

The Ouseburn Trust (January 2008)

Introduction...

The Ouseburn Trust is a development trust covering the Lower Ouseburn Valley, near Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It has been set up as a charity and aims to secure a sustainable future for the area through operating as a community-owned and led social enterprise, providing services and owning and managing property for the benefit of the community. They were first established in 1996 and the trust has an annual turnover of between £100,000 – 200,000, a staff of 3 and 15 – 20 volunteers at any one time.

Social accounting and audit...

The Ouseburn Trust took part in the Pentagon Partnership project which trialled 5 different performance tools – Social Appraisal (developed by Philip Angier); SAN social accounting and audit; a method developed by Social Enterprise Europe; SROI and LM3. The Ouseburn Trust is currently applying social accounting and audit and are supported through the process by Keith Stamp. The Trust started the project in May 2007 and are currently collecting and collating information based on agreed mission, values, objectives and activities; and identified stakeholders. The Ouseburn Trust initially got involved in social accounting in order to demonstrate their social value, monitor their impact and improve recording systems. An important “spur” was being part of a project which offered support and the Board was won over by the thought that through social accounting and audit they would be more accountable to stakeholders. They also wanted to augment their existing quality standard – Investors in Volunteers; and to look at their economic impact on the area. They are using the Manual and CD (2005), received support as part of the project and have visited Jesmond Swimming Pool who have kept social accounts in the past. They have provided just enough time and resources to carry out social accounting but it has been just added on to the existing work. The Ouseburn Trust will soon start writing up their social accounts.

Benefits and value of social accounting and audit...

The main benefits the Ouseburn Trust wanted to apply social accounting and audit was *“to be able to demonstrate that (the Trust) is publicly accountable to...members and stakeholders”*. They also see it as a way to plan and explain performance and impact while at the same time improving services for the external stakeholders. Speaking personally, the Ouseburn Trust social accountant felt that the process had helped to improve the data collection systems and it had meant that he had a better understanding of the organisation.

Negatives, problems, snags...

By far the major snag in social accounting has been that there has not been enough time to carry out the work. Also it took a bit of persuasion to get the Board to agree that the trust should keep social accounts and they would

have liked access to extra help on specific tasks. They reported that they were not sure *“where to start and what to exclude – the topic is a bit too big and it is hard to take it in bite sized chunks”*. They were pleased to be part of a support programme.

General thoughts on social accounting and audit...

The Ouseburn Trust liked the idea of having social accounting at different levels and would welcome a more prescriptive approach which was widely recognised by funders and contractors. They felt that it is important to get RDAs to recognise social accounting and audit as *“unless you get them on board will only be of internal benefit to the organization that does it”*.

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