

Objective 4

To develop and implement ethical working practices in all areas of our operation, and to ensure ongoing involvement of our stakeholders and regular promotion and marketing of our services by -

1. Undertaking an annual social and environmental audit and report
2. Securing awards for our work which recognise our ethical approach e.g. Investors in People, Beacon Company
3. Implementing an annual marketing plan
4. Ensuring best practice in equal opportunities and accessibility issues
5. Retaining our position as an innovative and leading social enterprise in IT in the UK

1. Social, Economic and Environmental Report

This is the first time in COSMIC's history of reporting that we have been able to produce a full set of 'triple-bottom line accounts' i.e. social, environmental and financial (or people, planet and profit!). A lot of work in environmental issues will continue in 2007 and development of a strategy for environmental impact will be adopted by the Company as a result of consultation with key stakeholders as part of the social accounting process. At present we are unable to gauge the economic impact of COSMIC, but this is something we intend to return to in future.

COSMIC's ongoing commitment to demonstrating good practice to other social enterprises and to the wider Third Sector remains a high priority for the staff team, and with this in mind we feel that it is highly important for us to produce this report as evidence of our commitment and being able to "walk the talk".

2. Awards

2006 was the year of our Investors in People review and 3-yearly assessment which took place in October. The assessor spent a whole day with us at COSMIC interviewing staff, directors and volunteers and reviewing working procedures and policies. Once again we passed the assessment with flying colours! In her report our assessor made the following comment reflecting on COSMIC's staff procedures;

"Your Induction Policies are exceptional, indeed your Staff Handbook is one of the best I've ever seen, and would suffice as one sole resource that could explain to any stranger what you do and how you do it. Well done."

A copy of the Assessors Report is included at Appendix 10.

The company maintained its Beacon Company status in 2006 and linked into several events during the year with the Beacon Network including a major conference in September at which Sir Clive Woodward was a key speaker and was highly motivating in translating good team work in sport into the business context. In addition Julie attended a number of the Beacon Boardroom events in the year. These meetings are aimed at providing an environment in which

business leaders can share experience and gain input from their peers around the table and the experience was highly beneficial. As Julie puts it "Sometimes leading can be a lonely place, and its not always possible or effective to get support from inside the organisation. Sitting with people in position of leadership in other businesses provides an ideal opportunity to exchange views and experience and to get suggestions from people who have that experience and knowledge."

Beacon Company status is an award given to those companies who can demonstrate outstanding achievement across a range of criteria.

- A company has achieved significant improvements in productivity & performance
- A company that has pro-actively managed a positive culture change within their business
- A company that has planned and successfully executed the development of the business.
- A company that is passionate about what it does and is striving to improve
- A company that is willing to share its knowledge and experience with others

Matrix accreditation continued during the year, but with a very low level of external focus in providing Information and Guidance (IAG) to clients, the focus switched to our services internally. IAG on an external basis was met through the First Time on Line initiative, a method of accessing advice and guidance that seems to meet the needs of our users rather than a more traditional delivery method.

The matrix Standard is the unique quality framework for the effective delivery of information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work and is useful for organisations that deliver information, advice and/or guidance to external clients as part of their business and also for employers who are committed to developing their people.

Our major achievement during the year was to win the Net:gain Flagship Centre Award in June in recognition of our early development of the training programme and materials and our engagement with pathfinder organisation in developing this approach. The Award came with a monetary prize which was invested in staff development programmes with Net:gain in mind.

3. Marketing Plans

During the year a focus was placed on the development of a full marketing plan with an associated implementation plan which would help to guide our work in the right direction and maximise resources in marketing and promotion of all of our services. The work of Nick Hall in the role of Business Development in the period from April – September meant that this focus was achieved and a marketing plan with associated review framework has been agreed and implemented effectively.

Strategic Planning

The focus of the 2006 Reflect Day was a review of the company's strategy, and whilst not fully achieved within the day itself, this led on to a number of smaller workshops during September with the review of our strategy in mind. This approach proved highly successful in engaging members of the team (staff and directors) in discussions about a number of options and how the forward plan can be developed. The highlights of the plan published to Members for approval at the 2007 AGM are:

Our Vision for 2012

1. COSMIC and our brand is recognised as a household name across Devon, Cornwall, Dorset and Somerset, and is operating out of local delivery points in each county, working alongside key strategic partnership organisations.
2. COSMIC is recognised by voluntary and community organisations (VCO's) and by small and medium enterprises (SME's) in the four counties as the "port of first call" for IT services: websites, IT training, IT consultancy, IT technical support.
3. COSMIC delivers a range of training and support services for all types of organisations and individuals who want to develop their enterprise or employment potential.
4. COSMIC has grown to achieve an annual turnover of £1 million, with an annual surplus of 10%, and with a maximum of 50% from publicly-funded sources, providing a sustainable basis which is consistent with our core values as a social enterprise:
 - Supportive
 - Innovative
 - Accessible
 - Inspirational
 - Ethical

The review process also looked at the business objectives for the coming year and agreed an update for 2007 as follows :

Business Objectives

1. To deliver a range of business support services which can provide SMEs and VCOs in the South West with effective, affordable and high quality solutions which will enable them to improve their operations, and therefore the economy of the region –
 - Website design, programming and production
 - IT training
 - IT consultancy
 - IT Technical support
 - Enterprise support

- Social accounting and auditing
 - HR solutions and consultancy
2. To develop and provide a wide range of high quality training and support services to those organisations and people who need them most –
- SME's and VCO's who are not maximising the potential of IT to develop their business
 - Young people progressing into work or further training and older people who have 'missed out' on ICT learning and enjoyment
 - People living in rural areas and therefore excluded from IT learning on a local basis

Organisational Objectives

3. To provide high quality local employment, to implement ethical working practices and to be a good employer with a supportive structure in a productive working environment by –
- Encouraging professional development and training
 - Providing systems to support a good work/life balance
 - Ensuring high quality supervision and mentoring support
 - Keeping up with new developments and cutting edge technology
 - Providing good pay and other incentives for high quality performance
4. To develop quality and improvements in all areas of our operation, to ensure ongoing involvement of our stakeholders and to promote and market of our services by –
- Undertaking an annual social and environmental audit and report
 - Securing awards for our work which recognise our ethical approach e.g. Investors in People, Beacon Company, Matrix
 - Implementing an annual marketing plan
 - Ensuring best practice in equal opportunities and accessibility issues
 - Retaining our position as an innovative and leading social enterprise in the UK

Strategic Marketing

In September members of the team took part in a strategic marketing workshop led by Margaret Hiles of Veromar Training who helped us work through the process of reviewing our marketing plans from a higher, strategic position and this helped to identify a number of areas for further improvement and development. This work will be continued again during 2007 and included in the annual strategic review with a focus on marketing and development of services.

4. Equal Opportunities and Accessibility to Services

We aim to ensure that all visitors to our website (www.cosmic.org.uk) can access the information stored on our website. However, we recognise that not all of the features on the site are currently accessible to everyone. This means that some people might find you have trouble when trying to use certain features with some types of adaptive technologies like screen readers. COSMIC is fully committed to ensuring every page on our site will meet guidelines for web accessibility and it is our intention to continue to work, on an ongoing basis, to further improve access for all customers.

Accessibility features

The site contains several useful accessibility features which are described below.

Navigation

We have provided clear and consistent navigation to aid visitors to our website.

Layout

Content is laid out using style sheets and the structure and layout of the content is designed to be meaningful with style sheets disabled. Members of the public using Mozilla based browsers such as Firefox can disable style sheets or create their own user defined style sheets.

Text sizes

This site uses relative font sizes that are compatible with user specified font sizes in visual browsers. To change the font to a size you are comfortable with:

- In Internet Explorer (PC), select View and then Text Size from the browser toolbar.
- In Netscape 6 or 7, Mozilla, Firefox, select View and then Text Zoom (or similar wording) from the browser toolbar.

Images

All content images on the site use descriptive ALT attributes. Purely decorative images include "null" ALT attributes.

COSMICs commitment to making sure that our website is accessible is not sufficient alone, and we always advise all of our customers to ensure that they also have fully accessible websites. Unfortunately, this is not something that we can insist that they adapt.

Equal Opportunities

'No discrimination on account of religion, race or politics shall be shown against any person in determining whether he or she is to be admitted to COSMIC as a member of staff or member of the Company, trainee, client or other stakeholder''.

COSMIC confirms its commitment to Equal Opportunities in all its activities. It is intended that no job applicant or employee, customer or trainee will receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of political belief, sex, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, race, nationality, ethnic origin, ethnic origin, religion, social class or age. Selection and promotion criteria will be kept under review to ensure that individuals are treated on the basis of the job

requirements are on their relevant personal merits, and are not disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be shown to be justifiable.

Recruitment

- Job Descriptions will be reviewed to ensure that they reflect the needs of the post.
- All staff material will state that COSMIC is an Equal Opportunities employer.
- The content and placement of staff recruitment material will be reviewed to ensure that applications are encouraged from all suitable candidates, and that there are no requirements (e.g. qualifications) included, which are irrelevant to the needs of the post.

The needs of the job will be the determining factor in selecting job candidates. Factors not relevant to needs of the job shall not be considered in any recruitment selection or promotion decision. Requests from applicants for more flexible forms of employment (e.g. job sharing or part-time) will be sympathetically considered.

Employees – Special Needs

Employees requiring special leave to meet family, cultural or religious obligations will be given sympathetic consideration within the normal terms of employment (as set out in the handbook). Consideration will be given to flexible working arrangements for existing employees whose personal circumstances change. COSMIC recognises the special needs of those with

responsibility for childcare and, where possible will have regard to these. All reasonable efforts will be made to enable an individual to continue working following illness or the onset of disability.

Complaints and Grievances

COSMIC will give a proper hearing, through established procedures, to complaints or grievances from any employee who alleges that she or he has been unfairly discriminated against. Any complaint from a job applicant will be properly investigated and the applicant notified. A Company employee may invoke disciplinary procedures in the case of any breach of Company policy on Equal Opportunities.

Environment

- Physical – consideration will be given to adapting the working / training environment and/or providing special aids (in consultation with the Disablement Advisory Service) to enable a disabled applicant to perform a job or recently disabled employee to continue working, or to enable a trainee to engage in learning.
- Language –COSMIC will endeavour to use non-discriminatory language.

Child Protection Policy

COSMIC takes its commitment to child protection very seriously and has always insisted on checks on all members of staff who come into contact with members of the public and enhanced checks where staff members will be dealing with young people and / or vulnerable adults. The policy statement from COSMICs child protection policy notes that

"We at COSMIC are committed to practices that protect children from harm. Staff and Volunteers recognise and accept our responsibilities to develop the awareness of the issues that may cause children harm."

We endeavour to safeguard children by: -

- Adopting child protection policies and guidelines through a code of behaviour for staff and volunteers.
- Sharing information about concerns with agencies who need to know, and involving parents and children appropriately.
- Ensuring that the Criminal Record Bureau, in accordance with their guidelines, checks all staff and volunteers with responsibility for children.
- Making all new staff and volunteers aware of our child protection procedures and policies.
- Appointing two designated people to enable any concerns to be reported in accordance with our procedures.
- We are also committed to reviewing our policy and good practice at regular intervals.

A full copy of COSMIC's Child Protection Policy can be seen in Appendix 13 Leading the Way in Social Enterprise

VISITORS

2006 saw the largest number of visitors to COSMIC ever, and not just because we invited people to share our birthday celebrations and promised champagne! There was a great deal of interest in our work and social enterprise model from various perspectives including international visitors from Australia and Japan who travel to UK to find out more about social enterprise and how it may work in their own context in future. Also people working in Third Sector organisations and with an interest in developing a social enterprise (including with ICT services) in other parts of the UK.

We were also very proud to welcome a number of "VIP" visitors (and yes of course everyone is a VIP when they visit COSMIC!). These included Rosa Wilkinson and Brian McCarthy of the DTI's Small Business Service; Glenys Thornton who visited on our Birthday and is currently Chair of the Social Enterprise Coalition; Stephen Peacock and Greg Taylor from South West RDA's Economy Team; Lucy Findlay Chief Executive of RISE, attendees on the social enterprise visit programme which came to an end at the beginning of 2006, and many more.

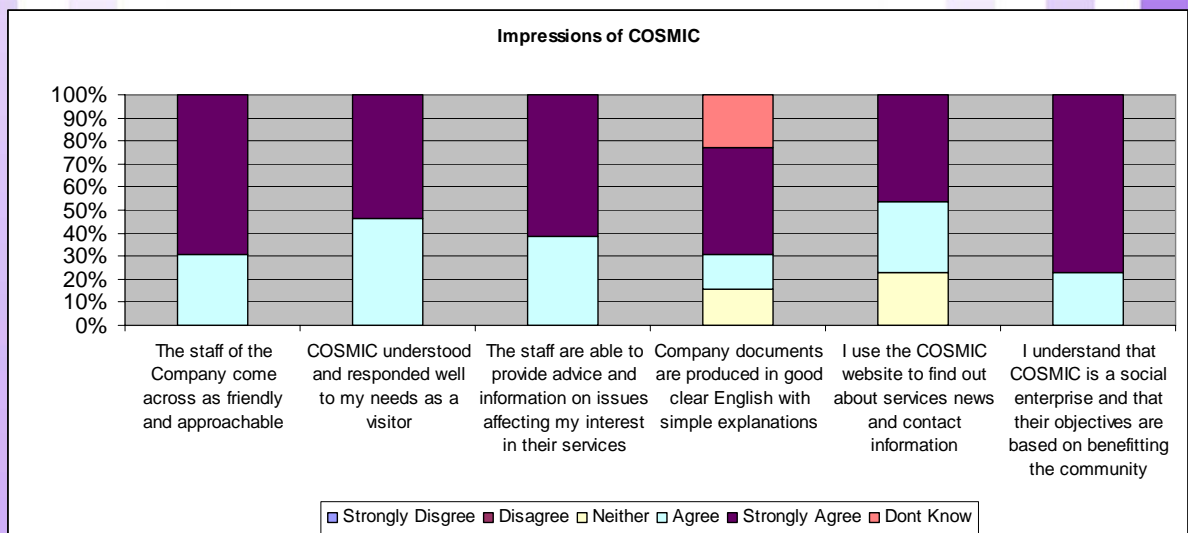
Consultation

These visits provided an ideal opportunity to talk with people about our work and to invite them to question and challenge our thinking. An important opportunity exists on such occasions for the team to consider new ways of working and to challenge current thinking.

With this in mind we decided to survey those people who had visited during the year in order to gain a reflection on their experiences of COSMIC.

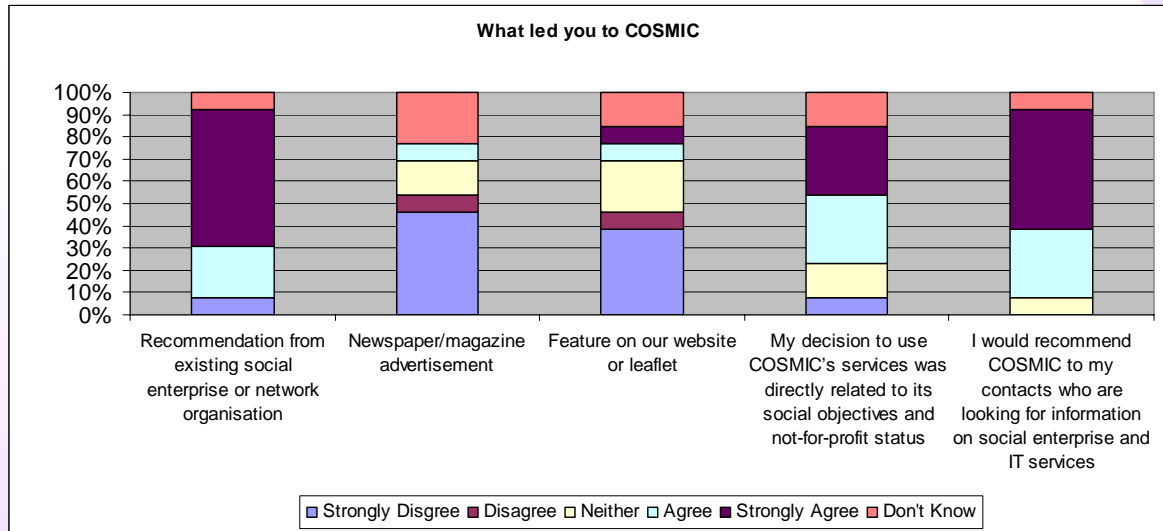
1. What was the main reason for your visit to COSMIC? Was there a particular element of our services or activities which you were interested in?

- "The industry relate to the IT."
- "2 visits, first to see the organisation and meet the device group from the SW and second in august to meet the ict regional champions."
- "I have visited twice. a, to meet with the CEO and have tour of COSMIC b, to attend a national meeting being held at COSMIC"
- "I am an international student. So I am very interesting to know how is the operation of foreign enterprises"
- "Meeting re Net:gain"
- "Partnership working"
- "To get a better understanding of how the business / social enterprise operated, business model etc, and to explore closer working relationships"
- "We have embarked on a ICT Social Enterprise in ther East of England and part of the R&D was to visit projects that have been trading in the same field."
- "To see the work of a sustainable and innovative social enterprise"
- "contact details and general information"



- "I tend not to use the website so frequently as I have a lot of personal contact"

- “The visitors, for whom I am responding, were all Japanese investigating social enterprise in the UK from the perspective of establishing se’s in Japan and learning from the UK experience especially of how a network is operated”
- “Everyone I met seemed to be clear about your role in the community and how you are setting out to achieve it”



What led you to contact COSMIC for the purposes of your visit and interest in our work?

- “Through my work in circuit riding I was keen to visit to see how the project was managing sustainably”
- “I've put "don't know" for 4.2, not because I don't know, but because I didn't contact you that way”
- “I know Cosmic well so I would not be led to coming just because of an ad or leaflet”
- “The visitors were particularly interested in rural social enterprise networks so were introduced to Cosmic on that basis, by the Devon Rural Community Council”

How you feel about the Company and your feedback on how services are delivered?

- “Fantastic”
- “Very positive Staff are happy to work there, always helpful and genuinely keen to see VCS groups make the most of their ICT. Done for the sake of the clients and not primarily for the gain of COSMIC”
- “I found the staff I dealt with re net:gain to be very helpful and supportive”
- “Keep up the good work”
- “Excellent - really impressed with the clear goals / ethos / business plan, and the way that they are communicated and delivered.”

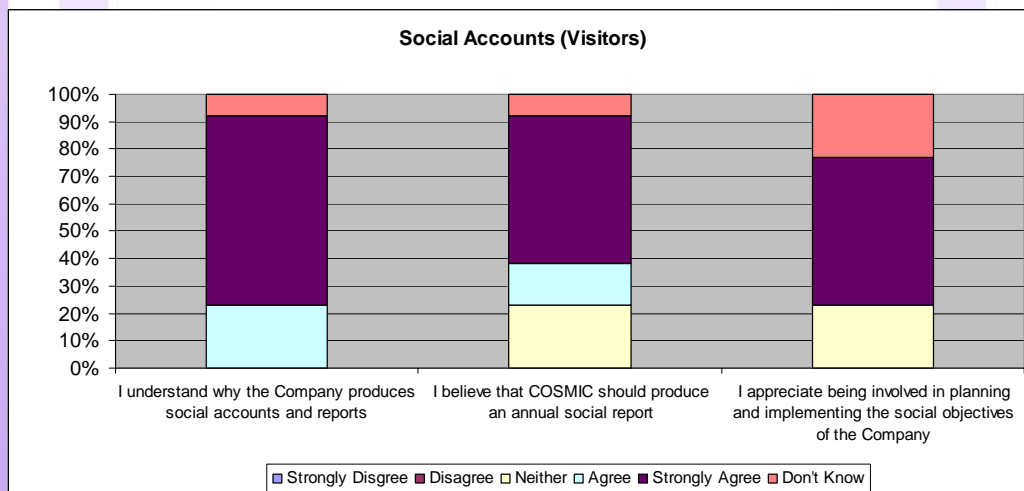
- “Seems very professional although it still suffers from the unfair disadvantage in some instance when it is not treated as an equal to the private sector!”
- “It is delivering very well for a number of reasons: - real involvement of stakeholders especially young people - the development of comprehensive social accounts to measure these activities - strong engagement in the staff team and Board in the development of strategy”
- “It is impressively energetic and enterprising with innovative ideas and understanding of the community in which it works”.
- “Friendly, exciting and fun”
- “I think you've got a great mix of services, a highly credible track record, a clear sense of leadership and great set of people to continue to grow and succeed”

The Company continues to seek to improve its services to clients. Please indicate any improvements, which you feel would be of value as a client, partner or stakeholder generally

- “The current work environment is difficult as there is a lot of competition for funding to sustain work. this is however being managed very well and negativity from others in the region is dealt with appropriately.”
- “See Q6 for my feelings about your excellent work ethics!”
- “None - keep on doing what you are doing”
- “In terms of event management making sure that the client is kept informed at all stages”
- “None that are relevant to our perspective”

Do you have any future IT service needs which you would like to tell us about?

- “None at the moment”
- “Do you work with organisations with comparable missions to see what partnership is possible and what overlap exist and do you do a social audit with them of what impact in community terms your joint rather than isolated activities bring?”
- “Keep up the good work!”



In addition to the promotional opportunities which visitors provided, we also achieved features in the National Social Enterprise Action Plan launched by Ed Miliband, Minister for the Third Sector in November, and in the national Trailblazers Magazine featuring our activities during Enterprise Week.

We were also featured in Big Issue with a piece on rural ICT issues and how COSMIC addresses them – [extract here](#)

A copy of all publications adverts and features on our work during 2006 can be found at Appendix 11

“COSMIC has always been an exemplar social enterprise for us in the region. Innovative in the high quality service it provides for its customers, it also embodies the values of the best social enterprises - commitment to its stakeholders, democratic management, and an ability to be imaginative and to take entrepreneurial risks in a competitive environment. We at Co-active look forward to the next ten years of collaborative possibilities.” (Judith Reynolds, Director, Co-active Ltd)

Objective 4 Recommendations

1. Further development of environmental accounting and audit in 2007
2. New awards to be investigated and applied for
3. Marketing plan to be reviewed mid 2007
4. Continual development of opportunities to promote our work nationally and to host visits.