

Halcyon Consultants

Wired up Communities Programme

2000 – 2003



**Final Report to the
Department for Education
and Skills**

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Introduction

This report summarises the Wired up Communities (WuC) programme that the DfES ran from September 2000 until March 2003. The WuC programme was funded with £10m from the Capital Modernisation Fund.

The report sets out to describe the context, key landmarks and learning points from the programme, and includes some outputs from the work undertaken by Halcyon Consultants in support of the programme in the period August 2000 until November 2003.

The contribution of the individuals and groups in the seven communities that formed the WuC programme, and the many advisors to them, including officials from the Department for Education and Skills, and academic, private and third sector workers, is freely acknowledged.

Summary

The WuC programme came at a time of intense activity to identify and deal with the issues of social exclusion. Set up to challenge the rhetoric of the inclusive information society, its purpose was to test the transformational outcomes of supported and largely free access to the Internet in deprived neighbourhoods.

The Department of Education and Skills, tasked by the Treasury with piloting wired up communities, set an ambitious programme that sought to harness local talents and actions. It ensured that the selected pilot projects were fully supported by its own staff and outside consultants, and that they were properly funded to meet emerging situations – whilst unusually for a government department maintaining a hands off approach.

An range of objectives were set by both the DfES and the projects themselves, and throughout the programme monitoring, feedback, research and current awareness were set at a premium.

Government policy advanced during the lifetime of the programme, and the pilot projects evolved in the light of this and local circumstances. The model for them was tested in different managerial contexts. Not all projects found the technical, motivational and forward planning implications easy, and each provided a test bed that has been recorded in a web based practitioners toolkit that serves as a resource for those that follow.

The costs and effort associated with the pilots means that they are not the forerunners of a national programme – to a large extent market forces are driving the move towards universal access for all those that want it. What the programme has done is begin to demonstrate the efforts needed to promote an inclusive network society, and as such they will have made a difference locally and to the national agenda.

Background

WuC Programme scope

News of the WuC programme emerged in the summer of 2000 from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE, subsequently renamed DfES) as a Capital Modernisation Fund initiative of the Treasury. The Chancellor, Gordon Brown, formally launched it on 11th October 2000 at the UK Internet Summit on the premise that a computer and a range of online services and online learning opportunities was on offer to all those who wanted it. The WuC programme would target people in deprived neighbourhoods and reach up to 12 000 residents across as many as ten pilot areas, although this was reduced to seven by March 2001.

The WuC programme was constructed as a test bed to ‘see how and what’ and the projects were pilots with licence to experiment. The expectation was that this experimental nature might give rise to some degree of failure by some of the pilot projects in meeting some WuC programme objectives.

Nevertheless, by ‘testing the rhetoric’, DfES hoped to provide a showcase for the evidential base of the transformational effect of ICTs on some of the most disadvantaged communities and their ‘hard to reach’ residents. By ‘saturating’ take-up in concentrated localities it hoped to make a significant difference to building capacity and creating some progression routes to education and employment. This included examining the role of parents in support of their child’s learning with the introduction of the school curriculum online.

DfES expected that the private sector would use the WuC programme to demonstrate the ‘commercial proposition’ of working in partnership with a major government department to create a number of wired up communities – a laudable aim given the belief that the test-bed pilots might pave the way for some form of national roll-out. The private sector could buy in by cross subsidising the pilot projects and then benefit from future large scale contracts, although this might not necessarily be in harmony with the community development approach taken by the projects and DfES’s aim that the projects enjoy a large degree of autonomy.

It was considered that innovative thinking, a variety of local circumstances and a reliance on existing community capacity were all critical to the success of the programme. It was important to understand relative costs and to reveal measurable outcomes.

Early stages

From the date of the announcement in October 2000, it was important for DfES to move quickly to consolidate thinking around the programme methodology to provide the framework for the formal research programme. At the same time, DfES was looking to set up two preliminary pilots after sifting through the applications received via the Government Office in every region in England. It set a timetable that would see competitive tenders received at the end of November 2000, with up to eight additional contracts running from early 2001 until March 2002 – in retrospect, an over ambitious target but clearly driven by the need to kick-start activity and yield some early feedback on the viability of the WuC programme.

With projects likely to cost around £1 million each, DfES needed to ensure that it could evidence a satisfactory audit trail and so ‘accountable bodies’ became the recipients, under contract, of DfES capital grants.

For the duration of the WuC programme, DfES aimed to provide arms length support to individual projects via the Wired up Communities and it’s appointed consultants. Halcyon Consultants was awarded the contract to provide project development, while technical consultancy (including a cost evaluation of projected pilot projects plans) was separated out. In the event, the technical support consultancy was not used directly for the individual projects and is therefore not reported on here.

Preliminary modelling

Halcyon Consultants was invited to provide project management support to the first two pilots. Halcyon’s proposals included the creation of a project methodology that took into account two linked strands. First, the preparation required to bring technology to low-income neighbourhoods, with the involvement of local people, public agencies and the private sector. Second, a series of actions that would meet DfES objectives and act as a template for further pilots.

Initially, Halcyon Consultants spent time establishing its model in the first pilot in Kensington, Liverpool. A policy level decision had already been taken to use recycled computers supplied via the national Computers Within Reach scheme. Halcyon negotiated a new contract with a supplier and the free recycled PCs were eagerly taken up by local residents in the L7 postcode area, although in other parts of the city, in particular L6, they had to pay a £60 charge under the Computers Within Reach scheme.

Around September 2000, Halcyon set about establishing another pilot in Framlingham Suffolk, work that continued through to the middle of 2001. Both of these projects were supported in this way in order to learn early lessons, and in effect ensure 'quick wins'. The Kensington project succeeded in its delivery of 2000 recycled PCs by Spring 2001, but the Suffolk project took longer to negotiate into being and this finally came on stream in October 2001, broadly using the model established in Liverpool but amended to local conditions.

In late 2000, DfES organised tenders through the issue of invitations to 30 projects pre-selected by Government Offices. A cross-departmental Project Board had been established, and after internal and external review, five more pilots were agreed in early 2001 – making with the Suffolk project six 'second stage' projects in all.

Support for projects

Projects continued to be supported throughout this time and on into the delivery phases by other private sector consultants such as HOP Associates (Alston Cyber Moor), Clicks and Links (Eastserve) and IS Communications (Blackburn East). These acted variously in planning, bid writing, managerial and research capacities. Projects also developed their own partnerships.

DfES itself established a programme of management and support throughout the programme in the following ways:

- Negotiations with private sector suppliers - for an intelligent portal and a generic WuC ISP, for example
- An active role for DfES staff on pilot project management groups
- Special funding – for example for special needs equipment.

DfES also funded Halcyon Consultants to provide general consultancy support on project planning and development, funding and troubleshooting in the following ways:

- Four major project conferences- see the website www.thewiredupcommunity.org.uk
- A series of project focus groups and seminars
- A monthly email newsletter
- Three rounds of interviews with WuC project managers
- Development of the Wired up Communities Practitioner's Toolkit www.intelligentcommunities.org.uk

Project Objectives

DfES Objectives

The overall objective of the WuC programme

“...to assess how individual access to the Internet can transform opportunities for people living in the most disadvantaged communities by developing new ways of using education, work and leisure services”

was examined in the context of the following key determinants:

- **impact** - the impact of new technologies on different types of community
- **integration** - how best to complement existing programmes in the most disadvantaged communities
- **technology** - the most appropriate technological approaches
- **public private sector partnerships** - how best to involve and work with the private sector
- **services** - what facilities, services and support should be offered to the communities
- **sustainability** - ensuring communities take up the technologies as their own and foster long-term development.

Moving goal posts

As a major government department, the DfES is subject to policy variations and Ministerial reshuffles and the original six DfES aims were augmented by a new focus on social cohesion and an emphasis on ‘home-school links’ (after the introduction of £5m further funding for the creation of e-learning foundations and technology for schools in the chosen WuC areas). These moving goal posts caused some difficulties for programme managers and those interpreting the scope and purpose of the projects – especially the researchers from the Policy Resource Institute at Leeds Metropolitan University.

DfES was particularly interested in projects that use ICT to:

- Test the accessibility and usability of government resources, especially in relation to employment and education
- Help people find work
- Encourage lifelong learning
- Deliver government and community information and services in innovative ways
- Support the work of government programmes (e.g. Employment Zones, New Deal for Communities, Sure Start, Education Action Zones, Job Action Teams)
- Encourage bottom-up community regeneration
- Improve community cohesion.

Evaluation

The Policy Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University was selected to carry out a research evaluation. It characterised the projects as being about **access**, **education** (learning), **work**, and **social cohesion** and drew up a table that showed the timescale against which these might impact:

Access	Immediate
Learning	Short term intermediate
Employment prospects	Medium term intermediate
Social cohesion	Ultimate

Assessing the WuC Bids - the projects' views

The pilot projects submitted their final bids to DfES for approval, having had the opportunity to present some initial drafts. In the case of those submitted by Liverpool and Suffolk, bids were prepared with help from Halcyon Consultants. Blackburn East was assisted by IS Communications, Eastserve used Clicks and Links and Newham Carpenters Estate had Newham.net. Alston CyberMoor had the support of Voluntary Action Cumbria, while Brampton Pit2Net had Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. The following analysis of the submitted bids reveals the projects' own interpretation of their priorities.

Pit2Net (now Com2Net)

Objective: improving skills, employability and job prospects to unlock the energies of the local people themselves and let them determine the extent to which being online improves life in their community, and test key elements of the Rotherham Council's strategy to tackle social exclusion and promote neighbourhood renewal.

Targets: A whole community of about 1500 households.

How: through community groups, training through an enterprise company, support from the Council.

What: Set top box, re-purposed content from Granada Learning.

Eastserve

Objective: provision of a comprehensive service of access and supported learning to develop community consultation and participation, capacity within the community and voluntary sector, ICT skill levels, employment and economic inactivity, the development of a Learning Culture throughout a resident's lifetime, locally focussed content, and to underpin the development and delivery of UK Online Centres and improved delivery of public services.

Targets: 4500 homes in the NDC area.

How: structured partnerships involving residents and volunteers, a community mentor network and community based online centres.
What: An 'Internet access device' of choice (including re-cycled computers) with a web portal accessed through wireless broadband and ADSL.

Alston CyberMoor

Objective: public access places, test and deliver Government and community information and services in innovative ways especially in relation to employment and education, support the work of national and European programmes (SRB, Objective 2, LEADER+ Programme, Rural Development Programme) and encourage bottom-up community regeneration and community cohesion.

Targets: 1000 homes and businesses and community buildings

How: Making local people aware of what the Internet can offer – public services, jobs information, local community news and activities, provide accessible training in IT and other subjects, and bringing jobs into the area through teleworking. Through 70 community IT amateurs, community groups, online learning materials (PLATO).

What: Satellite and ADSL network to new PCS and a web portal for services.

Suffolk Online

Objective: reduction in rural isolation and exclusion, economic strengthening, promotion of self-help and lifelong learning, testing e-government services, school-home links, support for childcare.

Targets: People (in one third of 4500 households) who want to work or learn, or overcome barriers to ICT, who volunteer or have children at home, businesses, parish councils and community groups.

How: public access points, 50 champions, using local training providers, establishment of Community Development Trust.

What: new and recycled PCs on dial-up access, prototype wireless village, web portal and ISP.

Carpenters Connect

Objective: to demonstrate how individual access to the Internet can transform opportunities for people living on the Carpenters Estate by supporting new ways of accessing education, work, leisure and other services.

Targets: Carpenters Estate and its multi-cultural population.

How: via connections, content and services – online learning materials (including PLATO) and digital TV, working through tenants organisation, college and other partners (including private sector), LearnDirect training.

What: CAT 5 and ADSL cabling to Internet and local extranet, and provision of PC / TV/ video services.

Kensington Wired up Community

Objective: to contribute to the ICT strategy that would underpin the delivery of the 10-year NDC programme – crime and safety, housing, employment and enterprise, learning and health.

Targets: 2000 household in the L7 area of Liverpool and people who wish to improve their employability prospects; achieve a degree of educational attainment; or contribute to the regeneration of their local community, and people wanting to improve their self-confidence or basic skills levels and in general, not feel excluded by the technology.

How: 5 public access points, local training provision, network of 50 champions and a user group.

What: Recycled PCs and dial-up access, and a web portal.

BeOnline

Objective: Enhancing school home links and supporting online pupil learning from home, building a culture of lifelong learning, piloting and develop electronic service delivery, helping people into employment, and most importantly, enhancing local social capital by using new technology to strengthen and extend existing social networks.

Targets: All in geographic area.

How: Through a community web site, online curriculum material, working with schools and community and service partners, and a Council-lead training programme.

What: Dial-up PC (re-cycled through CWR), web portal.

Comment

Overall and between the projects a range of objectives were to be tested. In effect though, all were testing the future – what would it be like, and how would people behave if all that wanted to be were online and able to make use of networked services? The emphasis was on themes compatible with the agenda being set for neighbourhood renewal, but with a slant towards both learning and social development.

Putting WuC into Context

The WuC programme needs to be seen in context.

Why is ICT important?

Its impact maybe arguable, but ICT is here to stay and people need to know what to make of it. The importance of familiarity with ICT is threefold.

First, there is the belief that exclusion and poverty should not be reinforced by lack of access to and knowledge of something new and important that has the potential transform social and economic behaviour. This is coupled with a view that the very newness of the technology means that everyone has an equal opportunity to learn, unfettered by previous experiences.

Second, there is a view that the 'network society' offers a means of building the strength of communities and overcoming isolation – both of individual and groups. From the inception of Freenets in the USA, via the creation of telecottages to the development of the community networking movement in the UK, there had been a sustained debate and experimentation on access, skills and content.

Third, and this has emerged more recently, is the recognition that those who most need access to support services are those who are most likely not to have the means to do so – especially if those services are available online.

Strategies and Policies for inclusion

The report of Policy Action Team 15 and the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal sought to deal with the 'digital divide'. Within this, DfES emphasised lifelong learning and oversaw the creation of the UK online centres programme and Computers Within Reach.

The Social Exclusion Unit aimed to develop joined up solutions to exclusion, and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit developed programmes including New Deal for Communities that targeted low-income neighbourhoods. Thus it was that WuC emerged at a time of multiple interventions on an area wide basis and during a time of systemic change in education, local government, community planning and so on. A number of issues have proved to be of primary importance:

- Community engagement
- Partnership development
- Involvement of minority communities

- Long term strategic planning
- The skills needed for regeneration
- Developing and measuring multiple outcomes.

Questions about new forms of delivery have surrounded the formation of Local Strategic Partnerships and the relationships between New Deals and local authorities ¹.

None of this paints a picture of a stable environment into which to place a short timescale and innovative project that had an apparently simple objective – wire up some disadvantaged communities.

The Internet

As it progressed, the WuC programme was increasingly framed by a government Internet access policy ² to ensure that all those who wanted it could access the Internet by 2005, and by its then target for e-government services in the same year. The government was also committed to an Internet access strategy as set out in the 2002 UK online Annual Report ³. The strategy focuses on encouraging take-up amongst ‘digitally divided’ groups by overcoming four key barriers to Internet use:

Motivation – encouraging people to want to use the Internet by increasing awareness about the benefits of online services, where they can be accessed and sources of support.

Access – investing in a network of public Internet access points for those who cannot afford or do not have home or work Internet connections and promoting access via a variety of different channels.

Skills – embedding ICT skills in schools, further and higher education, and lifelong learning.

Trust – advising citizens about safe Internet use and supporting a light-touch, flexible regulatory framework.

UK online

The UK online campaign aims to:

- Draw together the individual government projects that embrace the new digital communication technologies available, to help make the UK a leading knowledge economy
- Present government services in a consumer-focused way
- Change people's attitudes towards the internet, so that people use the Internet more in their everyday lives, in their business transactions and in their dealings with local and national government

¹ New Deal for Communities: the national evaluation Annual Report 2002/03. NRU Research Report 7, October 2003

² <http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk>

³ <http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/Resources/AnnualReport2002/fs/en>

- The UK online initiative aims to benefit the entire population, both those people who are not yet connected and those already online.

For those who do not currently use the Internet, UK online aims to help people:

- Learn where and how to gain access
- Learn how to use a PC or the Internet
- Get help with using technology
- Find out about what's available online
- Recognise that the Internet has something to offer them.

The major delivery agent of this is the network of UK online centres. The original vision for these was based to some extent on the view that people need a variety of locations and facilities where they feel comfortable in which to engage in learning, and that although there are barriers to their use, ICTs do offer a new chance to develop the confidence to take on a learning challenge.

Government services

The policy actions resulting from the 2002 e-government strategy⁴ remain the dominant driver. This in itself may conflict between the desire to increase democratic participation, inclusiveness or indeed the concept of the online community as a force for community regeneration, if it creates a new gap between those who do and those who do not access services online.

The Office of the E-Envoy in 2002/3 has suggested that online centres and libraries are natural places for people to go to access e-government, and a range of pilot studies are now testing out this premise. However, aside from the ease of home access to ICT, ICT will not necessarily of itself improve the way information and services are offered – and the standards driven climate makes it more difficult to ‘get right’.

eLearning

eLearning has been another driver that has developed through the period of the WuC programme. For adults there is the opportunity to learn remotely, and for families the opportunity to engage in the school curriculum at home. The establishment of the eLearning Foundation and its inception in the WuC project areas had the potential to link the strands of policy development at local level⁵.

⁴ see <http://www.localgov.gov.uk/>

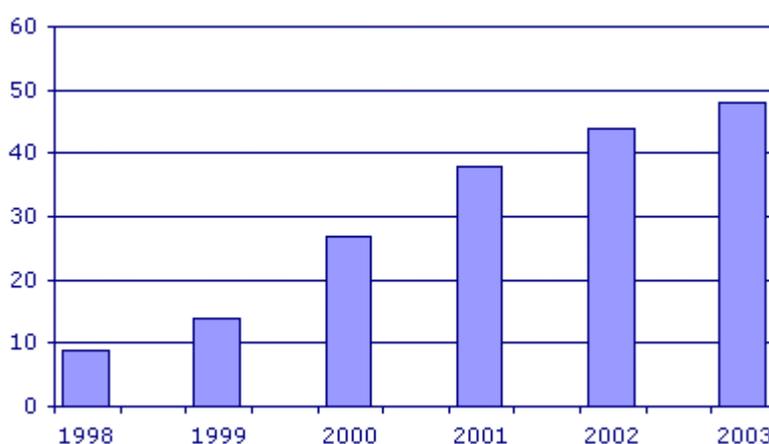
⁵ <http://www.elearningfoundation.org.uk/default.cfm?fuseaction=contacts.wupintro>

Skills for Life

Another policy strand has been the recognition of the need for improvements in adult basic skills, and the development of a strategy to deal with this. This has grown in importance though it appears not to have been fully recognised as an essential element at the inception of the WuC programme. ICT skills are both part of the need, and a new means of overcoming literacy, numeracy and language skills deficiencies.

Policy in action: the take-up of ICT

During the period of the programme, ownership of PCs and access to the Internet has grown. Arguably, the power of advertising and the growth-cycle of new products have led to an inevitable rise of ICT use as demonstrated by the table below.



% adults that have used the Internet (in the three months prior to interview)
2000 to 2003

By July 2003, 56 per cent of adults in Britain had used the Internet in the three months prior to interview ⁶. Sixty-one per cent of adults in Britain had used the Internet at some time. Sixty-one per cent of UK homes have a PC and fifty per cent of UK homes have Internet access⁷. However, in areas of high deprivation (six per cent of adult population) only forty-seven per cent of households have a PC and only thirty-seven per cent have Internet access. Unpublished research suggests that Internet use in the 2000 most deprived wards has risen more slowly than elsewhere and that the proportion of 'digitally excluded' resident in those wards is rising.

Over the three year timeframe of Wired up Communities from the summer of 2000, it is apparent that that PC ownership and Internet

⁶ Individuals accessing the Internet – National Statistics Omnibus Survey
Access to Internet from Home – Source - Family Expenditure Survey (April 1998 to March 2001); Expenditure and Food Survey (April 2001 onwards)

⁷ Oftel October 27th 2003 http://www.oftel.gov.uk/whats_new/publications.htm

access are now understood to be commonplace, with broadband the latest 'must-have'. This made the job of 'selling' the concept of wired up communities easier as time passed, aided largely by the effectiveness of commercial PC marketing. This has led to PCs being the overwhelming majority choice rather than other devices (as evidenced in Manchester where residents had a choice of a new or recycled PC, a set top box or a network served computer).

Nevertheless, there is evidence that for some, PC use and the Internet is just not for them, although again there is evidence that where UK online centres have been set up, the figures for this diminish – suggesting that an interventionist approach to support people in accessing ICT has some tangible impact.

Testing the Outcomes

Programme research

The overall research evaluation was carried out by Leeds Metropolitan University. Overall the aim was to assess the impact of the WuC programme and identify which approaches work best. It took considerable effort to define the scope for the research, particularly when the WuC programme was still unfolding. One of the issues was always the way in which impact could be determined over the timescale of the programme. In the event the problem was to match the research contract timetable with the actual implementation of the projects. Because of the planned time for the programme to be rolled out, DfES never intended to carry out an extended longitudinal research exercise, although the research plan included a baseline and follow-up survey nine months later, plus comparisons with other non-WuC areas. This has meant that there was not time within the programme to determine any longer term impacts or outcomes, certainly in terms of transformational effects.

Monitoring data

Several other methods were planned for collecting data. Each project submitted monthly reports to DfES that conformed to their contract arrangements. These were used in part to report to the WuC Board and monitor emerging issues, and they did cover the major themes – community involvement, links with other initiatives, content development and so on.

DfES also considered and spent some time attempting to develop an online portal that would be used by all projects and would be used as a mine of data about project recipients' Internet use. In the end this was not found to be practicable on a number of levels (particularly as the projects developed their own sense of identity through their community portals), and was abandoned.

Other methods

Five other methods were used to assist the determination of outcomes from the projects.

- WuC conferences
- WuC Project Manager interviews
- Focus groups and seminars
- Project activities
- Projects' own research.

WuC conferences

Organised primarily by Research and Innovation Services under the Halcyon contract with DfES, four conferences were held that had the aim of sharing progress, problems and practice amongst the WuC projects, and in the fourth one in January 2003, to share this to a larger audience. They were successful in dealing with emerging themes. They included feedback from the manager interviews carried out by Halcyon Consultants. Full details of the conferences are held on web pages at <http://www.thewiredupcommunity.org.uk/>.

Project Manager interviews

Although the formal LMU research was covering a good deal of ground, a series of three project manager interviews were carried and reports published in October 2001, May 2002 and September 2003.

These concentrated on the DfES objectives and looked at the issues and progress over time from the managers' viewpoints. The project manager interviews were particularly useful for obtaining a snapshot across all seven projects on progress and some commonality on issues faced. In response, Halcyon was able to offer project development consultancy support to address some of these – in particular, problems with private sector suppliers and the need to work on the 'business case' in the development of sustainability strategies.

The last report brings the state of the projects up to date until August 2003, and includes additional information about planned developments, sustainability and financial viability. Copies of the reports are on the research section of the Practitioner's Toolkit.

Focus groups and seminars

These concentrated in the main on the issues of content development for the WuC portals and sustainability, two of the DfES objectives that were to be tested. A final seminar looked at outcomes as perceived by project staff and stakeholders.

Project activities

Part of the programme design was to initiate two pilots with full support from Halcyon Consultants and DfES specifically to deliver meaningful information about DfES objectives and the general WuC programme. The two pilots in Liverpool and Suffolk carried out a number of activities to meet this need.

Both recruited and worked with project champions in order to engage with the community. In the first case an extranet was set up to improve communication and sharing, and local people in a workshop themselves identified a number of ICT based community-focussed activities, then developed two of them with private and academic sector help.

In the second case, the champions developed into a successful volunteer team that took on many tasks, including continuing to produce web content. They did not however develop ICT based community projects that would have acted as a focus for the project. In Newham, ICT activities based on media production were always and continue to be built into the project, engaging residents although arguably the relationship between making films and using other network services may not have been not a clear one for residents.

Both projects established special groups of partners – called theme groups in Suffolk. These covered **funding for sustainability** (in Suffolk), involvement of and support to the private sector (**business development**), **e-government**, and **training and learning** (including home-school links that became subsumed into the work of the e-learning foundation). They were seen as a way of partnership building over a fixed timescale, and as a way of both setting out what could be achieved with the project in place, and suggesting a model that others could follow.

In both cases they had limited initial success, and the e-government group in Suffolk was the foundation of experimental e-democracy work by the Hansard Society. The funding group failed to materialise effectively in Suffolk despite the ostensible support of a number of partners, and arguably lead to the late attention paid to sustainability by the project.

No other projects formally organised such groups in such a way that issues and outcomes could be made overt. Nevertheless they did work with volunteers and local agencies usually within the context of existing organisations and partnerships.

[Projects' own research](#)

Most of the projects had carried out community consultations, and analysed existing research before submitting their bids for funding, and baseline data was largely available where other funded interventions were in place. Some proposed to carry out further evaluative research as they progressed. Many use panels of residents to provide feedback.

Evaluation and impacts

LMU research

The final report was completed in November 2002, and showed that some people did not use the Internet despite the projects, not everyone was trained, and many recipients used their computer for supporting schoolwork. Impacts on employment prospects and social cohesion were not significant. The impact of broadband was not measurable within the timeframe. Despite the fact the 'saturation' was not usually reached in terms of take-up, more people took up training opportunities and used the Internet than might otherwise have been the case. The research yielded useful appendices on good practice, and a critical case study (once agreed locally) of each project. The report and appendices can be downloaded from <http://www.intelligentcommunities.org.uk/research/>.

Seminar workshop

At the final seminar in September 2003, staff from four of the pilots summarised outcomes from the projects. It was proposed that it takes time to see any measurable effects, and as there had not been recent programme or longitudinal research, projects were asked to brainstorm the sort of outcomes that they perceived in their communities. These are in part anecdotal and variable across communities, but they do indicate those things that were researched, noticed by or impacted on project staff and residents.

Personal impacts – improved self-confidence and capability, jobs and better skills, improved involvement and engagement, entry into further learning, and families keeping in touch.

Community impact – take up of education and learning opportunities; improved cohesion through communication and cross-generational links; increased capacity through people taking on and developing the model, and increased involvement in consultation processes.

Organisational impact – projects were stimulation to Council thinking and a link to new strategies through a bottom up approach and they integrated with community and interest groups. There was poor recognition by some organisations – Councils, LSC, and schools to some extent. This impacted for example on lack of funding support, development of basic skills provision and online curriculum support. Some schools have played a new role in family learning and access.

Positive outcomes – better communication; lessening of fear of ICT, allowance of self education at ones' own pace and improving confidence; learning the value of the Internet and how to use it for 'life transactions' including shopping and bill paying.

Negative outcomes - unrealistic expectations of what broadband can deliver (is it over-hyped?); people being turned off by the technology and not using it, and the possible creation of a further digital divide between those that embrace it and those who can't, won't, or simply did not.

Unforeseen outcomes – reluctance by residents to take up the offer through suspicion or wanting more 'free' services, and the need for more human resource to sell the benefits and engage residents; poor quality from suppliers and the difficulties in regaining residents' trust imposed on projects after major supplier failures; and the nature of a 'free' offer being undervalued by people.

Project's Own Research

Alston CyberMoor

As of early December 2003, research is currently underway by HOP Associates to evaluate the project for eventual publication in early 2004. It is using data from LMU (about which it has a number of questions as to its overall validity), data collected as part of the project, and some new data. In an interim report in August 2003 a number of points emerged:

- There is a correlation between the WuCs that used new PCs and those that had the highest uptake of Internet use.
- Other WuCs where training was a requirement of receiving the equipment did not fare so well in terms of use of the equipment. So perhaps the approach of encouraging rather insisting on training is a better approach, particularly amongst communities where there has historically been a low uptake of training courses.
- People used the internet more, and in particular to access information on events, government services, for children's learning, and for sending information to school
- The project has had a positive economic impact in terms of its purchasing activity in the local community, in addition to the 8 jobs created within the project. Some 44 people can be identified as having to a greater or lesser extent their employment supported by the CyberMoor project
- Three businesses have been identified that have relocated into the area, including two artists working in new media, where the availability of broadband was an important factor

- Seven volunteers on the project can be identified who have subsequently moved into employment.

The final report is planned to cover

- How households and household members are now using their computers and the Internet
- What Internet-enabled activities household members are engaging in now and what they would like / expect to be engaging in over the next 12 months
- What activity there is in creating community and family websites?
- How useful CyberMoor web site is proving to be? How do local people value it?
- How the Internet is being used to support household economies – teleworking, supplementary employment, job search, etc.?
- What, if any impact the Internet is having on travel patterns?

HOP Associates plan to use forms of questioning consistent with aspects of the LMU surveys, (in effect to provide a two year longitudinal research), analyse community engagement through unstructured and anecdotal responses, launch a survey of business premises, and explore the data available through the schools and, if appropriate, launch a survey exploring increased IT and internet awareness amongst schoolchildren.

All databases – current and new - (anonymised and protected as necessary) should be available online to allow segmented data searches and analyses to be carried out, for example by age, gender, role and status.

BeOnline

Staff in Blackburn carried out a survey of all recipients during November 2002 and February 2003. Replies were received from 1211 people, or 50.45% of the total number of members of the WuC scheme. There were some issues concerning the number of unanswered questions, people's understanding of the questions and the routing of them that make the interpretation of the results problematic. Nevertheless, project staff drew the following conclusions (amended):

Overall the survey provided some interesting insights into how the project has progressed and the impact that it has had. On the plus side, there is a high incidence of PC usage even in those cases where households claimed not to be using the Internet. The various forms of PC usage also showed a strong bias toward education of all kinds, ranging from user purchased preschool software through to schoolwork and on to University and LearnDirect courses. **The WUC PCs are so frequently used for a variety of applications that the**

project truly seems to have embedded itself within the community.

On the negative side, there are two main issues. The first of these is that many respondents found that they had technical problems and claimed that calls to the help desk had left these unresolved. *It appears that if people's problems are not resolved in the initial stages, they quickly lose interest and thus cease to benefit.* For any future project the area of technical help/support will need restructuring.

The second issue seems to be that there is still a core of people who do not use the PC at all, and some 32% of respondents said they no longer use the Internet. It may be that the proliferation of offers available simply confuses or discourages those who have become used to a free service, so that they disconnect once the free trial is over. It may be that all the training/support in the world will never change this, and cost appears as a major factor in the lack of Internet use. Whilst there may be an assumed level of "apathy" toward the project within the community, the data available does not highlight this as a major issue, and indeed **the prospects for the project's continuity seem positive if it can be handed over to community activists to maintain.**

If we look at the five overall objectives for the project, then we can see that some of these objectives were met whilst others proved more difficult.

Enhancing School/Home links and supporting online pupil learning from home

There has certainly been a positive benefit to schoolchildren from the WUC project and this has probably been one of the major successes of the project.

Building a culture of life long learning

It would be imprudent to argue that this objective has been completely achieved and maybe it was unrealistic in such a short timescale. What can be said is that the survey indicates that a significant number of users have taken advantage of the WUC project to explore educational opportunities that previously they might have been excluded from.

Working with local service providers to pilot and develop electronic service delivery

By providing a gateway the BeOnline web site has facilitated the ability of its members to avail themselves of electronic provision of services where available. This aspect of the project is still developing particularly in relation to the electronic provision of council services.

Providing information and support to help people into employment

This objective has been the most difficult to meet due to the previously mentioned reluctance on behalf of the community members to reveal information that they regard as sensitive. There are however other avenues whereby the BeOnline web site can be used to help people into local employment and these are being explored at the moment.

Strengthening local social capital by using new technology to strengthen and extend existing social networks

This is another difficult objective to measure however anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that the WUC has helped to strengthen existing networks.

Eastserve

Staff at Eastserve carried out an extensive 100-question interview survey with residents who have received a computer or a broadband service. The report on this research will be available in December 2003 on the research pages of Wired up Communities Practitioners Toolkit.

SuffolkOnline

Staff at SOL has carried out a survey of recipients. To date no information has been provided about this.

Carpenters Connect

Data on local research is expected early in 2004.

Practicalities: key learning points

The practicalities of setting up and running a Wired up Communities type project are many and varied, but can be described in terms of the particular stages – each of which is described in fuller detail on the Wired up Communities Practitioner’s Toolkit.

The toolkit was developed to encapsulate the feedback and experience from the WuC projects (via a series of interviews with the project managers, a series of themed workshops/seminars) into a good practice guide.

A number of key learning points on particular issues are noted below:

Project Set up

Prior to setting the project up in terms of physical space and recruitment of staff, there is a pre-planning stage that involves partnership building (the ‘buy-in’), securing funding streams (particularly revenue in support of large capital grants) and ensuring that the project is assimilated into local ICT strategies for community learning or regeneration.

It is important not to overlook the location of the project office (if it is to be accessible to the public) on order to promote its ‘offer’ to the community. The marketing materials that are developed need to be clear and unambiguous, with particular care taken on the use of ‘free’ and how that is defined in relation to a charging policy.

The staff recruited need to have a particular skills set reflecting specialist areas of experience. Community development work using ICTs in deprived communities requires prior experience of community work – especially for targeting the most ‘difficult to reach’ residents and groups.

On the technical side, the project management team needs to be able deal with a range of issues such as technical support of the PCs in the community, community portal software and, for example, wireless networks. It also needs to be able to respond to both those who lack knowledge in the community and hard-nosed commercial interests.

Community engagement

As well as being clear about what is on offer from the project itself in regard to ICT equipment, some work must be undertaken locally with community ICT champions to provide a vision of what a wired up community is, and how it has the potential to promote the ‘network society’ via e-democracy initiatives, access to a range of government

services online and ICT related initiatives that build community capacity and improve social cohesion. Such champions deserve a full range of support within a developed volunteer policy.

In order to avoid rejection of the initiative through the ‘parachuted in’ or ‘not invented here’ argument, the project must build on existing community infrastructure – the local groups, regeneration schemes, co-ordinating committees - and aim to work with and not in place of them.

Learning and training

Linking ICT training with the offer of a PC reinforces the concept of providing ‘progression routes to learning’ – from informal drop-in taster sessions at the local ICT centre through to the accredited courses. However, making ICT training courses a pre-requisite of the ‘offer’ of a free or cost subsidised PC impacts upon the training providers and their capacity to deliver training to a large number of residents keen to get hold of their PC. The timing of the offer of training is critical. At home training is too resource intensive. Providing training as a pre-requisite to being able use the equipment will work if it is timed properly. Training is best provided at a range of locations and circumstances.

Any delays or frustrations over the delivery of the training will also have an adverse knock-on effect on the planned roll out of ICT equipment into the community. The reputation of the project is damaged if the community’s perception is of a project unable to deliver.

Technology

The offer of a recycled PC with a basic 56k modem dial-up is a rudimentary approach to providing access to ICT in deprived communities. Using a recycled PC platform can lead to false economies – with the cost of technical support for older PCs, and replacement parts that are more difficult to source and may be more expensive than newer components.

This is also true of software in that new software packages are heavily discounted and older platforms such as Windows 98 become unsupported and as expensive as the newer software platforms. Also, most new software packages and PC games require a minimum specification not met by an older recycled PC. Educational discounts help, but again these are geared towards newer software packages.

Well supported community broadband initiatives help to address the market failure exacerbated by the slowness in ‘unbundling the loop’

and digitally enabling BT exchanges. The success of the digital TV platform in Newham will only be measured after further research.

Partnerships

Building a partnership with a range of agencies takes time and the project must already be clear about what it is offering and its wider vision on how to create a wired up community. Otherwise, there is confusion on how the project fits locally, and indeed why it should.

If the partnership is predicated upon a large capital grant to put technology infrastructure in place, the project potentially arrives at the partnership table as a player with little or no track record – another reason why an organisation already active in the area with a profile helps to smooth the introduction of the large community ICT project. At the same time, if the project is hosted within an existing organisation, it can take on the baggage associated with it – and in a low-income neighbourhood this can be a critical issue.

In early negotiations, especially bid preparation, a number of agencies, organisations and indeed the private sector will make promises of funding and/or deployed resources such as staff time. This is difficult for the project to enforce at the time of project implementation. Added to this, the project can be held to its side of the bargain on project delivery before the partnership regards it as a viable and worthwhile undertaking. This can lead to project atrophy at the critical time when it needs the nurturing support of other partners. A tripartite partnership needs to be rigorously developed between public and private sector agencies and the community based ICT project, bringing together economic power, regulatory and administrative impact and social capital.

Policy Action Team 17 drew out seven principles for effective joint working in deprived areas that are largely relevant to the experiences of the pilot wired up communities projects:

- Empowerment is essential
- Leadership and commitment are essential
- Prevention is better than cure
- A radical change of public service culture is needed
- All levels of government need to be involved
- Mainstream services are the key: sustainable change cannot be effected through area-based initiatives alone
- Central government should be a facilitator ⁸.

⁸

<http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/publications/reports/html/compendium/17.htm>

The private sector

Ostensibly, a large-scale initiative such as Wired up Communities offers the private sector the opportunity to test out innovative products in a controlled environment and receive feedback on usage. The private sector can also develop new markets as well as making a tangible and lasting contribution to deprived communities to help them overcome social exclusion barriers.

However, without the prospect of a full regional or national roll out, the private sector is more likely to treat the ICT initiative as a pet project than a truly viable business proposition.

There are also latent fears that large private sector providers operate to their own commercial agenda rather than the wider social agenda of residents in the deprived community. This is compounded by the fact that the vast majority of residents in the deprived area will have a limited disposable income that reduces the scope for the involvement of private sector providers with products to sell direct to the consumer, online or otherwise.

There are also issues around 'skills transfer' to local residents, especially where the private sector contractor is needed initially to provide all of its expertise and experience while the project staff and volunteers get up to speed.

Nevertheless, businesses can and do benefit from low-risk product and service development as evidenced in a number of the pilot projects, and local firms can and do benefit from the opportunities presented by a better-skilled potential and actual workforce, by benefits of broadband services, and by contracts for supplies and services.

What worked best

The critical success factors are four: taking time to prepare and develop all phases of the project; having leadership and vision shared by employed staff, volunteers and local people; devolving responsibility properly to local managers and the community they serve; and having the project represented physically in the community in buildings and on the street.

The WuC model

The essence of what became known as the WuC model developed over time, but had its inception when Halcyon Consultants was awarded the contract to provide consultancy support to the first two WuC projects from August 2000.

Part of the consultant's brief was to advise DfES as the WuC programme developed, and also operate in a project development support capacity. Discussions focused on the practicalities, which became the framework for the development of a WuC model with the following strands:

- A community portal as the way of providing the project with a local identity and keeping people connected to online sources of (local) information
- A dedicated WuC Internet Service Provider to make e-mail addresses available to residents via the community portal
- Creative digital media technologies to get people interested in the projects and see ICT as a way of adding a new aspect to a hobby – digital photography, community video, online history
- Use of ICT ‘community champions’ as a focus of the project, helping to build the vision of the project as it develops and acting as facilitators and experts
- A positive marketing and publicity strategy to establish some branding and making the offer clear to residents
- Using a high street location and ‘shop’ model to raise the profile of the project locally and to allow drop-in people to try out the ICT equipment
- Online purchases and bank accounts for people in low income areas (this recently became a policy objective)
- Developing a test bed area for government services online given the concentration of people online via the ‘saturation’ of PC roll-out
- E-democracy initiatives via the community portal – online polls, voting
- Specialist staff for the job - community engagement achieved through community networkers in a community development role

- An ICT training suite and other locations to provide formal and informal courses – the latter to hook people in via leisure hobbies or interests and then provide a progression route to further lifelong learning
- Examining the business case for the project as a ‘social enterprise’ - business planning and potential sustainability from undertaking a cost benefit analysis of the core services provided.

Sustainability models

As part of the WuC programme exit strategy from Autumn 2002 onwards it was felt that the seven projects should put forward the case for sustainability. Halcyon Consultants provided the development support to all six phase two projects via its associates, and ran two focus groups on the topic.

One of the issues for sustainability is whether the projects can be replicated elsewhere, or otherwise sustain themselves by selling their skills and knowledge as a resource, or whether they should be mainstreamed. Mainstreaming has been defined as

- Changing policies to deploy resources more effectively in deprived areas
- Redistributing or ‘bending’ resources
- Reshaping services to make them more responsive and accessible to local communities
- Incorporating innovations and lessons from special initiatives into mainstream practice ⁹.

There are many suggested barriers to mainstreaming, including short-termism, issues of flexibility and ownership, culture and community leadership. It has been said that the absence of adequate evaluation means that it is as yet generally unclear what works and why, and it is difficult to persuade mainstream organisations to take on initiatives where there is no proof that they work better than what has been tried in the past.

⁹ New Deal for Communities

The National Evaluation Annual Report 2002/03. Research Report 7. NRU 2003

What next?

If the Wired Up Communities programme is to prove of any value it can only be if the level of expenditure and effort needed to produce worthwhile results stands any chance of being replicated on a national scale.

This is the context in which we have to judge the Government's initiatives, apparently designed to address the availability of the *hardware* for poorer households, *access to infrastructure* where there is no commercial case for it, spreading (not only among the young) the *knowledge and confidence* necessary to make use of electronic communications, and seeking to ensure that there is *content* of some relevance to such users. **Some programmes seem to be designed to make a real difference. Others are evidently a drop in the ocean; they are either pilots which seek to prove that further expenditure is justified, or futile gestures**".¹⁰

Clearly there is not to be any kind of government follow-through. Nevertheless the WuC programme has excited considerable interest nationwide, and there is one question that people will be interested in.

At the time of its inception, neither the Internet nor broadband provision had made the impact currently being seen. Through the concept of 'saturation', the WuC programme was set to model a future where everyone (who wanted to be) was connected and competent to use online networks.

What would that be like? What issues would it raise? How would agencies from government to private sector to community behave in the network society? What would be the impact on individuals, on service delivery, on spatial and virtual communities?

The WuC pilots started to answer these questions, and for some of them at least, the answers were sufficiently positive to ensure that they will be replicated. Elsewhere too, others will use the WuC experience to plan their own versions of managed community networks. They will also see the gaps – for example the proper management of community-focussed content – and take steps to remedy these. They will also further consider that digital exclusion will continue to present a challenge that will not be resolved over the short term.

The people in the wired up communities however will not see their efforts as futile gestures.

¹⁰ Select Committee on Trade and Industry 8th Report
<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200001/cmselect/cmtrdind/66/6602.htm>

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The following people and organisations worked throughout the WuC programme in support of the programme and individual projects:

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