



Women's Business Network (North West) Ltd

Social Accounts

1st April 2004 to 31st March 2005

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Women's Business Network (North west) Ltd would like to thank the following:

**Board members
Staff
Sub contractors
Volunteers
Network Co-ordinators
Women in Business
Partners
Customers
ESF: EQUAL
Leonardo da Vinci II
NWDA
PDF Bursary Team**

The social audit panel:

**Alan Kay, CBS Network, Scotland (Panel Chair)
Sundeep Sangha, Business in the Community
Neil Rotheroe, Liverpool John Moores University, Business School**

**Observer
Nicola Millar, Social Economy Manager, Wrexham County Borough Council**

Contents

| | Page |
|--|-------------|
| Social Audit Statement | 3 |
| 1. About WBN | |
| 1.1 Introduction | 4 |
| 1.2 Background | 4 |
| 1.3 Partnerships | 5 |
| 1.4 Financial summary | 5 |
| 1.5 Organisational structure | 6 |
| 2. A process of continuous improvement | |
| 2.1 Social Accounts for the year ended 31 st March 2004 | 8 |
| 2.2 2004 Recommendations | 8 |
| 3. Mission, values and Objectives | |
| 3.1 Mission | 11 |
| 3.2 Values | 11 |
| 3.3 Objectives | 11 |
| 4. Stakeholders | |
| 4.1 Identifying Stakeholders | 12 |
| 4.2 Stakeholder map | 13 |
| 5. Methodology | |
| 5.1 Why we undertake the social accounting process | 14 |
| 5.2 Scope | 14 |
| 5.3 Stakeholder consultation table | 17 |
| 5.4 Exclusions | 18 |
| 5.5 Summary | 18 |
| 6. Performance analysis | |
| 6.1 Values | 19 |
| 6.2 Objective 1 | 23 |
| 6.3 Objective 2 | 34 |
| 6.4 Objective 3 | 39 |
| 6.5 Objective 4 | 42 |
| Internal objectives | |
| 6.6 Objective 1 | 43 |
| 6.7 Objective 2 | 44 |
| 6.8 Objective 3 | 45 |
| 7. Compliance | 46 |
| 8. Recommendations | 47 |
| 9. Dissemination | 48 |
| 10. The next social audit cycle | 48 |
| Appendices | |
| 1. Accelerating Women's Enterprise | 49 |
| 2. Innova SME support | 50 |
| 3. Stakeholders | 51 |
| 4. Example questionnaire analysis | 5 |
| 5. WBN member networks | 5 |
| 6. Women attending events | 5 |
| 7. Awareness raising activity | 5 |
| 8. Directors | 5 |

Insert social audit statement

1. About WBN

1.1 Introduction

Welcome to our fourth set of social accounts, which review activities from 1st April 2004 to the 31st March 2005. WBN has completed annual social accounts since commencement of trading in 2001.

Social accounting is a systematic means of accounting for the social impact of an organisation. It can be compared to the way that financial accounting provides the means to account for an organisation's financial performance. Whilst WBN recognise the importance of measuring our social impact, we acknowledge that the science of social accounting is still a young and emerging discipline.

Producing a set of social accounts enables us to account for our performance against objectives, report on that performance, review the impact Women's Business Network (North West) Limited (WBN) has as an organisation and identify areas for improvement.

Social accounts for the year ended 31st March 2004 were given a clean audit report, the social audit panel took place in January 2005.

All staff members have contributed to the gathering, collating and analysing of information presented in this document, supported by two independent business women, who contributed their time on a voluntary basis.

1.2 Background

WBN is the only regional network of women's business networks in England. A non-profit distributing organisation, WBN is a company limited by guarantee.

Organisational objectives are economic, social and environmental and provide the framework for all activities. We aim to contribute towards business support measures to assist women business owners and women thinking of starting a business in the North West of England. Activities focus on encouraging the development of new, local or sector specific women's business networks and supporting the growth and sustainability of our existing member networks. We deliver activities throughout Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside.

As a membership organisation, WBN adds value to the activities undertaken by our members. We consider ourselves to be a responsive organisation, maintaining our understanding of the economic climate, both regionally and nationally, to ensure that all WBN interventions are complementary.

WBN member networks are independent and range from small networks of c10 women offering each other peer support, sharing experiences and learning from each other, to larger networks, with membership numbers reaching into the 100s, where business to business opportunities feature as much as personal development and learning.

Many of the new, developing networks agree objectives that focus on peer group support and sharing knowledge. Building business strength through the development of skills and the increase in confidence is one of the key successes of our member networks.

WBN aims to encourage women to take the first steps to accessing formal business support structures. Our success would not be possible without the support of our partners. Working closely with business support organisations in the public, private and social economy sectors, we ensure that developmental activities are undertaken where a gap and a need is identified, sharing our experiences and knowledge, providing advice, resource and enthusiasm. WBN does not duplicate existing services, but helps the creation of self-owned, self managed vehicles of support for women in business, which complement existing business support services.

Activities are resourced through a combination of earned income and project delivery. Contracts have been established with a number of different public sector bodies, attracting financial resource from both the UK and the EU. Service delivery aims to achieve impact (which is translated into outputs and outcomes) and which is achieved by means of supporting the regional network and direct activity with the target client group, women in business.

1.3 Partnerships

WBN benefits from membership of the **Accelerating Women's Enterprise (AWE)** Development Partnership (appendix 1), part funded by the European Social Fund, community initiative EQUAL, which supports the delivery of activities between May 2002 and November 2005.

WBN also benefits from a second partnership, with organisations from Austria, Slovenia and the UK, who jointly deliver **Innova SME Support** (appendix 2), supported by the European Community initiative, Leonardo da Vinci II. This project commenced in February 2003 and will finish in February 2006.

Support from the **NWDA** in this social accounting period has enabled WBN to co-ordinate a series of regional network support activities.

The **PDF Bursary fund** made it possible for WBN to invest in developing the capabilities of the organisation as a whole, enabling both staff and Network Co-ordinators to access professional development opportunities.

Working in partnership with **Business Link Cheshire and Warrington**, WBN co-ordinated "Effective Mentoring Skills: Understanding relationships building and communication", a programme specifically designed for Network Co-ordinators.

ADD Photo 1

1.4 Financial summary

Income pie chart

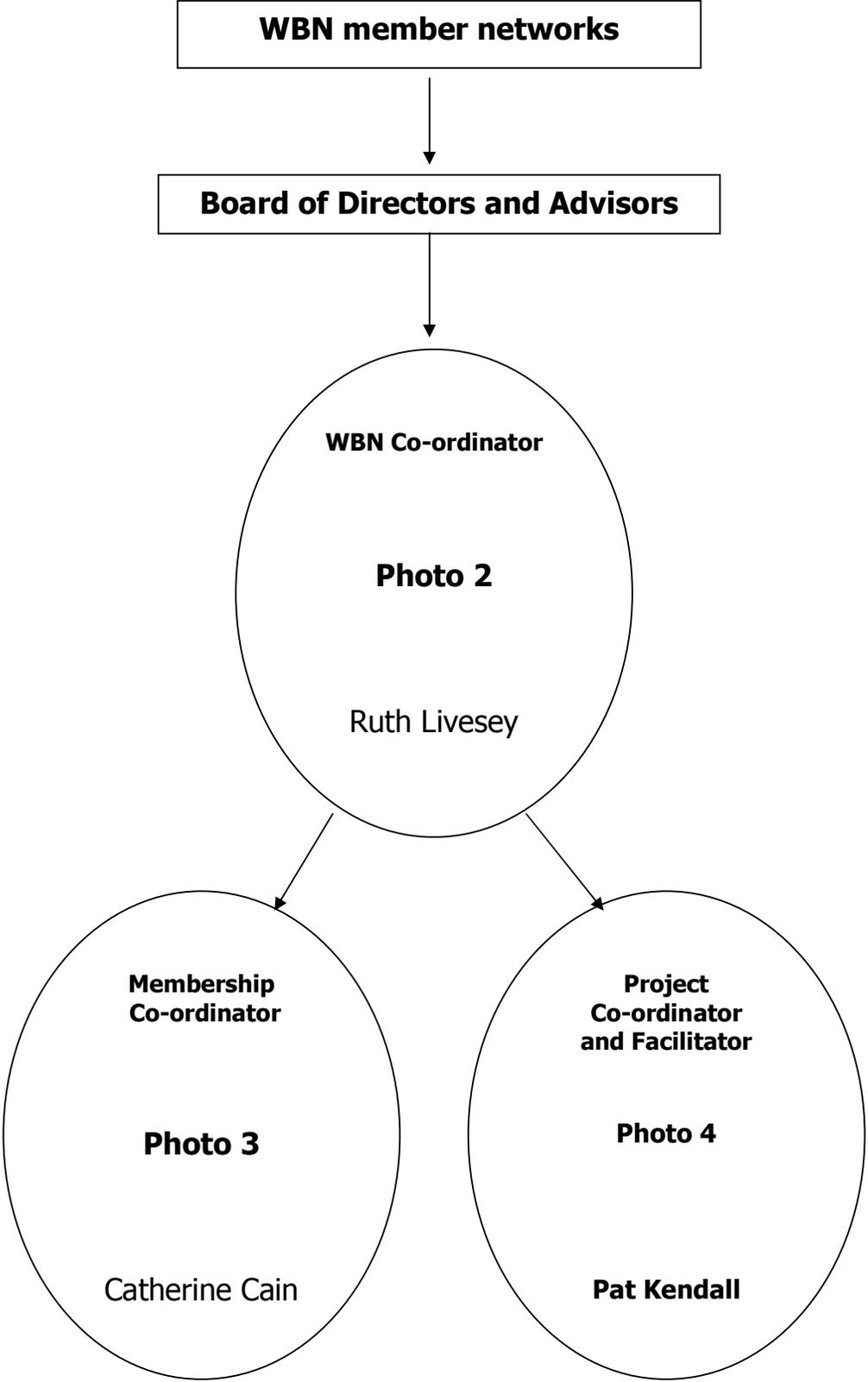
Expenditure pie chart

1.5 Organisational Structure

The voluntary Board of nine Directors and six Advisors contribute their wide and varied experiences to provide strategic direction. Eight members of the Board are Co-ordinators of member networks, representing our community of interest; the remainder of the Board is made up of women entrepreneurs and women who work specifically in the field of women's enterprise support.

WBN regularly gathers the thoughts of our members, on an on going basis, for example: at co-ordinators' meeting; at one to one meetings and through telephone surveys and through the social accounting consultation process, to agree activities, which are delivered by the WBN staff team, to achieve organisational objectives.

WBN has three full time members of staff: WBN Co-ordinator; Membership Co-ordinator and Project Co-ordinator and Facilitator.



2. A process of continuous improvement

2.1 Social Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2004

Social accounting is about proving and improving: although we aim to operate in an environment of continuous improvement, the social audit process highlights particular issues to be addressed. The 2004 social accounts produced the following recommendations. Actions taken to date are summarised in italics.

2.2 2004 Recommendations

- **Continue to build collaborative partnerships, focussing on linking with specialist agencies**

WBN continues to build strategic relationships across the region and beyond, through one to one meetings and attendance at a variety of events.

WBN also designed and delivered workshops: "Understanding approaches to Women's Enterprise support: sharing the experience". Delivery of these workshops brings together business support practitioners from across the region, cementing existing relationships and building new ones

- **Investigate what particular issues are important to members of networks, to inform how WBN can support, encourage and influence member Network Co-ordinators**

WBN undertook a telephone survey of Network Co-ordinators to gather views regarding the timing and content of meetings and the appropriateness of current services and gather suggestions as to how we could further improve our support.

- **Consider the relationship between WBN and women in business,**
 - **improve communication streams to promote understanding of WBN role and relationship with both networks and their members**
 - **develop approaches to support member networks to create challenging environments**

The relationship between WBN and the individual women who are members of the networks is communicated and facilitated through the Network Co-ordinators. WBN has focused more energy to encourage Co-ordinators to promote this relationship and share information about WBN (e.g. newsletters).

WBN staff share responsibility for network contact, allocated on a sub regional basis. Staff offer support in terms of attending network meetings and meeting Co-ordinators on a one to one.

Activities designed specifically for Network Co-ordinators now try to structure activities to inspire and motivate, both on a personal perspective and also in terms of ideas to put into practice in their networks.

- **Review marketing approaches, considering different stakeholder relationships to ensure clear messages**

It is intended to expand marketing activities, developing different approaches for different stakeholders, however time and resource has meant that WBN has not yet managed to progress this improvement.

- **Increase attention to completion of enquiry forms**

Staff have become more aware of the importance of completing tracking records.

- **Encourage consistent use of signposting tracking system**

Raising awareness of this issue has encouraged a more consistent approach to recording and monitoring signposting activity amongst staff members.

- **Review use of website forum and encourage participation of network co-ordinators**

The telephone survey identified that Network Co-ordinators often do not access the website forum due to lack of time. WBN has therefore agreed to cease offering this service.

- **Investigate development of Board job descriptions and consider Board training to improve understanding of relationships and responsibilities.**

A Board skills audit was undertaken following this recommendation. WBN also created the opportunity for Board members to access a Board Development day, delivered by Social Enterprise Network (Merseyside).

- **Review levels of investment in awareness-raising activities and incorporate this activity as an integral part of the marketing plan.**

Resources limit the time that can be invested in such activities, however WBN is attempting to invest more time and energy in contributing to partner events.

- **Local partnerships need to be fostered and developed to ensure relationships are developed more equally.**

As a networking organisation, WBN understands the length of time necessary to foster and build relationships. This is an on going activity, to which we are committed, as we recognise the value of partner relationships.

- **Effort to be invested in timely promotion of information about events to partner organisations**

Circulation of information regarding events is now undertaken a minimum of two weeks prior to the event.

- **Consider investigating the supply chain to assess environmental attitudes, policies and practices in identifying suppliers.**

No further action has been undertaken yet, due to resource limitations.

Ensure Training needs analysis is completed for each member of staff

- Recognising this recommendation was identified in January 2005, there is a commitment to ensure thorough training needs analysis is undertaken in the year 2005/06.

- **Invest energy into the exploration of commercial income generating activities**

Working together, Board and staff have explored a number of ideas and opportunities, with a number of possibilities being investigated.

- **Design and implement an appropriate procurement policy**

Now in place

Add photo 5

3. Mission, Values and Objectives

As a result of the 2004 social audit, small changes were made to the wording of the objectives and activities, to improve clarification. The Board approved the changes on 10th March 2005 and the revised statements provide the basis for these social accounts.

3.1 Mission

We facilitate the creation and development of sustainable Women's Business Networks and link these networks in order to provide an environment of peer support and the expansion of business contacts and opportunities.

3.2 Values which underpin WBN activities

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Collaborative | - working with other individuals and organisations |
| Open | - being honest and sharing |
| Progressive | - breaking new ground, inspiring others |

3.3 Objectives

1. To encourage and support networking amongst women entrepreneurs

by:

- Building and administrating a network for women in business networks.
- Supporting existing member networks to encourage sustainability.
- Supporting the creation of new women in business networks.
- Delivering a range of activities and resources for women in business and women thinking of starting a business.
- Providing relevant information and signposting.

2. To identify and raise awareness of the opportunities for and the challenges and barriers faced by, women in business and developing their businesses

by:

- Undertaking action based research into issues that are important to women in business and women thinking of starting a business.
- Promoting and sharing information and research to shape future activities.
- Educating and informing through marketing activities.
- Identifying, developing and supporting inspirational role models.

3. To create an equitable business environment for women through representation and influence

by:

- Influencing local, regional and national business support strategies through participation in and co-ordination of consultation.
- Developing collaborative relationships, including sharing expertise to influence change.

4. To offer an accessible and inclusive service to women from all communities

by:

- Encouraging active participation by women from all social and economic backgrounds.
- Removing barriers to access projects and activities.

Internal objectives

1. To be a socially and environmentally responsible organisation

by.....

- Striving to minimise waste in terms of energy used.
- Recycling and reusing materials.
- Proactively participating in projects that have a wider social impact

2. To be a good employer

by...

- Operating an Equal Opportunities and Diversity policy and Health and Safety policy.
- Offering good terms and conditions to employees.
- Providing staff with appropriate training and personal development opportunities.
- Operating an effective appraisal system.

3. To improve the sustainability of WBN

by:

- Identifying and developing income generating activity.

Add photo 6

4. Stakeholders

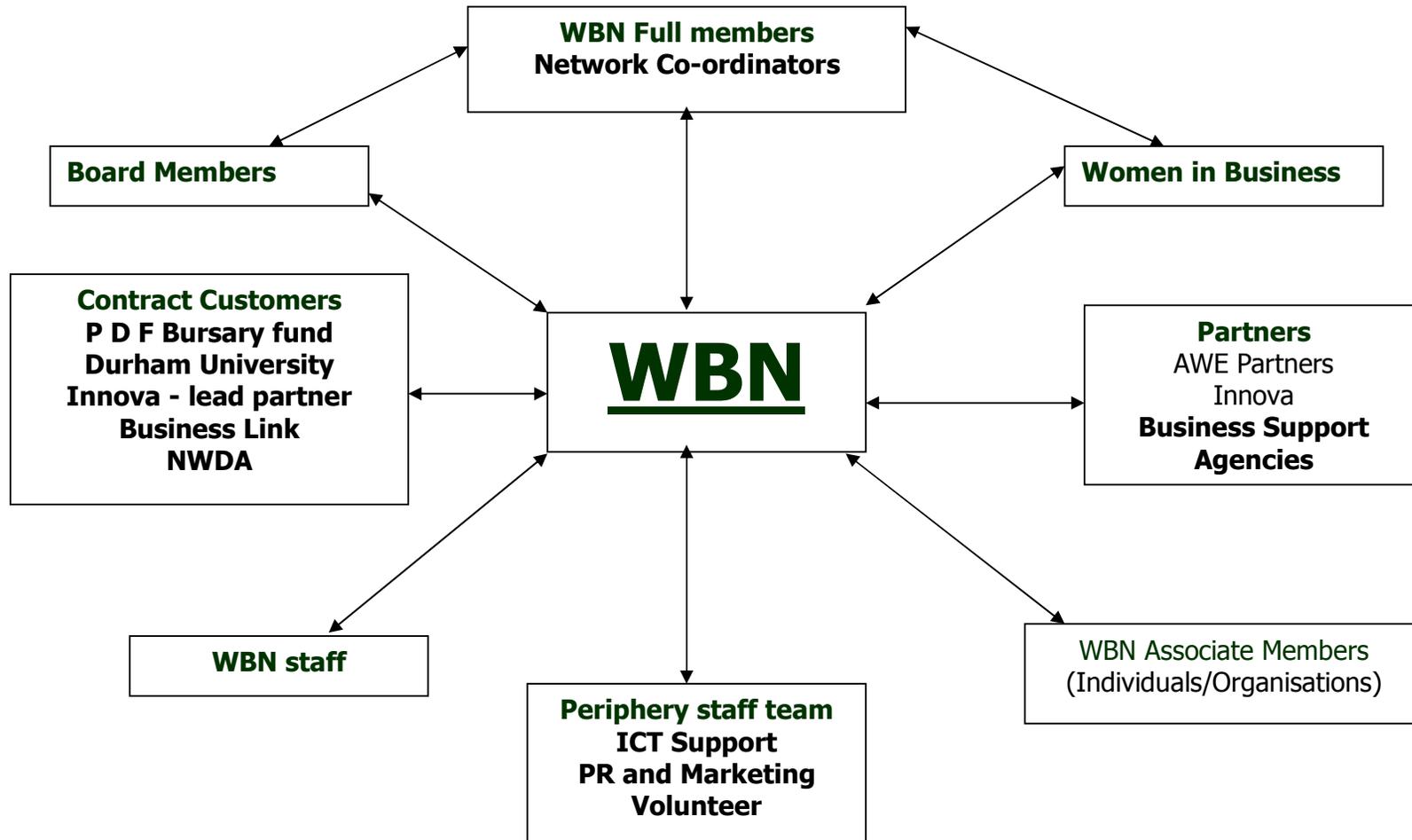
4.1 Identifying Stakeholders

Stakeholders are those individuals or organisations who affect or who are affected by the activities of WBN.

Stakeholders were reviewed and revised to reflect the current year and are summarised in the following stakeholder map.

A comprehensive list of individual members of stakeholder groups who were consulted in this social accounting period is included in appendix 3.

4.2 Women's Business Network Stakeholder Map



Key Stakeholders are shown in **BOLD**

5. Methodology

5.1 Why we undertake the social accounting process

Social accounts review both qualitative and quantitative information, seeking to evaluate and report upon the social impact of the work that we do. We treat these accounts as seriously as our financial statements and submit them to an independent verification process: the external audit and to approval at our Annual General Meeting. We have been publishing social accounts since 2001.

WBN social accounts are based on the following step-by-step approach:

- Review stakeholder map
- Establish indicators by which performance against the values and objectives can be measured
- Measure performance against values and objectives
- Report all of the above in as balanced a manner as possible
- Submit the accounts to independent audit
- Publish the accounts
- Disseminate to stakeholders

WBN is committed to the process of social accounting and believe it has become embedded in the organisation's practice.

5.2 Scope

These accounts review performance in achieving values and objectives for the period from 1st April 2004 to 31st March 2005.

The accounts draw on existing quantitative and qualitative data from comprehensive monitoring systems and management records. To augment our existing data the following key stakeholder groups were consulted:

- Board members
- WBN Staff
- Periphery staff team
- Network co-ordinators
- Partners
- Contract Customers

These key stakeholders were selected on the basis of being those who enjoy close working relationships with the organisation and who we consider can offer valid opinion regarding activities undertaken to achieve objectives 1 and 2.

All consultation exercises considered performance towards values and external objectives one and two, as these activities represented those which stakeholders were most significantly affected by and which they could affect.

Views were gathered from staff, Board members, Network Co-ordinators and partners and contract customers by questionnaire, which was hand delivered or circulated by e-mail (with e-mail reminders). Respondents were asked to rate performance on a scale of: 1 = not achieved, 2 = partially achieved, 3 = achieved in most respects and 4 = fully achieved, or DK = Don't know.

All responses were summarised and analysed by the social accountants, an example is presented in appendix 4.

The social accounts make every effort to be comprehensive, embracing all aspects of the organisation's work and performance. These accounts also strive to be multi-perspective, aiming to reflect the views of a wide range of stakeholders.

It should be noted that eight members of the Board are also Network Co-ordinators and as such may have chosen to complete only one questionnaire, however due to the process being anonymous, this can only be conjecture.

The opportunity was taken to drill down within each objective and gather further feedback from different stakeholder groups, reflecting the relationship with the organisation. Periphery staff were not questioned specifically about values or objectives 1 and 2, therefore they do not appear in the tabular summaries of stakeholder responses.

A focus group was also undertaken with a group of 5 network co-ordinators giving them the opportunity to contribute more in depth views.

WBN benefited from the support of two volunteers, one of whom facilitated a focus group and the other followed up customer and periphery staff questionnaires with telephone interviews. This independent approach encouraged frank and honest responses from stakeholders. WBN would like to thank Sheila Culshaw and Gaynor McKnight for their contribution to this year's social accounting process.

Add photo 7

5.3 Stakeholder consultation table

| Stakeholder Group | Subject | Method | Comments |
|--|--|--|---|
| 15 Board Members (Directors and Advisors) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Values ▪ Objective 1 ▪ Objective 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Questionnaire – distributed by e-mail, followed by e-mail reminder. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 15 questionnaires distributed ▪ 2 responses = 13% |
| Periphery staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2 sub contractors ▪ 1 volunteer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Values ▪ Objective 1 ▪ Objective 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Questionnaire distributed by e-mail, followed up by telephone interviews undertaken by independent volunteer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2 responses = 66% |
| 3 Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Values ▪ Objective 1 ▪ Objective 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Questionnaire | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 100% response rate |
| 60 Network Co-ordinators (47 networks) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Objective 1 ▪ Objective 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Questionnaire – distributed by e-mail followed by e-mail reminder | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 47 networks (contact list includes steering group members) ▪ 15 responses = 32% networks = 25% network representatives |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Objective 1 ▪ Objective 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus group of 5 Co-ordinators, facilitated by independent volunteer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus group discussion structured to gather views regarding WBN activities |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Objective 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Telephone survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undertaken during the year, 27 co-ordinators contacted to gather information regarding how to improve the service WBN offers |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Objective 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluation forms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feedback from events, contributes to our evaluation of delivery to achieve objective 1 |
| 34 Partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Objective 1 ▪ Objective 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Questionnaire – distributed by e-mail, followed by e-mail reminder | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 34 questionnaires distributed to representatives of 12 organisations ▪ 15 responses = 44% stakeholder representatives |
| 5 Contract Customers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Objective 1 ▪ Objective 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Questionnaire distributed by e-mail, followed up by telephone interviews undertaken by independent volunteer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 4 responses = 80% response rate ▪ Telephone discussion structured to gather views regarding WBN activities |
| Women in business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Objective 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluation forms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feedback from events, contributes to our evaluation of delivery to achieve objective 1 |

5.4 Exclusions

Individual partner organisations; WBN Associate members and women in business were not consulted in this social accounting period, largely due to resource limitations.

It was decided not to consult with the individual organisations within formal partnerships of which WBN is a member, largely as these organisations are contacted frequently to contribute to evaluation processes. The lead partner only of AWE was contacted and contributed to the consultation process.

WBN Associate members represent individuals and organisations, which support the organisation's objectives, but which do not necessarily benefit from regular interaction with the organisation. It is anticipated Associate members will be consulted as part of future social accounting consultations.

Contract customers and periphery staff were not asked about values, questionnaires were designed to reflect the nature of these relationships and it was considered that this area may sit outside their experiences of WBN.

5.5 Summary

These social accounts have been produced using the following sources of information:

- Membership records
- Monitoring returns
- Attendance sheets
- Evaluation forms
- Telephone survey – Network Co-ordinators
- WBN scrap book
- Board meeting reports and minutes
- Team meeting minutes
- Staff training records
- Staff Handbook
- Stakeholder consultation
- Press cuttings book
- Web page statistics

Stakeholder comments were selected for inclusion in this report, by means of review of all sources and identification of those reflecting views describing the specific value or objective.

Responses from Board members were low this year, however as previously mentioned it is possible that some Board members, who are also Network Co-ordinators, chose to complete only one questionnaire. In previous years, Board members have been consulted by telephone interview, which has produced in a much higher response rate.

Stakeholders were not asked for their opinion regarding performance to achieve the mission. This has been investigated in all of the last three social accounts and it was omitted this year in order to keep the consultation process of a reasonable size to encourage responses.

Recommendations

- ⇒ **Employ telephone interviews or focus group to consult with Board members in 2006, to improve response rate**
- ⇒ **Consult with WBN Associate Members**

6. Performance Analysis

6.1 Values

Collaborative - working with other individuals and organisations

| | 1 Not achieved | 2 Partially achieved | 3 Achieved In most respects | 4 Fully achieved | Don't Know |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Board members | | 50% | 50% | | |
| Network co-ordinators | | | 13% | 87% | |
| Staff | | | 33% | 67% | |
| Partners | | 6% | 47% | 47% | |

| Average % responses for all stakeholder groups * | 1 Not achieved | 2 Partially achieved | 3 Achieved In most respects | 4 Fully achieved | Don't Know |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2005 | | 14% | 36% | 50% | |
| 2004 | | 8% | 11% | 61% | 20% |

Overall feedback suggests that WBN continues to deliver a collaborative approach, particularly the responses of Co-ordinators, our members, demonstrating significant recognition of this aspect of our work:

"Maintaining good relationships with network co-ordinators and offering great support and inspirations in their seminars and events"

"In my experience as a co-ordinator I have had the opportunity to experience collaboration with individuals and orgs on a UK and European level".

"WBN consistently work in a creative way, encouraging individuals, introducing new ideas and bringing different organisations into the mix"

Although stakeholders consider WBN is working collaboratively, we are not perceived to be achieving this as well as in 2004. However 2005 has witnessed changes in key partnerships and this may well provide an explanation, as a Board member noted:

"I believe WBN does adopt a collaborative approach but recognise that in the past year the environment has sometimes been hostile"

*

Average % responses for all stakeholder groups is calculated as the total % for each response category, divided by the total number of stakeholder groups.

Open - being honest and sharing

| | 1 Not achieved | 2 Partially achieved | 3 Achieved In most respects | 4 Fully achieved | Don't Know |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Board members | | | | 100% | |
| Network co-ordinators | | | 7% | 93% | |
| Staff | | | 67% | 33% | |
| Partners | | | 27% | 66% | 7% |

| Average % responses for all stakeholder groups | 1 Not achieved | 2 Partially achieved | 3 Achieved In most respects | 4 Fully achieved | Don't Know |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2005 | | | 25% | 73% | 2% |
| 2004 | | 8% | 13% | 79% | |

Again feedback demonstrates that WBN is considered to operate openly, although feedback from Network Co-ordinators is significantly more positive.

"All events I have attended through WBN have been both honest and inspiring"

Again, in comparing 2005 and 2004, responses indicate that although stakeholders consider WBN to be open, judgements were more positive last year.

Progressive - breaking new ground, inspiring others

| | 1 Not achieved | 2 Partially achieved | 3 Achieved In most respects | 4 Fully achieved | Don't Know |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Board members | | 50% | | 50% | |
| Network co-ordinators | | | 33% | 67% | |
| Staff | | | 67% | 33% | |
| Partners | 7% | 13% | 13% | 60% | 7% |

| Average % responses for all stakeholder groups | 1 Not achieved | 2 Partially achieved | 3 Achieved In most respects | 4 Fully achieved | Don't Know |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2005 | 2% | 15% | 28% | 53% | 2% |
| 2004 | | 12% | 16% | 49% | 23% |

Generally feedback indicates improvements since 2004, particularly noting that a larger proportion of stakeholders felt they had enough knowledge about the organisation to make a judgement, compared to 2004.

One of the partners told us:

"WBN has been a supportive partner, helping us to inspire and engage female business people to become volunteers, mentoring and nurturing the next generation of female entrepreneurs"

However as one Co-ordinator commented, "*Definitely inspiring: Don't know about breaking new ground*", which drew our attention to the fact that although we are unique in the English regions, perhaps this is not a message we promote successfully to our members and wider stakeholder groups.

Summary

Network Co-ordinators responses appear to be more positive than Board members, staff and partners, this may well reflect the direct and regular contact between them and the organisation and the fact that predominantly interventions are delivered to benefit this stakeholder group, therefore they have a stronger awareness of activities which have been delivered in this social accounting period.

Recommendations

- ⇒ **Invest in promoting WBN's uniqueness in the English regions, in future marketing materials**
- ⇒ **Review values, particularly "progressive", which is demonstrating difficult to evaluate**

Add photo 8

6.2 Objective 1

To encourage and support networking amongst women entrepreneurs

Activity 1

Building and administrating a network for women in business networks

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| Number of full members | 8 | 21 | 30 | 37 |
| Number of associate members (network) | 4 | 5 | 7 | 10 |
| Number of associate members (individual/organisations) | 0 | 18 | 28 | 39 |
| Total number of associate members | 4 | 23 | 35 | 49 |

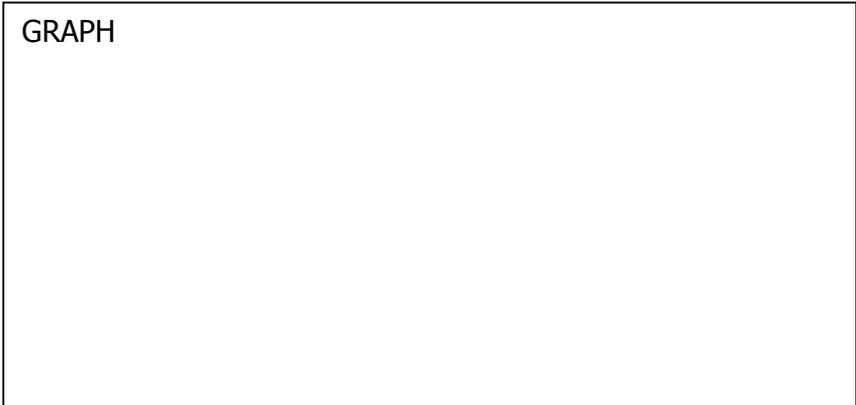
WBN has progressively built the regional network to **47** member networks (appendix 4) across the North West of England. These figures represent the total membership as at the 31st March in each year.

In this social accounting period 2 network dissolved, however it is considered that WBN membership continues to demonstrate steady expansion.

Of the 47 networks, 5 networks focus support on women from BME communities, representing 11% (2004: 8%) of the total.

The total number of women represented through WBN member networks as at 31st March 2005 was 6,562 (2004: 4,069). Network size varies; the following table presents the spread of size of networks across the membership. It must be noted that RWN, a member of WBN, is a large network, which supports members across Cumbria, their membership numbers are more than 2000.

GRAPH



As can be seen from the table, the largest group is that of small networks, with membership of less than 25, this is also the group that has seen the biggest increase in numbers, reflecting WBN's objective 4: to offer an accessible and inclusive service to women from all communities by encouraging active participation by women from all social and economic backgrounds.

WBN recognises that any network, whatever the size can offer real value to its members. Small networks can be perceived to be less intimidating and therefore can be more effective in attracting women who do not feel confident enough to join in mainstream networking events.

Activity 2

Supporting existing member networks to encourage sustainability

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| NW Network Co-ordinators' meetings | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Co-ordinators attending meetings | 21 | 52 | 62 | 41 |
| WBN network member events attended by WBN | | 50 | 43 | 57 |
| No. of Co-ordinator exchanges/visits /events | | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| No. of Co-ordinators attending exchanges/visits/events | | 12 | 14 | 17 |

WBN undertakes a variety of activities, designed to allow Network Co-ordinators to spend time with their peer group allowing them to share and learn from experiences and to maintain and increase motivation.

Network co-ordinators meetings

WBN creates four opportunities for all Network Co-ordinators to come together as a group each year: two day time meetings, one overnight meeting and the AGM, which is built into a network gathering.

Feedback informs us that these events are effective in creating valuable time together:

"Very important that you have the support from your peers to develop your own network - exchanging ideas, building relationships"

"The bringing together of Co-ordinators strengthens and motivates, which creates benefits for all the individual networks."

However, although membership has now reached nearly 50, the numbers of co-ordinators attending these meeting rarely exceeds 20 and this year has witnessed a significant reduction in numbers. Therefore WBN undertook an investigation to establish what we could do differently to encourage all co-ordinators to attend. We specifically asked about timing, number of events, and location/venue accessibility and content.

Feedback told us that it is often the demands on co-ordinators' lives as business women that prevents them coming to meetings, but that we should continue with a combination of daytime and overnight meetings and try to hold at least 4 meetings per year, so that if one is missed, it is not so long to wait until the next one.

WBN also invests time attending member network meetings or meeting with co-ordinators and/or steering groups to offer support and advice, to maintain network momentum. The table demonstrates that WBN has continued to increase the number of meetings dedicated to supporting network sustainability and the following comment from a co-ordinator is representative and indicates this is a valued part of the service.

"WBN has provided consistent, valuable advice and information which has encouraged and supported the growth of my network and subsequently encouraged members to set up in business"

Network Co-ordinator exchanges/visits /events

In response to needs articulated by members, WBN designs and delivers events, exchanges and visits, creating further opportunities for co-ordinators to build relationships, whilst adding to their personal development. Two such activities were delivered in this period:

- ✓ Training programme: Effective Mentoring Skills: Understanding relationship building and communication
- ✓ Facilitating attendance at the Prowess Conference
(*Prowess is the UK wide advocacy organisation for the promotion of women's enterprise support*)

Although WBN delivered only half as many of these additional Co-ordinator events this year, higher numbers of Co-ordinators benefited from this support in 2005, compared to 2004 and it must be noted that the training programme comprised of 10 learning sessions and therefore reflects more intense investment levels.

Creating further development opportunities for Network Co-ordinators, the "Effective Mentoring Skills: Understanding relationship building and communication" programme was delivered in partnership with Business Link Cheshire and Warrington.

This pilot project presented the opportunity to develop a programme of support that was participant lead, delivering learning experiences that would be useful to women in their roles as network Co-ordinators. The course addressed key areas such as: understanding the mentoring process; identifying personal objectives; listening and communication skills and creating thinking environments.

Comments from participants, demonstrate not only the value of the learning experience, but also how co-ordinators were keen to apply their learning for the benefit of their networks.

"Incredibly valuable as has offered a space to reflect"

"Interested in how we can use what we have learnt to develop mentoring within our networks"

WBN created the opportunity for 5 Network Co-ordinators to participate in the Prowess conference and training days (The case for women’s enterprise and Gender Lens).

The event was seen as an excellent way to increase their knowledge base whilst also giving the co-ordinators the opportunity to further develop their understanding of the women’s enterprise agenda and broaden their networks.

Again participants’ comments reflect not only the value of the event itself, but also the value of the time spent with other co-ordinators and the personal impact of the experience:

"Wonderful opportunity to gain an understanding of the national picture and how it translates in local groups across the country"

"Has broadened my knowledge of the economic climate in particular issues relating to women in enterprise"

"I was exposed to lots of new ideas on network development which I will be able to take back to my own network"

"I feel more confident, energised and better equipped to help develop my network and also have new ideas for my own business"

Activity 3

| |
|--|
| Supporting the creation of new women in business networks |
|--|

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| New networks developed | 4 | 8 | 4 | 7 |
| (Of which) Sector specific networks developed | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Requests for Blue Book | | | 24 | 33 |

WBN has supported the creation of 7 new networks in this social accounting period:

- Women’s Writing Network – sector specific
- Women’s Music Network – sector specific
- Active women’s network
- Last Friday Circle
- Branch and Grow
- Alnisa women’s forum
- Macclesfield and Wilmslow women’s networking group

The creation and development of a new network can be time consuming, but the success of the network is dependent on the right infrastructure, WBN share their experiences and those of existing members to encourage and support co-ordinators as they develop a new network. The key message is to develop a network that is owned and directed by its members and as one Board member observed:

"The support for network development needs to reflect the different nature of each new network and so the support that is flexible and customized does appear to be effective"

WBN does not include new network creation as an output, where this activity is undertaken in support of a partner organisation, therefore only includes those networks where WBN has been a direct lead in supporting the creation of the new network.

The number of new networks supported has increased in 2005, compared to 2004. Several Co-ordinators made the suggestion that WBN could do more to promote the success of our networks:

"Success stories from individual networks on a regular basis – to promote networking and inspiring women entrepreneurs"

The Blue Book: A Network Co-ordinators' guide.

WBN has been the lead organisation in the development of The Blue Book: A Network Co-ordinators' guide. Over a two-year period, the guide has gathered and collated valuable contributions from Network Co-ordinators across Europe.

This year saw the printing of the final version of the Blue Book, previously only the draft version was available. Publication of the Blue Book stimulated a number of media articles (see 6.3) this is reflected in increased requests for copies of the guide. It has been possible to download a PDF copy from the WBN Website since the completion of the first draft. Records of the number of downloads requested have not been maintained.

Activity 4

Delivering a range of activities and resources for women in business and women thinking of starting a business

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Number of activities | 3 | 5 | 7 | 7 |
| Number of women attending events | 65 | 415 | 298 | 64 |

Listening to Co-ordinators and drawing on our experiences, WBN designs and delivers a number of activities for women in business, who are members of the networks, thus adding value to the work of the Co-ordinators. During the year, we delivered a range of activities, including workshops and exchange visits (appendix 5).

The number of events delivered annually has been maintained, however the decrease in the numbers of women benefiting from WBN activities reflects the fact that the WBN launch was held in 2002 and two conferences were held in 2003 and 2004, all three events attracting large numbers of delegates. Increased levels of activity promoting women's enterprise in the North West have meant that more conferences for women in business are now being held in the region and have led WBN to decide that it is more appropriate that this type of activity is now best placed with partner organisations.

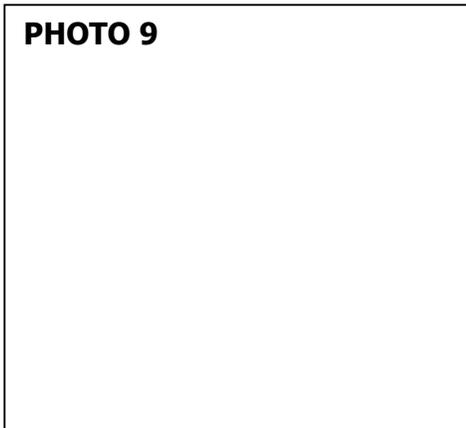
2004 also saw the completion of the Inspiring Women Entrepreneurs project, which delivered a range of activities to women running a business or thinking of starting a business on Merseyside.

As part of our activities to support women in business, we organised the following events, creating opportunities for individual members of the networks to widen their contacts and expand their experiences:

- ✓ An opportunity for group of women from East Lancashire to Merseyside
- ✓ A chance for members of our NW networks to attend a network meeting in Rotherham, Yorkshire
- ✓ A visit to meet with women in business from and Sweden
- ✓ Four workshops with different groups, testing different chapters of the networking toolkit

Networking across the North West

Cementing the relationship between a group of 22 women from BME communities in East Lancashire, WBN organised a full day of activities in Merseyside. WBN delivered two workshops focusing on how to develop networking skills and the benefits of being part of a network. The group also enjoyed a guided tour of the Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre, a purpose built centre for women from BME communities.

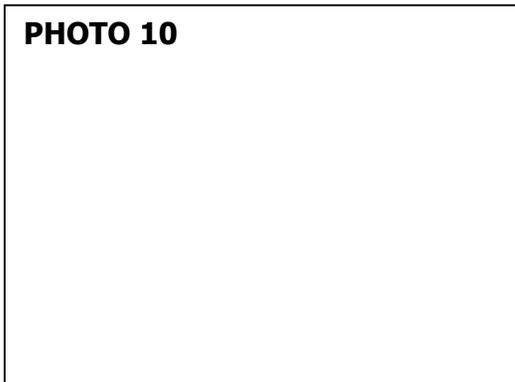


Enjoying the workshop

Having completed the first draft of the networking toolkit, 8 chapters

offering advice of guidance in the process of creating and developing a network, WBN tested these through a series of workshops. Four chapters were piloted during this accounting period, presenting an opportunity for women in business to further develop their skills.

"I thought the event was brilliant – it was well presented, inspirational and delivered in a light, easy to manage way"



The networking corner

WBN organised a networking corner at the International Women's day event held by Train 2000, Centre for Women's Enterprise and Employment, in Merseyside. 85 women left messages on the pin boards, which resulted in them making contact with other women in business.

Networking across the regions

Co-ordinating a visit of a group of 5 women in business from WBN member networks, to join a network meeting in Rotherham was a great success. Making the most of the time, the visit also incorporated a practice visit to meet the extraordinary Sally Robinson, founder of amplebosom.com, an excellent role model.

Comments from participants indicate the visit was considered to be a valuable experience and constructive suggestions have highlighted the need for more advance planning in future events of a similar nature:

"The whole two days was a chance to voice my opinion as well as listening"

"The exchange visit was a really good experience, being part of a small team, exchanging different experiences with each other."

"More time with people we are visiting. Find out in advance any specific contacts required and arrange table plan if possible."

"Maybe we could decide a list of questions amongst group to the ask champion (Sally Robinson)...missed valuable info by waffling!"

Networking nationally and internationally

Together with Street Cred (AWE partners in London), WBN co-ordinated a joint visit with partners from Sweden, where women entrepreneurs from across Europe joined together to create a three-way exchange. 4 women from WBN networks went along and enjoyed the "Networking skills" workshop and the "networking auction". Two WBN clients made successful links with Swedish clients to start investigating the export of their products.

PHOTO 11

An international group of business women

Feedback from participants indicates the impact of this visit in terms of increasing both personal and business confidence:

"Motivation. I felt more motivated after attending the exchange and went in to network with people in the North West about my business".

"I also got my story in the Bolton Evening News"

Finding opportunities for network members

A key activity is to identify and disseminate potential opportunities for the women that make up the membership of the networks. This cascading of information is achieved by e-mail to network co-ordinators, who can then either forward the e-mail or pass on the information at meetings. 47 opportunities were circulated in this social accounting period, and include opportunities to appear in the media (press; tv; radio) and possible business contracts.

"We value the communication received so far and are looking at ways to take full advantage of what is offered"

Activity 5

| |
|---|
| Providing relevant information and signposting |
|---|

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Number of referrals | 23 | 72 | 46 | 47 |

WBN maintains and expands information resources regarding sources of business support and advice. As we continue to build strong relationships with partners, across the North West, we expand the rich sources of knowledge we can draw upon. Enquiries result in passing on information and contact details for local or sector specific networks and women-friendly business training and advice services.

Co-ordinators frequently access WBN knowledge bank for regional and national links, as one co-ordinator told us,

"this saves so much time".

2004 social accounts highlighted the need for staff to be more thorough in recording referrals. The figures in 2005 do not indicate significant increase, however the method of recording referrals has been reviewed and since April 2004, it was decided to record each enquirer only once (as opposed to counting each agency to which they were referred), therefore it is considered that these figures demonstrate some improvement.

Summary

| | 1 Not achieved | 2 Partially achieved | 3 Achieved in most respects | 4 Fully achieved | 5 Don't Know |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Board members | | | | 100% | |
| Network co-ordinators | | | 20% | 80% | |
| Staff | | | 33% | 67% | |
| Partners | | | 33% | 54% | 13% |

| Average % responses for all stakeholder groups | 1 Not achieved | 2 Partially achieved | 3 Achieved In most respects | 4 Fully achieved | Don't Know |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2005 | | | 23% | 75% | 2% |
| 2004 | | | 34% | 56% | 10% |

Overall stakeholders considered that WBN was making good progress towards the achievement of objective 1, with board members and co-ordinators offering the most positive response. Staff are perhaps more critical, as they are involved directly on a day-to-day basis and effectively making personal judgements. As personnel change, WBN has only established relationships with some of the partner representatives within the year, this might explain the "Don't Know" response, which could be somebody who is still learning about the wide variety of activities undertaken by the organisation.

The summary of stakeholder responses indicates that WBN is considered to be improving in delivery of Objective 1, compared to 2004. Overall the range of activities delivered by WBN, continue to contribute to women's enterprise support in the region, as supported by a board member:

"Overall the organisation has had significant achievements in a difficult period and the staff team should be commended for continuing to provide quality services for women in business"

We consider that we continue to respond to the needs articulated by our members and design and deliver activities, which offer effective support to both Co-ordinators and women in business. As one Co-ordinator responded:

"Keep up the good work. Thank you for all your support"

However we recognise that we can always improve and take on board the comments made by some members of the group who visited Rotherham. As a consequence of these comments, we will endeavour to share more information with participants, prior to any events, to allow them to maximise the opportunity.

WBN recognises the value of even the smallest network, which can offer a safe, non-threatening experience to a woman who is just starting out on the networking journey and which offers the perfect environment for peer group support and the exchange of information, advice and ideas.

We consider that performance in this period reflects the ethos of the organisation, reaching those women who are not attracted to mainstream business support provision and supporting them on their journey of business development.

Reflecting the organisation's philosophy, to complement existing activities in the region, we aim to focus on supporting the development of small, peer support groups and connecting them to larger networks (both gender specific and mainstream) to create a continuum of support, that facilitates an individual graduating to a larger network as her individual and business confidence grows.

Recommendations

- ⇒ **Incorporate more WBN network success stories into future marketing activities**

- ⇒ **Ensure that participants of exchanges/visits are given advance notice of the content, to allow them time to identify specific areas for investigation.**

PHOTO 12

6.3 Objective 2

To identify and raise awareness of the opportunities for and the challenges and barriers faced by, women in business and developing their businesses

Activity 1

Undertaking action based research into issues that are important to women in business and women thinking of starting a business

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Research reports published | 1 | - | 1 | - |

WBN undertakes action based research, to help us to further understand what is important to women in business and how we can shape the design of our delivery to provide effective women friendly business support. Following completion of an action research project, WBN publishes the findings to share our learning with the wider business community.

Research studies are resource intensive and this is not an activity WBN can currently commit to every year. Despite not publishing any reports in this social accounting period, WBN continues to receive enquiries from a variety of organisations from Business Link operators to academic institutions, requesting copies of existing reports.

Activity 2

Promoting and sharing information and research to shape future activities

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|------|------|------|------|
| Number of awareness raising sessions | 15 | 31 | 14 | 15 |

WBN attends conferences, taking along the stand and information, offering advice to delegates and is also frequently invited to deliver presentations and workshops (appendix 6). Awareness raising activity in this period includes: presentations at the ISBE (Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship) and the Womens' Entrepreneurship conference in Oviedo, Spain, during which information was shared about WBN's approach and achievements.

Activity 3

Educating and informing through marketing activities

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|--|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| Number of newsletters | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Number of media articles | 27 | 19 | 21 | 17 |
| Number of pages accessed on website | 30,933 | 49,189 | 63,428 | 110,365 |

WBN actively distributes marketing information, locally, regionally and nationally, to promote key organisational activities and key messages about the women's enterprise agenda.

Issues 6 and 7 of WBN Briefing were published and distributed. Newsletters are distributed directly to over 1,000 people throughout the UK by post with additional distribution of 1000 copies being circulated to business support agencies and organisations throughout the North West for general distribution to clients. Network co-ordinators distribute a further 1,000 copies to their network members.

WBN contributed to the 2nd Innova SME support newsletter, which was published in March 2005 and included progress reports on the development of training modules and materials and a selection of case studies, including one of WBN's networks.

PR and Marketing

To raise the profile of women's enterprise with a wider audience, WBN produces articles promoting women in business and women's business networks for publication by the media.

The following table summarise articles published in the year:

| Media | Date | Article title |
|------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Daily Post | 7.4.04 | The staff really look after you |
| Taylor solicitors | April 2004 | Women's business Network |
| Crewe Guardian | 1.4.04 | Personalities put under the microscope |
| Daily Post | 23.8.04 | Women in business are blooming |
| Daily Post | 28.8.04 | Every day a holiday |
| Daily Post | 23.9.04 | Join the network |
| Liverpool Echo | 25.9.04 | Sisters do it for themselves |
| Liverpool Echo | 10.11.04 | Cleaning up in business |
| Daily Post | 17.11.04 | Blue Book to increase women-only networks |
| Liverpool Echo | 27.11.04 | Service provides sites for sore eyes |
| Daily Post | 9.12.04 | Wish yourself a better life |
| Slovenia Regional news paper | Sep 04 | Cath meets Slovenian business women at conference |
| Daily Post | 13.1.05 | Wedding Planners Eastern promise |
| The Champion | 26.1.05 | Women only |
| Liverpool Echo | 22.1.05 | Linking hands across Europe |
| Liverpool Echo | 2.3.05 | Why I love networking |
| Formby Times | 17.3.05 | Add a bit of Fun to business |

WBN successfully published 17 media articles in 2005 (2004: 21). WBN has invested in dedicated support of a PR service, provided by a woman owner/manager and this has achieved publication of the following articles, however resource limitation have meant that at the end of 2004, this investment was been temporarily put on hold, this perhaps explains the reduction in the number of media articles.

The number of page hits on WBN the website (www.wbn.org.uk) continues to accelerate. The WBN website is the number one site on Google in the UK and internationally, when searching with the words, "women", "business" and "network". An increase of 36% compared to 2004 indicates the WBN website continues to attract visitors.



WBN home page

Activity 4

Identifying, developing and supporting inspirational role models

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Women supported to become role models | | 7 | 3 | 2 |

This year has seen lower numbers of new role models being supported. Previous years have provided WBN with the ideal opportunity to identify and support a number of new role models, as we have organised the launch event and two conferences. However case studies in the WBN newsletter also create the opportunity to promote realistic role models and encourage women to consider self-employment as an option.

As part of the Prowess Best Practice day, WBN invited two co-ordinators to come along and tell the group about their networks. Creating opportunities such as these and offering the personal support and confidence building to individuals all contributes to women starting to recognise that they themselves are role models.

WBN briefing, the bi-annual newsletter aims to share a wide range of information, from strategic developments and new business support programmes that may be useful to women in business to good news stories, promoting successful networks or the benefits of networking and relaying the stories of business women, who have achieved success in their own terms and who can inspire other women to do the same.

What a Role model

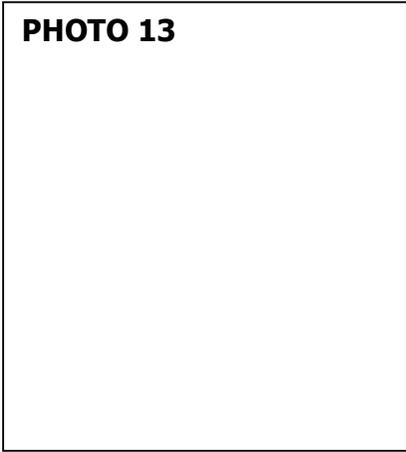
Burnley Enterprise Development Trust Ltd co-ordinates the Burnley Women Into Business Network, and has supported Miss Kiran Mehnaz (20) a member of the network, who owns Rivaaz Collections in Burnley.

Kiran was a platform speaker at a Burnley Women Into Business Conference organised earlier this year, something she would never have considered prior to her success.

Burnley Enterprise secretly nominated Kiran for two national awards; firstly the Natwest Everywoman Artemis Award for the most inspirational woman running a business under the age of 21; and the Phoenix Development Fund 'Beating the Odds' Award, as Kiran has successfully overcome health and cultural barriers to start her own business.

Kiran was both surprised and delighted to learn that she had been chosen as the winner on both occasions. Gaining recognition has increased Kiran's self-confidence and the publicity generated by winning these awards has helped her business to thrive.

PHOTO 13



Article from WBN Briefing Issue 6

Promoting local, regional and national conferences on the website also encourages women to attend events where they will hear the stories of women who have grown successful businesses.

WBN also collects information about women business owners who are speakers. This is largely part of our services to members, as we can offer suggestions to Co-ordinators as to appropriate speakers for their events. However we also receive enquiries from conference organisers and business support agencies and use this opportunity to promote women in business at mainstream events.

Summary

| | 1 Not achieved | 2 Partially achieved | 3 Achieved in most respects | 4 Fully achieved | 5 Don't Know |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Board members | | | | 100% | |
| Network co-ordinators | | | 27% | 73% | |
| Staff | | | 67% | 33% | |
| Partners | | 13% | 40% | 47% | |

| Average % responses for all stakeholder groups | 1 Not achieved | 2 Partially achieved | 3 Achieved In most respects | 4 Fully achieved | Don't Know |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2005 | | 3% | 34% | 63% | |
| 2004 | | 12% | 66% | 20% | 2% |

We consider that WBN is making good progress in delivering objective 2, this is supported by positive stakeholder responses across all groups and overall stakeholders consider that we have been more successful this year than in 2004.

WBN continues to invest in awareness raising activities, ranging from staff attending events and spreading information face to face to publishing newsletters and maintaining and updating the web site to attract increasing numbers of visitors.

Experience and comments received indicate to us that all printed materials distributed are not necessarily read. Day to day demands on people's lives and the constant pressure of time offer reasonable explanations for this, therefore we accept that this lies outside our control.

Considering what we have learnt through this social accounting process, it might be that a review of marketing activities in the future leads us to invest more heavily in fewer activities.

Recommendations

- ⇒ **Identify financial resources to re-engage an external PR consultant**
- ⇒ **Identify and invest in opportunities to encourage, support and develop new women in business role models**

PHOTO 14

6.4 Objective 3

To create an equitable business environment for women through representation and influence

Activity 1

Influencing local, regional and national business support strategies through participation in and co-ordination of consultation

WBN continues to contribute to regional and national strategies through participation in consultations and steering groups.

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| Number of co-ordinated consultation responses | | 1 | - | 3 |
| Number of strategies to which contributions were made | | 3 | 5 | 11 |

Increasingly, WBN co-ordinates consultation responses on behalf of the membership, circulating draft strategies and collecting views and opinions and incorporating them into a comprehensive, representative response.

Strategies:

| Strategy | Facilitator | Degree of contribution |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| New Business Development strategy, Merseyside | Business Link for Greater Merseyside | Consultation meeting Written response |
| NW strategic women's enterprise steering group | NWDA | Member of steering group |
| Development of women's enterprise across the regions | Prowess | Attendance at development day |
| Merseyside Social Enterprise Initiative | Social Enterprise Network | Written response |
| Changes in EU Tax systems | Institute of Business Advisors | Written response |
| REDS (Regional Equality and diversity Strategy) | North West Regional Assembly | Member of steering group |
| National Women's business centres strategy | Prowess | Consultation meeting |
| Business Skills North West | NWDA | Written response |
| Northern way strategy | Prowess members | Member of strategic development group Written response |
| Research on barriers to inform strategic development | Women in Science Technology | Telephone interview |
| Women in Social Enterprise, Manchester | 3SE | Consultation meeting |

WBN represents the views of women in business on the North West Equality and Diversity Forum, has contributed to NW Prowess members' meetings and was a representative on the NW strategic women's enterprise steering group, which was established to inform the North West implementation plan for the DTI's National Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise.

Activity 2

Developing collaborative relationships, including sharing expertise to influence change

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|------|------|------|------|
| Participation in UK partner meetings | 5 | 7* | 7* | 10* |
| Participation in European partner meetings | 2 | 4* | 2* | 5* |
| Presentation of WBN good practice | | | 1 | 3 |

* Number of staff members attending meetings, not number of meetings attended i.e. reflecting the level of staff resource that has been committed by WBN.

Collaborative practice

Partnerships with mainstream business support providers continue to strengthen, including: Business Link Operators and Chambers of Commerce, the public sector, including local authorities; Government Office for the North West; NWDA; HM Customs and Revenue, the social economy sector and the private sector.

Relationships with partners range from contractual relationships to project partnerships to working towards shared objectives. Reflecting the environment in which we are currently operating, that is one that is challenging in terms for both social economy organisations and organisations working to deliver the women's enterprise agenda, relationships sometimes come under pressure, as one contract customer told us, when asked if we work well together:

"Some of the time – a very complicated question – on a personal level we get on very well, but on an organisational level there has been friction – on occasion our relationship has been jarred".

WBN continues to work in formal partnership at national and European level through AWE and Innova SME support. These partnerships not only offer excellent opportunities to share good practice, but also create a powerful vehicle to raise awareness of effective approaches to women's enterprise. Feedback from one contract customer confirms the success of our approach:

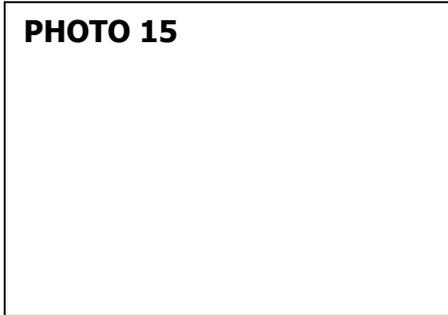
"Great Organisation to work in partnership with. I respect what they are doing and rate them very highly."

During the year, WBN has attended an increased number of meetings with partners, demonstrating commitment to working together with other organisations. Recognising investment of staff time and the small staff complement, this indicates the level of commitment WBN has made in the year.

WBN is an active member of five networks: PROWESS (Promotion of women's enterprise support), COMMACT (Commonwealth Association for Local Action and Economic Development), SAN (Social audit Network), Merseyside Network for Europe and SEN (Social Enterprise Network).

Prowess Best Practice flagship award visit on Merseyside

PHOTO 15



Flagship Best practice workshop

Following the achievement of flagship status, Prowess invited WBN to facilitate a one-day Best Practice workshop on Merseyside in May 2004. 8 Participants learned about the wide range of activities undertaken by WBN and the specific approaches that helped us to qualify for flagship status.

Building on this, WBN developed a one day workshop: 'Understanding approaches to

women's enterprise" and delivered two successful pilot workshops to business support practitioners from banks; Business Links; Princes Trust and a variety of social economy organisations. 34 delegates enjoyed the workshops, which raised awareness of women friendly approaches to business support. Comments indicate that the workshop did encourage participants to think differently:

"It helped me evaluate our services and identify what we do well and what we are not very good at when it comes to our services to women"

"It was a really Great day and I can tell you that my team were surprised at how much they did not know about the issues women face in business - Well worth attending"

Summary

Overall, we consider that we have continued to make progress in achievement of this objective, particularly reflected in the investment of resources to develop the "Understanding approaches to women's enterprise" workshop.

WBN acknowledges the comments made by one of our partners, but consider this reflects a particular period in the organisation's development. Relationships with contract customers (or potential customers) in the public sector can sometimes come under strain, depending on the political and economic climate and the position of women's enterprise support within the wider strategic context.

WBN believes all activities are underpinned by a collaborative approach and that the level of resource we commit to partnerships reflects the value we place on working together.

6.5 Objective 4

To offer an accessible and inclusive service to women from all communities

Activities

1. Encouraging active participation by women from all social and economic backgrounds.
2. Removing barriers to access projects and activities.

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|------|------|------|------|
| Number of women receiving specialist support | | | 2 | |
| Number of child places supported | | 35 | 10 | 24 |
| Number of free places at WBN conference | | 91 | 84 | - |

WBN aims to deliver services, which reach women who are not always attracted to mainstream business support provision. Consideration is given to the design, marketing and delivery of the event, the location and the provision of specialist support, including travel expenses (if this would prevent attendance).

Referring back to objective 1, activity 1, we consider the fact that the highest number of networks are those with membership of less than 25 women (i.e. networks that offer peer support), reflects the level of investment in this area.

Cultural considerations, location and accessibility

WBN takes great care in considering the language used in all literature, avoiding or explaining jargon. Events are timed to ensure that delegates have time to arrange caring support.

Venues are always checked prior to events to ensure that they are fully accessible, are convenient for public transport systems and where parking is available, that this is well lit. On the occasions where a venue is not very near to public transport, WBN arranges for delegates to be picked up at the station.

In recognition of a fully accessible website, WBN has received Web Accessibility Initiative, level AA. WBN has an ongoing accessibility policy to remain fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1999.

Childcare/Carer support

Recognising that over 70% of caring is undertaken by women, it is important to ensure that this does not exclude anyone from participating in a WBN event. WBN provided an on site crèche for 24 children to ensure that everybody could take advantage of the opportunity to participate in the visit from East Lancs to Merseyside.

Flagship status

Demonstrating continued success in our delivery approach, WBN maintained Prowess Flag Ship status for Best Practice in Women's Enterprise development (awarded 2003 and 2004).

Independently assessed against thirteen distinct standards of excellence for network organisations, designed to measure inclusion, equality, client focus and quality in the provision of support.

Summary

We consider that WBN continues to offer an accessible and inclusive service to women and designs activities in such a way as to remove barriers, where we can. Maintaining Prowess Flagship award status for a second year supports this conclusion.

2005 has witnessed reduced numbers of women receiving specialist support, however this reflects the lower numbers of women participating in events.

Internal objectives

6.6 Objective 1

To be a socially and environmentally responsible organisation

Activities

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Striving to minimise waste in terms of energy used2. Recycling and reusing materials3. Proactively participating in projects that have a wider social impact |
|--|

As a direct result of intervention from WBN, following the 2004 social accounting period, LCT (the landlords of the managed workspace in which we are based) have now committed to recycling and in 2004 introduced collections for the recycling of paper, cardboard, cans and ink cartridges.

Up to the landlord's introduction of recycling services, WBN recycled 6 boxes of paper, 4 bags of drinks cans and 1 bag of coffee jars. Ink cartridges were returned to the supplier for re-cycling. WBN collects scrap paper and re-uses the second side, to minimise our paper usage.

WBN continues to contribute in what way it can to the minimisation of energy use, by ensuring electrical equipment, lights and radiators are switched off, whenever the office is unoccupied.

An independent environmental audit was completed in 2003 and concluded that we were doing what was possible for a small service based organisation.

Resources limitations have meant that because of time pressure on staff, there has been less opportunity to participate in projects that have a wider social impact, however we continue to contribute the Regional Equality and diversity Strategy and regularly contribute to developments within SEN.

WBN promotes the benefit of environmentally friendly business policies to our member networks, whenever we receive information.

Summary

We consider that we continue to work towards this objective, recognising the limitations of a small and as yet emerging social enterprise.

Recommendations

- ⇒ **Identify relevant environmental indicators to evaluate progress**
- ⇒ **Identify further activities promoting sustainable business practices to influence women in business in the North West**

6.7 Objective 2

To be a good employer

- 1. Operating an Equal Opportunities and Diversity policy and Health and Safety policy**
- 2. Offering good terms and conditions to employees**
- 3. Providing staff with appropriate training and personal development opportunities.**
- 4. Operating an effective appraisal system.**

WBN considers that we offer good terms and conditions to staff. We operate a time off in lieu system, which ensure that staff can re-claim time invested outside the standard working day. WBN staff can choose to take up the option of a contributory pension scheme, as part of their remuneration.

Views regarding terms and conditions were gathered during each of the last three years social accounting processes and were positive, therefore this was omitted this year as the staff complement remains unchanged.

Team meetings take place each month and create the opportunity to review progress against the work plan and to raise and discuss any issues. Within this period a member of the Board took the time to join a team meeting, to help familiarise herself with the day to day activities being undertaken.

WBN constantly strives to ensure that the staff are progressing and improving their skills training. Training Courses are wide and varied: Developing excellence in Management, Board Development Day, Real women Real choices (personal development), Time management and a part time Masters in Social Enterprise.

Staff appraisals are undertaken annually, to review progress, identify areas for support and training needs. The 2004 social accounts recommended a training needs analysis was completed for all members of staff. This need was identified in January 2005, there is a commitment to ensure thorough training needs analysis is undertaken in the year 2005/06, by an external professional.

Summary

Considering the size and age of the organisation, we consider that we are working towards this objective with reasonable success. These factors also can also have a negative impact, as staff are committed to the delivery of organisational objectives and sometimes this can result in long hours worked and increasing levels of stress, however, reflecting many similar organisations in the social economy sector, working in a value driven environment brings added bonuses, by way of compensation.

6.8 Objective 3

To improve the sustainability of WBN

| |
|--|
| Identifying and developing income generating activity |
|--|

WBN is a company limited by guarantee, managed by a voluntary Board of nine Directors, supported by six Advisors (appendix 7).

Seven board meetings were held in the year. In May 2004, staff and board members attended an away day, this resulted in refinements to the mission, values, objectives and activities of the organisation. In the year, Board members have given their time to contribute to strategic development plans and bid proposals, both by attending meetings and responding to draft documents.

A Board skills analysis was complete in January 2004 to assess the existing skills within board membership and identify any gaps. It was agreed that the Board demonstrated a wide range of skills and that this exercise had provided clear information to enable the identification of appropriate sub group members as the need arises.

WBN considers its role to be that of a facilitating organisation, adding value to the activities undertaken by our member networks, creating opportunities for linkages across the North West, the UK and Europe. As such, outcomes are delivered with minimum resources. WBN employs a team of 3 and operates with annual expenditure of c£150,000.

WBN continues to develop its income generating activities. Commercial activities increased in this period and represented 10% turnover (2004: 8%). The development of the workshop, as a saleable service is considered to be a significant step forward.

The pie chart presentation of income analysis (page 6), demonstrate that WBN is still heavily dependent on contracts with public sector organisation, however it is considered that this is not unreasonable, as the organisation is contributing to sustainable business support structures in the region.

The pie chart presentation analysing expenditure demonstrates the activities of the organisation are highly staff resource intensive, reflecting the role of the organisation, offering support, advice and guidance and co-ordinating and facilitating events. Direct delivery is the second highest expenditure item, demonstrating that WBN is committed to investing in its membership activities.

Summary

We recognise the importance of developing income-generating activities, but remain realistic and recognise that as an emerging social enterprise, this is as yet a developing activity.

7. Compliance

A comprehensive staff handbook is available, which is frequently reviewed and updated and contains wide-ranging guidance regarding the organisation and its employment practices, supported by the following policies and procedures, which are implemented by WBN:

- Working Hours
- Career Development
- Leave
- Health and Safety Policy
- Stress Policy
- Environmental Policy
- Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy
- Web Accessibility Policy
- Dignity and Respect at Work Policy
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Grievance Procedure
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Volunteer Policy
- Maternity Policy
- Communication, ITC and Internet Security Policy
- Procurement policy
- Complaints Procedure

PHOTO 16

8. Recommendations

- ⇒ **Review marketing approaches, considering different stakeholder relationships to ensure clear messages**
- ⇒ **Review levels of investment in awareness-raising activities and incorporate this activity as an integral part of the marketing plan.**
- ⇒ **Consider investigating the supply chain to assess environmental attitudes, policies and practices in identifying suppliers**
- ⇒ **Ensure Training needs analysis is completed for each member of staff**
- ⇒ **Employ telephone interviews or focus group to consult with Board members in 2006, to improve response rate**
- ⇒ **Consult with WBN Associate Members**
- ⇒ **Invest in promoting WBN's uniqueness in the English regions, in future marketing materials**
- ⇒ **Review values, particularly "progressive", which is demonstrating difficult to evaluate**
- ⇒ **Incorporate more WBN network success stories into future marketing activities**
- ⇒ **Ensure that participants of exchanges/visits are given advance notice of the content, to allow them time to identify specific areas for investigation**
- ⇒ **Identify financial resources to re-engage an external PR consultant**
- ⇒ **Identify and invest in opportunities to encourage, support and develop new women in business role model**
- ⇒ **Identify relevant environmental indicators to evaluate progress**
- ⇒ **Identify further activities promoting sustainable business practices to influence women in business in the North West**
- ⇒ **Undertake focus group to consult with Board members on 2006 to improve response rate**

9. Dissemination

The social accounts will be distributed to all key stakeholders (the list is reviewed and updated annually) and will be available to anyone on request. WBN will take the opportunity to discuss the findings from these social accounts with WBN members at the AGM.

An executive summary of the social accounts will be posted on the WBN website, SAN website and an article will be included in the next issue of WBN Briefing.

10. The Next Social Audit Cycle

The social audit cycle will be in line with WBN's financial year, 1st April 2005 to 31st March 2006.

Appendix 1

AWE (Accelerating Women's Enterprise)

Partners

Bolton Business Ventures

Prowess

Rural Women's Network (Voluntary Action Cumbria)

Street Cred, Quaker Social Action

Train 2000 Ltd, centre for Women's Enterprise and Employment

WEETU (Women's Enterprise and Employment Training Unit)

WiRE (Women in Rural Enterprise)

Women into the Network, (University of Durham)

Women's Business Network (NW) Ltd

AWE Development Partnership

AWE is an England wide project supported by the European Social Fund initiative, EQUAL, which tests and promotes new means of combating discrimination and inequalities in the labour market.

Together the partners have developed a comprehensive and coherent programme of activities, which test approaches to ensure that mainstream business support is developed to meet the needs of excluded groups of women, with the ultimate aim of increasing the number of women entrepreneurs.

EQUAL is a European wide programme. Working with our European partners brings added value to activities designed to empower women entrepreneurs, through exchange activities, sharing best practice and the development of a research model analysing the position of women entrepreneurs across Europe.

The trans-national partnership includes Development Partnerships in Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands.

Appendix 2

Innova SME support

Partners

Berufsförderungsinstitut Steiermark, Austria

Human Resource Development Fund, Slovenia

Nov'na, Slovenia

Small Business Development Centre, Slovenia

Train 2000 Ltd, centre for Women's Enterprise and Employment

Women's Business Network (NW) Ltd

INNOVA SME Support is supported by the European Community initiative, Leonardo da Vinci II.

The project is developing a range of innovative products, and materials for business support practitioners, that recognise and address the particular barriers faced by women, young people and clients who live in rural communities.

WBN is taking lead responsibility for the development of a networking toolkit, which offers lots of ideas and suggestions about how to develop networks.

Appendix 3
Stakeholders

Appendix 4

EG Questionnaire analysis

Appendix 5

WBN Member networks

Insert table

Appendix 6

Women's Business Network (North West) Ltd

Events and Number of Women Attending

1st April 2004 - 31st March 2005

Insert table

Appendix 7

Awareness raising activity

Insert table

Appendix 8

Directors:

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Mariam Al-kathiry | Hawa Network |
| Sahira Chaudhrey | Active Women's Network |
| Lynne Jones | Merseyside Network for Complementary Therapists |
| Christine Lambe | Unique |
| Lisa McMullan (Chair) | Train 2000, Centre for Women's Enterprise and Employment |
| Fiona McMath | Kitted Out School Wear Ltd |
| Gillian Murdoch | Rural Women's Network, Voluntary Action Cumbria |
| Pat Parry | Sefton Women's Business Network |
| Eliza Tyrrell | WEBS, WEVH |

Advisors:

| | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Mumtaz Bashir | Manchester Employer Coalition |
| Nicola Gleave | Liverpool City Council |
| Linda Harper | Equality North West |
| Margaret Jones | MAJ Associates |
| Ellie Kerr | Business Link for Greater Merseyside |
| Yvonne Sampson | Business Link Cheshire and Warrington |