



Supporting Social Enterprise in West Cumbria

The Hub

The Evaluation



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WEST LAKES RENAISSANCE



CMS
Co-operative & Mutual Solutions Limited



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BACKGROUND

THE HUB:

The Hub is a major social enterprise ‘development and support’ project in West Cumbria. It has operated since May 2005 with the current contract ending on 30th September 2008. The Hub is managed by Co-operative and Mutual Solutions (CMS) Ltd and funded by West Lakes Renaissance (WLR, £450,000), Cumbria County Council (£250,000) and Government Office North West (GONW – European Regional Development Funds, £264,819). The project is overseen by a Steering Group comprising statutory, community/voluntary, business and social enterprise sector partners. This group meets 6-8 weekly and receives reports from the project managers: CMS Ltd.

The Hub aims to increase levels of social entrepreneurship in West Cumbria. It was conceived by the key funders and other partners (Business Link, Copeland and Allerdale Borough Councils) to stimulate development of the social enterprise sector in West Cumbria. West Lakes Renaissance in particular believed that social enterprises had a fundamental contribution to achieving a more diverse and sustainable economy.

It was felt that the social enterprise support provision at the time was general not specialist, geographically based, not cohesive, fragmented and not co-ordinated. Research at the time indicated that a facilitation role was important to provide support and signposting to appropriate advice; that progression through the business development process needed to be actively managed; that an “on call” approach to support was necessary and that networking between social enterprises could be enhanced to encourage trading relationships.

The Hub was set up to complement existing regeneration strategies and to target particularly the Priority 2 wards in Allerdale and Copeland (these include: Ewanrigg, Ellenborough, Flimby, Netherhall, Salterbeck, Westfield, Moorclose, Northside, Clifton, Mirehouse West, Sandwith, Cleator Moor South, Cleator Moor North, Frizington, Distington and Howgate).

The Hub’s key objectives are:

1. To create a viable and co-ordinated level of social enterprise support provision in the area.
2. To ensure that emerging/growing social enterprises have access to the support they need, in an accessible manner and at a time convenient to them.
3. To complement and add value to the NWDA Cumbria Action plan for social enterprise.

The Hub was openly tendered in 2004/05 and Co-operative and Mutual Solutions (CMS) Ltd were chosen as the preferred provider. The contract commenced in May 2005 and a local project manager (Anne Cartner) was recruited and started work on 1st September 2005. Other members of CMS staff are brought in for their specific expertise and sector experience such as legal and governance, financial and business planning and credit union development/support. In addition, CMS has built up a database of consultants and mentors which are called on to undertake specific pieces of work.

The Hub has run 2 venture planning programmes over the 3 year term in conjunction with Lancaster University Management School. It has a revenue and capital grant pot to pump prime new start social enterprises and for trading social enterprises seeking to grow. A grants panel, a sub-committee of the Steering Committee received grant proposals which are developed and appraised by CMS Ltd.

The services provided by The Hub are as follows:

- Business development support
- Consultancy advice
- Venture Planning comprising a start up programme and a leadership programme for managers/board members run by Lancaster University
- A feasibility fund
- A programme of business mentoring
- Revenue and Capital Grants

The Hub is located within a local social enterprise near Workington in, Salterbeck ACE. More information can be found at www.thehub.coop.

THE EVALUATION:

The evaluation was conducted by Keith Richardson and Michael Berriman of Economic Partnerships, a cooperative providing research and development services for social enterprise based in Newcastle. It was conducted between May and July 2008.

It consisted of the following elements;

1. Clarification of Scope of Evaluation – we met with the Hub Steering Group and Gareth Nash from CMS.
2. Interviews with key staff, funding and support organisations – we interviewed, directly or as part of groups, a total of 15 representatives (*see appendix i*) of stakeholder organisations and staff using a semi structured interview schedule.
3. Assessment of existing data.
4. Focus groups with social enterprises - we held four focus groups attended by 25 people, most of whom represented social enterprises (*see appendix ii*).
5. Questionnaire for Social enterprises supported - 32 completed by focus group participants together with a sample by post.
6. ‘The future of social enterprise support in West Cumbria - Lessons from the Hub’. An event which was attended by 37 people (*see appendix iii*) who discussed the evaluation results together with recommendations and ways forward.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

The Hub involves a substantial programme of work, tightly focused on social enterprise development and support, in a relatively small geographical area. This means that resources are being used quite intensively when compared to most areas of the UK.

Our overall impression of the Hub was of a project well thought through and specified and delivered to a high standard.

This was not only demonstrated by the results of our research, but also by the level of participation in it. In our experience it's rare to find so many clients prepared to give up their time to comment in such detail on a particular programme, but even rarer when they believe support to have been so positive (bearing in mind that a dissatisfied customer is generally more vocal). We should also be clear that whilst participants were universally positive about support they received, many had very poor views of other business support infrastructure organisations, particularly regionally-based support models.

“Difficult to find right source of support from existing agencies as they aren’t geared up to support social enterprises whilst the Hub has promoted itself and made itself accessible to social enterprises. Support is no good if people don’t know how to get it and not much use (from other agencies) even when they do get it” (funding body)

KEY POINTS:

A very clear picture emerged from both agencies involved in social enterprise as well as from social enterprises themselves. This was that the Hub is:

1. Approachable and proactive – people felt comfortable using the Hub and it was often proactive in reaching out to social enterprises.

“Feel that I can ask for help / advice at any time and the Hub will do their best to help”

2. Comprehensive - in terms of the service it offers through staff, mentors and networking activities, the staff team was often described as being complimentary and having diverse and useful skills.

“Advice that was appropriate, relevant and made a difference; Legal support in structuring; Financial, governance support and focus; Marketing advice and help”

3. Effective - much was made of the fact that the Hub provided an intensive service that is more than a one-off short term intervention.

“Seen them do really strong work with SEs with problems and develop strong business plan to get out of problems – really seen the difference the Hub has made”

4. Tailored – other support providers were seen to provide a fixed package of support that users had to fit in to. The Hub was seen as fitting to the needs of its users.

“The Hub offers value for money, no nonsense advice in a timely manner in a way that is suitable to the target audience”

5. Experienced and established - all those involved in the Hub have built up a great deal of local knowledge and, most valuably, an understanding of local social enterprises and the environment they operate within. Relationships between the Hub and SE’s have been built up that enables the Hub to respond swiftly and effectively.

“Always there as back-up and you know they will always support you”

A point we must also be aware of is something that came across from a number of recipients of support; that CMS came into the area of West Cumbria with no previous history of working within the area and as such with no particular ‘baggage’. However, a key element of their success as identified by many participants in the research was the fact that they employed a local manager with local contacts and that she was based in the area, within a social enterprise (Salterbeck ACE).

“Their networking and local knowledge is a huge bonus. Having someone local makes a huge difference”

In addition, it is felt that the diverse Steering Group made up of the Public sector, business and community support organisations and social enterprises encouraged referral to and from partners, facilitated a collaborative approach and enabled joint decision making (between grant givers).

ACHIEVEMENT AGAINST KEY OUTPUTS:

<u>Output Summary</u>	Budget	Actual	Variance
Social Enterprises advised	20	64	44
Social Enterprises established	15	16	1
Sales in new Social Enterprises	£750,000	£449,435	-£300,565
New Jobs	30	19.7	-10
Jobs safeguarded	0	18.6	18.6

All output figures are taken at the end of June 2008, 3 months before the end of the project.

What is immediately apparent, from the above table, is that the Hub has over-achieved by some margin on its development activity across the programme area.

It has worked with more than 3 times the number of social enterprises that it initially set out to. What has also been apparent from our research is that the quality of this support has been consistently of a very high standard and, as is shown below, very well received by the client group.

The support has also enabled it to over-achieve on the establishment of new businesses. Whilst this is perennially a difficult output area in which to budget activity (due to the nature of community/business ideas/general interest), the Hub was able to accurately gauge support requirements and provide accordingly. More importantly here, all of the businesses started under the programme are still in existence. Sustainability is paramount if social enterprise is to overcome issues surrounding its effectiveness; subsequently this is a very strong output.

A list of the social enterprises advised and new social enterprises formed can be found at *appendix v*.

The figures held for 'Sales in new social enterprises' is currently down on what was agreed as a target back in 2005. With 3 months remaining of the programme and the fact that some businesses were only established in the last year, actual figures may well yet reach their target.

This is a similar case with regards to 'Jobs created' but interestingly, when we add in 'Jobs safeguarded' (an output not contracted for), we find that when looking collectively as an 'Employment support' output, the programme has proved very successful. Indeed, many commented that without the Hub, their social enterprise or others they knew of would not have survived.

"I think the support we received, although painful at times, probably was an important factor when the Financial Services Authority considered whether we should be allowed to continue, giving us time to put in place an achievable recovery business plan"

Value for money

In the year ending July 2008 The Hub supported 39 social enterprises for an average of 19 hours direct support each. The total cost of this was £4100 per social enterprise. Excluding grants for feasibility studies and project management costs the direct cost for support was £2000.

We attempted to get comparative figures for other business support activities, but were unable to do so. However, the general impression we get is that these figures compare favourably, particularly given amount of support received and its quality.

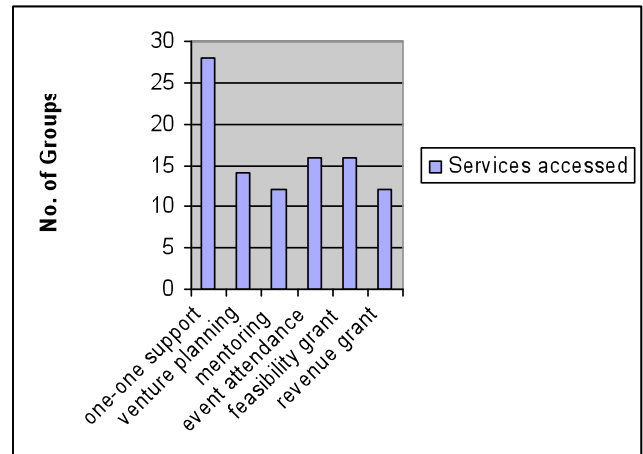
The cost also seems good value for money when the impact of this support is considered. It is not always easy to identify financial effect, but there were two examples we came across that indicated that The Hub’s impact far exceeded the cost of the support.

- A Credit Union increased its loan facility by 100%, increased its members by 100% and increased its overall income by 150%.
- A social enterprise supported since the very early days of the Hub reported an increase in sales in three years of £143,000, a 500% increase. They felt that a considerable amount of this increase – was attributable to support received from the Hub

SERVICES USED:

The above figures are taken from data received during the focus groups held, together with associated questionnaires.

We can immediately see that there was active interest in the whole range of services provided by the Hub. Most clients accessed more than one service provided, with some accessing the whole range but, as can be expected, highest levels of activity were around one-one business advice & support.



What was striking however was that more than 85% of clients involved in the evaluation had worked with the Hub for more than a year – both parties saw the development of this relationship as the way forward?

It was interesting to note that although it was assumed that most social enterprises came to the Hub for grants, in many cases this was not the case. In addition, in most cases social enterprises felt the support they received was actually more useful than the grant.

“We could have got by without the financial help but the individual advice and support is rare and invaluable”

There was a general feeling that the range of support on offer was greater than the sum of the parts and integrated well together. The only element that there was any question about was the first phase of the venture Planning programme. It was regarded as too academic and too distant from the needs of the participants. Lessons were learned from this and the second

phase, which changed its target group and introduced the ‘Social Enterprise X Factor’ event as a celebration was much better received. Partly this was to do with a change in personnel and partly due to the change in the way the programme was run. As a result, it went from being somewhat high brow to being a key element for reaching out into the community and assessing a much broader range of people, including people with drug and alcohol problems, learning difficulties and other disadvantages.

“Networking – they have established a more visible Social Enterprise sector in West Cumbria - social enterprises feel part of something and have helped create an identity and the beginnings of inter trading”

AWARENESS OF THE HUB:

Most social enterprises and support agencies appeared to be aware of the Hub and the fact that it had directly worked with 63 social enterprises clearly indicates that the Hub had successfully raised awareness and promoted the services it offered. There was also a view that it had effectively promoted the concept of social enterprise.

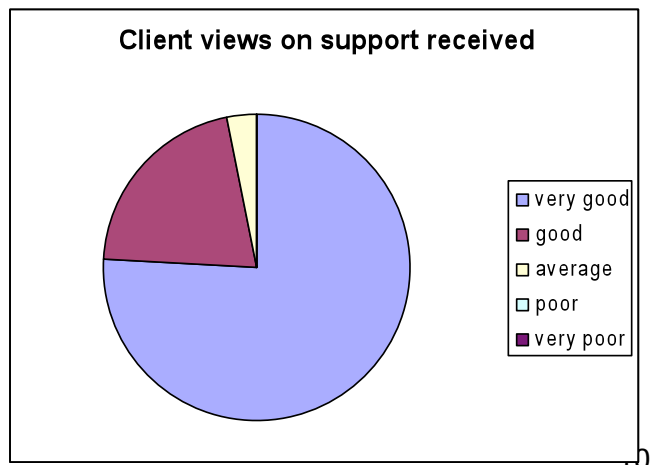
The Hub achieved this through a wide range of media and events: a launch event in September 2005, general and thematic networking events, press and pr, advertising in the Cumbrian business press and face to face contact with the public sector, business and other intermediaries.

CLIENT VIEWS OF SUPPORT RECEIVED:

Once again these figures are taken from data received during the focus groups held, together with associated questionnaires.

With more than 85% rating their service as ‘very good’ (as high as it could be), it is clear the Hub’s support was very well received indeed.

Many very positive comments were received during the evaluation process and, around support received, they included;



“If the Hub advised me of something I would trust it”

“They enabled us to give it our best shot”

“The Hub looks at the gaps and they have no axe to grind and no self interest”

WORK WITH OTHER AGENCIES:

With a steering group that over the past 3 years has included representation from all of the main agencies with a role to play in the development of West Cumbria (*see appendix iv*), it is clear that the Hub has sought to involve all who can assist in the development also of its overall aims.

One of the up-shots of this is that the Hub has become the referral point for many organisations working in and around the area – in fact the first port of call for many.

As one employee of a Local Authority put it,

“I’m amazed at how many times groups/individuals come back and thank me for the referral – it just does not happen with other organisations”

There does seem to be the feeling that the Hub had a different and more user-friendly focus where support for their clients was concerned;

“Other supporters seem to be interested in outputs. The Hub wants to concentrate on sustainable business”

As one group of clients stated so well at the recent evaluation review;

“The Hub blends the social side of CVS support with the business side of Business Link support and all of it with much more knowledge, focus and interest!”

SUCCESS STORIES:

In any research one of the hardest issues is to isolate the actual benefits of support provided from other variables that may also be having, or have had, an effect.

Therefore, in terms of social enterprise development or any other social or economic evaluation, the purest form of assessing the impact of the Hub is by comparing what would

have happened if the Hub had not existed. This is impossible to achieve however, there being too many uncontrolled variables.

However in a number of cases during the evaluation, clients made it clear that they had attempted to evaluate support they had received in ‘hard, quantifiable’ terms. In the cases below, both organisations fully believed they could put down their success to the Hub;

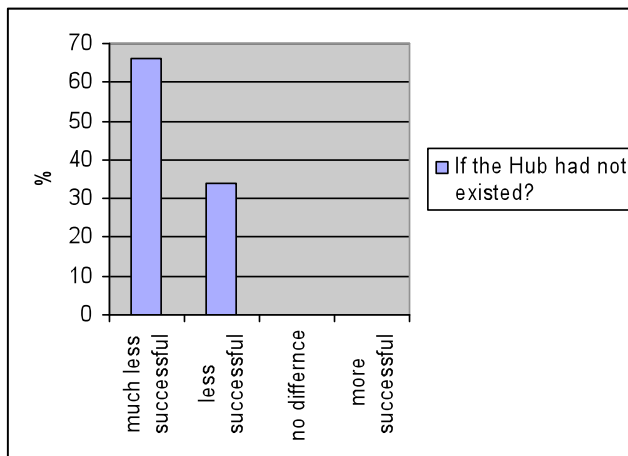
- A Credit Union increased its loan facility by 100%, increased its members by 100% and increased its overall income by 150%.
- A social enterprise supported since the very early days of the Hub reported an increase in sales from £30K in 2005 to £173K in 2008.

Anecdotally, many more clients had received as important, but less directly quantifiable, benefits;

“Without this support we would not be here - fact”

“Without the Hub, we wouldn’t have known we had an issue – we’d still be treading water”

“The time taken to get where we are would have been much longer and resource requirements much, much higher”.



This chart depicts answers given by clients when asked, what impact it would have had on their social enterprise, if the Hub had never existed. More than two thirds stated they would have been ‘much less successful’ with the other third stating they would have been ‘less successful’. Nobody thought it would have made no difference or that it would have had a negative impact on them.

“In the future there will be a slowdown in development. There has been a long-term investment as organisations supported by the Hub are more sustainable. The Hub will be missed as there will be less new Social Enterprises coming through to replace the natural wastage and business failures” (funding agency)

VENTURE PLANNING

A key element of the Hub's offer was Venture Planning (VP) co-learning training programme delivered by the Institute for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development (IEED) during 2006 and 2007. This programme worked with both existing social enterprises within the West Cumbria area, and also new start social enterprises.

Two cohorts of trainees went through the VP process. The first group consisted of social entrepreneurs, involved with a social enterprise or not, who pulled together a team of people from their community to develop a social enterprise idea.

This programme was relatively successful and satisfaction levels were reasonable. However, there were some issues with the language used by the trainers and difficulties recruiting a team.

To accommodate these factors, significant changes were made to the second cohort. This consisted of two groups, 'Launchpad' for people new to social enterprise and 'In Practice' for those already involved with a social enterprise. It also involved an X factor type of award ceremony for which the prize was £5000 for the best social enterprise idea. This was also made a high profile event and was widely publicised.

This approach proved more successful and built on the lessons from the first programme. The outcomes of the course were that VP;

- Has successfully identified and engaged new social entrepreneurs in West Cumbria. By many not involved this was seen to be its greatest success
- Stimulated new social enterprises to become established.
- Has delivered new knowledge and confidence to existing social enterprise staff.
- Supported the development of new products and services in existing enterprises.
- It has raised the profile of the sector amongst a wider body of people.
- It has created a new model for delivering social enterprise support'
- Offered the potential for this new model to be repeated and rolled out into other areas.

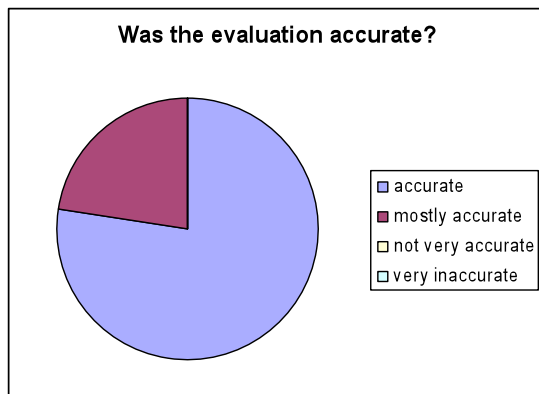
It would appear the second programme also more effectively linked into the work of the Hub and our research found it to be much more positively received.

EVALUATION EVENT - ‘THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SUPPORT IN WEST CUMBRIA- LESSONS FROM THE HUB’:

This event was held at the Oval Centre on 21st July 2008 and attended by 37 people who discussed the evaluation results, recommendations and possible ways forward.

Whilst the majority of attendees were from social enterprises, there was also representation from wider stakeholders. It was also Chaired, very effectively, by West Lakes Renaissance.

The event was very useful for a number of reasons; for us as evaluators to seek ratification of our interim findings; but equally importantly in order to generate an agreed way forward for social enterprise support in West Cumbria.

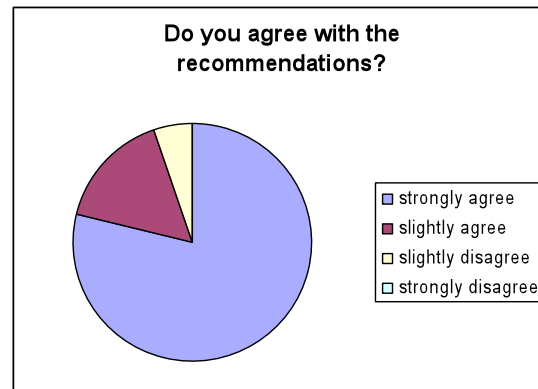


Following a full programme, attendees were asked to move into 4 discussion groups. The following graphs depict their answers to 3 key questions that were put to the groups;

1. Do you feel the evaluation is accurate – do you agree with its findings?

you agree with the recommendations as put forward?

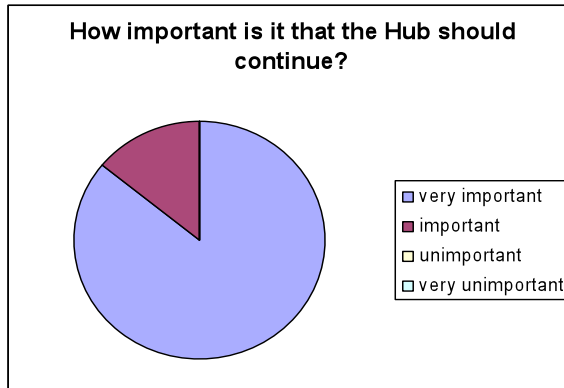
3. How important is it that the Hub continues to be funded to provide social enterprise support?



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As the charts show, wholehearted attendee support was given to the findings and to the recommendations offered. Even more comprehensive however was the insistence that the Hub needs to continue, and coming across loud and clear was the fact that there is very much a necessity for both it to operate, as well as the manner in which it operates.

“Really important for Hub to continue and have continuity and not to have a break and start again from scratch” (support agency)



What also became clear during the evaluation process was the way the Hub, as a unit over the past 3 years, very deliberately collected knowledge and information and then shared this knowledge for the benefit of all clients wherever relevant. Thus the lessons learned along the way by both staff and clients have been incorporated methodically into developing services for future clients. In this way the Hub is itself evolving and becoming stronger and, as such, even more a part of the fabric of the West Cumbrian social and economic community.

CONTINUED NEED FOR THE PROJECT/PROGRAMME:

The overwhelming evidence of our evaluation points unequivocally to a continued need for the service provided by the Hub. As evaluators we have not previously been involved in such a uniformly positive evaluation. It was a project well thought through and specified by the Steering Group and effectively delivered by CMS. Whilst this sounds simple and straightforward it is, somewhat like common sense, a rare commodity. The Project provided good value for money and the original reasons for it to be set up still pertain.

At the 'Shaping the future of social enterprise support in West Cumbria' event, it was universally agreed that the Hub should continue (just as there was in the Focus Groups).

Those we interviewed were clear of the need to continue and develop the Hub. The following quotes were typical of many that we heard and to which there were no dissenting views. They eloquently sum up the rationale for its continuation:

"Without the Hub we will be left with the bitty poor quality support there was before"

"It will take another 12 months after a new organisation starts and that will be all dead time. They (the Hub) have built up trust and understanding of how individual organisations work that will take a long time to replace"

It was also the view of all those consulted that the service should continue to be provided by Co-operative and Mutual Solutions (CMS) Ltd. To do otherwise would be costly, as any new provider may take up to a year to establish themselves and build the confidence and trust of local social enterprises and support agencies in order for them to deliver as effectively as CMS.

“Fantastic compared to other support agencies and has lots of resources. Compared to (another locally based support agencies in the North West) the Hub is much more dynamic and engaging”

LEARNING LESSONS:

In the previous section we have concluded that the Hub service should be continued and it should continue to be provided by CMS. In this section we will set out recommendations for how the service should be developed and consider lessons from the Hub for social enterprise support regionally and nationally.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUB:

In terms of continuation, we consider that there are two possible options for the Hub’s continuation. We will then look at how the Hub might be developed building on either of these two options.

1. Continue as currently organised, providing the same range of development support with the financial grants. The combination of support and finance has clearly been effective and is the preferred option if finances are available.
2. Continue with the same range of development support but without the financial grant. This would be a less preferable option. However, some of the benefits of providing grants could be provided by close working with the funds available for social enterprise through the Cumbria Community Foundation and the County Council’s grant fund (Community Regeneration Fund). This would be a considerably less expensive option also.

Given that it seems to be the general view (within the research project) that funding generally for social enterprise support is not as great as now when the Hub was set up, it seems likely that Option 2 is the most likely outcome. While the Hub’s capital and revenue grant pots have been generous, our experience is that small amounts of grant funding can be extremely useful. They can help to match other pots and exert some bargaining power for the grant giver. This has been useful for the Hub as it has provided “money” with “management”.

Although we were not asked to evaluate other forms of social enterprise support, we did ask what people felt about other forms of support that are available for social enterprise. This was done so that we could get a relative view of the Hub compared to other service providers. In

terms of other forms of business support available, the general consensus about this was as negative as people were positive about the Hub.

(Talking of another support provider) “Absolute nightmare, biggest waste of space going ... their business plan support is an online form that is so basic”

As far as we are able to ascertain, the cost of the support from the Hub is not significantly more than that provided by other agencies, in our opinion it would therefore be perverse in the extreme if agencies like the Regional Development Agency chose to fund them in preference to the Hub without very strong evidence. Indeed we would recommend that wherever possible funding for social enterprise support currently allocated to other bodies is re-allocated to fund the Hub.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUB:

Most of the following recommendations were initially outlined at the event, “The future of social enterprise support in West Cumbria - lessons from the Hub” (which we will refer to as the consultation event for simplicity). At this event, the recommendations we outlined were met with almost unanimous agreement;

1. The Hub is currently a brand rather than a real entity. We therefore recommend that it be established as a legal entity (the precise legal form to be determined).
2. That the Hub programme be extended to cover all of West Cumbria (Allerdale and Copeland), not just the priority wards.
3. That it should establish a membership with three categories:
 - Established social enterprises (ie those receiving more than 40% of their income from trading activities) within West Cumbria.
 - Aspiring social enterprises who may seek to generate more than 40% of their income from trading.
 - Agencies that support social enterprise development in the Hub’s area of operation.
4. That the Hub should be managed by a Board elected from its members with a majority of social enterprises, together with representatives of agencies supporting social enterprises (that the Hub needs to work with).

5. That in the longer term, as social enterprises become established and the sector becomes larger, that they take on greater responsibility for their own development needs and pay for this accordingly. We do not see it to be practically possible for The Hub to be paid for by social enterprises as yet (they are not yet able to do so financially or intellectually). In the medium term The Hub will have to be funded principally by grants, but it should seek to establish other independent forms of income and begin to charge for its services. This is important both in terms of the Hub becoming sustainable but also in terms of social enterprises establishing a more mature and equal relationship with support structures. This could come from;
 - a. Managing 'bidding consortia' for public service delivery and particularly bids for services to Housing Associations. Increasingly public sector providers are moving to commissioning at a County or regional level. If social enterprises do not wish to lose their local roots they could benefit from forming consortia and pay an organisation (the Hub) to provide this service. Of course, it is not just the coordination or the production of a bid that the Hub could provide; it is also the provision of specialist services like marketing, and management of contracts.
 - b. The Hub could act as a local agent for specialist providers and paid either a fixed fee, or for introductions made. For example, we are aware that the CapitalISE project in the North East is working in Cumbria supporting social enterprises to access grant funding. The Hub could be a local agent for this service, making connections and indeed delivering part of the service CapitalISE is funded to provide.
 - c. A membership fee of about £100 for support agencies and established social enterprises (aspiring social enterprises should have a reduced or free rate). This was a rate many felt was about the correct level.
 - d. Training, conferences and networking events – the events run by the Hub have been well attended and highly regarded and we believe there is scope to introduce a charging policy.
 - e. Venture Development – a group at the final evaluation event suggested that the Hub could take a share of the profits of social enterprises they work with to fund their own work. We (Economic Partnerships) have developed this type of mechanism as a means of funding social franchising. We called it 'Venture Development' because of its similarity to venture capitalism in that the venture capitalist gets a return from profits his or her capital has helped a business generate and does not charge an up front fee for the usage of their capital. In

Venture Development it is support not capital that is provided to a social enterprise, and the support organisation is paid out of any profits their intervention helps the social enterprise make. We found clear examples of how this happened with, for example, the Credit Union greatly increasing its turnover and profitability (attributed to marketing support provided by the Hub). Clearly there are a number of factors that would need to be looked into, and agreements would need to be made with the social enterprise before support is provided. It does, however provide an interesting and exciting market oriented opportunity. It should also be noted that some social enterprises have contractually agreed to fund social enterprise development out of a share of their profits. Cooperatives UK (the national umbrella body for co-operatives) is funded on this basis by the Cooperative Group, other consumer co-operative societies and other forms of co-operative (worker and multi-stakeholder) but this does not have the advantage of being market driven.

- f. Membership of the Hub could be linked to social enterprises reaching certain quality standards and proving the value of their social return. The South West regional body, RISE, has developed a social enterprise brand which only those enterprises that reach certain standards can utilise. Such a branding is valuable to social enterprises as it can obviously be a big help with their marketing. Such an approach would also help deal with certain governance issues within social enterprises as well as providing an incentive to improving quality and enabling a route to achieving this. It also benefits people wishing to purchase goods or services from social enterprises as it helps demonstrate that the enterprises are providing a social return.
- g. There is a clear need for social enterprises to have a voice. This is particularly so when dealing with the types of support provided for them and as a means of increasing awareness of social enterprise. We believe that the Hub should support social enterprises to have a voice both locally as well as on the Cumbria Social Enterprise Partnership. It is also our view that although the Hub could advocate on behalf of other social enterprise support agencies, but as a deliverer it should not be the voice itself (see below). However, this was the only real area of disagreement with our recommendations at the consultation event, with some participants feeling strongly that the Hub could and should be the local voice for social enterprise. Our view is that although simpler and easier to manage, this can lead to conflicts of interest and for social enterprises to be too dependent on support agencies.

- h. One of the unintended impacts of the Hub was, through the Steering Group, to act as a coordinator of support activities in the area. This was seen by those on the Steering Group and others to be a very valuable role that saved time and, importantly, made best use of resources. We feel that this role should be developed and formalised.
- i. Although the evidence was largely anecdotal, there were some indications that the Hub had spent a not inconsiderable amount of time working with social enterprises that were in danger of failing/ceasing to trade. Whilst this was understandable, it was clear also that if the Hub and other support agencies understood that the failing organisation in question was unable or unwilling to make the changes necessary for survival or was beyond the point of no return, then action should be taken. This was an issue that was discussed extensively at the consultation event. The general conclusion was that:
 - i. The Hub should have a short model contract for all organisations it works with. This should set out expectations on both sides and make it clear that either side can withdraw from the arrangement if they felt that the support provided is not being made use of, or is not beneficial.
 - ii. In a support situation the Hub and the supported organisation should have clear next steps detailing what each is expected to do. Subsequently, at the end of each meeting the Hub should draw up a list of actions both sides have agreed to carry out, and in particular what actions are crucial for each side to complete before further meetings or other actions can take place. Thus the Hub might agree to produce an advert or legal structure whilst the user might have to provide a list of customers etc. This need not be onerous but does provide both sides with a clear idea of what is expected of them and an understanding that if these expectations are not met, either side can withdraw.

LESSONS FROM THE HUB

What the Hub does is not particularly innovative, but it is unusual, particularly in the intensity, the medium term timescale and the comprehensive nature of the support provided. Mainstream business support has not always concentrated on establishing medium/long term business relationships and on ensuring that appropriate support is available from specialists.

The Hub has drawn on the skills and expertise of CMS staff, associates, social enterprise mentors and other specialist consultants. In this way, the Hub has been able to provide high quality advice and support to a wide range of types of social enterprise (i.e. credit unions, multi-stakeholder co-operatives/organisations, community businesses, worker co-operatives, social firms and trading subsidiaries of charities) and operating in different trade sectors (i.e. financial services, catering and food production, facilities management, construction and landscaping, childcare, social and health care).

“Working very much in the way most of us would like to work, providing long-term support”

“The Hub brings together a lot of facilities together under one roof – if we had had to go round lots of organisations it may have taken too long for us and taken up too much resource”

Participants in the evaluation, both support agencies and social enterprises themselves, frequently commented on the differences between the support offered by the Hub and that on offer from other organisations. The comprehensive long-term support of the Hub was frequently compared very favourably to short term interventions by other agencies, as we have seen.

“Are they ticking boxes (like a regional social enterprise support agency) or are they delivering services like the Hub and WISE?”

On the one hand we were frequently told of other large regional agencies whose support was over bureaucratic and also about the many ineffectual, but possibly cheaper, supports projects. However, our analysis of costs indicates that the cost of the support provided by the Hub is not expensive and we have no evidence that other support providers are significantly cheaper). On the other, we have the intensive long-term support of The Hub, often thought to be expensive, (though our evidence does not support this) but which is undoubtedly effective.

Because of a lack of data on other providers and their less intensive way of working, we cannot definitively say the Hub’s methods are more effective, but we believe they are and the evidence very clearly points to this. Unit costs may well be lower than for mainstream business support, but the gains to the public purse from activating parts of the population that through exclusion or disadvantage may not be working and often claiming benefits, as the Hub does and mainstream business support does not often achieve, are considerable.

As we have found, the Hub provides good value for money and a high quality service and has been a key resource for the development of social enterprise in West Cumbria. The sector has welcomed its presence and now views it as integral to individual and collective start up and growth.

Appendix i – Interviewees

Phil Greateorex	Sellafield Ltd
Roy White	TSELF
Alan Black	ACE
Anne Cartner	CMS
Gareth Nash	CMS
	Cumbria Community
Roger Hart	Foundation
Paul Dodson	Cumbria County Council
Viv Lewis	SECOD
Tom Bell	Business Link North West
Nick Hardy	West Lakes Renaissance

Appendix ii – Focus Group Members

Alison Marrs	WISE
Patrick Everingham	Mentor
	CCC- Neighbourhood
Dave Smith	development worker
Heather Snodden	Community worker
Keith Fitton	Mentor
Mark Fryer	South Workington Partnership
Michael	Moor Close
Justine Lewis	MANA Credit Union
Dave Camlin	Sound Wav
Mr Smith	Home Appliance
Carl Hodgson	Home Appliance
Grant Rayson	Home Appliance
Debbie Keir	Allerdale BC
Bill Revile	Salterbeck SRA
Lesley Dixon	Home Housing
David Howarth	Adam
Bridget Hornsby Smith	CCVS
Simon Bonnin	Learn First
Craig Lewis	Whitehaven AFC
Sheila Moffat	Works 4 you
Andrea Dockray	Whitehaven Credit Union
Matt Dalton	Starting Point
Lee McGarry	West Coast Fitness
Jo Crowe	PEC
Diane Ward	Allerdale Borough Council
Nick Hardy	West Lakes Renaissance

Appendix iii – Event attendees

Alison Marrs	WISE Group
Alex Armstrong	St. Mary Westfield
Michelle Simpson	Mirehouse Community Centre Association
Keith Fitton	Mentor –Jupiter
Patrick Everingham	Mentor -Mind in West Cumbria
Justine Lewis	MANA Credit Union
Michael S	Moorclose JAF CIC
Roy White	NW Community Loan Fund
Keith Richardson	Economic Partnerships
Mike Berriman	Economic Partnerships
Martin Mc Mullen	West Cumbria Community Gym
Jennifer Burkett	Salterbeck ACE - Oval Centre
Sheila Moffatt	Works 4 You
Nick Hardy	West Lakes Renaissance
Simon Sjenitzer	Cumbria Vision
Mark Fryer	South Workington Partnership
Bill Reville	Salterbeck ACE
Sue Hearn	West Cumbria Business Cluster Ltd
Bob Barnby	Hospice at Home West Cumbria
Michael	Learning First
Simon	Learning First
Dog Holden	West Cumbria Development Agency
Gareth Nash	CMS
Dave Hollings	CMS
Michelle Mc Gibbons	CMS
Anne Cartner	The Hub /CMS
Alan Black	Salterbeck ACE
Geoff Downham	Voluntary Action Cumbria
James Cox's	West House
John Probert	Capitalise
Nick Kennan	P&S
Maria Toman	Copeland Homes
Diane Ward	Copeland Borough Council