT champion.

In Manchester, the Education Action Zone (EAZ) is leading on the development of the e-LF and an EAZ representative attends meetings of the WUC steering group. The local e-LF is a part of the overall broadband network and is contributing some funding to this.

In Alston, the project manager is tied in closely to the e-LF because there is an opportunity for linking to CLEO's bandwidth and at the same time there are opportunities for both parties in the development of the broadband network. Geographical coverage is pretty much the same for both schemes and they share the same concerns on creating a sustainable enterprise. The schools and youth remix project opens up the possibility that local schools may contribute materials for the Alston website portal.

In Brampton, the project manager acts as the link with e-LF, but has struggled to find the time to meet the commitments involved. A Rotherham Council secondee with a background in education has been helping out the WUC project and assisting with the development of the e-LF business plan since November 2001.

(ii) Community Perceptions of Available Services from E-LF and WUC

In Manchester, the project manager feels that the community perception is that the WUC project is all about pcs, while the e-LF scheme is for schoolkids. The homes-schools link is good in theory, but needs to work in practice.

In Newham, the project manager stated that the TMO is dealing with the community networking side of the WUC project and the TMO is certainly aware of the e-LF scheme. The local e-LF is beginning to raise its profile, evidenced by some press releases in January 2002. The WUC project is interested in making links between the education/school sector and the community.

In Alston, the project manager is still a bit concerned over the geographical scope of Alston WUC and the local e-LF, which results in some of the schoolkids at the local school being unable to get a WUC pc. All the teachers at the schools got laptops, but not before being taken, on occasion, from their teaching duties to answer urgent calls from computer sales staff. The project manager feels that the e-LF does not have a profile in the community yet.

In Liverpool, the project manager felt that the local community understand the WUC project, but that the e-LF is not so well known. The Education Action Zone initiative has been working with the local e-LF.

In Brampton, the project manager thinks that local people generally understand the concept of set top boxes through public meetings, leaflets and the local media. However, the e-LF has been very rushed in terms of timescales to meet the 31 March deadline, so they have not really advertised or promoted what is happening in the schools. The local e-LF initiative has a steering group in place, but no local organisation in place to promote and advertise their scheme.

In Suffolk, the project manager feels the local e-LF staff have been working hard with local people. Links are growing between both initiatives, but the e-LF is probably a bit behind the WUC project on equipment purchased such as servers and general training.

In Blackburn, the project manager feels that local people probably do not yet understand the position. The community is beginning to see what the WUC pilot is about, but this might not be the same for the local e-LF. Teachers were apparently pleasantly surprised at getting 900k for six schools. The project manager feels that it has been hard enough for local people to get up to speed with the WUC project, far less the e-LF initiative.

9. Decision making/management

(i) Project Management Issues

In Manchester, the local authority is the accountable body for the WUC project and while the project has to follow the NDC's rules on procurement, there is a need for flexibility.

The council is being 'tight' with its projects already funded in full or in part by the NDC and this is putting extra pressure on the WUC project, which is becoming more and more part of the NDC programme. The WUC project relies heavily on the NDC because it has systems and procedures already in place.

The biggest issue for the WUC project is the process to secure funding. The NDC has its own system for project appraisal if providing a grant and this is markedly different in its application process from, for example, that of the ERDF. There is a frustration that the project should just be able to describe what it is aiming to achieve and get the funding to get on with it.

In Alston, the project management issues have been over the procurement of the kit and contract managing the suppliers, staff training and support, and trying to secure revenue in support of the DfES capital grant. Managing the number of volunteers is another issue for the project.

In Brampton, the project manager feels that the role of project manager should have been better defined so that there was clarity on roles and responsibilities. The WUC steering group has tended to determine what needs to be done, and this has been onerous on the project manager. The project manager needed more help on the educational and technical side and should have pushed assistance – especially considering that the council's education and IT departments are represented on the steering group.

The project manager also faced the situation that as the activity increased with the e-LF, the more the WUC project manager had to do, while not having the time to be fully involved with the e-LF initiative. This led to the scenario that the WUC project manager was sometimes being asked to sign invoices relating to the e-LF without full knowledge of the previous discussion and agreements.

In Newham, the project manager has had no issues with the DfES and the contracting procedures for the draw-down of funding. Also, the staff are all fully trained. In Suffolk, the project manager feels there is a tension between trying to develop a 'sustainable enterprise' more commercial in nature, while Suffolk Acre as accountable body is focused on community development and community networking.

In Blackburn, the project manager has faced a lack of ICT capacity and skills in the project and needs to try new ways of getting information about the project into the community by way of a marketing strategy. They have also had to overcome some negative perceptions of the project in the community, deal with the fall-out from the NTL situation and secure further revenue funding in support of the DfES capital grant.

In Liverpool, the project manager has faced problems over having insufficient staff to run the project – especially on the community portal development, but also stated that 'throwing money' at staffing is not necessarily the solution. A request for funding for more has been submitted and if successful will provide a revenue source from April 2002 onwards.

(ii) Staffing and Impact on WUC Project

In Alston, the project manager felt that the project could do with more staff, but this has eased off a bit since November 2001. Ideally, the project should have staff to co-ordinate the training and management of community web editors, provide ICT technical support in a troubleshooter role, co-ordinate activity on the broadband network, oversee the development of online learning and undertake outreach with community groups or individuals in the area. In the absence of this, the current staff try to cover these tasks.

In Brampton, due to lack of staff the project manager has had to end up doing quite a few administrative tasks such as invoicing, phone calls, letter writing and arranging publicity materials and dealing with all the complaints. The project manager has ended up 'fire-fighting' in dealing with extending insurance cover, paying suppliers on time (or late), trying to install the network in the project base and working with the local e-LF.

In Suffolk, the project has struggled to recruit staff, while at the same time it needs more revenue for more staff. As a result the project has struggled with existing staff 'pulling all the stops out' in terms of working extra hours. The project has also struggled a bit with getting the ICT champions fully on board.

In Blackburn, the project manager stated that the project needs more staff – in particular, a Content Manager to deal with content for the community portal website and marketing the website locally. The project has 16 voluntary web editors and 20 community groups in the area that need the support of a Content Manager. The project was able to utilise some work experience placements from the local school for a period.

In Manchester, the project manager has found that recruitment of staff has been difficult so there has been insufficient staff numbers to keep on top of the project and move things on as quickly as initially hoped. The current project manager is on a 'rolling contract' and that needs to be sorted out, so that the project can recruit a longer-term project manager. This is also the case in Liverpool, where the project manager is on a month-to-month contract.

In Newham, the project lost a member of staff for 6 weeks and this threatened the viability of the project to the extent that the council ended up offering staff support.

10. Funding & Charging Policy

(i) Current Funding Position

Manchester received a capital grant of £1.6m from DfES, with revenue of £350k in year one and £300k for year two from the NDC, SRB and ERDF. A further capital grant of £750k is contributing to the development of the broadband network. Liverpool received a capital grant of £500k from DfES, with revenue of £140k in year one from the NDC, plus a further £40k capital grant from the NDC. In year two, month on month revenue funding

has been provided by the NDC, although there is a pending application for European funding.

Brampton received a capital grant of £1.3m from DfES and revenue of £250k, while Blackburn has received £1.5m in a capital grant from DfES and has funding of £133k from SRB and £60k from ERDF. Alston has received capital funding of £1.28m from the DfES, with revenue of £99k from a combination of the RDA, ESF, ERDF and Cumbria Credits. Newham has received capital funding of £1.6m with £100k of SRB funding per annum over 3 years.

(ii) Outstanding Issues on Cost & Charges to End-Users

In Alston, WUC participants are charged £12 per month for Internet access over a 56k modem dial-up for now, but the project is moving to a broadband network from May 2002. It is expected that the cost to WUC participants will remain around the £12 per month mark. No other charges are made to WUC participants for any other aspect of the WUC project and the DfES funded the first 3 months of dial up charges for each WUC participant.

In Liverpool, no charge is made by the project for the supply of a recycled pc and printer and WUC participants pay for 56k modem dial-up through Merseynet. The project manager may consider introducing charges for training received at the WUC project's Cyber Centre.

In Blackburn, the project does not charge for the supply of a new pc and printer and training sessions are provided free of charge too. The DfES funded the first 3 months of surf time, but problems with NTL resulted in WUC participants getting goods to the value of £45 – the equivalent of the 3 months at £15 for the ISP. A similar arrangement is in place in Suffolk.

In Newham, the project supplies a set top box free of charge to the WUC participant, on the understanding that the WUC participant agrees to co-operate with the DfES research. Should the participant purchase a printer to use with their set top box they would be fully responsible for the purchase of consumables such as paper and ink cartridges. There are no other charges to users for the basic service though it is anticipated that added value services such as video on demand and higher speed internet access will be charged for.

In Manchester, WUC participants get a new pc valued at £700 for £200. A recycled pc is available too for £30. With the introduction of the broadband network later in the year, the project will have to decide on the cost to each household for signing up to high speed Internet access. In Brampton, the project supplies ITV Digital set top boxes for free, but may have to look at some form of charge for the supply of pcs later in the year, if this goes ahead.

11. Sustainability

(i) Organisational Responsibility for Leading WUC Project

In Suffolk, the voluntary sector charity, Suffolk Acre, is the accountable body and is therefore expected to lead on developing the model for sustainability. The project staff have the opportunity to float some ideas at an 'away day' hosted by Suffolk Acre. The steering committee may also contribute some ideas. Similarly, in Alston, the voluntary sector charity, Voluntary Action Cumbria, is leading.

In Blackburn, Beach Partnership Ltd is leading on developing the model for sustainability, with help from Bootstrap Enterprises. In Newham, the project is being supported and developed by Newham council via Newham Net, while in Rotherham, Rotherham Council is leading, with support from Phoenix Enterprises, who may take a stronger role in the WUC project's development.

In Manchester and Liverpool, the local council via the NDC is leading on the development of the WUC project.

(ii) Proposed Model for Developing Sustainability & Progress to Date

In Blackburn, Beach Partnership is helping to set up a Community Development Trust to take over the operational running of the WUC project. Beach Partnership Ltd may offer, for example, technical support for local community groups and a scheme for computer upgrades. Blackburn council is keen to enable community development trust. Bootstrap Enterprises may help with this move to a community business by doing some capacity building work.

In Newham, a business plan is currently being developed to turn the WUC project into a sustainable community enterprise and the project is looking at extending the WUC model across Newham. Liverpool and Manchester are working on developing business plans under the auspices of the respective NDC programme officers.

Working over a three to five year timescale, the Manchester project hopes to develop an income stream that is generated from offering access to network/intranet, plus some community content generation. There may also be some government funding for helping to deliver e-government services online in the WUC pilot. ITEM is a community enterprise and it is offering technical support and this would be expanded as part of the remit of the new WUC community enterprise. The pilot project may also pursue the resale of consumables, but on a not-for-profit basis. The pilot would also consider the use of ASP and providing web space.

In Rotherham, a consultant is beginning to develop the marketing strategy and business plan, while Alston is working with the community forum to the idea of a community business that takes over running of the WUC project in the next 18 months or so. Suffolk

Acre is considering a co-operative in preference to a community development trust or community enterprise.

12. Feedback – Good Practice Recommendations

(i) Running WUC Projects - Good Practice Recommendations

The Manchester project manager said the WUC project needs the right level of funding resources and obtain the necessary level of support at the local level from funders – even although the project can sometimes be innovative in approach and is driving things ‘at the edge’. The project must also take care to follow the conditions set out by the accountable body.

The project should have vision, but not try to achieve absolutely everything it thinks it is remitted to do. The overall targets, such as rolling out equipment into a community and running a web portal are tough enough. The Manchester project should have gone for simpler message in marketing the project. Potential WUC participants got confused by the range of technology available to them, either in the form of set top boxes, recycled pcs, new pcs, and the cost associated with each.

The Blackburn project manager said that the project needs good technical support and technically capable staff that can deal with ICT related problems. The project also needs staff to have experience of working with a local community. Most importantly, the project must have a clear way forward for obtaining revenue funding that is tied in some way to the capital funding.

The project should not have assumed that the set up of the ISP in the area was easy, as it proved otherwise with the saga of NTL. Another factor was people with telephone lines, but call barred on outgoing calls. The project manager also warned not to underestimate the difficulties of working with the community and some people who look to circumvent the project’s aims. Nothing ever runs to clockwork in a community ICT project. The project manager also said it is good to keep a sense of humour.

The Suffolk project manager felt that the project team should have time to settle into the job after being recruited in the early stages. It is very stressful for new staff to have to meet tight deadlines as soon as they are in post and still finding their feet. The team should also have enough time to help develop the project plan, instead of being handed the project plan after the work has already started. Project staff need good technical skills on databases, the ISP, server configuration and running the community portal. A degree of marketing skill must be available to the team, as well as good all-round management skills.

The Brampton project manager said the WUC project has to do lots of work on marketing the scheme and getting the community engaged in the early stages, so that some ‘vociferous’ members of the community get behind the project. Public meetings are

useful and can get people interested, but can also raise expectations too quickly. Early development of a good community website is to be recommended.

The Alston project manager said that the WUC project staff should take the time to plan things out and not be thrown off course by the demands of suppliers or individuals in the community. It is also important to be clear about what the suppliers are under contract to supply.

Generally, everything takes longer than anticipated and the project should not try to do everything. Project staff should be careful not to enter into 'partnership' arrangements with suppliers when writing bid applications because the suppliers will then try to hold the project to the partnership agreement. If at all possible, the project should not give pcs to people in the community without them having some form of training beforehand.

The Newham project manager said that although the project is still in its pre-launch phase, it is important to manage community expectations and those of some of the key players (including DfES). Ideally the project would have launched by now, but it proves that there is no perfect model for project planning – real life issues always intervene.

The Liverpool project manager said that the focus should be on planning before trying to implement the project and not get people in the community too hooked on the technology and what it apparently offers. The project needs to have SMART objectives and prepared to make necessary changes.

The project should not consider using recycled pcs and must not underestimate the amount of paperwork involved. The project staff must also keep a realistic perspective on what the project is likely to achieve.

(ii) Recommendations to DfES – Meeting Programme Objectives

The Alston project manager said the DfES should look at how it is evaluating the programme objectives again. The evaluators have been vague and not making things clear about their comparator studies. The project manager feels that DfES is unlikely to get the 'qualitative' measures it hoped from the evaluation. He would also have liked the DfES to have ring-fenced the funding for the community portal development. Across the various pilots, a lot of money has been committed, but the he is unsure about the longer-term benefits.

The Suffolk project manager said the DfES must be sure that the local agencies in partnership with DfES have understood and contributed to the project plan and are 'signed up' to it. The DfES should also insist that there is sufficient revenue in place to support their capital programme and a higher risk technology solution such as wireless should have been adopted across Framlingham and District and not dial-up.

The Newham project manager said the project has had to deal with a number of issues on procurement and technology compounded by the need to address a wide range of legal

issues too and might have expected more support from DfES at a national level freeing up the project to make progress. The project has become too dependent on key staff to run it, but that reflects the nature of the revenue funding secured because the DfES contribution is a capital grant.

The Brampton project manager said the DfES never made it clear about their programme objectives in the early stages. This led the project staff to feel they were working in a bit a vacuum and that the early focus of the project was the roll-out of the equipment and not the 'benefits'. The DfES had a 'watchdog' role and more of an involved role would have allowed the DfES to direct it. However, the DfES has been excellent in trying to ensure that the project works by being open to requests for additional funding when problems arose.

The Liverpool project manager said that the DfES should have followed the core principles of project management in implementing the WUC initiative to ensure there was a 'shared vision' across all WUC projects. The DfES should have set out its objectives, checked they were achievable and put in place quality controls.

The Manchester project manager said that DfES should consider offering a single source of funding at the strategic level. The WUC project staff have to 'cobble together' funding streams and there is little or no co-ordination of funding nationally and locally across a number of funding pots. The private sector has not been properly engaged and they need to be shown that the WUC project can deliver a number of services in the community.

The Blackburn project manager said the DfES have been very flexible in their approach to providing extra funding and should carry this on with other initiatives and programmes. The DfES should be setting out its future strategy and how the projects might dovetail with the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and Local Strategic Partnerships. It is hard to get the capital investment to replicate the WUC model across Blackburn, yet that kind of organic expansion is what is required – otherwise WUC is just an 'experiment'.

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