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Key findings

Drawing on existing good practice is an important part of service delivery. Three simple tips can help your use of good practice.

What is good practice?

Good practice is an important part of delivering any service. If you are faced with a new situation, a challenge or an opportunity, it is worth finding out if other people have been there before.

Good practice is about learning from what works well. It is about learning from other people's experiences that are of a recognised high quality standard and applying them to your situation.

Good practice is useful for almost every type of task. This could include simple tasks, such as writing a short policy, right through to very substantial long-term projects that take many years to complete, such as the creation of a unitary local authority.

Why bother?

Identifying and using good practice can have significant benefits for your service:

- It is a vital part of ensuring that you are delivering the best possible service;
- It can save you time and money;
- It can help you avoid the mistakes that other people have already made.

This summary highlights three tips to help you make the most of existing good practice:

- Be clear about what you are trying to learn and evaluate the sources of evidence that you are using;
- Recognise that the quality of learning is dependant on the way that you interact with the source of good practice (e.g. through human contact and/or virtual contact);
- Draw upon the knowledge of a reputable organisation that has considerable experience, knowledge, and expertise in a policy area. They can guide you in the right direction of recognised good practice to draw upon.

Tip 1 - Be clear about what you want to learn *and evaluate your evidence*

Make sure you have a clear understanding of what you hope to achieve from your learning. Are you looking for some quick ideas to help you start a project, some lessons on common pitfalls or a template to implement?

Failing to be clear about this can lead to poor learning. A small amount of information may suffice if you are just looking for ideas. If you intend to adopt a full template or package you will need much more information to ensure that it will be effective in your local context.

Think before you click the Google link

Internet search engines like Google provide a wealth of quick and easily accessible information. They are excellent tools to begin identifying organisations or individuals that have experience or expertise in the area you are investigating. However, it is important to remember that the top hits being displayed on the search engine list may not represent good practice and that a search engine is most effective as a gateway to locate further sources of information. Further research, through website reading, email exchanges, telephone conversations, or face-to-face discussions, can help you identify relevant good practice. Tip 3 below provides website links for organisations with expertise in a field that can be contacted to develop insight and learning about policies and projects.

Tip 2 - Think about how you learn : *build up your tacit knowledge through interactive learning*

'Tacit knowledge' describes the 'know how' that is developed by individuals through experience or operational skills. It includes the understanding of processes required to ensure the successful development of a project or policy. Therefore, tacit learning occurs through interacting personally with different people and situations – for example, through in-depth telephone dialogue, e-mail exchanges or face-to-face engagement in discussing problems and sharing experiences. It also involves learning through applied action and active participation in workshops, seminars and conferences.

However, whilst tacit knowledge is invaluable, it can be difficult to articulate and share with others because it involves more than learning about facts. It is easier to develop factual learning, for example, through reading reports or analysing statistical data such as league tables and databases (explicit knowledge). Nevertheless, the value of tacit learning cannot be underestimated in developing and implementing policies or projects.

Learn through human contact where possible

Virtual learning (telephone, email, internet) is an effective way to find good practice because it makes efficient use of the limited resources of time and money. However, it may be difficult to verify the quality of virtual sources of learning and virtual learning may not give you the depth of insight needed to take the maximum benefit from good practice.

Tip 3 - Make the most of experts

Many organisations and individuals will already have considerable experience, knowledge, and expertise in a policy area. They can provide shortcuts and good practice case study examples to draw upon.

Energy and housing

- Building and Social Housing Foundation www.bshf.org
- Energy Institute www.energyinst.org.uk
- Energy Saving Trust www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

Environment networks and consultancy

- Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment www.iema.net
- Society for the Environment www.socenv.org.uk
- Sustainable Development Research Network www.sd-research.org.uk

Local government

- Aalborg Commitments www.aalborgplus10.dk
- Audit Commission www.audit-commission.gov.uk
- Improvement and Development Agency www.idea.gov.uk
- Improvement Network www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk
- Local Government Association www.lga.gov.uk
- Local Governments for Sustainability www.iclei-europe.org

Planning

- Planning Portal www.planningportal.gov.uk
- Planning Resource www.planningresource.co.uk
- Royal Town Planning Institute www.rtpi.org.uk

bshf

The Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) is an independent housing research organisation and registered charity. Established in 1976 and based in Coalville, BSHF has been awarded Special Consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

BSHF promotes sustainable development and innovation in housing through collaborative research and knowledge transfer. Established in 1976, BSHF works internationally and in the UK to identify innovative housing solutions and to foster the exchange of information and good practice. BSHF is committed to promoting housing policy and practice that is people-centered and environmentally responsible. All research carried out has practical relevance and addresses a range of current housing issues worldwide.

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