

# Community Council for Somerset Social Accounts Summary

April 2007 – March 2008

*Equipping rural communities to effect positive change*



This summary of our Social Accounts, compiled by Marjie Dorling, Social Accountant for the Community Council, incorporates the findings of our recent stakeholder consultation, the detail of which is contained on pages 2 to 4.

## Who we are

The Community Council for Somerset, established in 1926, is one of a network of 38 Rural Community Councils. We support rural communities across Somerset on community development and regeneration initiatives. As a charity and company limited by guarantee, we have a vision for confident and sustainable communities.

## Our Services

We work to counter the threats to rural communities. Our focus is about finding, keeping and supporting community champions in hamlets, villages and market towns throughout the County. We accomplish this by providing a variety of services:

**Rural Advice:** We provide face to face support to new and existing rural enterprises and community groups, guiding them through the planning and implementation of their projects.

**Village Halls Advisory Service:** We provide bespoke advice and support to Village Halls and community buildings and a vital networking forum for Village Hall committees in rural Somerset.

**Rural Women's Network:** We host this project, providing support through a website: [www.rwn-somerset.org.uk](http://www.rwn-somerset.org.uk), informal meetings and published articles. This enables all Somerset women to access advice and support regarding issues such as stress, debt, transportation, isolation and starting up/sustaining a business.

**Hidden Somerset:** This sustainable tourism project helps to promote the unique and special hidden places, tourist destinations and businesses in Somerset through the website: [www.hiddensomerset.com](http://www.hiddensomerset.com).

**Somerset Broadplaces:** This project was undertaken to raise awareness of how broadband and ICT can improve access to services and, for the 14 communities who put in successful bids, to provide free computer equipment and broadband access. Our work continues with these communities to identify their training and information needs, improving their confidence and promoting sustainability.

**Rural Housing:** Through the work of our two housing enablers, this project aims to help deliver affordable housing across the rural parishes within Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset and Taunton Deane so that affordable

housing provision can be targeted to the areas of greatest need.

**Parish Plans:** We offer support and guidance to parishes wishing to produce and implement a Parish Plan, providing people with the opportunity to say what they think about the social, economic and environmental issues affecting their community. We take parishes through the 9-step process (survey to implementation) of designing and producing a Parish Plan as well as signposting them along the way to relevant organisations which can help with the implementation of the plan.

## Sedgemoor Rural Community Development Project:

Through the support of a dedicated community development worker, communities in rural Sedgemoor are supported and their capacity strengthened so they are better able to apply for external funding and help themselves.

## Somerset Market Towns

**Forum:** Hosted by the Community Council, the Forum provides a focal point for the dissemination of good practice and support for market towns in Somerset through networking, training and individual support. It has its own website: [www.somersetmarkettowns.co.uk](http://www.somersetmarkettowns.co.uk)



## What is Social Accounting?

Over recent months, the Community Council has been reviewing its Mission, Values, Objectives and associated activities, gathering information and consulting with key stakeholders as part of a process called **Social Accounting**. Social Accounting was designed as a means for organisations working in the community to report on their performance, prove the value of their organisations and gather information essential for planning future action.

We were first introduced to the Social Accounting process in 2003 and have just completed our third set of formal accounts.

These social accounts have been verified by an external social audit panel, which scrutinised the process and produced a formal 'Social Audit Statement' similar to the traditional trustees' statement found in all charity annual reports.

## How did we do it?

For the year April 2007 to March 2008, in a climate of funding uncertainty, we chose to look particularly at our **Mission** and **Values** and one of four key objectives: '**To raise the profile of the Community Council and to promote its mission**' and its six related activities.

A key component of the Social Accounts was a questionnaire, distributed to 609 of our stakeholders. From those 609 questionnaires, we received 140 responses, representing an overall 23% response rate. We were very pleased with the

amount of supportive and constructive feedback we received which will be used to shape our future activities.

## What did we ask?

### About Our Mission

The first part of our questionnaire addressed our Mission Statement: **To enhance life throughout Somerset by equipping rural communities to effect positive change.**

We were pleased to hear that a clear majority of our respondents believe that this is an appropriate mission for us, which we fulfil. Others suggested we could fulfil our mission better by increasing our direct, proactive involvement in Somerset communities.

### About Our Values

The second part of our questionnaire addressed our six 'Value Statements':

- **Maintains a commitment to the communities of rural Somerset**
- **Believes in social justice for rural communities**
- **Believes in confident and sustainable rural communities**
- **Committed to principles of partnership working**
- **Committed to promoting equal opportunities and social inclusion across the County and within the organisation**
- **Works to the highest professional standards**

We asked our stakeholders to provide us with examples of how we have demonstrated our commitment to these values and were very impressed by the number of positive responses. We received 54 positive

comments, 23 of those relating to our Village Halls Advisory Service alone! It was evident, however, that some of our respondents are unsure of how we demonstrate our commitment to some of these values, and we will be taking steps to better publicise our activities to connect them to these values.

### About Our Objective: To raise the profile of the Community Council and promote its mission:

We asked our stakeholders to tell us whether we were successful in meeting the above objective by undertaking the following activities:

1. **The publication and distribution of Thatch magazine**
2. **The publication and distribution of the Annual Review**
3. **The publication and distribution of our Village Halls Newsletter**
4. **Our website: [www.somersetccc.org.uk](http://www.somersetccc.org.uk)**
5. **Organising and attending specific awareness-raising events**
6. **The work of our project steering groups**

### Thatch Magazine

Most of our stakeholders receive a copy of **Thatch** directly or indirectly and, after reading, pass it on to others. They particularly enjoy reading about community projects, 'News in Brief' and 'Village Hall News.' The majority of our stakeholders feel that **Thatch** succeeds in raising our profile but others feel that the mailing list could be better targeted, and the content

could incorporate even more local, project-based articles.

#### **Actions taken since the findings:**

- Reference to our objectives, values and/or mission will be made in articles about our own project work, where appropriate.
- We have changed our strategy for mailing – advertising the benefits of subscription and adding a charge for non-subscribers.

#### **Annual Review**

We adopted a new approach and style to our Annual Review, producing a shorter, more colourful replacement for the Annual Report. Despite having been circulated with Thatch Magazine, the majority of our stakeholders said they either hadn't seen a copy or couldn't remember having seen a copy. As a result, the Annual Review did not raise the profile of the Community Council as much as it might have. Of those who had seen a copy, the majority thought the format, length and content was appropriate.

#### **Actions taken since the findings:**

- The latest issue has been distributed separately to maximise its impact and will be posted on our newly-revamped website.

#### **Village Halls Newsletter**

The Village Halls Newsletter circulation is considerably smaller than **Thatch** but, even so, the majority of our stakeholders feel that the Newsletter always succeeds in raising our profile. In addition, the majority always read the newsletter, funding information

in particular, and 'News from Halls' and then pass it on to their fellow committee members. Several stakeholders believe that the Newsletter circulation could be increased to include Parish and Town Councils and other community groups which might benefit from its contents.

#### **Actions taken since the findings:**

- The Village Halls Newsletter has been re-titled as the Village and Community Halls Newsletter to better reflect its audience.
- We are making new contacts, e.g. Church Rooms to gauge their interest in becoming subscribers to the newsletter and the Advisory Service.

#### **Our Website:**

[www.somersetcc.org.uk](http://www.somersetcc.org.uk)

The majority of our stakeholders have logged onto our website and feel that the website succeeds in raising our profile but equally feel that it needs to be refreshed and updated more frequently. Our stakeholders also feel it would be a good idea to make Thatch magazine, The Annual Review and the Village Halls Newsletter all available to read on the website.

#### **Actions taken since the findings:**

We are in the process of re-designing and rebuilding our website through **Somerset Web Services**. New features will include:

- A 'Members Only' section for Village Halls (as a pilot)
- A facility whereby officers can update their own project areas with current information

- Highlights from each issue of Thatch
- The Village and Community Halls Newsletter

#### **Events**

##### **Organised by the Community Council:**

One third of our stakeholders attended at least one event organised by the Community Council and the two most popular of these events were **1)** the Community Advice and Funding Information Conference held in June, 2007 and **2)** the Village Halls Conference held in October, 2007.

These two events were also considered to be the most successful in raising the profile of the Community Council. Some stakeholders feel they already have too many commitments to attend our events, or that our events are scheduled in locations inconvenient to them.

##### **Attended by the Community Council:**

Slightly more than one third of our stakeholders attended events which we also attended but gave a mixed response when asked whether our presence succeeded in raising the Community Council's profile.

#### **Actions taken since the findings**

- Before organising an event or agreeing to attend an event, each is measured against a set of criteria to gauge their value to the Community Council's ongoing work and to the event attendees.

## Project Steering Groups

In response to our question: 'Do you believe we have made effective use of the groups to raise our profile?' the majority of our stakeholders, who are also steering group members, responded 'not applicable.' The implication is that this might not be the most appropriate platform for raising the profile of the Community Council itself.

## Actions taken since the findings

- This activity has been removed from the list of activities under this objective and re-aligned under our objective: *To support the development of sustainable communities.*

## Environmental Impact

The Community Council has an Environmental Policy which has been recently updated to include the following:

- Energy efficient practice in our offices by switching off all unused electrical equipment, and regular servicing of electronics and 'white goods'
- Use of paper and envelopes from renewable/sustainable sources wherever possible
- Recycling of office paper, cardboard, computer equipment and consumables, including ink cartridges, where possible, all plastic bottles, food and drinks cans, glass containers, and food waste
- Printing Thatch magazine on chlorine-free, environmentally friendly paper stock, manufactured with pulp supplied from sustainably-managed forests

- We purchase Fair-trade tea and coffee for use in our offices and employ the services of local caterers for meetings/visitors where practicable
- Implementing a car-sharing system where appropriate
- When directing visitors to our offices, priority is given to public transport, cycling and walking options

## Economic Impact

At present, the Community Council does not keep formal accounting records to reflect its economic impact, that is to say, the contributions the Community Council makes to the local economy to ensure its sustainability. That said, in keeping with our Mission and Values Statements, we support our local communities by using:

- Local suppliers for stationery and supplies and local caterers for all in-house and area meetings wherever possible
- A local website design company (within our office building) for our website re-design and rebuild
- A local printer for Thatch magazine and our business stationery
- Local area village halls for meetings and our AGM
- Local accountants and solicitors



## Financial Summary April 2007 – March 2008

Incoming Resources	Amount
Grant Income	£527,892
Other Income	£89,879
Subscription Income	£9,810
Total	£627,581

Resources Expended	Amount
Staff Costs	£353,968
Office Costs	£83,842
Other Costs	£78,103
Parish Plan Grants	£34,956
Total	£550,869

## Acknowledgements

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- Debbie Stewart of CEU Ltd.
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- Marc Hole, Community Planning Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council
- Mike Atkinson, Social Enterprise Coordinator, Somerset County Council

To read the full version of our Social Accounts, visit [www.somersetccc.org.uk](http://www.somersetccc.org.uk)

For more details about Social Accounting, visit [www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk](http://www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk)