Wales CVC Circuit Rider Pilot – West Wales and Merthyr Tydfil
November 2006 – May 2008

Pilot Project Evaluation

Regional Partnership Project on behalf
of the Infrastructure Partnership
(County Voluntary Councils, WCVA and
Independent Volunteer Bureaux)

Report prepared by: Catherine Palmer, Project Development Manager
Contributions: Phil Perry, Rae Coope, CVC Circuit Riders

Date: September 2008

Acknowledgements

The Wales CVC Circuit Riders Regional Partnership pilot project was funded by the Communities @One fund.

Communities @One is a Welsh Assembly Government initiative to help people in Communities First areas make the most of new technology. The programme is jointly funded through the European Union's Objective 1 and 2 programmes and the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Communities @One project was administered by Wales Co-operative Centre.

The CVC Circuit Riders pilot project is managed by a Regional Partnership of County Voluntary Councils and aims to assist voluntary and community groups working within Communities First wards across Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Merthyr Tydfil to develop their activities or services through the use of ICT.

The Regional Partnership is made up of Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services(CAVS), Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations (CAVO), Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) and Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil (VAMT).

Charity No 1062144	Charity No 1061364	Charity No 1063289	Charity No 1060242
Telephone No 01267 236367	Telephone No 01570 - 423232	Telephone No 01437 769422	Telephone No 01685 353900

Table of contents

1. Background to CVC Circuit Rider Pilot

The aim of the project was to pilot the provision of a developmental ICT support service to voluntary and community groups, with four organisations working together on a regional basis.

The project was a pilot delivered on behalf of the Infrastructure Partnership which consists of Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), 19 County Voluntary Councils and Independent Bureaux. The aim was to provide methodologies and toolkits to enable the activity to be rolled out across the rest of the CVCs in Wales.

The Infrastructure is formally recognised and supported by the Welsh Assembly Government through a five-year partnership agreement, through which the Social Justice and Regeneration Department provides core funding against agreed service specifications.

The pilot partnership was made up of four County Voluntary Councils in Pembrokeshire (PAVS), Ceredigion (CAVO), Carmarthenshire (CAVS) and Merthyr Tydfil (VAMT).

PAVS and VAMT already had experience in delivering ICT support and development as one of their activities, CAVO and CAVS did not.

The pilot was to expand the range of services provided as well as the geographic coverage.

1.1 Links to County Voluntary Council Services

One of the main benefits of an ICT service of this kind being delivered by a CVC is that all groups will benefit from the full range of services currently provided by the CVC network.

These services include;

- a development and funding advice service
- access to a range of training courses
- links to volunteer management and recruitment services
- availability of practical services
- access to voluntary sector information and involvement in strategic planning.

1.2 The main activities of the pilot project

- Strengthening the infrastructure role of the four County Voluntary Councils to enable them to provide a consistent, comprehensive and ultimately sustainable ICT[1] development and support service to voluntary and community organisations.

  Setting up a Circuit Rider Team to provide a full range of services, including an ICT Telephone Helpdesk, on-site technical support / development and web-based communications support, mainly website development.

- Developing an ICT Information and Support Centre as a single reference point and resource repository accessed by all Infrastructure partners, initially on a virtual basis.

  The purpose of the resource was to bring together the full range of good practice, information and research outcomes that CVCs could share to enable them to build the capacity of locally based groups to bridge 'the Digital Divide' and improve services offered through voluntary action.

  Further development of information held in the resource was for use by the voluntary and community group members themselves.

1.3 Funding constraints

The pilot received funding from the Communities @One fund - a Welsh Assembly and European funded project restricted to voluntary and community groups in Communities First wards.

In Pembrokeshire (PAVS), Ceredigion (CAVO), Carmarthenshire (CAVS) this was a small area compared to the overall county but in Merthyr Tydfil (VAMT) the entire borough is covered by Communities First.

[1] The term Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) covers PCs and networks, the full range of electronic communications devices (PDAs and 3G mobile phones) and devices which create or capture digital content (video cameras and sound recorders).

2. Delivery Mechanisms for the Circuit Rider service

The project delivered three complementary approaches to ICT support and development:-

2.1 Promotion of digital inclusion through the use of new technologies

123-communicate model

The delivery of the established PAVS *123-communicate* service was expanded into Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire.

123-communicate is an established tailored programme, delivered in an informal and supportive environment and encourages groups to get involved in ICT by inspiring and supporting them to use a range of communication technologies, at whatever level and pace suits them.

This service was not delivered in Merthyr Tydfil as a local project, Shape-IT, was providing support for local groups to get a webpage on the county Web portal and was seen as a duplicate project by the funders.

The aim of the service is to build confidence to enable groups to create their own content and contribute to their own websites and on-line communities, as well as other on-line initiatives.

The service provides:-

- Support to build, publish and maintain a simple information website and to create email accounts
- Support to create a secure private on-line community for group or network interaction
- Basic web hosting for group / community websites
- ICT Telephone Helpdesk and email support
- Practical Active Content Creation workshops using new technologies to produce website content text / video / audio
- Information workshops eg internet safety, website accessibility
- Comprehensive Information service eg Good Practice guidelines for email and websites, access to local training in ICT and web authoring, advice on seeking funding for computer equipment

2.2 Provision of ICT Technical support and Strategic Development

The project piloted the provision of an ICT Technical Support service based on the 'circuit rider'[2] model of mobile support, co-ordinated through a Central ICT Helpdesk.

The team delivered a broad range of ICT technical support services, with the emphasis on strategic development, capacity building and planning, including;

- Information and awareness raising activity
- Provision of an ICT Healthcheck which is a review and assessment of current activity and future needs of the group
- Access to an ICT Telephone Helpdesk with on-site technical support as required
- Development of an ICT Action Plan for future needs after the pilot project end
- Technical workshops on practical support issues eg backing-up data, installing software and simple repairs.

During the short period of the pilot project, the Circuit Riders assessed sustainable solutions to meet the individual ICT needs of the groups - training for staff and volunteers, mutual support networks, finding and using local support services and possible social enterprises.

2.3 Research Activity and Development of an 'ICT Information and Support Centre'

The Partnership developed a Draft Regional ICT Strategy as well as model ICT polices and procedures.

A virtual centre was created that enables individual groups, project staff and volunteers, Trustees and the sector's infrastructure to benefit from the focus on up-to-date information and research outcomes; examples of best practice; project work; innovative development and future planning.

[2] **Circuit Riding – A guide for voluntary sector managers and development workers published by lasa Aug 2004**
A Circuit Rider is a mobile IT development worker who supports a caseload of small voluntary organisations, and who works collaboratively with other Circuit Riders. They are not based in the organisations but have an on-going relationship with many who cannot afford, or need, full time IT support.

In 2006 there were several examples of 'Circuit Rider' type working in Wales but none that cover the full spectrum of activity of the preferred Circuit Rider model.

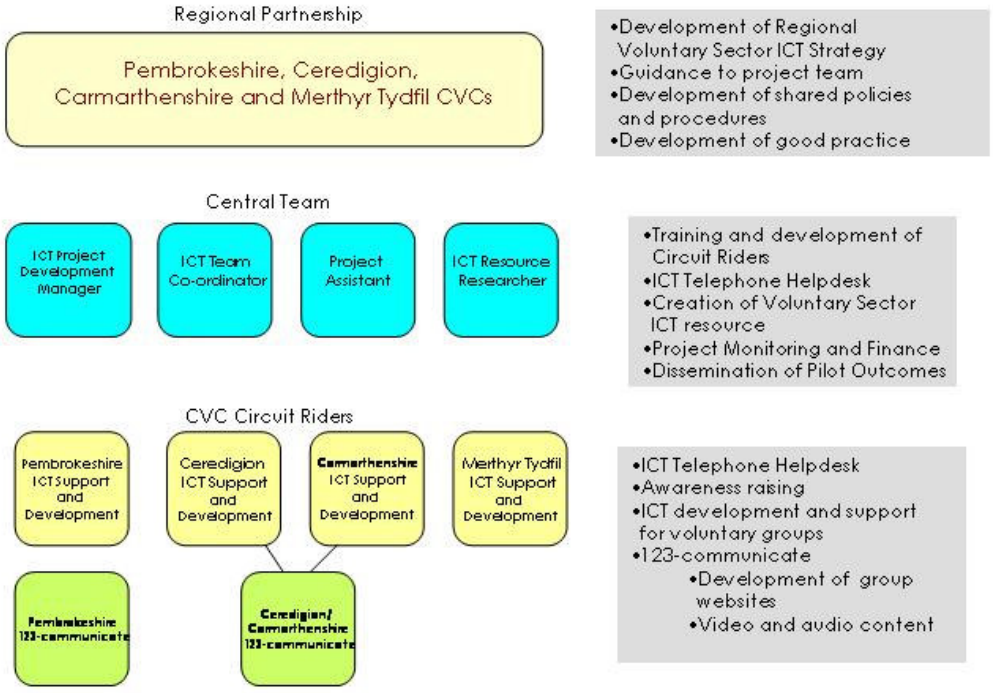
2.4 Team Structure and management

Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) acted as the lead body and were responsible for project development and implementation, managing the central budget and filing claims, all internal and external monitoring requirements and the daily management of the team.

The Central Team were based at PAVS office in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire and consisted of the following staff: ICT Project Development Manager, ICT Team Co-ordinator, Project Assistant, ICT Researcher, Pembrokeshire Circuit Rider

Circuit Rider Team
The three other CVCs (CAVO, CAVS and VAMT) employed a Circuit Rider each, with an additional Circuit Rider delivering the *123-communicate* programme across Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire.

The host CVC provided 'pastoral' management to the Circuit Rider, except for VAMT in Merthyr Tydfil where daily line management was provided by the CVC.



Budget Management

Each CVC had a basic budget which covered the salary, purchase of a laptop and basic costs of their Circuit Rider, whilst PAVS had the budget for the Central Team salary costs and the budget for all project activity and other equipment.

Each CVC submitted their budgets to the PAVS Finance Officer who, as the lead body, collated the quarterly claim on behalf of the Partnership and dealt with any queries with the funding body Communities @One.

Equipment and Facilities

Each Circuit Rider was equipped with a laptop and mobile phone as well as a toolkit, which included a network tester.

Shared equipment such as projectors and camcorders were held centrally and loaned out as required.

2.5 Project Application Procedure

As support was restricted to groups working across Communities First wards, a Project Application procedure was developed by the Central Team to ensure they only worked with eligible groups.

Groups completed the Project Application Form (PAF) and submitted it to the Central Team. Once accepted onto the project, the group were written to and assigned a local Circuit Rider.

The Circuit Rider contacted the group to arrange an initial visit to find out what the group's activities were and their current level of ICT involvement. If possible, a basic ICT Healthcheck was carried out at the same time.

The group were then provided with practical technical support and / or the *123-communicate* service (mainly providing website creation support) as required.

All contact and activity with the group were logged onto the web office tracking database which was available to all team members.

3. Details of Pilot project Activity – November 2006 to May 2008

3.1 Breakdown of Groups by geographical area and type of support

The project worked in the following Communities First wards in each county:

Ceredigion **(CAVO)** – Penparcau, West Aberystwyth and Communities of Interest Tregaron

Carmarthenshire **(CAVS)** – Felinfoel, Llwynhendy, Pantyffynnon, Glanymor, Tyisha and the Upper Amman Valley

Pembrokeshire (**PAVS**) – Llanion and Monkton and Communities of Interest – Youth

Merthyr Tydil **(VAMT)** – the whole of the borough of Merthyr Tydfil

NB All further references to groups within a particular county will be by the local CVC initials.

	Number of groups			Breakdown of Support			
CVC	**Project Applications**	**Support provided**		**Technical Advice**	**Technical support**	**Website support**	**Both**
CAVO	21	18		4	9	11	6
CAVS	39	29		1	14	26	12
PAVS	24	21		1	12	17	9
VAMT	14	14		5	9	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	98	82		11	44	54	27

- **66%** of groups created their own website
- **54%** of groups had practical help with technical issues and forward planning
- **33%** benefited from both types of support
- **17%** of the groups did not progress past the initial application. From past experience, lead times for group engagement can be many months or years. This was a 12 month engagement period.

4. Evaluation of Circuit Rider Activity with Groups

4.1 Methodology

A questionnaire was developed by the Project Development Manager and the ICT Researcher to evaluate different aspects of the project:

- Group awareness of the project
- Ease of joining the project
- Stage of ICT Development of Group
  A selection of questions initially asked as part of the ICT Healthcheck
- *123-communicate* – Website Development received
- ICT Technical Support received
- Working with the local Circuit Riders
- Future ICT requirements

The questionnaire was approved by the Partnership.

Five groups were selected from each area by the local Circuit Rider, on the basis that they had received a significant amount of support during the project.

Groups that had only received ICT advice or one PC installed were not selected.

25% of the groups supported were evaluated.

Each group was visited by the ICT Researcher, who was selected as she had not previously participated in any group activity and was not known to the groups.
One group had the survey conducted over the telephone.

The survey was carried out over the period of one month at the end of the project.

4.2 Results Analysis

The questionnaire was created in ***snap 9*** (market research software) which was also used to store and analyse the results.

The results were analysed by the Project Development Manager.

The data was analysed as a region and by county.

4.3 Regional Overview

Of the **25% of groups** who took part in the evaluation,

General Awareness of Project

- **90%** currently use their local County Voluntary Council and all of them were aware that Circuit Riders was a CVC service
- **60%** heard about the project from a friend or colleague, **15%** from a telephone call of introduction from a Circuit Rider
- **75%** had seen the Circuit Rider flyer
- **80%** found the Project Application process **Very Easy, 20%** found it **Easy**

Awareness of Project Services

- **65%** were aware of the **ICT Telephone Helpdesk**
- **70%** were aware of the *123-communicate* **Website Development service but only 70%** of these, knew about the **content creation eg video**
- **95%** knew the project provided **ICT Technical support** but less than half of these **(48%)** knew that **strategy planning** was also offered
- Only **half** the groups were aware of the **Circuit Rider project website**

Only one group was aware of any other similar ICT project in their area.

Possible Impact of the Circuit Riders on ICT Development of Group

If appropriate, groups joining the project were given an ICT Healthcheck, which consisted of a range of questions about their ICT usage, ownership and financing.

A selection of ICT Healthcheck questions was asked again, approximately a year later, as part of the final Project Evaluation survey.

The purpose of this exercise was to give an indication of how Circuit Rider activity may have impacted on the groups.

Changes to group members, perceptions of individuals and other external factors make interpretation of the answers difficult.

Changes in factors restricting the wider use of ICT

- Funding continues to be an issue for the vast majority of groups (**>70%**) and little appears to have changed during the course of the project.

- Lack of support was initially a key issue, whereas at the end of the project most groups no longer consider support to be an issue, reflecting confidence in the level of support offered by the project. **However, 90% would still consider support to be a major issue should the project not continue.**

- About **75% of groups** considered a lack of skills and/or knowledge to be an issue at the start of the project and this has risen. This could be due in part to increased awareness and raised expectations.

Increased infrastructure capacity and ICT usage

- The majority of groups had broadband Internet at the start of the project and all groups had broadband by the end.

- With broadband uptake so prevalent, many groups are now expanding their ICT infrastructure to include networked capacity. **67% of groups** are now networked and **27% of groups** have either added to, or improved, their network infrastructure.

- **Over 90%** of groups thought they would benefit from using ICT more and this figure remained largely constant during the project.

- ICT usage for key tasks such as administration, communications, information and research was surveyed and of those groups not already using ICT in each key area, **84% have increased their usage** during the course of the project.

- **80% of groups** now employ some form of mobile working using ICT.
  The main areas of increase were in the use of laptops (up 50%) and mobile phones (up 27%). VoIP(Voice over IP), video conferencing and Instant Messaging are starting to be used more widely.

Sustainability

One of the key objectives of the project, and equally one of the most difficult to achieve and benchmark, is that of sustainability and embedding ICT into future plans.

At the beginning of the project **no groups surveyed said they had an ICT budget.** However, development work undertaken with groups has given rise to a **13% increase** in the number of groups that now have a dedicated budget for ICT.

123-communicate Service evaluation

The *123-communciate* service provides information and support around web-based communications, such as internet access and email but is predominately about supporting groups to create and maintain their own websites.

Other activities, such as creating blogs and videos, were also offered to groups.

70% (14) of the groups evaluated used the *123-commnicate* service.

- Only **15%** had had a website previously
- **86%** received support to purchase their own domain name and create a website – the remainder used the free web hosting for an existing website
- **2** groups set up an **On-line community**
- **3** groups created **video content**
- **4** set up **emails** and **2** had assistance with their **internet connections**

The process of creating a website with a group is well defined as it has been used with nearly 200 groups during the past few years in Pembrokeshire.

It requires the group, through support from the Circuit Rider, to thoroughly plan the structure and look of the website from a set of standard templates, to learn how to update using the appropriate software, as well as create all their own content.

There was a large variation in how easy or difficult the groups found the whole process of creating their own website. This may be due to many factors, such as whether they had finished the entire process or were still in the final stages and how well the process was tailored to the individual group.

More detailed analysis needs to be carried out by the team, almost on a group by group basis, to see if improvements can be made to the process.

12 of the groups are planning to update their websites in future and feel confident that they will be able to do this in six months time. This will be a test of their learning and needs to be followed up at a later date to complete the overall evaluation of the service.

- **Over 70%** said the website had raised awareness of thier activities and **43%** had attracted new members
- **65%** said the website made it easier to inform members of meetings and events
- **4 groups** said it had helped with **a funding bid**

123-communicate Service contd

The *123-communicate* process uses **Adobe Contribute** software as the preferred method for groups to update their websites. This software is designed for non-technical people to update web pages.

Although there is a cost for this software, most groups have found it very easy to use as it allows them to edit pages live using basic word processing and browser skills.

Groups can use other software if they want to.

The Circuit Rider will advise the group to initially use a free trial version before purchasing the full license.

The cost for Adobe Contribute is approx £100 and all groups managed to purchase it out of their group funds.

- **8 groups** used the Contribute trial version before purchasing and **3** managed to get all their content uploaded before the trial ran out
- **2 groups** used the copy installed at the ICT Drop-in facility in the PAVS office in Haverfordwest
- No other software was used

All groups surveyed who had experienced the 123-communicate process said they **would recommend the service** to another voluntary group.

Working with the local Circuit Riders

All the groups found the Circuit Riders that they had contact with '**Interested and approachable'** or **'Friendly and enthusiastic'**.

Groups found the language used by the Circuit Riders equally, **'Technical but the Circuit Rider explained terms used'** or '**Clear and concise'.**

ICT Technical Support and Development

Although PAVS ICT projects provided technical support to groups in the past, it has mainly been in support of the *123-communicate* process, and it has not provided a full technical support service (for example PC and network installations, fault finding etc) to groups for many years. PAVS were keen to provide this service in a manageable way - it can be resource hungry and difficult to balance across many groups needing support.

The ICT Officer at VAMT had been providing technical support to groups in Merthyr Tydfil for many years prior to this project.

Previous research by PAVS, and further work during the project development process, suggested that the Circuit Rider approach of a shared worker, providing development and planning support as well as practical support, would work in a rural area such as West Wales.

The project gave the Partnership the opportunity to pilot this approach.

All groups in the evaluation received ICT Technical Support from the project.

- **45%** of groups were previously getting support from **a friend or relative** of a group member
- **20%** had someone in the group who could help
- **40%** used a **local supplier**/**shop** when they needed help
- **20% did not have any technical support at all**

As well as solving problems the Circuit Rider function was to help the groups help themselves.

- **50%** said that all their main issues were resolved and 50% said Yes, mostly
- **45%** said they were more informed about their equipment and 50% said Yes, mostly

All groups surveyed who had experienced the ICT Technical support service said they **would recommend the service** to another voluntary group.

Answers from the groups who took part in the Project Evaluation when asked ' What did you learn?'

'Setting up a network, creating internet connections'

'How to set up an email account unaided. Extra group members informed. He made us do it!'

'Technical terms. Helped with confidence, able to give it a go, but backup if needed.

'Not to give up. Gave advice on domain name'

'None really, he did diagnostic tests and produced reports'

'Security + regular maintenance checks'

'Concentrate on building the website'

'Learnt about network structure'

'Gave us the confidence that we would do a website'

'About websites'

'About spyware and software to help prevent it'

'Ideas of things we can do in the future. Clarified how systems work.'

'Way of solving recurring problem'

'Broadened our knowledge. Answered our questions, gave general advice.'

'How to create a desktop shortcut'

'About networks'

'How to edit a website'

'How system works, technical side of things. How to sort out little problems'

'I owe it all to him - from being a novice to now producing a newsletter. Gave me confidence'

'Backing up, confidence in using the computer, internet, email, FW email'

4.4 Pembrokeshire Communities First Wards Project Evaluation

ICT Technical Support

- **2** groups did not previously have any technical support
- **2** groups were previously getting support from **a friend or relative** of a group member
- **1** had someone in the group who could help
- **2** used a **local supplier/shop** when they needed help
- or a mixture of above three were used

As well as solving problems, the Circuit Rider function was to help the groups help themselves.

- **80%** said that all their main issues were resolved and **20%** Yes mostly
- **60%** said they were more informed about their equipment and **40%** said Yes, mostly
- **All groups** felt more confident about tackling everyday problems.
- **All groups** felt more confident about routine technical tasks (eg backups, security issues)

Comments about ICT support

'More confident about finding out how. For example, often a wizard will appear to help.'

'Found (service) very efficient. Good to try first over the telephone. Good that someone can come out if needed.'

All groups would recommend the ICT support service to another group.

General Comments

'We like the idea of a telephone support line as an initial avenue.'

'Would rather a local person, not too remote as a call centre / telephone helpline'

'The project has worked very well for us.'

4.5 Carmarthenshire Community First Wards Project Evaluation

ICT Technical Support

- **1** group did not previously have any technical support
- **2** groups were previously getting support from **a friend or relative** of a group member
- **3** used a **local supplier/shop** when they needed help
- or a mixture of the above two were used

As well as solving problems, the Circuit Rider function was to help the groups help themselves.

- **20%** said that all their main issues were resolved and **80%** said Yes mostly
- **80%** said Yes, mostly they were more informed about their equipment and **20%** said No
- **60%** felt more confident about tackling everyday problems, **40%** did not.
- **40%** felt more confident about routine technical tasks (eg backups, security issues) **60%** did not

Comments about ICT support

'Would be nice to have a workshop. Want to learn more about technical side.'

'Under a service level agreement with a company' (Therefore support restricted)

'Have now got confidence to do things'

'Lack of our time has affected how much we could do'

All groups would recommend the ICT support service to another group.

General Comments

'Been of huge benefit, free, honesty + trust factor'

'Learned new skills + has been of great benefit particularly with our young people'

'Support has been invaluable.'

4.6 Ceredigion Community First Wards Project Evaluation

ICT Technical Support

- **1** group did not previously have any technical support
- **2** groups were previously getting support from **a friend or relative** of a group member
- **1** had someone in the group who could help
- **2** used a **local supplier/shop** when they needed help
- or a mixture of the above three were used

As well as solving problems, the Circuit Rider function was to help the groups help themselves.

- **60%** said that all their main issues were resolved and **40%** said Yes mostly
- **60%** said Yes, mostly they were more informed about their equipment and **40%** said Yes mostly
- **All groups** felt more confident about tackling everyday problems
- **All groups** felt more confident about routine technical tasks (eg backups, security issues)

Comments about ICT support

'Know how to get help when needed' *'Excellent and could do with more'*

'Have now got confidence to do things ' *'I know how to approach problems now'*

'Very grateful, easy to contact '

All groups would recommend the ICT support service to another group.

General Comments

'Excellent reliable service'

'Not enough availability of technical support It has been really good for us'

'Would love it to continue. The support has been amazing'

'Has been fantastic'

4.7 Merthyr Tydfil Community First Wards Project Evaluation

ICT Technical Support

- **3** groups were previously getting support from **a friend or relative** of a group member
- **2** had someone in the group who could help
- **2** had used the previous ICT support from VAMT
- **1** used a **local supplier/shop** when they needed help

As well as solving problems the Circuit Rider function was to help the groups help themselves.

- **50%** said that all their main issues were resolved and **50%** said mostly
- **45%** said they were more informed about their equipment and **50%** said Yes, mostly
- **80%** felt more confident about tackling everyday problems and **20%** not sure
- **80%** felt more confident about routine technical tasks (eg backups, security issues) **20%** not sure

Comments about ICT support

'It makes a huge difference to us.' *'Job done has been splendid'*

'More confident because backup is available'

'Phone when it goes wrong'

All groups would recommend the ICT support service to another group.

General Comments

'Project has saved a vast amount of time. Best project we have had help from. D has been brilliant'

'Has been invaluable, if not available would have caused us financial difficulty.'

'Circuit Rider has been very valuable to our organisation'

'Excellent reliable service'

5. Evaluation of ICT Telephone Helpdesk

The aim of the ICT Telephone Helpdesk was to provide an initial query service for all groups in the Communities First wards, regardless of whether they had applied to the project for full technical or website support.

The ICT Telephone Helpdesk was also used by the groups signed up to the project to access help and contact the Circuit Rider team.

- During the period April 2007 to April 2008 inclusive, the project received **178 calls** to the ICT Telephone Helpdesk.

- Calls to the ICT Helpdesk are distributed evenly across the CAVS, CAVO and PAVS regions, with VAMT only recording 1 call to the central ICT Telephone Helpdesk.

- There does not appear to be any correlation between the number of groups registered or engaged per region and the number of calls.

- Generally, calls relating to Contribute/website building, Internet/network connectivity, and printing issues seemed to dominate.

- When presented with a choice of mechanisms for contacting the project for help or assistance, groups demonstrated an **overwhelming preference to contact a Telephone Helpdesk number.**

- However, there was also an overwhelming preference or expectation to speak to “their” local Circuit Rider with little comprehension of the wider nature of the Project or that someone else may be able to help them with their issue.

- The **second most popular method** for contacting the project for help or assistance was by **email.**

- Some groups expressed a preference that **email** may be preferred for **less urgent issues** such as requesting information.

Overall feedback for the ICT Telephone Helpdesk service received was overwhelmingly positive, with groups valuing the service and feeling that it met their needs.

For the full version of the ICT Telephone Helpdesk Review see Appendix 1

6. Project Team Research Activity

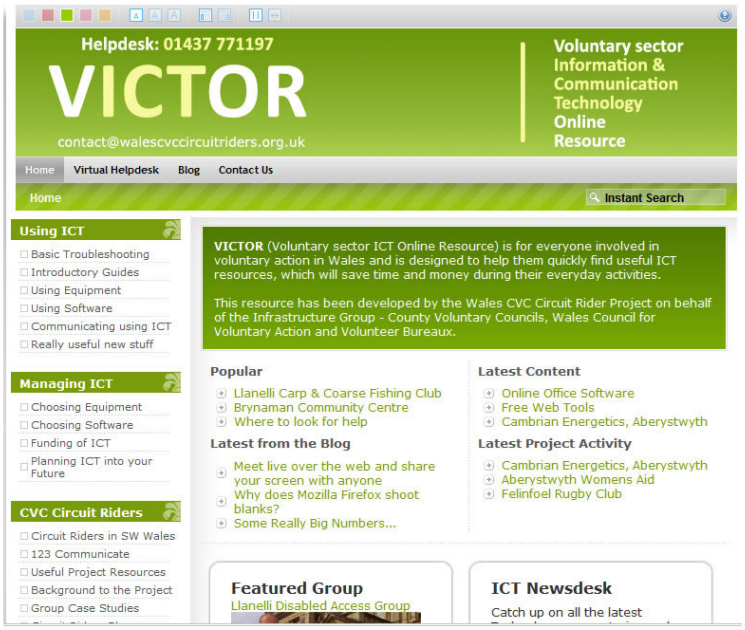
As well as providing a comprehensive support service to the groups, the team carried out a series of research and development projects to enhance their service delivery.

6.1 Development of 'ICT Information and Support Centre' - VICTOR

In support of the Circuit Rider service, the Project team has established a resource repository that can be accessed by all Infrastructure partners.
The resource is called the 'Voluntary Sector ICT On-line Resource' (VICTOR) and was launched at the Wales Digital Conference in Cardiff on the 14th March 2008.
The web address is www.victorwales.org.uk.

The 'vision' was to create a 'Website with a Third Sector View' which would initially be added to by the project team and eventually opened up to other ICT development workers. The resource was created by a subset of the team, although all members of the team were involved where possible in the design and content creation stages.

Screen shot of Home page of Voluntary sector ICT Online Resource (VICTOR)



A **Case Study** describing how the team researched and selected appropriate Content Management System (CMS) software for the development of **VICTOR** can be found under the CVC Circuit Rider section of the web resource.

6.2 Circuit Rider Development - Training and Standards

As a Pilot study of the Circuit Rider methodology of providing support and development, an important theme was the identification of Circuit Rider key skills and standards of working.

ICT Hub Circuit Rider Training and Standards Project

In July 2007 the CVC Circuit Rider Project Manager attended an initial meeting of the *Iasa* Circuit Rider Training and Standards Project which was funded to start the process of developing CR principles and standards with the following aims:

- publishing an updated list of Circuit Rider principles
- updating and seeking consultation on a set of ICT standards for organisations upon which to build a skill-set for Riders; and
- establishing a training path for Riders based on peer exchange, collaborative online resources, mentoring and partnership;

The Advisory Group was set up by *Iasa* to steer the process and the CVC Circuit Riders Project Manager was accepted as a member along with five other organisations from around the UK.

Working collaboratively, the Advisory Group produced a set of Circuit Rider Principles which were published to the wider Circuit Rider community in Feb 2008.

Signing up to the Principles is voluntary and is seen as a first step in the long process of making the Circuit Rider activity into a profession.

The CVC Circuit Riders signed up to the Circuit Rider Principles as a team.

The Advisory Group then worked with consultants to develop a set of tools for the next *Iasa* project and other initiatives to work with based around skills assessment and development.

These tools were published to the wider Circuit Rider community in July 2008 and will be further developed in the field by the new London Region ICT Infrastructure project. This project will work with existing Circuit Riders in London to develop their skills and competencies, as well as starting the accreditation process.

In West Wales, the Tools and Skills set will be used for future recruitment and personal development of the CVC Circuit Rider team.

6.3 Review of Communications Equipment used for Regional Working

The team were spread over a large geographical area and managed from a central base; making the latest mobile communication technology vital. Essential services such as email, data management, telephony and Internet access needed to be available from any location to ensure the seamless running of the project.

In addition the Project team possessed a mixture of skills and were required to quickly share skills and knowledge across the team to develop each other and the service.

Throughout the project duration the team evaluated and implemented the most suitable system for each of the following requirements.

- **Using a Web Office / eMail**
  All four CVCs had their own ICT systems (servers, email, phones) which, in such as short term project, would have been impossible to integrate.
  It was decided therefore to trial a mobile web office for communication and information management. This provided calendars to create a shared diary, detailing appointments and activities on a daily basis; documents storage for group action plans and visit summaries, along with project application form information.
  Comprehensive databases for both group activity and project resources were constructed using the tools provided within the software.

- **SmartPhone PDA**
  Primarily, the team used the mobile phone for voice communications and messaging, however features such as the WLAN interface and multiple internet connectivity options were also applied to certain field-based activities such as accessing shared calendars, email and connectivity testing for networks. The phone can be set up as a modem attached to a laptop computer or PC – this provides excellent opportunities for group work in community locations with no internet access.

- **Video Contact & Recording**
  Professional video conferencing equipment is expensive and not widely available in the voluntary sector, so the team evaluated simple, affordable solutions. This was used to record group activities, both for monitoring purposes and to enhance the ICT skills of the groups and to fully explore the use of video contact and find cost effective ways of communicating with each other and groups.

For the full version of the Communications Equipment and Activities Review see Appendix 2

6.4 Review of Sustainability of Third Sector ICT services

The CVC Circuit Rider project is the third European-funded ICT project run by PAVS who were the lead body of the pilot project. The sustainability of the ICT service provided by the project has been a major concern of PAVS management and the project partnership team. Past research has suggested that developing the service into a separate trading arm or social enterprise, with less reliance on funding streams, is a long and difficult process.

At the start of the project, due to the activity being restricted to the most deprived area (Communities First wards) of the region, it was decided by the Partnership that it was inappropriate to initiate charging schemes at this stage. Instead the team worked with groups to ensure that they would have maximum benefit from the project during its lifetime and afterwards.

For planning future work, groups who took part in the Project Evaluation were asked about how much they might be willing to pay for services in the future.

Web Development support

Web Development support falls into two areas; the initial support to create the website, and then the on-going costs of having the website. *NB Groups update the content of their websites, no support is given for updates by the team.*

- Only 4 (16%) of the groups in the 25 evaluated said they would be able to pay £50 -100 for support and training.

- 10 (40%) groups would be able to pay £20 per annum for their web hosting, domain name administration and telephone support for connection issues.

- 5 (20%) said they would be able to pay between £50-100 per annum for the above package.

ICT Technical Support and Development

- 1 group would not be able to use the service due to lack of funds

- 3 groups would be able to pay a limited amount for an ICT Telephone Helpdesk (telephone and email)

- 5 (20%) would be able to pay approx £300-500 per annum for Telephone support and on-site visits

- 12 (48%) would prefer a ‘Pay-as-you go’ system – approx £25 per visit.

Research into current thinking around the sustainability of ICT services in the Third Sector has been carried out and the report uploaded onto VICTOR. (www.victorwales.org.uk)

6.5 Expansion of the *123-communicate* process into other counties

One project aim was to fully test the theory that any reasonably technical person could deliver the *123-communicate* process to 'hook' in groups, not only to create websites etc, but also to encourage them to look at other areas of ICT usage and take advantage of the technical support offered.

Mid way through the project period, the opportunity was taken to fully test the implementation of the *123-communicate* process by a person with technical skills, but who did not have more specialised web development skills.

This was due partly to the low take-up of Technical support in Ceredigion, and also to the agreement by the funders to allow the team to work in the Communities of Interest in Ceredigion.

This had some success, although it was clear after the Project Evaluation that the *123-communicate* induction process and the 'How to … Guide' needed to be strengthened.

This is to ensure there was adequate support for the individual throughout the learning process and to fully explain why the *123-communicate* process needs to be delivered in a structured way.

7. Pilot Project Recommendations for next phase activity

The following recommendations are made by the project team for further development of a CVC based ICT support and development service.

Circuit Rider Development - Training and Standards
The Circuit Rider model proved successful and it is recommended that a 'How to…'Guide is written by the team to further develop the service.

The 'Tools to Build Circuit Rider Competencies' documentation produced by *Iasa* should be used, alongside the experience and outcomes of the CVC Circuit Rider pilot, to further develop the recruitment process and the personal development of the team and individuals involved in any future service.

Central ICT Telephone Helpdesk

To increase takeup of the Central Helpdesk Telephone and to use it to the full as part of the service, a clear marketing strategy needs to be developed.

There should also be promotion of the Circuit Riders standards being developed and the CRB checks already performed on staff, to encourage trust and full use of the service.

Development of the *123-communicate* process

This particular element of the service proved very popular with groups and a useful tool to engage them in technology.

The ***How to Set up a Group Website*** Guide should be reviewed and enhanced and an induction and mentoring programme, for development workers who intend to delivery *123-communciate,* should be developed to complement the guide.

Development of an 'ICT Information and Support Centre'

The team should further develop the features and content of VICTOR (the on-line resource), especially in terms of other users and ICT workers outside of the project adding comments and content.

Communications Equipment and Facilities for Regional Working
The equipment trialled by the team delivered the benefits expected and made regional and team working across West Wales easier and more effective. The team would use all of the facilities again, especially the web office.

The main recommendation is that any future regional projects need to spend time identifying their intended range of activities, reviewing what is available at that time and then match up solutions.

Many solutions can be free or low cost so can be trialled initially.

Appendix 1

ICT Telephone Helpdesk Review (May 2008)

Prepared by Phil Perry, Pembrokeshire Circuit Rider
Reviewed by Catherine Palmer

Introduction

The Circuit Riders project started in January 2007. The first 3 months of the project were primarily used to research and implement infrastructure and procedures and working with groups commenced in phase two as of 1st April, 2007.

This report covers the period April 2007 to April 2008, inclusive.

The project was managed centrally from PAVS and the Central ICT Telephone Helpdesk number is also based at the PAVS office (although the number may be transferred / forwarded to other CVCs or Circuit Rider telephones).

Previous ICT projects at PAVS had operated an informal system of telephone and email support as part of the service. This trial was intended to formalise and enhance this facility.

The aim of the ICT Helpdesk was to provide an initial query service for all groups in the Communities First wards, regardless of whether they had applied to the project for full technical or website support. The Helpdesk was also used by the groups signed up to the project to access help and contact the Circuit Rider team.

Marketing and Publicity

It was anticipated by the Partnership that marketing the ICT Telephone Helpdesk service, let alone the entire *free* Circuit Rider service, across a very small number of Communities First wards in the region (in West Wales 8 wards in total) was always going to be difficult.

Too much publicity might have generated non-eligible calls for help, which would have been difficult for the team to deal with.

A low key approach through Communities First Partnerships and other CVC contacts in the areas, followed by personal contact of the Circuit Riders in the field, was decided upon.

The ICT Helpdesk number was however promoted as follows: Project flyer, Project business cards, Project website, Email signatures, Publicity – newsletters, Word of mouth – Circuit Riders

Circuit Riders were asked not to give out their mobile phone numbers, which were provided for internal team contact, but to promote the ICT Helpdesk Telephone number.

ICT Helpdesk Call Logging

In-coming Calls

Calls to the ICT Helpdesk were logged in an online database in the team Web Office throughout the duration of the project. (Appendix 2 for details of software)

Various data relating to each call were logged including name of caller and group, date/time of call, CVC area, mode of contact and type of issue/purpose of the call.

Options for logging mode of contact and purpose of call are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

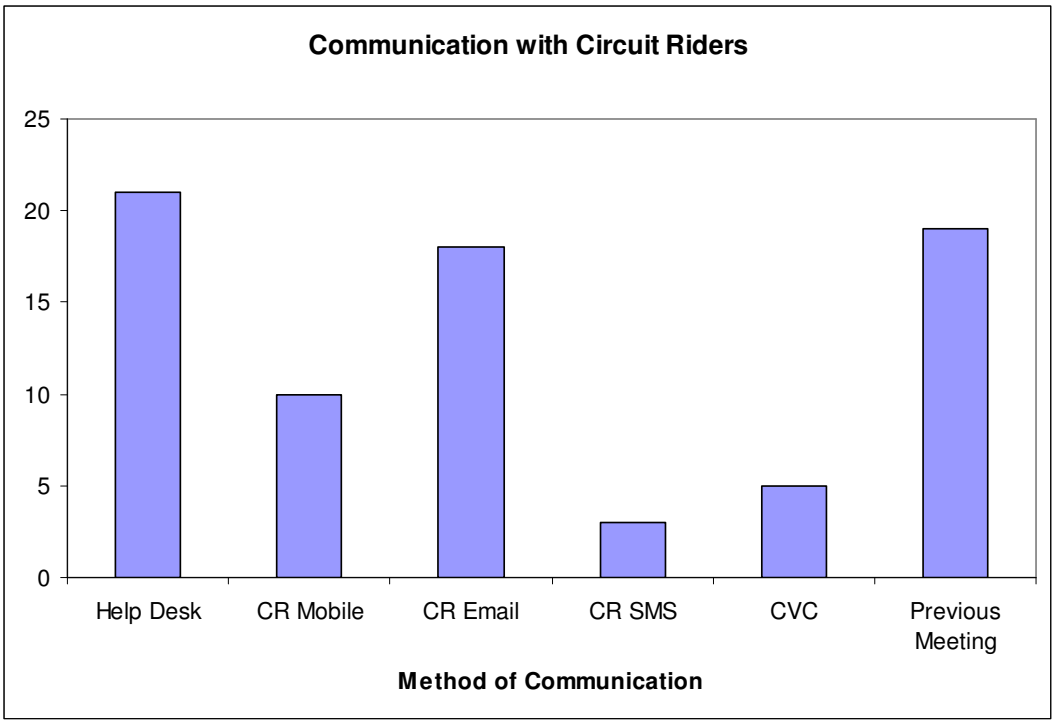
Mode of Contact	Type of Issue
Direct call to help desk CVC Switchboard Email Text message (SMS)	Arrange appointment with Circuit Rider Computer hardware Computer software Email ICT training Initial/general enquiry Internet connection Networking Project Applications Printing Website building

Further to logging the mode of contact when the call came into the Helpdesk, during the final Project Evaluation, groups were surveyed to assess awareness of the Helpdesk number and what they had used as their main contact methods.

Five groups in each of the 4 regions were asked how they communicated with the Circuit Rider team.

In addition to the modes of contact listed in Table 1, groups also identified phoning a Circuit Rider's mobile phone and arranging meetings at a previous meeting as methods of communicating with the Circuit Rider team.

Results of the survey are presented in Figure 1 below.



During the period April 2007 to April 2008 inclusive, the project received **178 calls** to the ICT Helpdesk (Figure 2).

Calls to the ICT Helpdesk are distributed evenly across the CAVS, CAVO and PAVS regions, with VAMT only recording 1 call to the central helpdesk (Figure 3).

Figure 2.

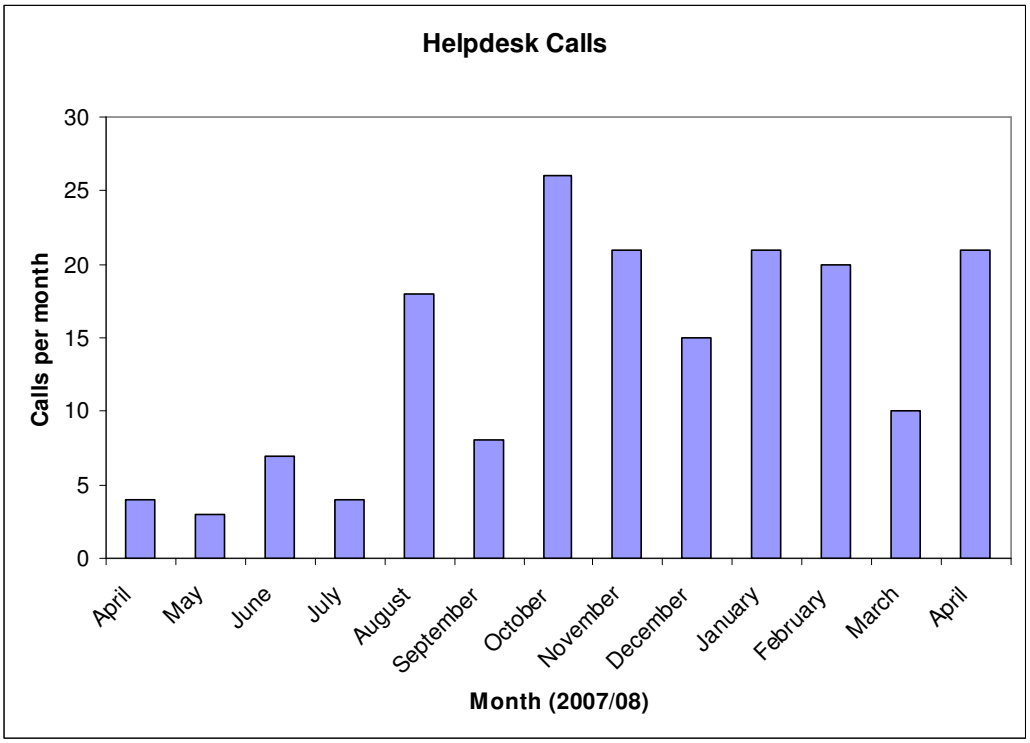
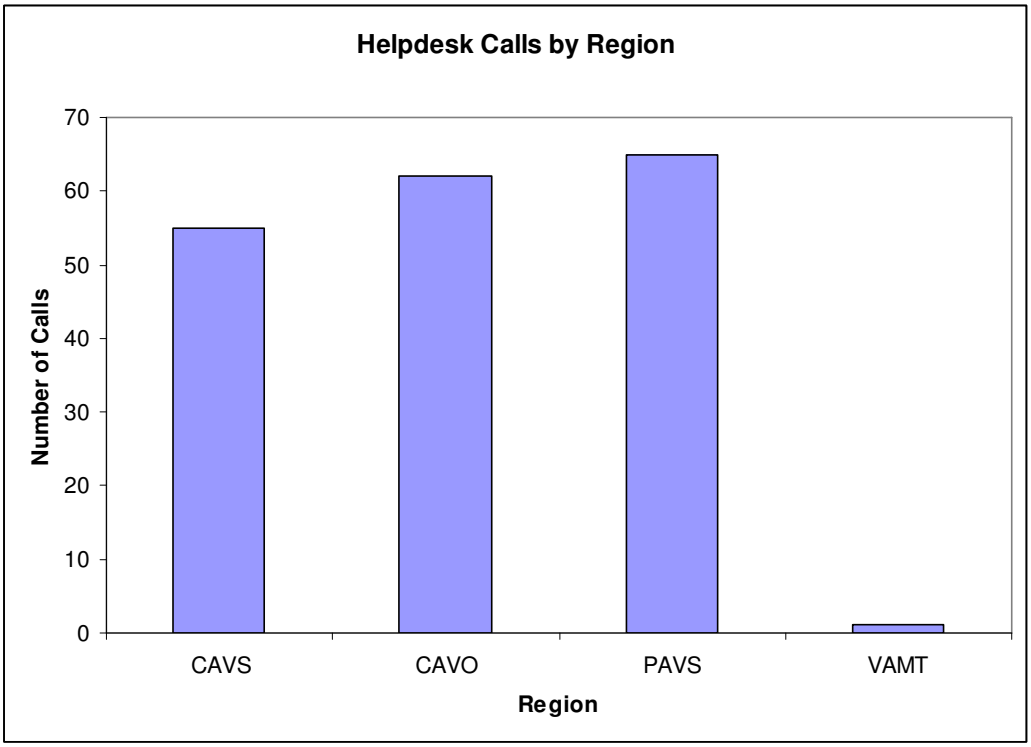


Figure 3.



Analysis

- Marketing of the ICT Helpdesk service within the project appears to have been more coincidental than targeted. Whilst marketing of the Circuit Riders brand overall is good with professionally produced flyers and business cards, the ICT Helpdesk phone number is not prominently positioned or large enough to jump out at the reader.

- During the first 4 months of recorded activity (April to July, inclusive), call volume to the central ICT Helpdesk was relatively low and consisted mostly of project application enquiries. The low volume during this phase of the project was most likely a result of the lack of any targeted advertising of the service. After the initial phase, call volume rose sharply and has remained largely consistent during the course of the project.

- The number of ICT Helpdesk calls per region is distributed roughly equally between CAVS, CAVO and PAVS regions, with VAMT registering just a single call.

  The fact that groups from VAMT had not utilised the ICT Helpdesk facility was borne out in survey results presented in Figure 1, with groups from this region largely unaware of the existence of a centralised ICT Helpdesk and instead choosing to contact the Circuit Riders through their CVC.

- There does not appear to be any correlation between the number of groups registered or engaged per region and the number of calls.

It has been difficult to gain any useful information about the type of calls received, in part due to the fact that during the first half of the project many calls were logged as a call to a Circuit Rider for an appointment rather than as the underlying cause (e.g, a printing, Internet or email issue). This is probably also due to the fact that many groups have a weak perception of the overall project and focus on the individual Circuit Rider(s) with whom they have built a relationship of trust.

- Generally, calls relating to Contribute/website building, Internet/network connectivity, and printing issues seemed to dominate.

Results from the survey on how groups contact the Circuit Riders team show that direct contact by mobile phone together with arranging meetings at previous meetings (face to face) are also popular methods of communication although these are not currently logged in the ICT Helpdesk database.

Besides phone (ICT Helpdesk and mobiles) and face to face, contact by email proved to be equally popular both from the survey and from feedback from groups (see below).

Feedback from Groups

A small sample of groups (5% of those engaged in the project) in the PAVS region (Clouds, Greenlinks, Monkton Voice, Pembroke 21C) were asked for verbal feedback by their local Circuit Rider on the service they had received when they contacted the ICT Helpdesk.

No group outside of the PAVS region were surveyed so all respondents were in the same county as the ICT Helpdesk.

- When presented with a choice of mechanisms for contacting the project for help or assistance, groups demonstrated an **overwhelming preference to contact a Telephone Helpdesk number.**

- However, there was also an overwhelming preference or expectation to speak to "their" Circuit Rider with little comprehension of the wider nature of the Project or that someone else may be able to help them with their issue.

    a. This may be attributed to the large amount of initial trust building work by an individual Circuit Rider that was necessary with many groups at the start of the project, particularly when working with less developed groups in deprived areas.
    b. Conversely, it could also be the over protection of a Circuit Rider of their patch of 'clients' and the feeling that they can best serve 'their groups'.
    c. It could also be reluctance in general to use a telephone helpline. This has been reported in other ICT projects (ICT Hub, HAVS IT project.)
    d. It could also be the way the ICT Helpdesk was / was not marketed.

Without more extensive research by different people and in different areas it is difficult to say why this was.

- The **second most popular method** for contacting the project for help or assistance was by **email.**

- Some groups expressed a preference that **email** may be preferred for **less urgent issues** such as requesting information.

- There was no strong preference displayed for any other method of contacting the ICT helpdesk, and this is also reflected in the survey results presented in Figure 1 where phone and email were the preferred methods of communication.

Overall feedback for the ICT Helpdesk service received was overwhelmingly positive, with groups valuing the service and feeling that it meets their needs.

Remote assistance

Groups were also asked for their views on the use of remote desktop software as a future mechanism for offering support if a Circuit Rider were not available.

About half of the groups asked had previously heard of remote desktop software, and most were positive about the idea, but some interesting points were raised.

The issue of trust was raised. Groups were happy to trust their local Circuit Rider (who they knew and had built a relationship with), but seemed less willing to trust an perceived anonymous person on the project who they had not met and did not know, to log in remotely to their computer.

This raised some other issues relating to data confidentiality especially, for example, with groups working with children.

At a purely technical level, a remote desktop solution based on assistance requests where an invite is required rather than one where a remote user is able to remotely access a client PC at any time (uninvited), would be preferred.

Recommendations for future development of ICT Helpdesk

- Better, clearer, bigger promotion of Helpdesk Telephone number on all publicity material
- Expand the contact types to Helpdesk database (e.g, Mobile).
- Increase “Issue Types” for more accurate logging (e.g, Other, and space)
- Promote email address for all CRs. Contact@ is currently used – support@ might be more suitable.
- Promotion of the Circuit Riders standards being developed and the CRB checks already performed on staff.

Appendix 2

Communications Equipment and Activities Review (July 2008)

Prepared by Rae Coope, Carmarthenshire Circuit Rider
Reviewed by Catherine Palmer

Introduction

The team were spread over a large geographical area and managed from a central base; making the latest mobile communication technology vital. Essential services such as email, data management, telephony and Internet access needed to be available from any location to ensure the seamless running of the project.

In addition the Project team possessed a mixture of skills and were required to quickly share skills and knowledge across the team to develop each other and the service.

Throughout the project duration the team evaluated and implemented the most suitable system for each of the following requirements set out in the Communications Project Outline:

1. regular contact to assist with rapid transfer of information between the Circuit Riders and the Central co-ordination to use resources to the full

2. delivery of demonstrations / workshops across the project area

3. maintenance of a consistency of approach and creating a strong team morale

4. access to on-line resources and solutions via the 'circuit rider' and other technical communities

5. maximising the 'bumblebee'[3] effect of workers linking similar groups across the region

6. demonstrating new technologies that voluntary and community groups may not have access to.

[3] 'a "bumblebee" effect; cross–pollination of ideas and projects

General Comments and Observations

The purpose of the Communications Project was to identify the most suitable solutions to a variety of different 'communication' needs by using, testing, demonstrating and evaluating a range of technical equipment and services.

In each case, usability, cost and functionality were of primary importance.

Additionally, taking into consideration the environmental impact of the project could also influence the decision to use or not use a particular method of communication.

Where possible, we sourced free or low cost services in line with the requirements of the sector.

Field Communications

The Circuit Rider team is made up of both office based and remote working members, all needing to be able to communicate effectively with each other, a central administrative base, as well as the community groups throughout the project coverage area.

Essential services such as email, data management, telephony and Internet access need to be available from any location to ensure the seamless running of the project.

Range of solutions trialled by the Circuit Rider Team;

- SmartPhone PDA
- Using a Web Office
- eMail
- Video Contact & Recording

SmartPhone PDA

Mobile telephones are the most universal tool for communications in any team environment.

The SmartPhone PDA is an extremely versatile piece of ICT equipment; offering a raft of additional features to a standard mobile telephone including Wireless Networking capabilities, eMail and Internet functionality, video calling, a Windows Mobile operating system (or similar) and a large touch-screen display.

Extras such as GPS and Satellite Navigation Systems are also available.

Review of available phones

There is a range of SmartPhone PDAs available from a variety of providers, all offering similar functionality and cost-saving service features. Most providers will offer 'group call plans' for multiple users so it is always best to review a number of options before committing to a contract. Independent online review sites can also offer good insight into the best deals available.

When the project began in January 2007, the two market leading SmartPhone PDAs were the Sony Ericsson P990i and the Nokia N80.

The following table shows a direct comparison between the Sony Ericsson P990i and the Nokia N80 and the results from our initial research into these two products, based on our requirements for this type of device.

	Sony Ericsson P990i	***Nokia N80***
Telephone/Text	Good call quality, easy to use	Good call quality, easy to use
MMS & Email	Yes – POP and PUSH (Exchange)	Yes – POP
High Speed Modem	Yes	No
WiFi Connection	Yes	Yes
Touch Screen	Yes	No
Stability	Very stable, few problems	Unstable, regular crashes
Camera & quality	2 megapixel (excellent quality)	3 megapixel (poor quality)
Internal Memory	80Mb	40Mb
Qwerty Keyboard	Yes	No
Battery Life	Good (normal use)	Poor (normal use)
Free on Contract	Yes	No
Extras (from supplier)	Bluetooth Handsfree Kit	None

The Sony Ericsson P990i offers extensive features and allows the user to access email and the Internet using a number of methods including WiFi, 3G, and WAP (Wireless Access Protocol).

Additionally, the phone can be synchronised (via its own docking station) with a computer to update calendar and contact information.

The phone provides an excellent quality 2 mega pixel auto-focus digital camera and video recorder built in, allowing for good quality images and up to 59mins of Video playback.

Each Circuit Rider was able to use these features whilst out working with groups to record activities and build up a media library of group working.

Using the SmartPhone

Primarily, the team used the mobile phone for voice communications and messaging, however features such as the Wireless LAN interface and multiple internet connectivity options were also applied to certain field-based activities such as accessing shared calendars, email and connectivity testing for networks.

The CD which comes with the phone contains software for setting the phone up as a modem attached to a laptop computer or PC – this is an extremely useful feature as it allows the user to connect to the internet using their computer as they would in an office environment, in any remote location. This also provided excellent opportunities for group work in Community locations where normal internet connectivity was not present.

Overall, the Sony Ericsson P990i is fairly complicated to use unless you are familiar with SmartPhone applications and the Symbian operating system.

Some team members felt that the phone was too large to carry comfortably and the small QWERTY keyboard hidden under the flip pad was too small to type on.

The menus can be overly complicated for everyday use, but once you are familiar with the system, you can find everything you need within a few taps of the screen.

It is important to note that, in normal everyday use, not one team member was able to fully utilise every aspect of the phone or its software.

Cost of SmartPhone

The Business 700 package for 5 phones was free to set up and included the 5 handsets as well as a free Bluetooth Hands-free device for the car.

The monthly tariff was based on the 5 phones sharing 700 free minutes to any network at any time; as well as free calls between the 5 phones on the plan. Although we began the tariff with 5 handsets, the package was very flexible and we were able to add an additional 2 handsets to the call plan at a later date.

The only cost implication of this was £16.50 + VAT for each extra handset:

Business 500 Basic Package £60 + VAT	£70.50 inc VAT
Plus 6 additional handsets @ £16.50 + VAT	£116.33 inc VAT
Total package fee (basic rate)	£186.83 inc VAT

Text messaging, Data Usage and Video Calling carry an additional charge:

Text Messaging	£0.10 per message
Data (Mb)	£2.55 per Mb

Comparison of travel costs and equipment costs

Using a Web Office

The team were spread over three counties in the West of Wales as well as Merhyr Tydfil. All the organisations concerned had their own ICT systems (servers, email, phones) which in such as short term project would have been impossible to integrate. It was decided therefore to trial a mobile web office form communication and information management.

In order to synchronise the services provided by the Circuit Rider team and to provide daily calendar information to the team co-ordinator, a 'web office application' was identified as being the most suitable solution as it would be available online from any location.

This application would also need to be able to hold a database of information such as group details and activities; as well as provide a helpdesk solution for the central base and outreach workers.

A number of potential products were reviewed at the beginning of the project, ranging from Open Source software to commercial solutions. Following a review period of several weeks, Webex Web Office was chosen due to its extensive functionality and simplicity.

The following table shows a direct comparison between the various solutions available based on our requirements for this type of software:

	Webex Web Office	GoogleDocs	Bespoke CRM solution	Open Source Solution
Shared calendars	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Ability to synchronise with Outlook	Yes	No	No	Variable
Document management	Yes	Yes	Yes	Variable
Multiple Database facilities (Contact, Activities, Helpdesk)	Yes	No	Yes	Variable
Task Manager	Yes	Yes	No	Variable
Accessible from any location, using any browser	Yes	Yes	Not easily, requires complex hosting to make this work	Variable
Variable user privileges	Yes	No	Yes	Variable
Reports	Yes	No	Yes	Variable
Forum / Discussion	Yes	No	No	Variable
Free / Low cost	Low cost	Free	Free (excluding hosting)	Free
Ease of Use	Good	Good	Reasonable	Reasonable
Hosting	Included	Included	Required complex hosting setup in order to provide web interface	Variable

Using Webex

(www.webex.com) is not a free solution; however the company offer heavily discounted rates for the Voluntary/Educational sector. The full functionality of the software can be evaluated during the 30 day trial period and your web-office is simply transferred into full membership upon your first payment.

Administrators can add/remove members, set up databases, contact lists and much more. Each member is assigned a level of control (guest, member and administrator) and can be given access to certain functions as desired.

Other functions include individual and shared calendars, email, task lists and document sharing.

Review of Webex

Throughout the project, the Circuit Rider team made use of the majority of features available.

Each member of the team made use of the calendars to create a shared diary, detailing appointments and activities on a daily basis.

Documents such as group action plans and visit summaries were uploaded onto the system, along with project application form information. This created an invaluable filing system for all group documents which can be accessed from anywhere by any device with an internet connection.

Comprehensive databases for both group activity and project resources were constructed using the tools provided within the software.

- Initial Project Enquires
- Circuit Rider Tracking Database
- CVC Circuit Rider Helpdesk
- Circuit Rider Helpdesk FAQs
- Task and Meeting Actions (TMA)

Although extensive ICT knowledge is certainly not necessary to do this, some prior knowledge of database development is an advantage, especially when planning what information needs to be recorded.

Each database had Views for easy look-up of information as well as a reporting facility where custom reports could be set up.

The **Circuit Rider Tracking Database** was the main database and, once a group was accepted onto the project, it was entered into the system. From that point on, all activity undertaken with the group linked to their records on the database. This allowed the Circuit Riders to log meetings, conversations, practical work and any other vital information in a central location – making reporting a straightforward task.

The **ICT Telephone Helpdesk** also had its own tracking database linked to a task manager, allowing team members to make a record of conversations, allocate a Circuit Rider to resolve the issue and create a task list to prioritise any activities.

As a Regional project, many meetings were held at Partnership, team, mini-team and individual level and the **Task and Meeting Actions database** allowed this to be recorded and tracked by the different types of meeting or by tasks assigned.

Webex is an extremely versatile tool for any team environment. The system is very easy to use and due to the level of customisation, it can be adapted to any type of project activity.

The only adverse comments made by the team relate to the speed at which the pages load – it can be very slow to move between functions on a low bandwidth internet connection.

Cost
Webex Web Office is an American-owned company so the prices are in US dollars. Payment is made by credit or debit card online on a monthly basis and the total figure is based upon the number of members to the site.

Charitable Organisations benefit from a 50% reduction of the standard business tariff.

Minimum Charge (10 members) @ Non-profit Organisation Rates per month	$49.95 + VAT
Total Monthly Fee	$58.69 USD
Total Monthly Fee Approximate in £	£29.80 £3 per month for each team member

eMail

The Circuit Rider team needed to be able to access emails from any location, to keep in touch with the central team and to communicate with their groups and colleagues.

Whilst any type of webmail account (such as Hotmail, Yahoo, etc) would have fulfilled this requirement; in order to portray a professional image the team's email addresses needed to be domain based.

Some members of the team worked predominantly from their office base allowing the use of MS Exchange to distribute their emails; however those team members who spent the majority of their time out of the office would either need to use Outlook Web Access or POP3 email accounts.

As Outlook Web Access allows direct remote access to the organisation's MS Exchange server, this posed a potential security risk for the CVC. Instead, POP3 email accounts were set up for each Circuit Rider; this would allow emails to be collected using any type of internet connectivity both in and out of the office with no security implications.

Using the mobile phone as a modem

The Sony Ericsson P990i is supplied with additional software which allows the user to set up a separate dial up internet connection on their laptop/tablet PC. By following the step-by-step instructions on the CD, the user can install the mobile phone as an external modem attached to their computer, giving a standard dial up connection speed (25-38kbps) wherever there is a mobile signal present.

In 3G enabled areas, the user can experience speeds of up to 400kbps, provided that this feature has been added to their mobile service contract.

Data Usage is measured in Mbps and usually carries a standard charge per Mb set by the contract supplier (Orange, Vodafone, TMobile, etc). Bundled packages can also be purchased from the supplier and usually offer some discount over a pay-as you-use option. For this project, we used this service on a pay-as-you-use basis which was closely monitored.

Review

Using the mobile phone as a modem enabled the Circuit Rider team to access email using their laptop computers as the interface, similar to normal office use. The advantage of this method is that all the functionality of the laptop computer is available to you whilst using the connection, such as the ability to attach images and files, use email folders and your normal web browser – not to mention being able to view the internet at full screen size.

Normal web browsing speeds are slow in comparison to broadband, however it is perfectly usable for collecting and sending emails (provided there are no large attachments) whilst in the car or working with groups at a community venue.

Using the Mobile Phone to collect email
The Sony Ericsson P990i can also be used as a stand-alone device for connecting to the internet. Email account details (identical to the account information used by a computer) can be entered into the phone using the messages menu and collected at the press of a button. You can choose to download the complete message or just the message header (From, To and Subject lines), then browse through the list and decide which ones to view.

Review
The screen size of the mobile phone makes reading long emails difficult and the process of replying is similar to that of composing a SMS Text message – it is also awkward on the small phone keypad.

However it is quick and fairly straightforward and allows the user to access email without a computer. The costs are identical to that of using the phone as a modem.

Cost
Data transfer using the mobile phone is charged per Mb. This equates to approximately 160 WAP pages, 100 short emails or 4 video clips.

Data (Mb)	£2.55 per Mb

Video Contact & Recording Overview

In order to record activities undertaken during the project, both for our own monitoring purposes and to enhance the ICT skills of the groups, we needed to establish effective methods of recording video, voice and images and ways to transfer these to a number of different locations (back to base, to the web, etc).

Additionally, we intended to fully explore the use of video contact and find the most cost effective way of communicating which each other and our groups.

Professional video conferencing equipment is expensive and not widely available in the voluntary sector, so we needed to evaluate simple, affordable solutions.

The project initially bid for a trial system for desktop video conferencing between two of the participating CVCs to demonstrate the ease of use and the quality of current equipment. Unfortunately this was turned down by the Funding Review panel.

There is a wide range of Video Conferencing software available on the Internet, a search on Google for 'free video conferencing software' will return pages of potential solutions, however most of these only offer a free trial and require a subscription to continue using the service.

Solutions such as ooVoo offer an extensive range of features for free – the only issue is popularity. As it is not as well known, not as many people will be using it and they will therefore be less likely to become an available contact. As we intended to use the service as a way of keeping in contact with each other and our groups, the greater the coverage the better. With this in mind, Skype was chosen as the most suitable option for review.

Video Recording

Video and audio content needed to be captured for both our own recording and evaluation purposes; and as part of our work with the groups.

Due to the nature of the project, the equipment needed to be extremely portable and fairly robust; it also needed to be relatively simple to operate as the Circuit Rider team would also be working with groups to record their own content for websites.

The Sony Ericsson P990i offered reasonable video recording facilities, but due to the nature of mobile phones the media was somewhat lacking in quality, although it was used by some team members to record audio snippets for larger video projects. However, the phone was capable of taking excellent quality still images and was able to store a great number of these using both its internal memory and removable memory card. The camera phones were used a great deal throughout the project by the Circuit Rider team and the groups to capture images of group working and for generating website content. These images were transferred to the laptop computers using the Sony Memory sticks supplied with the phones.

For more professional video recording, a Sony Handycam with a 60GB Hard Disk Drive was purchased due to its size and capabilities. The Sony Handycam DCR-SR72E comes equipped with a USB docking station and Sony multimedia managing software, making it very straightforward to use. Recording the media onto HDD means that it is already in electronic format; this makes it easy to transfer to other devices such as the computer for editing purposes and easier to manipulate in the editing process. Using the supplied software, the operator can dock the camera and transfer the contents onto a computer in a matter of a few minutes depending on the file sizes. Using tapes or discs means that the contents have to be transferred in 'real time,' meaning that a 60 minute film would take 60 minutes to transfer.

The following table shows the results of our initial research into the model available at the beginning of the project, based on our requirements for this type of equipment:

	Sony Handycam DCR-SR72E
Portability (lightweight, small size)	Very light – 355 grams
Recording quality	Excellent
Picture quality	Excellent
Sound quality	Good
Ease of use	Excellent
Value for money	Good
Storage capacity	60 GB internal HDD + card
Editing software	Included

Windows Movie Maker, which is already pre-installed with the Windows XP operating system, was used to edit the video content to produce good quality films for both the Circuit Riders project and for group websites.

Windows Movie Maker is free and very simple to use making it an ideal program for this type of work. Finished movies can be saved in a variety of different formats depending on their intended use.

Costs

The Sony Handcam was the marketing leading HDD camcorder and was at the higher end of the price range as a result. However, it provides excellent value for money and was an ideal choice for the Circuit Rider project.

Sony Handycam DCR-SR72E	£499.99 + VAT

Recommendations

At the start of the project the team defined what type of equipment and facilities they needed. The selected items that were trialled by the team delivered the benefits expected and made regional and team working across West Wales easier and more effective. The team would use all of the facilities again, especially the web office.

The main recommendation is that any future regional projects should review their intended activity and decide on what facilities they require. As the market is constantly changing, with new web-based facilities and new equipment being launched continuously, a full search should then be done on what is available.

Cost, number of project staff, geography, length of project and type of activity will all be factors for consideration in deciding what is suitable. Most facilities offer free trials or demos and many come on a monthly charge so you can try things out before you make further commitment. Many are free.

Review

(www.skype.com) is a free VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) solution that can be downloaded onto your computer and used to make free calls to other Skype users.

Using your existing internet connection, Skype allows you to make voice calls, use chat windows (Instant Messenger), video calling and file transfer through a simple software interface. Users can even buy 'talk time' for their accounts, allowing you to make calls to mobile phones and landlines at a heavily discounted rate; however we did not make use of this function during the project.

In order to make video calls, each party needs to have a webcam installed on their computer to transmit their image. The Sony Vaio laptops purchased at the beginning of the project for the Circuit Riders feature built-in webcams allowing for seamless integration with the Skype software.

The quality of the video feed is very much dependant on the speed of your broadband connection; although some members of the team found that even on a low bandwidth connection (such as the mobile phone connection), you could still manage a reasonable conversation.

Overall, the quality of the video feed is very good for such simple, free software; it is far superior to the quality experienced with phone to phone video calling and does not add any additional charge to your existing internet service.

Skype is easy to set up in the first instance and is extremely user-friendly to operate, colleagues can search for each other using the 'add contacts' feature and once added, these appear in the interface window displaying their online availability.
To start a call or chat window, the user has to click on the contact and choose the method of contact they wish to use (video is only available using the call feature); this then opens up the dialogue window.

During the project, all members of the Circuit Rider team used Skype to communicate with each other; both in and out of the office.

Cost Vs. Value
Skype costs nothing to install or use, providing that you only want to contact people via the internet. If you want to be able to call people on mobile phones or landlines, you will need to purchase calling credit.

Scenario A: Collaborative Working

Catherine and Clive needed to work together on an important document - a task which required them to be able to have a one-to-one discussion about the content and share electronic information to be included in the final piece of work. The deadline for submission of this document was tight, leaving them just a day to complete their work.

Catherine was based at head office in Haverfordwest and Clive was based in the CAVO offices in Lampeter, some 54 miles apart. If Clive or Catherine were to travel to meet each other, it would have cost **£60.24** for one return journey, based on the organisation's standard travel allowance of 55.8 pence per mile.

The total time taken to make the return journey would have been **3 hours**, leaving Catherine and Clive just 4 hours to complete the work.

Solution

By using a combination of low cost or free communications tools, Clive and Catherine were able to work efficiently together to achieve their objectives.
By logging on to the team's Web Office portal, Catherine and Clive were able to locate each other and select a suitable time to have their discussion using the group calendar.

Rather than travelling to meet each other, Catherine and Clive used Skype to contact each other and have the discussion they needed using Skype's Chat and Video Conferencing facilities. They were able to send files backwards and forwards using Skype's file transfer feature and when finished, upload the completed document to the Web Office document store.

Costs breakdown

	Traditional Meeting	**Using Communications Tools**
Travel Costs	£60.24	£0.00
Software Costs - Skype	£0.00	£0.00
Software Costs - Webexone	£0.00	£0.09 per person, per day
Total costs	**£60.24**	**£0.18** (2 people, 1 day)
Total time	**3 hours travel**	**0 hours travel**

Scenario B: Remote Working

As a Circuit Rider, Rae spends the majority of her working hours out of the office working with groups. Rae works within 2 counties of Wales, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion, reaching from Aberystwyth in the North to Llanelli in the South.
Often, when out working with groups a Circuit Rider may have other important issues to address either by email or by phone, or may even need to update some information in the team database that relates to a particular support issue. There is often time spare in between appointments when a Circuit Rider could address these issues, provided that they have access to the Internet.
When working in Aberystwyth, Rae is **70 miles** away from her base in Haverfordwest. The cost of the return journey would be **£78.12** at the organisation's standard travel allowance of 55.8 pence per mile.
It would take approximately **3.5 hours** to make the return journey from Aberystwyth to Haverfordwest, resulting in the remainder of that working day being spent on the road.

Solution

By using communication tools, Rae was able to keep in touch with head office and utilise her time effectively in between appointments, rather than travelling to the nearest office base. The Sony Ericsson P990i Smartphones can be used in any location to connect a laptop computer to the internet, allowing the Circuit Rider to check and respond to emails, update information on the team database, make appointments and diarise meetings.

Costs breakdown

	Getting back to base	**Using Communications Tools**
Travel costs	£78.12	£0.00
Smartphone Contract	£0.00	£0.88 pence per day, per phone
Data Usage (Internet)	£0.00	£2.55 per MB (average 2MB per day)
Total costs	**£78.12**	**£5.98 (including 2MB data usage)**
Total time	**3.5 hours travel**	**0 hours travel**

Scenario C: Group Support

Matt is a Circuit Rider based at CAVS in Carmarthen, working in the Communities First wards of Llanelli and the Upper Amman Valley. Due to the nature of ICT Support, call outs are often for fairly simple, easy to fix problems that are just a little too in-depth to be resolved over the telephone.
Brynaman Community Centre were having difficulty in using their email accounts and had called the helpdesk for assistance. As the designated Circuit Rider for that area, Matt was assigned to the call. In order to fix the problem, settings needed to be changed in their email program and Matt needed to be able to see what was happening, even though he knew it would only take a few minutes to solve.
Brynaman Community Centre is **27 miles** away from the Carmarthen office, making a return trip of **54 miles.** At the organisation's standard travel allowance, this journey would have cost **£30.13**.
It would have taken **2 hours** for Matt make the return journey to fix a 5 minute problem.

Solution

During a previous visit to the Community Centre, Matt had installed Zolved Remote Access software onto the main office computers and had explained to the staff how it worked and what it could be used for.
Using this remote access software, Matt was able to log on to the computer in Brynaman whilst sat at his desk in Carmarthen; edit the account information for the email settings and reset the system.
In Brynaman, the support was almost instantaneous and was resolved in just a few minutes.

Costs breakdown

	Travel to site	**Remote Access**
Travel costs	£30.13	£0.00
Software costs (Zolved)	£0.00	£0.00
Total Costs	**£30.13**	**£0.00**
Time spent	**2 hours travel**	**0 hours travel**