Transforming Neighbourhoods

A collection of stories about community empowerment

Edited by
Saffron James

Foreword

When councils work successfully in neighbourhoods, people feel empowered and are more inclined to get involved in shaping the places they live in. This increases a sense of belonging and local identity.

The evidence suggests that identifying and fixing 'the little things' has a big impact on satisfaction and people's sense that the council is listening. Local government recognises the benefits of working at neighbourhood level, and central government has invested a great deal of effort in understanding neighbourhood renewal.

Most councils have some sub-local level working arrangements, though not necessarily at neighbourhood level. Research commissioned by IDeA into neighbourhood working in 2006 highlighted several benefits to service delivery, including improved satisfaction with services, especially those dealing with the local environment.

So selling the principle of neighbourhood working is relatively easy. The tougher task for councils is making it happen in reality, and there are challenges for both councils and councillors.

'Bottom up' engagement takes time and a great deal of effort is required to convince people of the benefits and in thinking about how services are delivered. Communities are not homogenous places, and the people who live in them do not have a single view about the places they live and work in so it is important to consult all sections of the local community.

There is a consensus that frontline councillors can build stronger local accountability and improve councils' effectiveness in engaging with local communities. Therefore the starting point for councils is to think about how councillors can strengthen their community leadership or 'frontline' roles, and whether this requires better officer support.

Our experience in working with councils is that investment is needed to develop the leadership skills of frontline councillors in their wards that enable them to do a better job involving people. The challenge for councillors will be their ability to:

- Lead on the development of neighbourhood arrangements
- Broker, mediate, champion and advocate between competing interest groups
- Be visible in the neighbourhood – it is about knowing and being known
- Take an active role in the monitoring performance of public services in their neighbourhoods.

Then there is the problem of deciding how to define a neighbourhood, whether it is an estate, a ward or another kind of area. The challenge for a council is to define a neighbourhood in a way that resonates with local people, while maintaining the council's ability to serve the wider community that it is responsible for. Good data about service use is therefore important.

Furthermore, as third-sector organisations and partnerships increasingly deliver community-based services, councillors and officers will need new skills in commissioning to deliver outcomes that benefit whole communities or neighbourhoods.

The recognition by central government of the benefits of neighbourhood working is to be welcomed, but there is a danger of reinventing the wheel. A collection of essays called Lest We Forget published by Solace in 2006 showed over 30 years of experience of neighbourhood working already in local government. The conclusion of those essays was that neighbourhood working was neither new nor easy, and absolutely has to be tailored to meet the needs of specific places.

This collection of stories gathered by the Young Foundation reaches a similar conclusion. The stories collected here are about innovative and inspirational neighbourhood initiatives. They originate from a consortium of 15 councils plus national organisations that are collectively seeking modern and practical ways to support community empowerment and improve neighbourhood working. Importantly, they are a 'warts-and-all' telling, describing both what has and hasn't worked and the impact of the initiatives.

Developing and delivering services at neighbourhood level is the way forward for local government. I hope these stories will encourage other councils to think about embedding a culture of democracy by improving neighbourhood engagement as the way to provide better services.

Lucy de Groot
Executive Director
Improvement and Development Agency

The IDeA works for local government improvement so councils can serve people and places better.

Introduction

This collection of stories captures the experiences of people, community organisations, local authorities and other public agencies, all working in different ways to empower the neighbourhoods they live in or work with.

While each story features only a handful of individuals from different communities, they have been chosen because they reflect perspectives and challenges that are common to neighbourhoods and local authorities right across the country, including questions like: What is a neighbourhood? What encourages neighbourliness and social interaction between different groups and communities? How can agencies and communities respond to the growing levels of diversity in neighbourhoods? How can we develop new and innovative ways to encourage community participation to address the lack of public interest and trust in local politics?

Over the two years of the Transforming Neighbourhoods programme we spoke to hundreds of people about their experiences of neighbourhood working and community empowerment, in rural villages, inner-city neighbourhoods, and suburban communities. These conversations ranged from informal chats with local shopkeepers to interviews, focus groups and practical projects involving community activists, councillors, faith leaders, youth workers, residents, council officers, researchers, academics and policy makers.

The stories reflect the mood of these conversations and the growing political interest in neighbourhoods. Over the last decade the political spotlight has focused on the need for individuals and communities to have more opportunities to influence the decisions that affect their day-to-day lives and immediate environment. Over the past two years we have seen this interest gather pace as debate about the Local Government White

Paper pushed community empowerment and neighbourhood working up the agenda for English local authorities and for all the main political parties. There now appears to be cross-party consensus – at least at the national level - on the need for a new type of relationship between citizens and the state, one where power and influence are increasingly devolved to people and to communities to shape their own futures.

Our aim was to understand what makes neighbourhood working effective in a variety of different geographical and political circumstances, in order to draw out lessons, experiences – both good and bad – and examples of innovation that could be shared widely across local government and other public agencies.

In simple terms, these lessons can be reduced to four factors that are essential for effective neighbourhood working:

First, flexible and responsive structures that reflect real need and circumstances. We know that structures matter much less at street level than they do at the town hall, but to be successful neighbourhood working needs to be driven from the centre and owned politically. Councils need structures but they must allow for local difference.

Second, while structures matter, the processes put in place to shape, design and implement them are also crucial. How change and risk are managed can make the difference between whether neighbourhood working succeeds or fails.

Third, it is enthusiastic and dedicated individuals who make community empowerment a reality by working day after day to make change happen in neighbourhoods, often in challenging circumstances. They need strong support to develop the skills, experience and trust needed to work in such a complex environment.

And fourth, an organisational culture that is committed to embedding community engagement at the heart of council business – this requires clear political and corporate leadership to transform an ambition into a way of working from the centre to the frontline, and the right balance between innovation and risk management.

Looking ahead, new questions are already emerging about how to implement new ways of working and to tackle these issues: how to understand and measure the long-term effects of participation and empowerment on communities and the people who live in them? What can be done to bridge the tensions between representative and participative forms of democracy that can get in the way of progress being made locally? How can we remove the barriers to involvement in local politics to build a healthy political culture in neighbourhoods? What can be learnt from new forms of social networking to increase interaction in communities? These are just some of the questions that we will continue to explore in the years ahead.

Our hope is that this collection highlights the diversity of different approaches to neighbourhood working and honestly reflects both the complexity and frustrations of the task. We also hope that it reflects the enthusiasm, persistence and creativity of so many of the people we met who were working, with or without pay, to improve the neighbourhoods and communities which they live in.

Saffron James
The Young Foundation

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We would also like to thank the hundreds of people whose views, opinions and experiences were gathered through interviews, focus groups, meetings, and other events, to shape our thinking about neighbourhoods and community empowerment. Over 400 people were directly involved in practical projects and local research projects, including council officers, elected members, community organisations and activists, and residents from different neighbourhoods. In addition, almost 100 people were involved in seminars, interviews and policy research projects, including policymakers from local and central government and other public agencies, community organisations, and academics.

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Chapter 1

Working with the Charedi Jewish community in Haringey

Anna Minton

A swimming pool in Haringey may not be an obvious place for encouraging ultra-orthodox Jewish women and devout Muslim women to come together, but it is exactly what the council hopes to achieve.

Haringey, in North East London, is one of the most multicultural boroughs in Europe, with more than half its population of 225,000 people from an ethnic minority background and a total of 160 languages spoken at home, including Somali and Yiddish.

Community development worker Sara Leviten, discovered through her work with the ultra-orthodox Charedi Jewish community that the women she talked to were keen to use the pool, but would prefer to do so during single sex sessions screened from men, a cultural requirement shared by Muslim women.

As the pool is surrounded by glass walls effective shutters are required and she hopes they will be provided, with the result that "religious Muslim and orthodox Jewish women can swim at the same time", she says.

This is just one example of Sara's work in Haringey, where part of her job is to work specifically with the Charedi community, the first time any local authority has employed somebody to look to the needs of this community in Britain.

According to the cultural norms of the Charedi and Chassidim sects, visible from their nineteenth-century dress, most children do not go to university, many homes do not have televisions or internet access and only 22 per cent of adults are in full-time work, with the full- or part-time study of the Torah the accepted occupation for men.

The consequence is that while the community is run on principles of benevolence and charity, acute poverty is a feature of daily life, with an average family size of six children and the majority of home owners struggling to meet their payments.

At the heart of Sara's work, and today's debate on multiculturalism, is the fact that despite maintaining a strong presence in the UK over the last 100 years, the Charedi community has also shown a degree of resistance to integration, and in the past the council has struggled to make good connections within the community.

But Sara points out that a careful look at local specifics has shown that the needs of the Charedi community in South Tottenham need not be viewed simply through this prism, but are characterised by changing daily realities.

"Slowly but surely the Charedi community is moving down the hill into Tottenham from the more well-established community in Stamford Hill, because of affordable housing. But the traditional orthodox community in Tottenham has either died off or moved on," she points out, increasing feelings of isolation within the community which were magnified after an arson attack on a local synagogue.

"From their perspective they're a community with no funding from the council and with no one listening to their needs," she says.

Sara's project, which received Neighbourhood Renewal Funding for 18 months up to May 2006, is particularly remarkable for the fact that it is the first time any local authority has worked so closely with this community, something Sara believes has been easier because she is orthodox Jewish herself – although not ultra-orthodox – and therefore able to act 'as a bridge' between the community and the council.

The result has been a raft of schemes including a counselling service, an elderly social club, a homework club attended by 200 children and a library, which operates from a private house. For the children, who do not watch television let alone play on computers, access to books and reading is particularly important which is why funding to this unusual library was given such high priority.

Mrs. Lopian who runs the library, explains what a vital resource it is, especially as many children do not use the public library.

"Our children go to school until 5pm. One of the very few entertainments they have is reading. It's one of the very few luxuries they have – it's not even a luxury, it's a necessity," she says.

The library, which has been operating out of Mrs. Lopian's modestly-sized front room for the last 20 years, sees 60-80 children come to borrow books every Friday. As a result of the project, Sara managed to re-kit the library with a large amount of new stock of orthodox Jewish literature, including children's fiction, but paradoxically the popularity of the project has created so much demand that Mrs. Lopian worries she can barely cope with the flow of traffic.

But she is in no doubt about how much the project has helped her. "This is a very big help and it's something very new and people are grateful. People appreciate it – I'm stopped in the street by people I don't know and thanked and the children are so appreciative – they get so excited – these are children who had gone through all the books I had two or three times," she says.

For Dick Muskett, Haringey's Tottenham and Seven Sisters neighbourhood manager, the success of the project has been the trust built between the council and a community, which had no contact with statutory institutions. "We know many more people now and it's undoubted that people are more relaxed. We know them, they know us and they're very appreciative of Sara. We're trying to develop that relationship so that they see us as a benign force they can approach," he says.

And the corollary of that is a community that is confident of its place within the wider Haringey community. "If you can get people confident in their own community then the inevitable result of that is that they're not so isolated," he explains.

Lessons from Haringey:

■ Haringey has mirrored its approach to working with the Charedi Jewish community to engage with a number of different cultural, ethnic and faith communities in the borough. The council has recruited community development workers from a wide range of backgrounds, including Somalian, Iranian, Afro-Caribbean, Cypriot, Ethiopian, Italian and Nigerian, to undertake intensive work with these different communities, to understand their specific issues and improve service delivery for these groups

■ Haringey has also done work to build relationships between diverse communities by developing initiatives such as 'Meet Your Neighbours', which brings together residents from different communities, ethnic and cultural groups, to talk about what brought them to the borough, their experience of living in Haringey, cultural customs and traditions, and connections to family and friends abroad

■ Haringey has used Neighbourhood Management to encourage innovation and creativity locally, with a very strong focus on a community development remit for the team.

Chapter 2

Neighbourhoods and globalisation

Nicola Bacon

The Young Foundation's Transforming Neighbourhoods programme worked in 15 local authority areas, including London boroughs, northern cities and rural counties.

We found that in many areas local populations are changing dramatically, complicating the task of community empowerment and neighbourhood working.

Rapidly changing populations put a strain on public services trying to meet newly emerging needs. We also saw how new arrivals can fuel tensions within communities over resource allocation – particularly between long-standing (white or black) residents and newer groups. Conflicts may play out through violence particularly among young people, and particular groups may be demonised. Globalisation and international conflicts have raised the stakes when community tensions build up, the consequences of getting it wrong have never been higher.

But we also found examples where communities and agencies were finding ways to manage tensions and value the benefits of diversity. Living with diversity demands skills, sensitivity and good information about different communities to enable residents and agencies to balance the need to share common spaces and experiences with the need to maintain separate identities. These skills are required by residents wanting to get along with neighbours, parents dealing with social relationships in the playground, and by frontline staff and decision makers needing to develop a full understanding of local needs and potential tensions.

Migration has increased dramatically in recent years, in the UK and internationally. In 1965 – across the world – 75 million people lived outside their home country. The equivalent figure today is 200 million.[1]

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[1] *Global Economic Prospects* 2006, The World Bank (2006)

Globalisation impacts dramatically at the very local level, both in areas with long-standing ethnic diversity and in places where minority ethnic populations have been traditionally very small. However hard data about who lives where in the UK is in short supply. It is five years since the last census (in 2001), and official statistics have yet to catch up with changes in migration patterns in this period – missing out for example on the 250,000-plus Poles who have registered to work in Britain since May 2004.

In the 2001 census Sheffield's black and minority ethnic population was recorded as slightly over 10 per cent. By 2005 this figure is estimated to have risen to around 15 per cent. In the same year, nearly a quarter of children starting primary school and nearly 30 per cent of births were to people from black and minority ethnic groups.[2] Similarly East London and City Heath Authority estimates that the population of their area is 30-40,000 more than official census figures, however resources are still allocated on the basis of the lower census estimate.

But as well as the statistics, people need to understand that the UK has changed in subtler ways. The experiences of different people who come to the UK to live now vary enormously. Within every group, individuals juggle multiple identities, with class, faith, sexuality, education, and experience of life all affecting the ways they relate to British institutions and culture. People also come to the UK with different aspirations: the global super-rich because of UK tax laws and because of the financial services industry; many well-qualified younger people seek new experiences and job opportunities. An unknown – but significant – number of people come with few assets, in search of economic opportunities and a better life. Other people arrive in need – over 25,000 asylum applications were made in 2005[3] – or as victims of trafficking and slavery.

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[2] Sheffield City Council statistics
[3] Home Office, 2005, as quoted on Refugee Council website (1 March 2006)

New communications technologies have changed the relationship people have with the area where they live. It is easier now than it has ever been to keep up friendships and relationships with people elsewhere, whether that is on the other side of the city, of the UK or another continent. Good communications and cheaper international air travel mean that people can return more easily to their homelands. Recent research found that new immigrants from five Eastern European countries living in London and Brighton reported that although only a minority felt they belonged to their neighbourhood, a larger proportion felt they belonged to the UK (in similar proportions to long-term UK residents). Most felt a sense of belonging to both the UK and their home country.

Recently there has been debate about whether multiculturalism has gone 'too far', whether the UK is 'too diverse'. Discussion has become more heated following riots in 2001 in several northern British cities involving Muslim and white communities. This intensified following the London bombings in July 2005. Two years ago, Trevor Phillips, then Chair of the Government's Commission for Racial Equality, warned that the UK is 'sleep walking into segregation' (although he subsequently acknowledged that he had misinterpreted the research on which his remarks were based).

Robert Putnam – whose work on the atomisation of US society has been highly influential – has written recently about the corrosive effects of ethnic diversity on trust. He has argued that the more diverse a community is, the less likely its inhabitants are to trust anyone, from their next door neighbour to the mayor. When his data was adjusted for class, income and other factors, it showed that the more people of different races lived in the same community, the greater the loss of trust.[4]

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[4] *Study paints bleak picture of ethnic diversity*, John Lloyd, Financial Times (October 2006)

But recent government survey research in the UK suggests a different story. The data shows that people who live in multi-ethnic areas, and people with friends from different ethnic groups to themselves, tend to have the most positive views about the level of racial prejudice, and more positive views about services and institutions.[5] Other studies have established that while London is the UK's most multicultural region, polling consistently also shows that it is the region in the UK that is most comfortable with diversity.[6]

Oxford psychologist and Young Foundation Fellow Miles Hewstone has explored what happens to relationships between different groups in conflict areas. His research – in Northern Ireland, in areas of Hindu-Muslim conflict in India and in former Yugoslavia – has established that when people have more contact with people from other backgrounds, understanding increases and hostility reduces. This challenges the more popularly accepted (within the UK) 'threat' theory which proposes that more diversity leads to more misunderstanding and competition, and increased prejudice. Hewstone's work suggests the opposite – that so long as there is contact (which isn't always the case) diverse populations can develop understanding and less discomfort between different groups.[7]

Our neighbourhoods work unearthed many examples of individuals and agencies finding creative and practical solutions to managing the tensions generated by high levels of diversity: increasing people's sense of belonging in a neighbourhood; bringing different communities together; and tackling tensions between groups. In Tottenham we found that food was being used as a way of helping different communities to get to know each other and help boost attendance at area assemblies.

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[5] *Citizenship Survey: Cross-cutting themes*, Sarah Kitchen, Juliet Michaelson, Natasha Wood, Peter John, DCLG (June 2006)

[6] ONS census 2001, MORI, Home Office (2001)

[7] Miles Hewstone, *'The World in our Neighbourhoods'* conference, Young Foundation and Haringey Council, London (2006)

In Bristol we discovered the work of a local voluntary agency, Community Resolve, brokering conflicts between Somalis and longer-established communities in Bristol using community mediation techniques.

In Oldham, PeaceMaker has used peer education and work with parents as well as their children to develop communities' capacities to live together.

Earlier this year, Great Yarmouth PC Gary Pettengell received a Pride of Lithuania award for his work with Lithuanian migrants. He started learning the language from a phrase book and a CD set used in his car over three years ago when 50 Lithuanians arrived in Yarmouth. Since then he has set up the Welcome to Norfolk website designed to help migrants with practical information, such as setting up a bank account or finding a GP.

For centuries the UK has absorbed waves of newcomers from different countries, from the Huguenots, different seafaring nationalities, and escaped slaves from the Caribbean and USA in the 18th and 19th centuries, to mass migration in the 20th century. In general people in this country are more at ease with diversity than in many comparable countries.

However the reality is that in many parts of the UK there are now unprecedented numbers of different communities, and many people now live in neighbourhoods with no shared lifestyle, culture or faith. The key question is whether – in these times of international terrorism and global tensions – we can rely on our past record of tolerance, integration and common sense to help us muddle through the contradictions of living in increasingly diverse communities, or whether

we need to pay more attention to managing and developing the skills and practices needed to promote meaningful integration that doesn't stifle difference.

Unlikely Communities in North East London

Geoff Mulgan

I live in a neighbourhood in London which should be a nightmare for lovers of social capital and community cohesion. Parts of it have a very high turnover of people – not quite as high as the 80 per cent found in parts of North East and North West London, but not far off. Each year large numbers of new migrants come attracted by cheap private rented housing, alongside asylum seekers and refugees squeezed into social housing and B&Bs, most of whom want to move on when they can. The area has had its fair share of crime – and one street has long been a primary entry point for heroin into the UK, prompting the occasional burst of shooting as gangs jostle for position. The area is also very diverse – with some 80 languages spoken in the local secondary school, and the full plethora of different places of worship (mosques and evangelical churches sometimes look like the strongest local growth industry).

Yet there are some surprisingly positive experiences of community that cut across the divides, and most long-standing residents find it a welcoming and safe area to live in. The quality of the physical infrastructure has markedly improved, and the local park is full of marvellous play areas.

I've lived in the same street for 15 years and have been surprised to see the very local community ties strengthen during that period. One factor has been a change in the nature of threats. When the threat is low-level crime people tend to drift apart, fearful of too much interaction, or spending too much time out in the street. Thankfully crime rates are down, and most people feel rather safer than they did, despite the occasional flowering of yellow police notices. On the other hand the types of threat that galvanise social bonds have not gone away. A good example is the habit of bad drivers using side roads for rat runs, which has prompted residents to get organised campaigning for speed bumps or for the ultimate luxury of turning through roads into cul-de-sacs. A recent plan to build a cement factory nearby had a similar effect, summoning up

fears of juggernauts thundering through the area at all hours of the day and night.

The second factor has been children. We're very lucky to live in a small street in which there are nearly 10 children of roughly the same age attending the same local primary school. Parents meet through children in ways that they never meet without them – and through their children they become dependent on each other for helping out with the odd bit of childcare, looking after the kids in the local park, or walking them to school. Before long they find that they like each other. It goes without saying that the feel of the street would be very different if all the children were heading off in opposite directions.

The third factor is the web. A couple of years ago one enterprising resident set up a simple website for the roads around where we live. It's not sophisticated or fancy, but it does provide a straightforward window on what's happening and a place to record meetings of residents' groups. It's just beginning to become an information exchange where you can go for advice on finding a reliable plumber, or how to make a complaint to the council. And I'm sure before long it will become a more regular news bulletin board where you'll be able to go to find explanations of mysterious events – like roads closed off by swarms of armed police in the small hours of the morning.

The police are the other factor that's changed, and the best example of a public service that has tried to reach down to the community. Like many other urban areas we now have a dedicated police officer, backed by a team of Community Support Officers (CSOs), who's willing to appear at regular meetings to talk about what's new and what's changing. By contrast, trying to find out anything from the local health service is just about impossible.

Like many neighbourhoods we find it hard to get things done. Most of the power that's relevant to daily public life lies with the local council. But trying to achieve even minor changes feels like wading through treacle – even though, to be fair, the council has gone some way to open itself up to public engagement. The more basic problem is simply one of scale. A council serving between 200,000 and 300,000 people (no one knows the true figure) isn't well placed to act quickly on very local issues like providing play for children, or adjusting traffic flows. Fairly modest powers in the hands of a neighbourhood council would make a big difference – as would pledgebank-type schemes to enable people to put in another £10 or £20 a year to the neighbourhood so long as another 500 or 1,000 did as well.

The lives of most of the people living in the neighbourhood are extraordinarily connected. Some work in big companies or the city. Most have friendship networks that stretch over the city and far beyond, and on the local high street the internet cafes are packed with mainly young men talking to friends and family back home. Diasporas are far more connected to their countries of origin than ever before – through the net, newspapers, owning land and cheap travel. But very local life hasn't disappeared because of these other pulls. Paradoxically the very visibility of globalisation may have made people value their local spaces and local bonds all the more.

Chapter 4

A Mayor's tale

Steve Bullock

When we think about 'our neighbourhood' we usually mean a few streets we know well, perhaps going as far as the local shops. Those of us involved in planning and delivering local services use the word with great abandon yet all too rarely stop and think about what it really means.

Becoming an elected politician with a constituency of about 250,000 souls forced me to think hard about what the concept of neighbourhood meant to me. As the local mayor did that mean the whole borough was 'my neighbourhood'? In some ways it did. There are some people who have to think about the whole borough in order to do their job – the local police commander, the Primary Care Trust, and the council's senior staff all operate on that basis. But we are atypical – and if we fool ourselves into thinking that the discussions which take place between us and those other few individuals who work on the same basis will connect us to local residents in anything but a superficial way, we need to think again.

We need to be able to look at the borough from multiple viewpoints – we have to be able to see not only the strategic perspective but also the perspective from a genuine neighbourhood level. During my first term I looked at how I could achieve this as mayor. Lewisham's basic structure for engagement is six area forums each covering three wards and consisting of about 30,000 electors. Some district councils aren't much bigger than that! This is hardly a vehicle for neighbourhood engagement, but at least a way to meet some electors as I discovered when visiting each of the forums. Apart from their size the forums are also essentially consultative bodies.

However, scattered around the borough were a number of other structures which provided some interesting ideas about how I might get to grips with the many neighbourhoods that make up Lewisham.

Foremost among these, of course, were five Neighbourhood Management Pilots. In truth, the scale of these varied considerably, with some covering what were clearly self-defined neighbourhoods while others had a wider area to cover.

What became clear to me through conversation with both residents and workers in these areas was that Neighbourhood Management was providing a way for service providers not only to work more effectively together but also to engage with local residents. There were clear successes as well as the inevitable difficulties, but overall this was a way of working that cried out to be sustained where it was already in place, and also should be informing how new forms of engagement might be developed across the borough.

Other non-universal programmes and schemes offered other insights. The Sure Start programmes at their best were transforming the lives of not just our youngest residents but entire communities – not least because communities themselves were running them. The impact of Community Warden schemes was also significant in some areas.

I then undertook a series of visits to each ward in the borough, spending a day visiting community organisations, local businesses and public services. This was followed in the evening by an open house session for local residents.

These visits gave me fresh insights into both those things that made each ward unique but also what were the common issues across the borough. I involved colleagues from the police, environmental services and youth work in the evening sessions and at their best these meetings created connections and opened discussion about how we could solve problems together.

But however stimulating I found these day trips, in practical terms I knew I would never be able to find the time to repeat them with the kind of frequency needed to develop consistent working relationships in each ward. It might be possible for me to work in particular areas for periods of time, but not across the whole borough with the same intensity.

After being elected to serve a second term in 2006 I decided to establish a commission to examine neighbourhood working. I invited the political parties to nominate councillors but was clear that anyone joining the Commission did so as an individual. They were joined by local residents who had particular experience or expertise to bring to the table and our work was greatly assisted by the involvement of some of the 'Young Advisers' who work with the elected 'Young Mayor' – a scheme I had introduced during my first term.

The Commission worked in a collaborative way taking evidence from a variety of local and 'expert' sources. Officers were encouraged to input without feeling they needed to wait to be asked. The Commission's task was to consider how best to empower local people and facilitate their engagement in their local area.

In late May 2007 the Commission finalised its report. It recommended that ward assemblies be set up in each of the borough's 18 electoral divisions. The active involvement of the ward councillors will be crucial in providing leadership at this local level and the assemblies will enable people in each area to have a stronger and more direct influence in shaping their local community.

If the whole council adopts this approach there will be much detail to be worked out, but the core elements will be enshrined in a local Charter that will be the basis for an annual 'Priority Plan'. I envisage meeting annually as mayor with each assembly, and also over time, working to identify additional powers and resources that can be devolved to them in

addition to the relatively limited 'ward budgets' which have presently been allocated for local determination.

As a directly-elected mayor I have attempted to avoid being trapped in the town hall and to carry out my roles across the borough and in the neighbourhoods. I believe that this new way of working for Lewisham has the potential to help not only myself, but local councillors, to forge a dynamic relationship with the many neighbourhoods that together make up Lewisham.

Chapter 5

What is a neighbourhood?

Getting a picture of natural neighbourhoods in Sheffield

Anna Minton

A few years ago Danny Gilhooly was a chief inspector in the South Yorkshire Police. Today, he works for the council and feels he is finally able to understand the real context for crime committed in Sheffield.

This is thanks to the system popularly known as SNIS – the acronym for the Sheffield Neighbourhood Information System, a new way of mapping data in 100 local neighbourhoods across the city.

The system maps data in seven key areas, known as 'domains', which cover community safety, health and social care, economic activity, the environment, housing, education, and access to services and is, for Danny, uniquely well placed to put crime in its proper context.

''For the first time we're able to say, 'here's crime in relation to what's going on in the background' and people are finding it an absolute eye opener,'' he says.

As well as mapping crime in a particular area against correlating statistics in, for example, health or education, the system has also won praise for its definition of neighbourhood boundaries, based around a combination of natural boundaries and census output areas, the smallest unit of the census.

''We tried to use natural boundaries where possible – major roads, rail, rivers, groups of major estates,'' explains David Barrett, the system coordinator. ''They had to be big enough for the statistics to be robust and small enough to show differences within wards.

''The key to it is designing boundaries local people recognise, that mean something, rather than just looking for uniform size,'' he says, reflecting a widespread recognition that to enhance local identity and a sense of genuine community it is essential to work with the grain of local cultural characteristics.

The result is 100 area profiles which summarise the data results for each of the seven domains, plotting them against the city average, pinpointing at a glance in which domain neighbourhoods may be falling behind and hence enabling effective targeting of resources.

For Danny, the great advantage of SNIS is that it shows how crime correlates to other domain areas and immediately shows 'quick fix' solutions. For example, one neighbourhood, which had shown rising criminal damage also revealed increasing truancy and lower levels of attainment at school.

"It gave us the whole picture. The police aren't going to solve this just by increasing patrols, so we worked with the community action groups and schools targeting young people. The neighbourhood began to show significant decreases in criminal damage," he explains.

Interestingly, he has found that the ability of the system to put problems into context has also thrown up unexpected results, at times challenging perceptions of what is really happening.

One troubling statistic had been high levels of criminal damage to homes occurring around 11pm, despite the fact that antisocial behaviour peaked at 8pm. "Cross checking with intelligence information held by 'Housing', the answer came back that it was domestic related, with householders and other visitors finding themselves locked out and breaking windows and locks," he recounts.

What emerged is that crime reports for criminal damage would be filed the next day so that the council would carry out repairs for free; some of the worst offenders would ring in up to 20 times a year.

He admits, "this was not the result we expected" and led to "a lot of debate within the council about the nature of reported crimes."

Ultimately a new damage and repairs policy was introduced with the council agreeing to repair damage if it was honestly reported, without the need for a crime report – but monitoring how many times callers rang in.

But despite these successes, unexpected results have not been the only challenge SNIS has faced, with many partners anxious about the level of data sharing required and the potential disclosure of sensitive information.

At the outset a number of councillors also had reservations about the possibility of presenting Sheffield's neighbourhoods in a 'league table' style and Danny believes the decision not to publish tables from the programme is the only way to allay these concerns.

"It's the only way to have frank, honest debates, otherwise councillors in neighbourhoods would be very wary if they were top of the list every time and then went to the media. It would divert attention from what SNIS is trying to do. We're not hiding or keeping things back but we are being tactful about how much you should disclose," he says. At the same time more general, relative information is released relating, for example, to overall crime performance in the city.

In fact, the project officers found that engaging councillors in a discussion about disclosure helped them get more involved in the idea of SNIS and enabled them to find out more about the opportunities it could offer. Similarly, concerns over data sharing led to discussions that actually increased trust among the multiple partners, which include South Yorkshire Police, South Yorkshire Fire Service, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive and Sheffield Health Infomatics.

Vicky Williams, who is an area coordinator for six neighbourhoods in Brightside Shire Green, an area of 12,000 households spanning one and a third wards, feels that the strength of the system is that "it shows up something important to an area that we wouldn't necessarily recognise

and we can use that to show what gaps we're trying to close and to target funding".

For users of SNIS like Danny and Vicky, the immediate impact of the system is that local neighbourhood information is now available on an unusually diverse range of topics from sixth-form college uptake to air quality, information which often leads to challenges for policymakers.

For example, the correlation between domestic violence and educational attainment and the burglary spike highlighted in student areas at the end of the academic year, when students might possibly sell their laptops and report them stolen, have resulted in robust discussions. Meanwhile at other times the information may seem to state the obvious, such as the correlation between heavy smoking and deprivation or access to public transport following route changes.

But while some of the individual data might highlight uncomfortable results and other sources of information can seem little out of the ordinary, the extraordinary benefit is that placing all this diverse knowledge together enables real holistic working between departments and agencies, exemplified by Danny's role at the council today.

As he says: "I was determined coming here to tell the proper contextual story and that's what this programme allows me to do."

Lessons from Sheffield:

■   'What is a neighbourhood?' is a question that continues to vex many local authorities. Sheffield has demonstrated that mapping natural neighbourhoods can be done relatively easily

■   It is important that structures for neighbourhood engagement reflect real need and circumstances. Defining natural neighbourhoods can help community forums or committees to work more effectively by representing an area that people identify with immediately

■   Councillors often cite lack of detailed or relevant intelligence about neighbourhood-level problems as a barrier to influencing decision making. Sheffield has proved that it is possible to combine various sources of neighbourhood data in an innovative system that supports local service improvement

■   Sheffield's experience with SNIS has proved that neighbourhood data can provide a useful reality check on local problems and can highlight issues that have previously gone unrecognised. Neighbourhood data can be used to demonstrate to communities why resources are allocated to particular issues, which local people may not immediately identify as being priority problems.

Chapter 6

Good and bad neighbours

Practical ways to foster neighbourliness

Alessandra Buonfino

Fifty years ago many of Britain's rural areas and cities appeared to have stable and broadly contented communities with strong neighbourly ties.

At that time, Young and Willmott's well-known study of life in London's East End spoke of doors remaining unlocked and children playing in the streets watched over by the neighbours. They recognised that 'Bethnal Greeners are not lonely people: whenever they go for a walk in the street, for a drink in the pub, or for a row on the lake in Victoria Park, they know the faces in the crowd' and told anecdotes of mutual support and help.[1]

In early 2004, Gordon Brown described the Kirkcaldy of his childhood as a ''community not in any sense as some forced coming together, some sentimental togetherness for the sake of appearances, but a largely unquestioned conviction that we could learn from each other and call on each other in times of need, that we owed obligations to each other because our neighbours were part also of what we all were: the idea of neighbourliness woven into the way we led our lives''.[2] But in recent decades increased mobility, longer life expectancies and the breakdown of the extended family have largely changed the way we live our lives and the extent to which we are able to be 'neighbourly'.

Today, knowing and interacting with neighbours appears to play a more secondary role in people's lives. In the news media, neighbours are all too often associated more with indifference, noise, antisocial behaviour or 'neighbours from hell' than with close ties, mutual support and solidarity – though popular sagas such as *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* continue to focus on the drama of close-knit neighbourhoods.

Little neighbourhood interaction and the lack of a local public sphere mean that we know less about who our neighbours are and what we might have in common: one small sample survey of 1,000 members of the public

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[1] *Family and Kinship in East London*, Michael Young and Peter Willmott, Pelican (1954)
[2] Speech at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations Annual Conference, London (February 2004)

nationwide[3] suggests that as many as 6 in 10 British people do not know any of their neighbours' names even if 47 per cent of the British population trusts many people in the neighbourhood.[4] Yet neighbourliness or good neighbouring is still far from obsolete.

People have an innate need to relate to others and this can be seen in day-to-day interactions at the very local level: from recognising people in the street, to exchanging Christmas cards or borrowing sugar from next door neighbours. When positive, evidence shows that neighbourliness contributes to people's health and wellbeing and can be important for social efficacy, child development, crime reduction and for an overall feeling of safety, belonging and protection.[5] Good neighbours may be particularly important for those who spend more time in their local area – flexible workers, young families, the young, the elderly, the unemployed, the disabled.

Getting the balance right is important. Too much neighbourliness can lead to disputes and breach of privacy, and too little neighbourliness can lead to loneliness and social exclusion. Much is down to the individual and their personal preferences: the more clearly that residents can see opportunities of neighbouring and the more easily that they can take them up, the more they will be likely to do so. As mobility in neighbourhoods increases, a framework of conditions that help residents to be neighbourly *when* and *if* they want to be becomes increasingly necessary.

Neighbouring is not amenable to large-scale national policies and the local, fine-grained detail is more important for bringing people together. In the first instance, a framework for supporting neighbourliness will necessarily be structured around brief interactions, possibly leading toward common projects, activities or interests. These can also provide grounds for new kinds of solidarity. People are motivated to neighbourliness not simply by material interest, but also by social or altruistic value and the desire to belong. Many people will nonetheless continue to prefer other kinds of interaction.

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[3] From a research study conducted by Linden Homes (2005)
[4] Home Office Citizenship Survey (2003)
[5] Philip Abrams in *Neighbours, the Work of Philip Abrams*, Martin Bulmer, Cambridge University Press (1986)

Neighbourliness should not be enforced, but instead encouraged and there is much that local councils can do to foster and support neighbourliness.

Creating spaces for interaction and dialogue can encourage neighbourliness:

■ Although the evidence is limited, there are grounds to suggest that some practical actions could facilitate neighbourliness. These include: better designed and maintained spaces for social encounters (from parks to health centres); developing homes more conducive to socialising through porches and front gardens; providing places for meeting and interaction between children and families through extended schools, or local street parties

■ Traffic-calming, pedestrianised areas, wider pavements, seating, public toilets, public art, trees, better signing, street-sweeping, footway repairs, graffiti removal and lighting can all encourage people to feel safer and walk around their neighbourhoods

■ The evidence suggests that neighbourhoods that are people-friendly and have well-designed, well-kept public spaces where people can spend time outside their homes, are usually successful in providing the opportunity for residents to 'use' and enjoy their local areas and to meet other residents. Local shops, car boot sales and markets can all help the development of social relations between neighbours[6]

■ A number of viable opportunities may exist for more mutual services at neighbourhood level based on simple social innovations. Collective services for streets, blocks and villages could either be designed-in or resident-initiated, and might include wireless internet, group laundrettes, collective composting, even cooking facilities (as in some Scandinavian housing developments) or as technologies

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[6] *Park Life: Urban Parks and Social Renewal*; E. Greenhalgh and K. Worpole, Comedia & Demos, London (1995); *'Towards a Strong Urban Renaissance'*, an independent report by members of Urban task force chaired by Lord Rogers, Urban Taskforce (2005)

advance, street-based distributed power generation. 'Neighbourhood hubs', ideally flexible and multi-use buildings which may bring together public services with community space and business, can help to concentrate local 'footfall' and provide a focus for neighbourhood interaction. Caution is advised however as, when they are too centrally planned, such services often fall foul of individual preferences and behaviour

- Local public services (GPs, police) could also play a more engaged role in connecting neighbours to each other and to change their perceptions of whether the authorities are on their side

- Mechanisms for local knowledge and information sharing, if well-designed and used by a reasonable number of residents, can help people build up weak ties and identify common interests. These can range from news-sheets and free notice-boards in local shops to email groups and internet sites of varying sophistication. A simple 'who's who and what's what' of the neighbourhood is often valuable for new residents in helping to orient them

- There is also a question of how commuters can be more closely involved in their area, perhaps through weekend activities, and of opportunities for flexible and home workers to meet each other during the day in a cafe or a local resource centre.

While life patterns have changed, often shifting our frames of reference outside the neighbourhoods where we live, the evidence suggests that good relations with neighbours at the very local level can still have very beneficial effects on quality of life, and are still valued by most people. They may not be based on family, close friendship or 'strong ties' as they used to be in the past, but respect, friendliness, and help in times of crisis or need can go a long way to improve people's lives. While neighbourliness is not for everyone, facilitating more encounters between neighbours could support a rediscovery of the local – and help people, in particular the most vulnerable, to live happier and healthier lives.

Chapter 7

Supporting tenants to become neighbourhood champions in Cornwall

Liz Bartlett

Kim flushed red and hesitantly began to explain that she probably wasn't the right person to speak to about neighbourhood issues. A full-time mother of three children, she had become involved in her local residents' association over the previous 12 months by organising community events and children's parties for the residents of her estate; but as she modestly pointed out, she wasn't a chair of any organisation and had just been doing a little to help, unlike the others who'd been doing this kind of thing for decades.

Kim was one of four people from various neighbourhoods around Penzance taking part in a focus group about their relationship with their landlord and other agencies. Described as 'community champions' by a local neighbourhood manager and his staff, they were all heavily involved in efforts to improve facilities on their estates and foster a stronger sense of community spirit.

As the members of the focus group warmed to their subject, it soon became clear that many residents felt abandoned both now and in the past by their landlord and by the local authorities. Their efforts had, at times, met with a rather lacklustre response from the agencies they looked to for support. However, despite these trying circumstances, a wealth of community organisations and individual volunteers has sprung up; these are working hard to improve their neighbourhoods with some individuals committing a phenomenal amount of their personal time and energy; effectively constantly 'on-call' to deal with their neighbours' problems.

One particular estate on the outskirts of Penzance, Roscadghill, has been transformed by its residents' association. The neighbourhood of over 100 family homes and small blocks of flats had suffered for many years from the antisocial behaviour of some residents and problems related to drug use. These issues had been dramatically reduced by the actions of the residents themselves, who had not only been instrumental in building a sense of community, but had also fundraised for facilities such as play areas, garden equipment and a small community building. Despite this success, the

residents' association clearly felt that they had not had the support of their housing association or the local authority over the past decade, and had battled hard to make the improvements that they had achieved.

West Cornwall has been identified as one of the most deprived areas in the country, qualifying for both Neighbourhood Renewal and Neighbourhood Element funding from central government. Of the various estates within Penzance, Treneere is considered to be the most disadvantaged.

Paul Forsythe, the Treneere neighbourhood manager, described just what this translates to in reality. Fewer than 26 per cent of students achieve five GCSEs, whilst many families experience second- or even third-generation unemployment. Cornwall's dependence on the tourist industry means relatively low wages and job security for those in work, coupled with high house prices, driven up by second-home buyers and retirees drawn to Cornwall's picturesque landscape.

Funding from central government has given Treneere an opportunity to transform itself, and it is now home to the Treneere Together Partnership. Paul has been seconded from Penwith Housing Association (PHA), landlord to around 60 per cent of the homes on the estate (the rest being owner-occupied) to oversee the day-to-day running of the organisation.

The Partnership consists of local councillors, representatives of the housing association and a local regeneration charity. PHA has given its support to the initiative, not only by seconding a staff member and being represented on the Partnership board, but also providing an office space on the main street of the estate.

A pre-condition for receiving the funding was that the Partnership's aims were shaped by the residents themselves. As Paul concedes, community consultation in previous schemes was at times little more than skin deep. This time, however, the residents are present both on the main board of the Partnership, and also form the working groups that deal with specific issues:

crime and violence, health and leisure, transport, community building, and worklessness and education. A parallel, informal consultation process takes place through both resident surveys and conversations with local people designed to give a greater sense of the residents' perceptions of their neighbourhood.

The working groups invite the relevant service providers to meet with them, discuss the problems that exist on the estate and explore viable suggestions for improving the situation. They insist on meeting the right representative, someone able to make firm commitments about budgets or policy, who doesn't need to refer back frequently to their own organisation over what can be agreed upon. As Paul explained, the residents expect meaningful dialogue: "They cannot just cruise in there, tick the box that they attended on behalf of their organisation and then they are out of the door again, that is no use to us really."

Change has happened steadily, and since the Partnership came into effect in 2006 the estate has seen much higher levels of visible policing – with its two dedicated Community Support Officers – along with improvements in the cleanliness and safety of its streets. Increasingly residents are becoming more communicative, frequently dropping into the Partnership office and describing problems or discussing what they wish to see happen. The residents' association, in existence for many years, has been reinvigorated by the enthusiasm of its newer members, and is currently building its own community centre. There is a tangible sense from residents that their voice is being heard and that improvements are happening around them. Not only that but, as Kim explained, it had led to new opportunities for local people to interact and form friendships, and despite the scale of the Partnership's task, getting involved had not been as difficult as she had first thought it would be.

Lessons learnt from Cornwall:

- Even in extremely deprived neighbourhoods, inspiring change is possible. However, it relies on close partnership working between many agencies: local government, housing associations, service providers, voluntary and community organisations and residents

- The experience from Cornwall and other neighbourhoods around the country shows that in many communities there are extremely committed individuals with great energy, who are prepared to work hard to see improvements in their communities. Often these people are residents or councillors, sometimes they are very dedicated community practitioners. This story also illustrates the damaging impact of negative history, and that activists' views of agencies are strongly affected by their past experiences. It is vital that these individuals are nurtured, recognised and receive support, so their efforts can be channelled positively to achieve long-lasting change

- Central government funding was crucial to instigating change in Treneere. It is hoped that the close working relationships between agencies and strong community representation will leave a positive legacy that will continue to aid the regeneration of the estate after the funding ends

- Housing associations often have strong links with local government and strategic structures, such as Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). Many also have developed internal arrangements to involve tenants and residents in their decision-making process. Housing associations have the potential to contribute strongly to the development of neighbourhood working, at the very local and at the strategic level.

Chapter 8

Encouraging behaviour change and civic responsibility in Staffordshire

Anna Minton

Linda Devlin chose to move from London to Biddulph East in Staffordshire, on the edge of the Peak District, because it was such a beautiful place.

"I picked it because it's such a lovely spot. I could have gone anywhere," she says.

So, it may seem surprising that the area, which boasts fantastic views from the bottom of every street, ranks among the more deprived parts of the country.

In fact, the large estate, which is a mix of newer and older properties, social housing and owner-occupied homes, is generally a well-maintained and pleasant place to live, with the pockets of deprivation linked to former mining communities who have been unable to find new employment.

But there are some minor yet persistent problems, particularly around environmental issues, which impact disproportionately on the community, from overgrown footpaths to small-scale arson.

Biddulph East, therefore, seemed a particularly appropriate location for a new initiative by Moorlands Together Local Strategic Partnership, known as a Community Pride Agreement. While the Agreement is in keeping with recommendations in the Local Government White Paper[1], to enable local communities to hold service providers to account and to engage local people more fully with activities on the ground, Ruth Reeves, one of a multi-agency team working on the project including officers from both the District and County Council, describes how it evolved.

"We have been working with local residents for some time and they have told us how important these issues are to them. Many local residents are

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[1] *Strong and Prosperous Communities* – the Local Government White Paper, DCLG (2006)

already taking positive action in their community, for example lots of people have been helping build community gardens. At the same time, agencies want to improve the way that they work with local communities. The Agreement is about having shared priorities, shared responsibilities, and a shared action plan," she explains.

One of the key planks of the Agreement is the importance of bringing together all the statutory agencies involved in providing services, to provide real joint working and create what Lesley Savage, from Staffordshire Moorlands Community and Voluntary Services, describes as "such simple solutions" which are clearly visible to the community.

The Agreement, which is still being drafted, is structured around a number of key protocols, promising what statutory agencies will do, alongside protocols for what the community will do and an agreement on where the community and agencies will work together.

"We are trying to be very clear about expectations on both sides, expectations from residents about what statutory agencies are supposed to do and on the other side expectations by agencies that residents will take ownership of local environmental issues. It's about coordination and negotiation," says Linda who is chair of the Biddulph East Neighbourhood Partnership group on environment and community safety.

The Agreements are tailor-made. Both community representatives and agency representatives have been involved in putting the Agreement together. The Biddulph East Agreement includes abandoned vehicles, grass cutting, action days, alleyways, parks and playing fields, community gardens, and community pledges and, as Lesley describes, some of the potential solutions are remarkably simple.

"You get a situation where the roads might be swept on a Monday and the bins emptied on a Tuesday because it's done by different departments. The result is that any litter dropped won't be collected till the following Monday," she says.

The protocol concerning abandoned vehicles is particularly important as the vehicles have become the target of occasional arson attacks by local young people. Here, one of the key agencies is the fire service which carries out a very effective programme of work with the community, young offenders and potential offenders.

Mick Daniels, assistant area manager, based at Leek Fire Station, explains how the fire service employs an arson technician who works closely with partners and the community to prevent incidents of arson. Staffordshire Fire and Rescue has a Local Public Service Agreement, which aims to reduce arson incidents by 30 per cent by March 2008. One of the education programmes used is the 12-week course for student firefighters, targeted "at people on the periphery, who are about to drop out of school". Students learn how to use fire service equipment and are taught about arson. "The expectation when they leave is that they go onto a mentoring scheme and do extra work with firefighters and the community," he says.

But for agencies to meet their side of the bargain regarding arson and abandoned vehicles, residents have to report the problem, which often doesn't happen because the tendency is to think somebody has already done it.

Similarly grass cutting will be an issue that will benefit from better coordinated input from the agencies alongside efforts from the community.

"There are three different agencies responsible for three different things when it comes to grass cutting. We need a programme to do it more efficiently.

"Then the next step is for residents to take action themselves," Linda says, pointing to community initiatives which are part of the Agreement such as the work by Rethink, a local voluntary mental health organisation providing gardening services.

Although the Agreement is broadly welcomed, the role of elected members within the Agreement has yet to be agreed but it is recognised that they must have a leadership role in the local process. The exact role of councillors in service planning and scrutiny is a persistent challenge reflected across the country.

At least as important are the questions raised about the involvement of the local community, which for those involved in drafting the Agreement is the issue at the heart of their work. "It's not that every individual resident is expected to engage with this," says Linda. Meanwhile, for Donna Hollands, housing officer with Moorlands Housing, which owns a significant proportion of property in the area, "how to involve more people is the hardest question".

Donna feels that in every community there will always be some people for whom local voluntary activity will not appeal, while others will come forward. For her the ideal, in this case, is to achieve a realistic agreement of practical initiatives which will benefit the community for all.

Lessons from Staffordshire:

■ Neighbourhood charters and agreements figure prominently in 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' – the Local Government White Paper. Biddulph's Community Pride Agreement is a good example of how a charter or agreement can work in practice to bring service providers together to tailor services to meet very local needs, and to change the relationship between the local authority and the community to one of mutual responsibility for local action

■ Biddulph's experience shows that neighbourhood agreements require meaningful and ongoing involvement from residents and community organisations to ensure they reflect real needs and outcomes locally

■ The difficulty of engaging residents in discussions about the content of a neighbourhood agreement, or involving them in monitoring those agreements should not be underestimated. The process must involve negotiations around the expectations and aspirations of the community and the reality of dealing with limited resources. However, Biddulph's experience shows this can be done successfully

■ Not everyone will want to be involved, and those people that are will need to have the skills, capacity and time to sustain their involvement in the process

■ However, experience from other communities that have also developed ultra-local agreements, shows that the process of involvement can itself help to develop local capacity and confidence.

Neighbourhood energies, engaged agencies, and better services

Reflections from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Neighbourhood Programme

John Low

These days it has virtually become a commonplace that active residents, armed with vision and determination, can spearhead a transformation in their communities: not just through their own innovative projects, but also by working with public agencies to create better, more relevant services. This is generally achieved through a mix of: being clear about what problems need tackling; attracting funds; voluntary effort; partnership working; involving agencies who can make a difference; and putting together creative solutions that are based on pooling resources, ideas and energies. At base, a lot of this adds up to little more than good local knowledge, hard work and common sense.

Put like this, one is left wondering why such efficient working practices are not more widespread. This essay explores neighbourhood work that took place within the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) Neighbourhood Programme (2002-2006), which brought together 20 regeneration neighbourhoods in Wales, Scotland and England into a learning network. It also assisted the neighbourhoods with 'light touch' support services which included: facilitation and mentoring; a small pot of neighbourhood credit; networking events; access to knowledge of what works; help with action planning and evaluation; and brokering or mediation help for when the going got tough.

Besides looking at examples of how some of the neighbourhoods organised things to achieve local improvements, this essay will also reflect on the question of if, and how, neighbourhood-based neighbourhood management of this kind can be encouraged, supported and rolled out over whole cities – rather than, as at present, tending to be a rather rare flower, flourishing only in those few locations where conditions happen to be favourable.

The JRF Neighbourhood Programme

The Neighbourhood Programme provided many examples of how active residents – usually working in 'neighbourhood anchor' organisations – were successful in engaging with public agencies to secure improvements.

The Boothtown Partnership from Halifax started the programme with very little in the bank. But it was not long before they successfully accessed landfill tax credit and other grants, and found themselves with a budget running into six figures. With this, they set about erecting a small community centre. Soon after they were in negotiation with local authority agencies that helped provide services for adult education and young people. Later, the local authority re-landscaped the surrounding sports field, and the group moved on to tackle issues of community safety and road safety, as well as forming a successful youth forum. Energy, some assets, and some clever batting, was what it took to put this group in a more powerful bargaining position vis-à-vis its partners.

On the much larger Caia Park estate in Wrexham, the Caia Park Partnership had already existed for more than 14 years as a resident-led anchor organisation in this large edge-of-town estate. At the start of the JRF Neighbourhood Programme they already employed some 70 staff, three quarters of them living on the estate. Owning several buildings, the Partnership was able to lay on a range of services provided both by themselves and other agencies. These included: training services (woodwork, computers, maths, and literacy); a healthy living centre; a job search team; and services for Eastern European immigrants. One of the most impressive teams, staffed by local young women, provided support for tenants at risk of being evicted from their homes.

Successful at both fund-raising and income generation, the Caia Park Partnership has enjoyed a reasonable relationship over the years with Wrexham, a local authority that appears to understand the importance

of good anchor organisations like this, and which has been prepared to keep up a steady flow of grants over the years to support the work. Strong local activists and a cohesive community have also played an important part in building a resilient organisation. There are other statutory and voluntary agencies working on the estate and there have at times been tensions between them and the Partnership. But a process of mediation, with input from the JRF facilitator, was able to resolve these.

On Scarborough's Eastfield estate, the Eastfield Partnership started out as a European-funded partnership with the aim of increasing active citizenship. Latterly, with inputs both from Scarborough's Department of Economic Development and JRF's facilitator, a broader neighbourhood management partnership has been assembled to include the local school, housing associations and the town's Council for Voluntary Service. This enhanced partnership, chaired by a local resident, plans to focus on a range of issues including employment opportunities, environmental improvements and a range of resident-led activities, including a possible youth forum.

All of these examples from JRF's Neighbourhood Programme share similar features: creating the room to plan creatively; sharing resources and ideas; intelligent networking and partnership building; and a readiness by agencies to loosen working styles, learn, relax controls, and negotiate. Gaining permission from elected members and senior officers to work in this way, as well as the availability of experienced facilitators, all play an important part in encouraging collaborative efforts and innovation.

Can good neighbourhood working be rolled out more widely?

Although fruitful collaborations like those described above – the basis of all good neighbourhood management – can be found in a number of UK cities, JRF's research shows that they still only work in a minority of neighbourhoods. Usually this is where extra resources have been available – special initiatives, short-term grants – with which to put together dedicated teams or pilot projects. More often than not, the valuable experience and skills gained from these experiments have failed to carry across to colleagues in other departments (or even within the same department).

Another potential blockage is the fear that, although pilot projects can successfully engage mainstream agencies, these partners might nevertheless fight shy if neighbourhood engagement were expected of them across whole cities. However, since few cities have actually crossed this further bridge, there is little evidence about whether or not this is true.

There is not room here to explore these ideas in depth. But, if a sensible pooling of ideas and resources is accepted as the basis for rolling out good neighbourhood management more widely in our cities, there would not in principle appear to be any insurmountable constraints.

Here, to conclude with, are some initial thoughts about what might assist the process:

- A mapping of needs, resources and ideas (as has been achieved for example by Neighbourhood Action Planning in Bradford)

- A reasonably simple framework within which agencies and communities can configure a 'neighbourhood management' approach. Not all work need be focused on geographic neighbourhoods. Steve Hartley of Bradford Trident suggests a 'Rubik Cube' approach – in other words, three ways of configuring the work: core themes, work with a geographic base, and communities of interest

- Clear strategic leadership from the local authority

- The encouragement of some quick wins to raise morale and demonstrate the advantages

- The availability of experienced facilitation, trouble-shooting and mentoring, both for communities and for service agencies, in order to encourage practical and innovative forms of collaboration

- Better ways of evaluating impact and demonstrating the value of these approaches.

Chapter 10

Transformation through community anchors – the partnership approach

Bec Clarkson

To contextualise what is meant by 'community anchors', the following definition may be helpful. Community anchors are independent community-led organisations. They are multi-purpose, providing holistic solutions to local problems and challenges and bring out the best both in the individual and in agencies. They are there for the long term, not just the quick fix.

Community anchors are often the driving force in community renewal

In the wider policy context, it is worth noting the considerable interest which community anchors are generating at national level as key deliverers of a number of the intended outcomes of 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' – the Local Government White Paper.[1] Some of the underpinning themes of the White Paper, such as responsive services and empowered communities, are ones shared by the partner organisations which make up the Community Alliance.[2] The critical role of the Third Sector in bringing this about is emphasised in the document, but in addition to this the other, equally important themes which run throughout, such as strong cities, strategic regions and community cohesion are fundamental to the work of the Community Alliance and to the anchors which they serve.

The Community Alliance story will take the reader through the characteristics of a community anchor organisation as defined by the partnership, and will give some examples to illuminate how the theory works in practice.

Community anchors are many and varied – their beauty is that there is no such thing as a 'typical example'. This means that they are diverse, responsive and innovative. They are linked in to the local community of which they are a part.

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[1] *Strong and Prosperous Communities* – the Local Government White Paper, DCLG (2006)
[2] The Community Alliance is a partnership of three national organizations: British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres (bassac), Community Matters and the Development Trusts Association

Characteristics of a community anchor organisation:

1.   A building: a physical space which may be community owned, and is certainly community led

Buildings are of immense value to local communities. Frequently, part of the struggle for local groups is the difficulties placed in the way of their accessing these resources, but they are vital to the whole community transformation agenda.

2.   A focus for services and activities which meet local needs

These will vary from community to community, but the emphasis is on 'local needs'.

> Renton Community Development Trust: 'The centre has acted as a focal point for the community and provided a range of services, from luncheon clubs for the elderly to after-school classes.' [3]

3.   A way for local voices to be heard

Local voices are unique and individual, and they are also knowledgeable – about their lives, their communities and the issues which affect them. Anchors enable these voices to be articulated and, just as crucially, to be channelled where they need to be heard, right through to national level.

4.   A platform for community development, promoting cohesion whilst respecting diversity

> Ashmead House Conflict Resolution Project brings together the mainly white communities who have been within the Barton Hill area of Bristol for over 20 years with new communities, particularly the Somali community. The project focuses on commonalities, with issues such as housing, health care and community safety being discussed, rather than cultural or racial tensions. Through this work there is acknowledgement

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[3] Quoted in *On the Borderline: Development Trusts tackling poverty in the UK* (p. 17), DTA (May 2007)

that everyone within the community has the same social problems. The group members then work together to resolve the issues facing their community. Ashmead House tenants meet on a regular basis and have seen a resultant reduction in racial and cultural tensions.

5.   A home for the community sector which is supportive of the growth and development of community groups

Cambridge House in Camberwell, London, provides practical support to local community groups with hot-desking accommodation, offices and a range of meeting and activity rooms, in addition to mentoring and skills development along with access to funding opportunities, partnerships and training. Cambridge House's Young People's Project has recently produced a unique and thought-provoking DVD which follows a group of young people on a journey which culminates in an educational – and emotional – visit to the site of the former concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In preparing for their visit, the young people discuss their understanding of the Holocaust and how they think they will react when they are actually present at the site of such atrocities. The viewer witnesses their journey, and at the end of their visit hears a profoundly moving reading which the group has created in honour of those whom, they recognise, were the same age as themselves when they perished at the hands of the Nazis. The DVD is a convincing argument for good, creative youth work but, just as importantly, it shows how vital it is, particularly with the challenges the world faces at the moment, for future generations to comprehend what terms like 'fascism' and 'final solution' mean in practice and to be able to apply that understanding to modern variants like 'ethnic cleansing'. The DVD is compelling because it shows young people learning about their own reactions to, and responsibilities around, prejudice and discrimination.[4]

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[4] To find out more about this project please contact Nick Riley on nriley@ch1889.org

6.   Promoting community-led enterprise

Through, for example, the formation of social enterprises which generate wealth and   employment opportunities, as well as leading to local regeneration in areas which have lost their traditional industries, such as the Arts Factory in the Rhondda Valley in south Wales and Ibstock Community Enterprises in Leicestershire.

7.   A forum for dialogue within communities, creating community-led solutions

This includes the growth and development of leadership skills as a vital resource for the future.

"Community Leadership – not the domain of the few but the resource of the many. It involves qualities and skills we can all develop and learn. It is not a limited commodity but an approach we can develop in ourselves and build in others. It can be based on our values and address the needs of our organisations, neighbourhoods and the community sector."[5]

Lonsdale Community Association in Hull formed in response to the death of a young child in a local drain channel. The community needed a space to discuss the loss and come to terms with its grief as well as a forum to lobby the local authority for better play space and a safer environment. More than 20 years on, it is still fulfilling a central role in identifying local concerns and acting as a channel for communication with Hull City Council.

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[5] *Quoted in Challenging the Status Quo* (p.10), Annual Report, Bassac (2006)

8.   A bridge between communities and the state which promotes and
     brings about social change

Precisely because they are 'of the community', anchor organisations are
trusted in a way which others often struggle to be and for this and many
other reasons, being a 'bridge' is one of the anchor's most vital functions.

To summarise, then, community anchors are a vital component of healthy,
vibrant communities. They are responsive. They are innovative. They
make a difference because they are seen as part of the communities they
serve and because they celebrate and accommodate life as it really is, in
all its complexities. They are a powerful tool of social change and
transformation that starts where it is most effective – at the grassroots
level in local communities.

Chapter 11

Double devolution in Birmingham

Anna Minton

Birmingham, which is the biggest unitary authority in Europe employing 30,000 staff and with a population of 1 million, is responsible for more people than many a small country.

So for Birmingham City Council, devolution is not merely a reflection of national policy changes but a local necessity.

Tony Smith, senior policy officer at the council, explains that after 2000 the decision was taken to devolve council functions, decision making and resources to 10 constituencies. "It became obvious that the perception was that Birmingham was a huge centralised, monolithic bureaucracy and that this was an issue that had to be addressed," he says.

Meanwhile, in Perry Common, a large suburban estate on the edge of the city, necessity had also given rise to another, far more local type of devolution, now being piloted as a model for change in Birmingham and beyond.

Linda Hines, a resident on the estate and a director of Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA), explains how the organisation she helped to set up in 1994 was "born out of a crisis".

At that time the estate, built in the 1920s, was beginning to run into problems, with much of the system-built stock unfit. But instead of opting for the more conventional route of housing association and developer-led regeneration she was instrumental in setting up the Community Association, which chose a model of resident-led organisation.

With the support of the council, WLCA was granted some of the land, part of which could then be sold to private developers and housing associations to part-fund the build of the 167 affordable, socially-rented homes that WLCA now own and manage. These include Sycamore Court, a 40-apartment Extra Care Scheme promoting independent living.

WLCA has also overseen the rebuilding of over 500 mixed tenure homes, which are part of the larger Perry Common estate of 1,300 homes. The surpluses that these properties generate are reinvested into the community to provide neighbourhood management services.

John Iles, a regeneration consultant with Anthony Collins Solicitors who is closely involved with WLCA, explains that the association is very similar to a community land trust, with its own assets that generate income. "The important thing is that the local authority wanted to do it. When the land here was sold the capital was recycled back into the community. If we were forming it now we would probably call it the Witton Lodge Community Land Trust," he says.

For Linda, who is closely involved with the running of day-to-day services on the ground, it has been amazing to see the difference local knowledge really makes.

"When we got the schedules of work for grounds maintenance done centrally by people who didn't know Perry Common, we saw that we were paying £2.53 a day to keep a playground swept clear of glass – but that playground hadn't been there for eight years!

"We had also been paying for the emptying of four dog bins – but there'd only ever been two," she says.

Linda and John feel that the next step is Neighbourhood Area Agreements, being piloted by the city council and its partners, to work out exactly what is needed. "Do we just need a street sweeper who doesn't know the area and doesn't talk to anyone, or a group of people employed in Perry Common who we know as Alf or Jo or Nancy, so we can brief them and tell them what we want and what is going on in the area – we want them to feel and be part of the community," John says.

Linda is also one of the coordinators of the Perry Common Community Watch, a group of residents in Community Watch jackets who go out and walk the streets meeting residents in the evenings. Being local residents, a lot of soft information is shared that helps build residents' confidence and reduces the fear of crime and stress that many feel. She adds: "It's going back to how it used to be. If you had a park keeper people knew them, you looked out for people."

But just as devolution at a central council level has raised challenges, the transfer of local power to communities is also producing tensions, especially with senior managers at the council.

Tony, from his perspective at the council, describes how he has encountered 'small p and big P issues'. "Lots of officers are dead against the idea. They felt they would lose power and position – they'd been running services from the centre and they wanted that to continue," he says.

The aim of the Local Area Agreements was to look at whether it was possible to have agreements with strong, well-established community organisations like WLCA, which he feels "is the only way to get devolution down to that level", but this in turn has raised the hackles of some councillors who feel that as elected members they should be making the decisions.

"This is one of the huge dilemmas and challenges. We're talking about participatory democracy bumping up against representative democracy and we haven't yet got the answer to that. Community organisations are saying 'we can do these things', but we can't just say to councillors 'you're no longer the centre', our councillors need to get a stronger role as well," he says.

At the same time, issues have also arisen over the question of the Community Association's electoral accountability because, although elections are constitutionally possible every two years, they only take place if there are sufficient nominations – which has only happened once, 10 years ago.

By devolving power into 10 local constituencies and forging agreements with community organisations on the ground, Birmingham is putting double devolution into practice. So it is perhaps inevitable that these new ways of working are bringing with them new challenges and tensions.

Lessons from Birmingham:

■ The experience of WLCA in Perry Common demonstrates how community organisations can shape and influence decisions about local service delivery if the right intelligence is available to disaggregate spending on neighbourhood level services, and how this experience can lead to the development of new services in response to local needs

■ Enabling local people to scrutinise service budgets and to work out the value they received from local services was key to this process working in Perry Common

■ Putting community organisations onto a sustainable footing is crucial to build confidence and capacity over time. WLCA is a good example of how combining community asset ownership and service delivery has enabled the organisation to broaden its interests from housing into neighbourhood management, community engagement and service delivery

■ A Neighbourhood Area Agreement or a Charter between the council and the community association could further develop the relationship and opportunities for WLCA to influence service delivery

■ Birmingham City Council's approach to devolution demonstrates the need for strong political and corporate leadership, in particular the importance of having flexibility to experiment locally, and to take measured risks in order to innovate

■ However, it also demonstrates the need for clearly-defined roles for elected members to ensure that councillors and community organisations can work together, bringing different skills and expertise to the partnership, without coming into conflict over issues about representation and legitimacy

■ Other Transforming Neighbourhoods partners have been thinking about engagement in different ways. A good example is Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, which aspires to involve residents in decision making about services. For every service function, it has identified how and when residents can get involved in decision making, for example, at the point of commissioning, giving feedback to contractors, or taking over the management or delivery of certain services.

Chapter 12

Learning from international experience of citizen participation in local government

Tricia Zipfel and John Gaventa

What happens when you bring together 45 'champions of participation', from 15 countries around the world, to explore the problems and the potential for strengthening citizen participation in local government?[1] What does their experience, drawn from such different contexts, have in common? What are the lessons and how can sharing this experience inform and shape policy and practice in the UK and overseas?

These questions were addressed at a five-day workshop in May 2007, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at Sussex University, working in collaboration with the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Department for International Development (DfID), the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).

The aim was to look at the challenges faced by local government in responding to the growing demand for more participatory forms of governance, where local communities are able to play a decisive part in shaping public policy and the services they need, alongside elected representatives and officials.

The workshop brought together a wide range of people involved in local government: elected officials, including mayors from the Philippines and Brazil, city councillors from New Orleans and UK authorities; local government officials and other service providers; community activists; workers from local and national NGOs; academics and representatives of central government in the UK. They discovered that they shared similar problems and frustrations, and that their stories could provide valuable insights and inspiration for change despite the different contexts in which they worked.

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[1] Countries were: China, Philippines, India, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Bosnia, Spain, Hungary, Bulgaria, Norway, USA, plus 20 participants from the UK

Why the workshop

Around the world, in rich countries as well as poor, there has been an explosion of interest in more participatory forms of governance. This is both a response to the crisis of legitimacy between citizens and the institutions that affect their lives, and also a reflection of the growing recognition that community involvement is central to the major challenges of revitalising democracy, improving service delivery, tackling poverty and building strong communities.

In northern democracies, political participation has been declining steadily. Despite real improvements in local authority performance, most UK citizens do not feel they have a voice or influence over key institutions that affect their day-to-day lives, though the majority would like to. But they are disillusioned with the political system and, especially in poor areas, very few even bother to vote. In parts of the south, while the ability to vote is often more valued, confidence in local government is undermined by corruption and the failure of politicians to connect with the lives of ordinary people and tackle widespread poverty.

Although 'democratic deficits' are now widely recognised, responses have varied. In the UK, there has tended to be a focus on building community capacity to participate as partners in specific government-led initiatives, and on strengthening citizen voice and influence as consumers of services, through varied forms of consultation and greater individual choice. On the other hand, growing attention has been paid to strengthening the accountability and responsiveness of institutions and to developing structures for better government.

In both north and south, there is a growing consensus that the way forward is to be found in 'working both sides of the equation' – that is focusing both on a more active and engaged citizenry and on a more responsive and effective state. Citizen capacity is clearly key, but effective

leadership and political will as well as good institutional design is equally important. Citizens need to be able to move from being simply 'users and choosers' of public services to being 'makers and shapers' of policy, with shared power and responsibility for decision making and the allocation of resources, alongside elected members and officials.[2]

Opportunities for UK learning

The workshop took place at a critical moment in UK policy development. With its emphasis on democratic renewal, localism and community empowerment 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' – the Local Government White Paper gave added importance to the discussions.[3] Participants felt this was a unique opportunity to draw on international learning and innovative approaches and use them to shape ideas for implementing the White Paper in the UK.

In the UK this builds on a generally positive story. At least in principle, community involvement is now expected – consultation is almost taken for granted. Partnership working is routine in local government and the White Paper will make it a statutory duty for local authorities to inform and involve local people in the design and delivery of services. The national strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal was based on a commitment to put communities in the driving seat and at the heart of local improvements. The government is promoting the voluntary and community sector; it has initiated a programme of civil renewal to encourage and support greater citizen involvement, and 'community empowerment' is seen as essential for long-lasting change.

There is also a wealth of good practice emerging from newer democracies like Brazil, and also from well-established ones like India, where a similar imperative to reconnect government with local communities and citizens is driving change. Participatory budgeting is one

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[2] Studies and resources on citizen participation in local governance by LogoLink at http://www.ids.ac.uk/logolink Also research material by the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability http://www.drc-citizenship.org

[3] *Strong and Prosperous Communities* – the Local Government White Paper, DCLG (2006)

of the most powerful examples, but many other initiatives are creating ways for citizens to have a voice and mobilise for better service delivery at local level.

For the 'champions of participation', this workshop was a rare opportunity to learn from each other, to 'think outside the box' and to take back new ideas and models to use in their own contexts – something they were keen to grab with both hands!

Gathering the stories

It is impossible to do justice to the vast range of experience brought together by participants in this workshop. Broadly speaking, the experiences and innovative approaches included:

■ Participatory approaches to budgeting providing more transparent methods for allocating public resources, involving citizens, elected representatives and local government officials.

In Porto Alegre, Brazil, following the end of military rule in 1988, the newly-elected mayor Olivio Dutra opened up discussion about budget priorities to the people of the city – rich, poor, private, public. He needed their help to resolve the financial problems he had inherited. Since then organised citizens have participated every year in setting overall budget priorities and determining local spending. 40,000 regularly take part in the process, allocating around 17 per cent of the municipal budget. As a result, poor communities have benefited and participation has increased. "Democratising the state means making people the subjects rather than the objects of policy. In the past the poor had no voice, but their input is needed to create government not just to receive it. This is not only a better way to meet the needs of the people, but it is about inclusion, respect and a new political culture – the democratisation of everyday life." Olivio Dutra (former Mayor)

■ Processes of participatory planning, ranging from public involvement in construction of small community-based projects, to larger neighbourhood action plans, to strategic area planning and the rebuilding of an entire city as in the case of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, or in human rights participatory planning in post-war Bosnia.

In New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina left 80 per cent of the city under water. 150,000 families were evacuated. Many lost everything and were left homeless or dispersed to cities across the country. The impact on poor communities was devastating but local residents were determined to rebuild their neighbourhoods. Rejecting an initial recovery plan drawn up by the city, they raised funds to organise Community Congresses for citizens still in New Orleans and those scattered across 21 cities. 3,000 citizens participated in drawing up new plans that secure land and buildings for residents first and use the rebuilding process to strengthen links between neighbourhoods across the city. "From now on neighbourhoods and neighbours will work together and look out for each other." Cynthia Hedge-Morrell (Councillor)

■ New forms of partnerships between citizens, government and other stakeholders as in the UK Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and at neighbourhood level through local agreements, or in places like Brazil and the Philippines where citizens and officials sit as 'co-governors' of key decision-making bodies.

Bradford Vision, the local LSP, has forged a strong partnership across all sectors in the area in order to deliver better outcomes for local people. At the same time it has made community development a priority, building stronger neighbourhoods through 60 local Action Plans, investing resources in a small grants programme and using participatory budgeting to bring communities together to determine the allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding for environmental improvements across the city and a range of service improvements in one small town.

■ New forms of public scrutiny to hold elected representatives and government officials to account, ranging from local scrutiny groups in Shropshire; citizen-led organisations holding independent public forums with politicians in east London; and citizen monitoring of public tenders in Chile.

London Citizens (LC) is a broad-based community organisation that brings together over 80 groups from all faiths and ethnic backgrounds, schools, trade unions and residents' organisations, to provide a common voice for citizens on key issues of concern. It has campaigned successfully for a 'living wage' for cleaners and other low-paid staff. It is working to ensure the 2012 Olympics benefits local communities and to regularise the position of migrant workers. LC uses public hearings to call politicians to account. It reminded the workshop that local communities should be seen as the 'first' not the 'third' sector, giving informed consent for government to exercise power in a servant role and challenging attitudes that treat people as consumers rather than citizens. "London Citizens is an invitation to power, not to partnership – it's important to build alliances, but they have to be negotiated from a position of strength." Neil Jameson (LC coordinator)

■ New methods for consultation and inclusion, such as community study circles in Wisconsin, community radio and mobile phone feedback in Nigeria, the 'powerful whispers' programme in Bradford, and puppet shows with young people in Rotherham.

In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, a series of round-table study groups brought together citizens in a genuine dialogue about complex social, economic and cultural issues relating to racism and human rights. The study circles provided safe spaces for citizens to share personal and sometimes searing experiences, leading to increased awareness and a desire for change. Over 100 recommendations emerged for action to address discrimination. But the process planning had not anticipated that people would move so quickly from discussion to implementation and officials were not geared up to respond as quickly or directly as people wanted.

In Abuja, Nigeria, quarterly Town Hall Meetings with the local minister and his team provide opportunities for citizens to engage in a 'no holds barred' encounter, broadcast on radio and TV. In addition, a mobile phone service, run by young people, processes complaints, provides quick feedback and reports on a weekly basis to the local authority.

■ Opportunities for citizen participation in service delivery, such as housing, employment and community safety service through neighbourhood renewal and tenant management programmes in the UK, delivery of healthcare in Brazil and education in the Philippines.

The Provincial Government of Bulacan, in the Philippines, has mobilised over 3,000 parents of children in public schools to decide on, assist in, and oversee the implementation of education reforms in all public schools throughout the province. These have resulted in better performance by students in standard tests administered by the national government.

In Brazil, over 5,000 legally mandated health councils bring together neighbourhood residents, local governments and health professionals for the planning and delivery of health services. Research in São Paolo has demonstrated that where such councils have both strong political support of local governments and well-organised citizens who participate, health services are more inclusive of and responsive to low-income and socially-excluded groups.

In the UK, since 1995 residents in public housing have had the right to manage their estates. Around 300 Tenant Management Organisations now control the budgets and manage their own housing services. Some have also set up separate resident-based companies to undertake cleaning and maintenance work, thus creating local employment.

Challenges for participation in the UK

Despite positive and sometimes inspirational examples of effective participation, there are still many challenges to be addressed within the UK.

Changing the attitudes and behaviour of those in power as well as those who are used to being 'on the other side' is crucial, but it is also complex. Elected representatives and officials can have 'entrenched views' of communities that make them unwilling to give up or share power. They may not have the skills or confidence to engage effectively with local people or to cope with the messiness and uncertainties of participation. The 'rules of the game' are still defined by a professional public sector. On the other hand, citizens can feel disillusioned and unwilling to engage, be stuck in an

adversarial, 'them and us' mode and resistant to sharing responsibility and ownership.

Many innovations have been developed within special programmes, but in order to become integral to 'the way we do business round here' rather than an 'add on', they need to be mainstreamed, underpinned by longer-term funding and a clear political commitment to adopt new ways of working. The growing emphasis on local decision making should allow local government to design new public spaces for dialogue and deliberation with local citizens, and central government to encourage this and create the space for it to happen.

For this to work local government will have to 'go deeper' into local communities to ensure that new voices are heard and listened to, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable groups, whether defined by place or by identity. But this also raises the question of how to develop democratic structures that respect not simply the majority view, but also recognise and respond to minority interests. Inclusion of women and lower castes in the Panchayati Raj, village council system, has led to more elected women representatives in India than in the rest of the world combined! This strategy reflects the importance of having community voices at the table, but it also highlights the need to provide support to enable these citizens to be effective.

Citizen engagement in the democratic process has significant implications for elected representatives as well as for citizens. The emergence of community leaders who derive their legitimacy through a participatory process can be threatening to elected members who usually rely on political parties for their nomination and the ballot box for their legitimacy. There is a real challenge for them to be rooted in the communities they represent and to develop the skills and capacity to listen and engage. Citizen representatives also face a challenge – working

both on 'the inside and the outside' of institutions, and providing a voice for their communities alongside elected representatives. They are crucial 'expert citizens', working long hours on a voluntary basis, but they can also be undermined if this leads to them being labelled 'the usual suspects'.

In this context, many citizens can find partnership difficult – even if they are respected as equal partners, which too often is not the case. Building relationships that lead to trust and the capacity for genuine joint working takes time. It can be difficult, especially if there is a negative history, and once established it can be fragile and easily undermined.

For officials who are trying to deliver results, meet targets and balance budgets, participation can introduce a new level of complexity, with many different players and expectations that need to be taken into account. Getting the balance right is tricky. Local government can feel caught between the legal and performance requirements of central government on the one hand, and local expectations and demands on the other. The managerial culture of government is not conducive to participation, nor is the 'hyperactivity' of policy making.

There is no single blueprint for effective participation, no 'magic bullet', so it is just as well that central government says it does not want to be prescriptive. That presents both an opportunity and a challenge for local government to find solutions that work locally. But it also raises the question of whether this could be done better within a framework of legal requirements, such as the statutory Duty to Involve, core principles and minimum standards.

Lessons:

This workshop was the start of a much longer debate, but a number of key lessons became clear. [4]

■   One stark lesson was that the stakes for participation are often very high. Many of the participants are trying to champion participation against a background of current or former authoritarian and military regimes, where participation could mean risking your freedom or your life – it is a *high-risk business*. In other areas such as Eastern Europe, participatory democracy is a completely new experience that has to be pursued alongside the development of human rights. But even in the UK, participation demands a lot of those involved and can take its toll, especially on residents who give huge amounts of time on a voluntary basis and often struggle to keep up with government requirements and expectations

■   The starting point for participation however is that it should be a *right* not just an invitation and therefore there is a need for some kind of enabling legislation, even in countries where government is not restrictive or repressive. In the UK the new statutory duty to involve citizens will go some way towards this, but more is needed

■   The issue of power needs to be out in the open. People will only participate if they believe their input can make a difference. Often this means having information about budgets and a degree of control over spending decisions. Without this, there is a high chance of 'consultation overload and fatigue'

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[4] A full report of the workshop and resource pack including detailed case studies will be published by IDS in September 2007.

- Structures and processes for participation must be *well designed* and fit-for-purpose. This requires *political will* to make things happen and the active mobilisation of the community to take up the opportunity and use the new spaces on offer

- Effective participation will involve building *new relationships* between citizens, their elected representatives and service providers, relationships that recognise and seek to change the power imbalances that exist. This may lead to conflict at times, but it could also lead to stronger alliances that might provide a win-win situation for everyone

- In order for this to happen, *new roles* are needed, reflecting a more participatory approach to public leadership and a management style that is more open, enquiring and responsive – less 'top-down' and much more accountable

- Getting the *timing right* is important but can be tricky. The process needs to be slow enough to allow for real engagement and at the same time produce results that address the most urgent concerns and give people confidence that change is happening

- Finally, while participation is the means by which citizens can get involved and exercise influence, community empowerment should be recognised as an end in itself. This means that process matters, as well as outcomes. So, while citizen involvement in partnerships that deliver better services and in self-help projects that build social capital are all important, citizens should also exercise the right to establish their own civil society organisations to provide an independent voice and power base for community involvement. In a healthy democracy there has to be enough space for this form of political engagement as part of a serious strategy for community empowerment and democratic renewal.

Chapter 13

'People writing their own script' for services in Wakefield

Anna Minton

In Airedale in West Yorkshire, Councillors Yvonne Crewe and Linda Broom face some of the most challenging conditions in the country with illiteracy rates of up to 25 per cent and support for the far-right British National Party at a similar level.

Just five miles away, 73 year-old Annie Mars is the founder of a community organisation at the heart of the former mining district of Hemsworth. Starting with one room as a base to offer advice after the miners' strike, they now have a computer suite, a crèche, a lunch club for the elderly, a kids club and an after-school club. Their latest initiative is a community-owned fish and chip shop that will plough its profits back into the organisation.

And in Agbrigg, another few miles down the road, Kathy Stevens heads up the Castle Children's Centre, which runs an 80-place nursery and a range of activities supporting families, from a dedicated family support team to a credit union collection point.

For Steve Stewart, deputy chief executive at Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, this level of grassroots activity in community organisations reflects the 'citizen-focused' view of local services that the council hopes to encourage through its Local Area Agreement, 'Families and Neighbourhoods', which is also paving the way for neighbourhood management pilots in Airedale and Agbrigg.

In Agbrigg, Kathy describes the ethos of the Castle Children's Centre, which has developed over the 15 years it has been up and running: "The idea was to bring together different agencies under one roof to support families but initially the support could be rather paternalistic – about telling families they weren't doing well. We were supporting children and families where many of the children's names were on the child protection register and while we were parenting children, we were not supporting parents themselves to do a better job," she explains.

What she wanted was "to enable people to write their own script" and using 'strength-based approaches' through both individual support and later parenting groups such as the Webster Stratton parenting programmes, she feels the centre has become far more genuinely inclusive, reaching out to groups who would not normally wish to access services. "It's not about bringing people in and telling them what to do and sitting in judgement. It's about working with their strengths," she says.

For example, she recounts a group that included a woman whose children were temporarily in care, sitting alongside a teacher whose child was having sleep and behavioural problems. "I want to preserve that integration in one community. We look at people as human beings, not as targeted groups, but we do also know that certain groups are disadvantaged and we try to understand their particular needs. If you are fully inclusive in this way then you can reach out to people who often don't want to target services," she says.

For his part at the council Steve Stewart hopes that this approach will be at the centre of the Local Area Agreement's commitment to 'Total Family Support'. "We recognise that you can't help the problems families are having with a child without dealing with the problems of the parents," he says, pledging packages of 'customised support' for individuals and families.

A recent example of this way of working is John*, a father and ex-offender, who worked with the Castle Children's Centre's social work coordinator, exploring his feelings towards his children. "We had this chap come to us, he'd been in and out of prison all his life and his children were on the child protection register. He started working with Mark on his feelings to his children, his feelings about himself as a father and as a man, and using the strength's model of family support, looking at what he could do, not what he couldn't do," Kathy explains.

The result was that he stopped offending from the time he started working with the centre, his children's names came off the child protection register and he started looking for work. "His confidence improved in himself because he realised how much was to do with the way he had been parented and he worked with anger management about how to deal with those feelings. The amount of money that's been saved through this is incredible," she says.

At the other end of the spectrum, the council is also looking at other completely different ways of pioneering 'citizen-focused' services, through its 'real-time democracy' project, which is exploring the use of new technologies, from text voting and digital video production, to real-time electronic bulletin boards.

But for the Airedale councillors, while they hope the neighbourhood management pilot will bring them benefits, they also point out how desperately change is needed: "We need everything there," says Councillor Broom.

Councillor Crewe explains: "Our area is a deprived area, people don't work. The parents are illiterate and some of the children are as well. We've got third generation unemployment since the miners' strike and there's no employment apart from Sure Start and the local shops."

But both are agreed that work by Sure Start with families and children in the area, similar to Kathy's work in Agbrigg, has made great strides, so while there is still clearly a mountain to climb, at least parts of the community are beginning to show signs of engagement.

For Steve Stewart, the main aim is to achieve a shift in the council away from paternalism to being 'citizen focused': "It's about enabling people to sustain themselves, which will often involve a package of support, for children and for parents. We have to look at this from the point of view of people who receive services rather than from the producers of public services. It means a huge cultural shift for us, for officers and members," he says.

* This name has been changed.

Lessons from Wakefield:

■ Wakefield's neighbourhoods strategy is embedded in the Local Area Agreement, which is crucial to ensure that the idea of neighbourhood working and citizen-focused services can be applied across a whole range of services

■ Shifting the council's focus from service delivery to the citizen's perspective is a major cultural change. Both the neighbourhoods strategy and local structures need political support and ownership from senior officers to make the transition

■ Wakefield has developed different structures for each community, with a constant role for councillors in this system. These include a community leadership model in Airedale and Ferry Fryston, where councillors work through neighbourhood forums alongside community representatives to influence services. In Agbrigg and Belle Vue, a collective governance model has been introduced which involves establishing new neighbourhood bodies and partnerships to influence and deliver services, and to strengthen the capacity of the voluntary and community sector. In Fitzwilliam and Kinsley, a real-time democracy model will be tested, involving local people in day-to-day decisions about their neighbourhood and services by using telephones, text voting, digital television, to engage and communicate with the community

■ Now, Wakefield is planning to embed neighbourhood working in all services, with Children's Centres and Sure Start as key components of local community engagement

■ The stories from Agbrigg and Airedale show how crucial it is to support and nurture individuals who work in neighbourhoods either as volunteers, activists, frontline staff or councillors, and how community empowerment can be used to tackle extremism.

Chapter 14

A sustainable community strategy owned by the community – Camden Together

Philip Colligan and Dean Stokes

Following the local elections in May 2006, the London Borough of Camden was designated for the first time ever as having no overall control. Soon after the election a partnership administration of Liberal Democrat and Conservative members was formed – another first for Camden. The new administration wanted to make good on the election promises to be better at listening and responding. Developing over the past year a new community strategy for the borough was a key first step in terms of better engagement with residents and businesses.

Camden's first community strategy in 2000 was public service and target driven with over 100 specific targets for the council and other local services – a document very much in keeping with the national approach to the performance management of services in the late 1990s. The new community strategy was to be focused on 'place-shaping' – a community strategy describing the kind of place we wanted Camden to be and setting out the main steps that the council and its partners would take in order to achieve that vision.

Camden is a really diverse borough in every sense. Its southern end includes the business and retail hubs and residential neighbourhoods of Holborn and Covent Garden. In the north you find the leafy suburbs of Hampstead and Highgate. Some very wealthy people live here while a third of children live in households that rely on state benefits. Male life expectancy varies by up to 11 years across neighbourhoods. The local economy is thriving and three quarters of people think their neighbourhood has a good sense of community, yet levels of crime are high and Camden includes some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England.

Earlier consultation had highlighted some of the real dilemmas facing the borough. We were clear that we didn't want a standard consultation that left us with a list of contradictions. We wanted a series of community-

based discussions that confronted the big and difficult issues head on and recognised how hard it was sometimes to reach a consensus.

The challenge, then, was finding a way of creating deliberative debates across Camden's diverse communities to create real ownership of the vision for the borough and to start to resolve some of the tensions between, for example, a growing population and the administration's firm ambition for Camden to be a more environmentally sustainable place.

We started by getting the basics in place. A consultation document that articulated the challenges and dilemmas and which proposed a vision framed around Camden as a borough of opportunity. A website that provided online access to the consultation material and encouraged people to send us their views. We held a range of consultation events including meetings with specific groups of residents, separate consultations on sustainability and business issues, work with schools and young people, including through the citizenship curriculum, and a civic forum involving 100s of residents held at Haverstock School.

Perhaps the most successful part of the consultation was the ward meetings that engaged people at the neighbourhood level. Though we expected them to be successful, we were genuinely surprised about how many people attended and how well they reached out to people who wouldn't normally turn up to council meetings. Over 1,200 people were actively involved in the consultation and nearly 400 directly involved in the ward meetings. A small proportion of Camden's overall population maybe, but an impressive turnout for evening meetings to discuss a strategy. More importantly the meetings were lively and people really engaged with the big issues. Councillors spoke of meeting many residents for the first time.

People had lots of questions and issues. Why was London's population set to grow by 10 per cent over the next 10 years and how could that

be managed without altering the village atmosphere of places like Hampstead? How could existing residents be given some sort of priority, without being unfair to new arrivals? What could the police, council and community do about the concentration of cannabis dealing in Camden Town? Perhaps the wider character and reputation of the place needed to change. How did Camden the borough fit into central London – would the new development at King's Cross embrace or alienate the local community?

This is just a flavour of the richness of the discussions. The point that stuck out was how well frontline councillors, over half of whom were new to Camden Council and local government, were able to make a reality of their community leadership role.

The community strategy was launched in April this year – a truly community effort. But what about longer-term ownership, can communities really own a community strategy? In Camden we think they can, in fact we believe it's essential that they do.

Wide and meaningful community involvement is obviously the foundation for that ownership. One thing people felt very strongly about was encouraging personal responsibility – the idea that everyone had a role to play in making Camden a better place to live. People said they looked to the council for leadership but recognised there is only so much a local authority can do. That's why each section of the community strategy includes what local people can do to contribute.

While the council and its partners are working to transform secondary education, we want parents to make sure their kids attend school and arrive on time and this has been written into the community strategy. People told us they value local independent businesses and so the council is committed to reducing red tape. Local people have a community

strategy objective to support their shops through pledge card schemes to buy goods and services locally.

The next step is to build on the success of the consultation, reporting back to the community on how it's doing as well as on our own performance. Area forums are being set up across the borough this autumn to help residents influence decision making and to build on the enthusiasm generated through this process. The new area forums also open up the possibility of some healthy competition between our distinct and varied neighbourhoods on their community strategy objectives.

It's all part of the journey towards a sustainable community strategy owned by the community. Camden Together.

Chapter 15

Communities and neighbourhoods in Surrey

Developing a countywide approach

Mike Edley

Surrey county covers a diverse area of South East England with a population of around 1.1 million people and an annual cost of providing services to the population of almost £1 billion. Surrey is a generally affluent, safe and green county with an older than average population with many residents travelling long distances between their homes, work and places of leisure.

Per square mile, Surrey is the most densely populated shire county in England, but is a county of contrasts between urban and rural areas. The county is run by a three-tier system comprising Surrey County Council, 11 district/borough councils, and approximately 80 parish/town councils that cover part of the county.

It is in this context that Surrey County Council and Surrey Police have initiated a programme of work that seeks to develop a consistent approach to more community- or neighbourhood-focused delivery of services, enhanced community engagement, and a focus on stronger, more cohesive communities.

Surrey County Council and Surrey Police face a number of similar drivers for change in working to deliver the neighbourhood agenda. From central government, Surrey Police has the target of delivering neighbourhood policing by March 2008, while the White Paper on Local Government and the forthcoming Bill place an emphasis on delivering stronger and more cohesive communities and neighbourhoods. The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in 2009 will also seek evidence of the council having identified local needs and priorities, as well as having met centrally-driven targets.

Locally, there are many opportunities to push for a consolidated, customer-focused and differentiated approach to engage with and serve Surrey's residents. Examples include reliance on each other to deliver services, multiple access points for citizens, and the need to deliver better value for money services, especially as both the council and Surrey Police

face significant financial pressures, with further major real terms reductions in grant from central government.

Traditionally however, there have been a number of barriers that have prevented closer working between the council and its partners.

For example, there is no commonly shared definition of the geographical neighbourhoods in Surrey: on the one hand, for electoral purposes, the county is divided into parishes (in some areas), wards and divisions. Our services are also managed across different boundaries. From a community point of view previous work suggests that communities relate to some 25 'natural community' areas. More recently, Surrey Police have consulted with both the public and partners in defining 685 'natural neighbourhoods' and 86 'safer' neighbourhoods (clusters of 'natural neighbourhoods'). In addition, we are aware that individuals also consider themselves members of other communities based upon their interests and/or association, depending on the issue or organisation with which they are engaging.

There is a lack of common delivery systems across Surrey, both in terms of those systems required to support the organisations and those systems and structures that support closer working. We also face a lack of common knowledge, intelligence and engagement structures to enable our organisations to better target services at the local level, and solve problems in a joined-up way, taking account of the public's preferences and identified needs.

Current local governance structures are unable to, or are not empowered to, make decisions at the neighbourhood level. In general, the majority of services are focused on reacting to issues rather than preventing problems arising.

In seeking to respond to these issues and the localism agenda, this project seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- In what way can countywide organisations ensure continuity, consistency and coordination whilst at the same time recognising the benefits of different local and countywide approaches?

- Which of our services could we deliver at a more local level, and are there opportunities to integrate or better coordinate these with those of our partners?

- How can we ensure that Surrey County Council's decision-making and governance mechanisms are fit for purpose, and are better joined up with those of our partners?

In seeking practical answers to these questions, the project team is identifying and evaluating ways that Surrey County Council, Surrey Police and other partners can collectively deliver five main objectives:

- A more joined-up approach to community and neighbourhood engagement

- A menu of services that local communities will have the opportunity to influence

- Transparent, joined up decision-making mechanisms

- An agreed approach to neighbourhood management

- Single or integrated points of contact to deal with local issues.

We are aware of the constant need to take into account the work that our partners are already doing to achieve these outcomes. In an effort to ensure a genuinely joined-up approach and solutions, the project team has included from the outset a member of Surrey Police. As we work towards developing practical options for better working, we have recently also been joined by a secondee from a local borough council.

Initial research and analysis, and discussions with partners have identified a number of areas for potential development, both in the short term, with several pilot projects being proposed over the summer months, and as proposals for longer-term development.

Our work to date has identified opportunities within Surrey Police to conduct a review of co-terminosity of neighbourhood boundaries through combined GIS mapping, to review the impact of 'Tune In' neighbourhood engagement events and to develop a joint approach to panel meetings, including possible trials of different locations and styles of neighbourhood meetings such as using coffeehouse venues. We are also working towards joining up different surveys to reduce costs and share common data.

Along with a district council partner we are looking to test out some options by focusing on cleaner, greener, and safer streets, by actions such as joining up 'street scene' services, and actively exploring pilots whereby local residents might take over the management of certain services.

We are also exploring options for shared reporting mechanisms (especially those via websites) for local people across all local partners. This will enable residents, or their representatives, to report a problem, concern or other comment to the county, district or borough council, police or other local agency easily, without by-passing our organisational reporting and feedback processes.

Each of these short-term and longer-term opportunities are being mapped across a matrix, taking into consideration the extent of the opportunity – in terms of whether it concerns a single organisation, a joint opportunity, or a shared opportunity by all partners – and our other key considerations: value for money; more effective engagement and local service delivery; and better, more joined-up governance and decision making. By October, the project team are expected to have developed specific proposals for implementation in 2008, and to have identified other opportunities for further development in the coming years.

Chapter 16

Community involvement in public places

Nicola Mathers

Well-designed parks, streets and squares have a crucial role to play in our towns and cities, boosting quality of life and reducing crime and antisocial behaviour. 91 per cent of people believe that parks and open spaces improve people's quality of life and 74 per cent of the public believe parks and open spaces are important to people's health and wellbeing.[1] Communities can and do influence the decisions made about public space design, as well as its management – often adding to overall quality.

CABE Space[2] launched two important new initiatives in 2007 designed to boost community involvement in public space design – *It's our space* and *Spaceshaper.*

It's our space is a guide designed to help anyone involved in a public space project for the first time. It gives examples of great outdoor spaces led by community groups and highlights lessons from their experiences. And Spaceshaper is a practical tool for anyone – whether a community activist or professional – to measure the quality of public space before investing time and money in improving it. It uses a questionnaire and workshop approach.

Lenton Recreation Ground, Nottingham – Spaceshaper community case study 1

City council seeks out local people to see what they really think of their award-winning park.

Nottingham City Council got involved in the development phase of Spaceshaper by applying it to Lenton Recreation Ground, a popular neighbourhood park. This compact two hectare park offers two bowling greens, playground, basketball area, playing field and a full-time 'parkie'. As with many other neighbourhoods, this space is a valuable resource for an

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[1] Mori (2005)
[2] CABE Space is the specialist public space unit within CABE, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

area characterised by high-density housing, with limited other green space, either public or private. The pressure on the park is great and it has to provide for a wide variety of people.

The park has met the national standard for parks and green spaces, winning Green Flag Awards in 2005 and 2006. The council wanted to find out whether the park lived up to local expectations and to compare findings against the Green Flag Award judges' feedback.

The council works closely with the Dunkirk and Lenton Partnership Forum, a voluntary sector organisation established 10 years ago to improve the quality of life for local residents. The forum set up a dedicated consultation group to work alongside the council's development officer with the park team to shape the plans for the park so that they met the aspirations of the local community, and to oversee the works.

The forum has been instrumental in getting the public to influence the plans for the park by actively involving them in the decision-making processes, understanding the level of investment made into the park, how the money was being spent and securing much greater ownership.

Having a strong role to play in the improvement of the park has meant that there is a much higher level of ownership resulting in, for example, much more self policing, with local residents encouraging others to respect the park more. Members of the consultation group have been instrumental in encouraging greater respect by acting as informal guardians of the park. Through their involvement, members clearly felt a sense of ownership in the regeneration project and did not wish to see the new facilities damaged or the park slip back to its poor condition. Some members were known to challenge individuals disrespecting the park, such as irresponsible dog owners. The continuous dialogue

established with the local community through the forum newsletter was instrumental in raising people's awareness of the park. This dialogue encouraged more people to visit, and the openness in publicising how much the facilities cost (in excess of £200,000) appeared to instil an appreciation of the level of investment that was being made in the park.

Careful consideration by the council and the forum of all the groups that used – or did not use – the park led to over 60 people assessing the site using the Spaceshaper questionnaire. Representative users included young people, youth service workers, schoolchildren, university students, members of an over-50s health group, local residents, dog walkers and casual users, and a group of vulnerable adults and teenagers. Frontline staff, maintenance managers, community protection officers and councillors were also surveyed.

The results were then presented and discussed at a consultation group meeting. The results demonstrated how much the community valued the park, reflecting the recent investment and its Green Flag Award. Issues of concern were discussed with the council and those requiring action were identified.

"The toolkit is a valuable resource to help us measure the quality of the public realm," said the council's development officer. "It offers us an opportunity to take us beyond a compartmentalised view of the components that make up public realm and see these places as whole rather than disparate parts, in turn helping us to transform the city's neighbourhoods. We are especially keen to use it in places that are scheduled for refurbishment, such as the Meadows and Victoria Embankment. This will help us determine the impact of investment by assessing quality before, during and after refurbishment."

Lessons learnt from Lenton Recreation Ground:

■ Find out if there are any voluntary sector partnerships in the area and work with them to find common ground. It is worth investing in developing constructive relationships which help generate enthusiasm

■ Where appropriate don't be afraid to use consultation to test out basic ideas to inform the debate about the opportunities and constraints of the site

■ Keep people informed and involved through all stages: planning, design, implementation and maintenance of the project to maintain enthusiasm, understanding and value of the project.

Fairy Dell, Middlesbrough – Spaceshaper community case study 2

Schoolchildren and a local friends' group explain why they value their local woodland and describe their fears and aspirations for the planned improvements.

Fairy Dell is a haven for wildlife, with steeply wooded banks, a stream, lakes, woodland and grassy glades. It is very important to the local community as a place of leisure, recreation and fresh air and also for the pupils of the nearby primary school as a living, green classroom. However, it suffered from long-term neglect and problems associated with antisocial behaviour. The locals regarded the footpaths as muddy and overgrown.

A successful local campaign won the community £50,000 from the Big Lottery Fund to restore Fairy Dell. Middlesbrough Council match-funded the investment and was keen to use Spaceshaper to measure the change in people's perceptions before and after the improvements. The local Wildspace! officer wanted to involve the local primary school. A workshop was designed around a half day in the nearby school with a year six class. Questionnaires were completed on computers, allowing the children to create their own 'spider' diagrams instantly and reflect their individual perceptions of Fairy Dell.

The children said they valued the space for the greenery and wildlife and appreciated its important role in the community. However, they were disappointed that the Dell was not used as often as it should be, was poorly maintained and that there were no staff to control antisocial behaviour.

A Friends of Fairy Dell volunteer group attended a second workshop – and the results showed that people felt that Fairy Dell's natural beauty, peace and tranquillity were its key assets. The questionnaires stimulated discussion of the issues to take forward. Increased political support was needed, as was continued communication with local residents on the progress of improvements. The group recognised that a balance was needed between the importance of conserving the site and the value of encouraging more visitors. It also recognised the value of educational work in bringing new families to Fairy Dell. And it agreed that success of the project was dependent upon improved standards of maintenance in the long term.

The exercise presented a snapshot of two groups' perceptions for future comparisons. It contributed to the environmental education programme and helped widen the discussion beyond just litter and antisocial behaviour.

Since then many of the improvements have been implemented. This has included tree works to open up the wood, footpaths surfaced and wood carvings installed. The impact has been terrific. Many more people use the dell thus creating a greater sense of safety. The local community values the space as somewhere you can go to slip away from the noise of the city, to be surrounded by nature. It is both attractive and, thanks to community involvement, very well respected.

Lessons learnt from Fairy Dell:

■ Talk to a wide variety of people from the beginning, not just through formal consultation but through general conversations

■ Local people have a huge amount of knowledge and experience of the site; capitalise on this information and build it into the project

■ Always keep people up to date with progress throughout the whole project, particularly if there are delays. Things often taken much longer than anticipated. It helps keep people on board.

Chapter 17

The 21st-century parish

Rural innovation in Wiltshire

Anna Minton

The village shop in the picturesque West Wiltshire village of Steeple Ashton can justifiably claim to be at the centre of the community, with its cafe and post office and roster of 50 volunteers.

Apparently some locals even go there three times a day, for breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea, according to Allan Baker, a volunteer who's also a STASH (Steeple Ashton shop) committee member. "They're the regulars, they're in here all the time," he says.

It would seem that the success of the shop is bucking the national trend, which is witnessing the closure of 50 independent village shops a week. But, in fact, what it does reflect is a counter-trend, which is the growth of community-owned shops.

Steeple Ashton's own village shop had closed in 1998 and when the community shop opened in 2005 it was among the first in the country. Now there are around 170 in Britain with the number rising all the time.[1]

However, despite their popularity, getting an enterprise like this off the ground is no easy task as the Steeple Ashton villagers, whose campaign was underpinned by an unusually active parish council, found.

Parish councillor Rosie Brett Green, who was born in the village and whose father and grandfather were parish councillors, explains: "When the shop closed it came as a shock to the village. Everybody was anxious to have a new shop. The big problem was finding premises.

"Very sadly the county council closed the village school in 2004 but as the building had been given to the village in perpetuity in the 19th century by the Long family it provided the answer," she says.

With the building found, further funds were also needed to make the

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[1] Village Retail Services Association (ViRSA)

project work. £12,500 was raised from villagers' own pockets, and a Rural Renaissance Grant of £57,000, from the South West of England Regional Development Agency, was secured.

Today, the shop has 230 shareholders and another 100 donors. 50 volunteers work shifts alongside one paid employee who works up to 20 hours, enabling it to open between 7.30am and 5.30pm five days a week, 8.30am to 4.30pm on Saturdays and 9am to 11am on Sundays.

"People enjoy working in the shop – it's the social centre of the village," says John Aeberhard, the current chair of the shop management committee.

"It provides a nice atmosphere – the coffee shop helps. We've also got a photocopier and computer access and a collection point for a laundry service, dry cleaning and shoe repairs. And we have a post office one morning a week, which we're looking to expand. We think a post office goes with a village shop."

"The male volunteers love coming in here. A lot of them had quite high-powered jobs. One ran a publishing business, another had a management consultancy," adds Rosie.

Peter Dunford, senior development consultant at Wiltshire County Council, is in total agreement about the social importance of the shop. "The village shop is a focus for the community and a place for social networking. Losing that focus means that those who are socially excluded can become even more isolated.

"The village shop can support the rural economy and tourism and is valued by many, including those people who chose to live in the countryside and wish to preserve its identity," he says.

He is also keen to encourage the community ownership of local assets, pointing out that the council is planning a review of its property holdings.

''There are likely to be a growing number of opportunities for communities to take on the running of previously public-run assets,'' he says, highlighting the recent Quirk Review 'Making Assets Work', published by the Department for Communities and Local Government.[2]

In Steeple Ashton, there is no doubt that the need for the shop mobilised what was an already active parish council, which has focused its energies – and resources – mainly on the shop and bringing local playing fields back into use.

''Like anywhere, you tend to get more engagement and activism at the local level if there's an issue that pulls people together. Steeple Ashton is reasonably well-heeled but the issue is loss of services in what is becoming a dormitory village,'' says Tim Martienssen, principal regeneration officer at the county council.

The parish activities have been partly enabled by the Parish Precept of just under £26,000 for this year.

''Every year we have a precept, a proportion of these funds goes towards the shop and playing fields. We apply to the district council for what we require. It's a little bit on top of the council tax,'' explains Judith Buxton Dean, the parish clerk.

On the other hand, it is quite clear that this parish council of nine councillors, which has two meetings a month, plus a parish liaison meeting with seven parishes and the district council, is likely only to become more politically active over issues of local importance.

''People come here and they think they're going to retire, but we show them they're not,'' says Rosie.

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[2] *Making assets work: The Quirk Review of community management and ownership of public assets,* CLG (2007)

Lessons from Wiltshire:

■ Steeple Ashton Parish Council provides a good example of how parishes can successfully combine different functions of community governance, local representation, raising and managing local budgets, and innovation in service delivery

■ Steeple Ashton is one of several parish councils in Wiltshire and around the country that are enthusiastic about the potential for parishes to take on the delivery of ultra-local services, that are devolved or commissioned by local authorities

■ The Parish Council and Community Shop are a good example of how to use local people's skills. Steeple Ashton is an affluent community with a huge variety of skills and expertise that can be put to good use for local social action. Their experience shows that community governance and empowerment can benefit a whole range of communities, not just deprived neighbourhoods

■ The parish is part of a Parish Liaison Group that brings together seven parish councils that share similar concerns about local issues including traffic and road safety. The Parish Liaison Group works together to share intelligence and campaign together for action on issues of local interest

■ Wiltshire County Council is proposing a joint decision-making forum for each area, which will bring together councillors from all three tiers. The pilot will not only reduce the number of meetings that councillors have to attend, but will also help to make decision making more transparent to the public.

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PARKING ONLY WITHIN
DESIGNATED

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ONLY APPLY WITHIN DESIGNATED
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Chapter 18

The power of an apology

Improving the accountability of public services

Vicki Savage

In 1995 the Beacon Estate, Falmouth was the poorest estate in Cornwall, which in turn was the poorest county in England. The council-owned low-rise flats and semi-detached houses that made up the estate were damp and in desperate need of renovation, housing a community whose illness rate was 18 per cent higher than the national average.[1] Violent crime and drug dealing were prevalent and there was a climate of mistrust between the police and the community. Overwhelmingly the population felt isolated and abandoned by the agencies who were there to provide for them.

Despite these feelings of despair, when the estate's housing officer first approached the community about a grant-funded programme of work to improve the insulation of the properties and add central heating, his proposals were met with widespread scepticism. Residents, angry about previous promises not kept and long-term under-investment, wanted nothing to do with partnering in the regeneration project, making their views clear at the public meeting.

Locked in a stalemate with agencies wanting to look only to the future and residents unwilling to forget the past, Carrick District Council's housing officer took the unusual and brave step of apologising to the community for the chronic problems they faced. He both acknowledged the lack of investment and poor previous communication, and took responsibility for the consequent entrenched problems.

His apology proved to be a seminal moment for the estate, triggering a new partnership relationship between the community and local service providers. 10 years on, the crime rate has dropped by 50 per cent, educational attainment of boys aged 10 and 11 has improved by 100 per cent, asthma rates are down 40 per cent and 60 per cent of the properties have new central heating and cladding.[2] This dramatic

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[1] *Community Regeneration: final summary report by the Health Complexity Group*, Crest (2005)

[2] *The public governance implications of user co-production of public services: a case study of public services in Carrick*, INLOGOV (2006)

turnaround is undoubtedly the result of significant investment through regeneration funds, as well as the dedication and hard work of both residents and professionals. But it also tells a tale of what can happen when agencies open up an honest dialogue with the communities they serve.

Creating an open dialogue

Encouraging such a relationship is designed to both stop public trust ebbing away from institutions and improve resident influence over services – currently just 61 per cent of people feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area.[3] Proposals in 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' – the Local Government White Paper aim to tackle both of these challenges:

'The best councils… work closely with citizens and communities. We want this to be the normal pattern of working everywhere. People… should be informed about the quality of services in their area, and enabled to call local agencies to account if services fail to meet their needs or standards do not match what has been promised.'[4]

So the rhetoric is in place, but mainstreaming such an ethos within all areas of local authority service provision is much more challenging. New tools and working practices such as the revised Best Value Duty to Involve, the opportunity for area-based scrutiny, and the Community Call for Action (which was introduced in The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill), will all aid authorities and citizens to connect, but opening a genuinely honest dialogue between service providers and citizens is an unmistakeably challenging agenda.

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[3] *2005 Citizenship Survey: active communities report*, DCLG (2006)
[4] *Strong and Prosperous Communities* – the Local Government White Paper, DCLG (2006)

Public debate of policies and performance can be uncomfortable for institutions. Our natural instinct is to defend our actions, even when we or the services we manage under-perform. Yet any partnership-training course will tell you that partners need to trust one another and be willing to admit their mistakes. The same is true of the partnership between local authorities and residents.

Local performance management

One council which is taking steps towards this model of working is Tower Hamlets, a partner in the Transforming Neighbourhoods consortium. The borough's 17 wards are grouped into eight Local Area Partnerships each with a unique mix of affluence, deprivation, ethnicity and average age. For the last five years the residents, service providers and councillors which make up each Local Area Partnership have received Ward Data Reports giving a detailed breakdown of educational attainment, housing stock quality, crime trends, standardised health information and incident reporting for each ward. Local Area Partnerships have used this information to create action plans and set local priorities for quality-of-life improvements.

Ward Data Reports and THIS Borough (an online version of small area data) are compiled using the latest data available from partners and detailed performance information from council services. Local Area Partnerships are therefore able to assess the impact of initiatives or work on their priority actions, and monitor the performance of local services.

Providing this sort of honest appraisal of service performance gives residents the opportunity to ask difficult questions such as 'why is my local secondary school lagging behind in GCSE attainment?' and 'why are waiting lists longer in my area?'. Difficult though these questions may be, this is exactly the kind of dialogue that the local authority and Tower

Hamlets Partnership (the borough's local strategic partnership) want to encourage.

Heads of Service have been invited to Local Area Partnership meetings to discuss performance. Rather than result in a public lynching of officers, residents (keen to improve their local provision) have been eager to understand what causes the under performance and what can be done about it. Residents feed in local intelligence to help tailor service delivery and promote new initiatives or campaigns to improve performance.

The Ward Data Reports, but more importantly the conversations they begin, have been a key tool to enhance transparency in Tower Hamlets.

Overcoming challenges to improve accountability

Research from across the country as part of the Transforming Neighbourhoods programme showed overwhelmingly that residents valued transparency, consultation and evidence of being listened to alongside good quality services. But the challenges for local authorities in emulating the examples of Carrick District Council and Tower Hamlets are not to be underestimated. Though many local authority services are used to customer-focused communication, many will find the culture of publicly discussing performance challenging.[5] Embedding such a working practice across local authority departments requires clear political and corporate support[6], as well as information for frontline staff on tools, techniques and best practice, to help change existing cultures which are often primarily focused on delivery against top-down targets.

There are also risks for local authorities providing detailed performance data publicly (for example, fear that an area will be labelled unsafe or a school labelled as failing) but with appropriate data management the

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[5] *Managing the risks of neighbourhood governance*, Young Foundation (2006)
[6] *Developing community involvement in public services in Suffolk*, Young Foundation (2007)

benefits significantly outweigh the risks. More widespread is the challenge to institutions of public debate or comparison and the challenge politically of admitting failure. Opening up such debates though may well improve engagement with democratic processes.[7] Indeed the Local Government White Paper and local authorities across the country recognise there is an important role to be played by local councillors in stimulating and coordinating local debate. Tools such as area-based scrutiny have been welcomed warmly by elected members[8] to broker conversations on the implications of policies locally. Charters too could provide an avenue for members to have honest conversations with the community about residents' priorities and the ways in which they can or cannot be tackled.

To be truly transparent councils need to be proactive in giving citizens information and the tools to hold them to account. And in the spirit of genuine accountability, local authorities also need to be willing to admit when they have made mistakes or their services underperform. Both require an investment of time and resources but our evidence would suggest that authorities taking such an approach can benefit from a rebuilding of public trust in institutions and an ongoing dialogue of local intelligence to help tailor and improve service efficiency and effectiveness.

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[7] *Parties for the public good*, Young Foundation (2007)
[8] *Helping members to work effectively in localities in Haringey*, Young Foundation (2007)

Lessons:

■ Communities value authorities being honest with them about delivery, constraints and challenges. Natural instinct however is to promote and defend the services we provide in public rather than providing an honest appraisal

■ Changing this culture requires strong leadership and clear analysis of the benefits of entering into such a relationship. There is a clear role for local members to lead on brokering such conversations locally, and tools such as data summaries, area-based scrutiny and charters can help local authorities

■ There is much to be learnt from the approach of Carrick District Council and partners who undertook co-production of services with communities on the Beacon Estate – for more information see www.healthcomplexity.net

■ Tower Hamlets Ward Data Reports are a simple way of summarising complex information at a local level to provide residents with the opportunity to engage with priority setting and scrutinise service performance – for more information see http://thisborough.towerhamlets.gov.uk

Chapter 19

Who represents neighbourhoods?

Building trust between the voluntary sector, officers and councillors in Liverpool

Anna Minton

Twelve years ago Graham Bell was unemployed. Today he chairs Liverpool's Community Regeneration Forum and one of the city's Cluster Boards.

His involvement with the voluntary sector began in 1995 when he heard that local people were being invited to participate in distributing Objective One funding from Europe.

"My residents' organisation started in my front room when a leaflet came through the front door saying 'do you want to be part of distributing Objective One funding?'

"I had been unemployed and I needed something to do. It gave me my health back," explains Graham, who had worked in telecommunications for thirty years.

Liverpool is keen not to lose the skills, knowledge and expertise of Graham and others like him who helped distribute Objective One funds in the city through Cluster Boards, now that this funding stream is coming to an end.

"The money coming in through Objective One is stopping but the cluster expertise is being transferred into our new structures," says Keith Gerrard, head of neighbourhood services at the council.

Marilyn Fielding, Liverpool's executive director for housing and neighbourhoods, explains: "We want to bring the chairs of the Cluster groups onto our area committee groups – we don't want to throw away the good work they've done, they have done a lot in strategic areas – on the environment, health and youth."

In Liverpool, the council is working hard to build positive relationships with the voluntary sector whilst working their way through any traditional tensions between local councillors, officers and the voluntary and community sector.

The council works directly with the Liverpool Centre for Voluntary Services (LCVS), with an LCVS officer working in the local authority's neighbourhood teams, liaising with community groups who may have had little contact with the council. For example, Marilyn recounts how applications from Somali individuals had been unsuccessful until the LCVS officer encouraged the community to make a bid as an umbrella group, which was successful.

Not only that, over the last year joint sessions between the voluntary sector, elected members and officers, have become a regular fixture, with an agreement in place between all three groups to ensure it continues. "With other councillors we went to Liverpool Football Club a couple of weeks ago and brought together officers, members and community groups – we've been doing that for the last 12 months," says Marilyn.

Meanwhile the voluntary sector has also been reaching out in return with the LCVS holding a day of workshops on the new arrangements, followed by a dinner. "It works really well, if you do it over a meal, it's enjoyable and it breaks down some of the barriers," says Graham.

"In the past we didn't have good lines of communication with the council, and now we have a really good dialogue. They don't want to lose the good things that have gone on and they can see we have the governance and the ability to get things done. The result is that the Community Regeneration Forum is working with the city on both the new neighbourhood structures and plotting the demise of the Clusters," he adds.

Councillor Malcolm Kelly agrees. "For the first time, LCVS asked us to go to their annual dinner after their away day. We went and sat on different tables and met the leaders of a number of different groups and had a great time," he says.

An increasing role in neighbourhoods for voluntary sector organisations is going to create challenges for local authorities, who must balance demands for communities and voluntary organisations to play a greater role in decision making with issues about supporting and empowering elected members to have a stronger local leadership role. However, in many places around the country the evidence is that these can be creative tensions that provoke debate and engage local people. In this way there is much to learn from Liverpool.

Lessons from Liverpool:

■ Incremental change to community engagement or governance structures is often more successful than a radical overhaul: building on structures that already exist, like Liverpool's Cluster Partnerships, prevents valuable local experience and relationships from being lost

■ Introducing new working structures needs to be accompanied by changes to working practices. In Liverpool it was important to embed the idea of neighbourhood engagement in the working practices of council officers and other service providers. This involved building consensus to overcome ideas about barriers to neighbourhood working

■ Acknowledging the different roles that councillors and community organisations can play in neighbourhood working is crucial, in particular recognising the value of different forms of local representation. Defining and promoting these different roles is important to reduce tensions around who is speaking for the neighbourhood in different situations.

Chapter 20

Women councillors and neighbourhood working

Identifying and recruiting women candidates

Kirstie Haines

The recent census of local authority councillors found that just over 29.2 per cent of councillors are women. While this is a slight rise (around one per cent) over the 1997 survey, women councillors still lag far behind men in both overall numbers and the seniority of the positions they hold: nationally, only 829 women are members of a council cabinet or executive, compared to 2,098 men, and only 65 female councillors chair a Local Strategic Partnership, compared to 191 men.[1] An increasing number of local authorities are looking at how they can better support councillors working at neighbourhood level, and political parties are struggling to field candidates at all levels of local government. At such a time, it is useful to consider the following questions:

- Will more women candidates put themselves forward if neighbourhood-level working is given greater prestige?

- If local knowledge and activity is given a greater profile in selection criteria, will political groups select more women?

While there has been much significant research into women's involvement in local politics[2], there is little published research on the relationship between the status given to councillors' neighbourhood work and the number of women councillors. This essay explores that relationship. It uses anecdotal evidence gathered from a number of local authorities participating in the Transforming Neighbourhoods consortium set up by the Young Foundation, including interviews from across the spectrum of political parties.[3]

Becoming a candidate

Although each party has different selection methods and regulations,

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[1] *National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2006*, LGAR (2007)

[2] *Gender & Political Participation, Electoral Commission* (2004); *Gender & Participation - An Overview*, Supriya Akerkar, Institute of Development Studies (2001); *First Thoughts on Attracting Women into Politics. Woman's Place is in the Chamber*, Pam Giddy, LGA (2000)

[3] *Transforming Neighbourhoods local work*, Young Foundation (2005-2007)

when local councillors were asked how they had become members it became clear that three broad routes had been followed:

1.   They were directly approached (to join a local political party, stand as a candidate or both), or
2.   They volunteered because no one else would do it, or
3.   They were selected by a local party following a competition against other potential candidates.

Clearly, some routes are more likely to emphasise neighbourhood knowledge and may be more likely to encourage the selection of women councillors.

Direct approach

Members were usually approached to stand as a local councillor either because they had professional skills and a local profile that could benefit the party, or because they had gained a profile through participation in a recent campaign, participation in local groups, or volunteering with local people.

Candidates with an established professional standing (such as trade union officers, civil servants and business people) have already demonstrated, through their careers, that they have the skills and knowledge to influence 'town hall processes' to the benefit of the political party. For example, many will have experience of corporate budget setting, using standing orders, influencing scrutiny workloads, chairing meetings, and assessing proposals for political impact. This type of selection emphasises skills that benefit the local party in area-wide decisions, rather than benefiting local people through neighbourhood working. Furthermore, if potential councillors are approached because of their senior roles in business or the public sector, then less women will be approached because (currently) women are less well represented at senior levels in both business and public sector organisations.

We came across a number of women councillors who had been approached to join a political party and stand as a councillor as a consequence of their local good works and contacts – sometimes through the provision of voluntary and community work, or on other occasions through campaigning to retain local services. In all cases these women had made themselves visible before they were encouraged to stand. For a number of women in this group, there has been subsequent disappointment as their local activism has been managed out (through whipping and attendance requirements for reselection) and they are expected to refocus their activities on the needs of the town hall.

These findings reflect a perception found in many areas that councillors' roles are focused on town hall activities (a form of 'town hall centrism'). Local, neighbourhood activities are often unnoticed, unrecorded and unrecognised, and so play a marginal role in the selection of candidates.

Volunteering

Another feature of interviews with women councillors is the number who had become councillors unintentionally – "I was a paper candidate" was a common phrase. These women came forward because there was no other candidate. They felt that there was little or no chance of being elected because the seat was politically unobtainable, but ended up being elected anyway.

There are two related issues arising from this type of volunteering:
1. A number of women who came forward because they felt that, paradoxically, there was a low risk of being elected – so the usual objections (those about balancing work and home, or not feeling comfortable in a 'meeting' rather than 'doing' culture) could be over ridden
2. These women secured seats viewed by their political parties as unobtainable, sometimes due to a high local profile gained through local campaigns or connections to local groups and organisations.

The relationship of these volunteers to the group whip is notable. Whilst all councillors interviewed indicated that there are opportunities to go against the whip or negotiate a space for difference, this was dependent on the whip recognising that neighbourhood needs could differ from whole area needs. However, it was acknowledged that where there is a struggle to find candidates, there is often greater freedom to negotiate the whip. (A senior councillor in a safe seat may have less freedom in relation to neighbourhood issues than a successful 'paper' candidate in a marginal seat.)

For women who volunteer to stand as councillors, often because no one else will, there appears to be a greater recognition of the role of neighbourhood activities in securing and retaining the seat. There is also a more flexible approach to the whip. Overall, these councillors felt more empowered in their role because they had greater choice over the activities they pursued.

Self selection

Councillors talked about considering their chances of selection before entering the competition and often felt that their professional knowledge and experience would enhance their chance of selection but also make being a councillor easier because they understood council processes. Where women put themselves forward they were aware that a professional, local profile was most desirable and they had often assessed their desirability to the local party by looking at this. The greatest prestige was given to a professional profile, with that of local activism being less highly regarded.

Some of the councillors we have worked with felt that a history of local activism or involvement in campaigns could work against potential candidates. It is questionable whether political groups are comfortable with recruiting candidates who would wish to challenge the group whip on local issues. Whilst many political groups see the value of

accountability to local people there is a concern that this could result in difficulty in securing a party line on key developments because there is a desire to present a coherent party position at the town hall.

Research has demonstrated that women are more likely to find their way into local politics through involvement in local groups and activities and further research may find that women candidates are less likely to come forward for selection when they are aware that local activism is not desirable.

Conclusions

There is still much more work to be done before the relationship between recruiting and retaining women councillors and neighbourhood working is fully understood. However, our experience from Transforming Neighbourhoods has indicated that there is a relationship between how a councillor's role is defined and who stands in local elections.

It appears that where party selection favours candidates with a local profile, rather than a professional skill set, then more women are likely to be selected and that councillors with the greatest freedom to respond to local issues are likely to stand again.

If more women are to stand for local government seats, then all political parties need to question the value given to professional standing above local activism and neighbourhood knowledge in the party selection processes. Political parties should examine the balance between party discipline and neighbourhood working to ensure that whipping (for example on attendance at town hall meetings) doesn't prevent (women) councillors, with a neighbourhood focus, re-standing.

Chapter 21

Councillors of tomorrow

Developing empowered councillor roles in Newham and Suffolk

Anna Minton

Councillor Ayub Korom Ali could be the closest person in the country to the conception of an empowered 'frontline councillor', as set out in the Local Government White Paper. [1]

This is as a result of Newham's 'Influential Councillor' programme, which has paved the way for Councillor Ali's enhanced role. At the same time a very different type of authority, Suffolk County Council, has introduced 'locality budgets', which are in tune with the White Paper's desire to increase powers for councillors through access to funds to support local projects.

But while the two authorities could hardly be more different, the issues raised by the devolution of real powers, backed by resources, are strikingly similar.

In the London Borough of Newham, Councillor Ali, who has been designated a 'community lead councillor' – the chosen term for influential councillors – is piloting this new role in the Manor Park community forum area which encompasses three wards.

He describes how the main aim of the pilot is to radically improve communication and responsiveness between the community lead councillor and both council officers and the community, while also "giving non-executive members a much more visible role in the community and giving backbenchers more of a local leadership role".

This is achieved through a process Newham has called 'Local Reviews', which involves the community lead councillor working with community groups to identify issues of concern, while also holding regular cross-departmental meetings with officers representing all services. Initially the meetings were held once a fortnight to kick-start the process, now they take place on a monthly basis.

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[1] *Strong and Prosperous Communities* – the Local Government White Paper, DCLG (2006)

Councillor Ali describes how the key issues identified from his meetings with mosques, churches, community organisations, youth groups, schools and training providers, include anything from car parking, forecourt trading, and the number of litter bins, to recycling and extended school hours.

"I can now take these issues to the big meeting with officers from across the council to get them to action problems and chase them. When you can meet with public realm, social services, traffic and highways and housing providers all at the same time it gives reality to joined-up working," he says.

"Big organisations are not very good at responding to detailed concerns until the next year's planning cycle. This is about responding here and now," he says. "If people say they need 10 bins in the street then it happens," adds Milly Camley, head of the Mayor's office.

So far, aiming as it does to improve the responsiveness of services to local needs, the scheme can hardly seem controversial but, because it is backed up by resources, political issues inevitably enter into the discussion.

"We haven't gone all the way – instead of giving a budget directly to individual members we have created a 'Local Fund' of £500,000, which community lead councillors can bid to," Councillor Ali explains.

The big spectre for local government in this regard is the possibility of funds falling into the hands of extremist parties such as the British National Party (BNP), as famously happened under the Tower Hamlets 'Going Local' programme in the early 1990s.

But although Councillor Ali feels that the bidding mechanism of the Local Fund would safeguard this from happening he also emphasises his personal view, that the presence of fringe extremist parties should not be a barrier to real devolution.

In support of this he cites his recent experience of working with a member of the Respect party on his Community Forum Steering Group. "He stood against me in the council elections and there were people who didn't want him there but I was prepared to be more flexible. Just because people come from a different political persuasion doesn't mean they can't be given responsibilities. Everyone should be encouraged to participate in their local civic affairs. That's democracy for you.

"We need to be careful about how we design and manage schemes, making sure there is a strong role for officers. If there is a good management system in place it should work regardless of political composition," he says.

Meanwhile in Suffolk, a shire authority that could not be more different from an inner-city, multi-cultural borough such as Newham, the council has adopted an arguably more devolved, but not dissimilar, approach with its 'locality budgets'.

This scheme, which began in 1999-2000, enables £750,000 to be set aside every year with each of the council's 75 councillors indirectly allocated a share according to the population size of their ward. However, councillors are not given the money as an individual budget, instead they are able to recommend applications for funding from local community groups, which are judged against certain criteria. Ultimately the locality director – the council is split between seven locality directorates – decides on applications but they are very rarely refused.

"The criteria for funding are projects which will have an impact locally, disproportionate to the amount of money which is spent. The idea is that councillors are able to identify pockets of need and raise awareness of county councillors and the county council," says Mary Clancy, head of democratic services.

"At one end of the spectrum you get a bench on a village green or a contribution to the repair of a parish hall, at the other councillors can pool money for quite significant buildings. It's not eligible for anything requiring an ongoing spend but is set aside for pump priming and capital projects," she says.

The scheme, which is very well used, receives hundreds of applications a year and encourages councillors to engage directly with communities to make sure applications come in. "Some councillors use parish councils as a method of consulting, others use local networks as a method of attracting applications," Clancy explains.

Councillor Ben Redsell, assistant portfolio holder for resources, believes that the reason it works is because it is not used as a political football, with an unwritten agreement among councillors not to use the funds for political ends.

"The way our councillors work, which is very locally orientated in areas which may be 50 miles from here, means they have to rely on their personal credibility not just party politics to be re-elected. One of the reasons it works in Suffolk is because councillors stand up for the ward over any party political line," he says.

But despite the success of the scheme neither Redsell nor Clancy believe it would work in an inner-city borough like Newham. "Councillors would find themselves under a lot of competitive pressure from different communities, but we don't have those kind of arguments about decisions made in favour of one community rather than another," says Clancy.

With one model for Suffolk and another for Newham the aspiration of providing specific local solutions to meet specific local needs is clearly already proving to be a reality in parts of the country.

Lessons from Suffolk and Newham:

■ New empowered councillor roles need to reflect the different circumstances and needs of neighbourhoods, and the risks of empowerment under these conditions. Devolving locality budgets may be appropriate in some circumstances, but localised scrutiny and decision-making powers arguably can be more effective ways of increasing councillors' influence over local issues. In this sense, delegated budgets are not always a test of whether local authorities are taking empowered roles and neighbourhood issues seriously. A bigger challenge is to enable members and communities to influence the use of mainstream budgets under the control of councils or other public bodies

■ Even relatively small changes to councillors' roles require significant changes to the way members and officers work together. Newham and Suffolk both demonstrate that evolving members' roles requires strong political and corporate leadership to embed new ways of working and to make sure that this understanding is shared between officers and members

■ Councillors and officers need to develop new skill sets to work effectively in neighbourhoods and to work better together. In particular, councillors need support to develop soft skills including new tools and techniques for community engagement, conflict resolution and brokering. While councillors are advocating for local issues, officers often look at the bigger picture. Councillors and officers working together helps officers to look at issues on the ground

■ This story illustrates the importance of councillors working together to tackle local problems and not using a neighbourhood issue as a political football

■ Councillors need greater support to carry out an enhanced local role, including both practical help such as more administration and IT support, and training and development opportunities. Newham's 'Influential Councillor' scheme offers personalised development, officer updates, ward-based bulletins, and consultation sessions.

What is Transforming Neighbourhoods?

The Young Foundation's Transforming Neighbourhoods programme was set up in the summer of 2005 to promote and accelerate the development of community empowerment and neighbourhood working, with a specific focus on the Whitehall localism agenda that was then starting to gather pace.

Transforming Neighbourhoods brought together key stakeholders including partners from central and local government, and national organisations with an interest in the neighbourhoods agenda.

The programme combined intensive practical work with local authority partners to help understand challenges and develop new solutions, with research about a range of issues of importance to neighbourhoods and to our partner organisations.

Transforming Neighbourhoods ended in March 2007. The Young Foundation has developed a new programme of work on neighbourhoods, with a stronger focus on local innovation in neighbourhood working and community empowerment. Once again, the programme brings together a number of partners to facilitate practical action, research, policy development and opportunities for learning. This programme, called the Neighbourhood Action Network, launched in April 2007 and will run until March 2009.

For full information about Transforming Neighbourhoods and the Neighbourhood Action Network visit www.youngfoundation.org

Biographies

Nicola Bacon is Local Projects Director at the Young Foundation. She has set up a new workstream for the organisation on local innovation and is now responsible for all of the Young Foundation's work on neighbourhoods including the new Neighbourhood Action Network, and on wellbeing through the Local Wellbeing Project. Last year Nicola coordinated the Young Foundation's contribution to the Tällberg Forum in Sweden on the impact of globalisation on East London. Nicola has worked for the Home Office, has run an award-winning homelessness prevention charity Safe in the City, and was Director of Policy for Shelter. Nicola began her career working for a tenants' federation in Southwark.

Liz Bartlett is a Researcher with the Neighbourhoods and Local Innovation team at the Young Foundation, specifically examining the role of housing associations in local governance structures. Before this she studied an MA in International Development, concentrating on the relationship between politics, economics and the use of public space, an interest that developed from her original background in architecture.

Steve Bullock has been the Executive Mayor of Lewisham since 2002. He has been involved in public service in London as a member, officer and board member since 1976. He is Leaders of the Labour Group and Vice-Chair at London Councils and also currently chair of London Connects. He is the chair of LGE, the Local Government Employers body.

Alessandra Buonfino is Head of Research at the London-based think tank Demos and Fellow of the Young Foundation. Before joining Demos, Alessandra worked at the Young Foundation and was responsible for work on belonging, integration and neighbourliness and for the Young Foundation edited collection *Porcupines in Winter: the pleasures and* pains *of living together in modern Britain* (with Geoff Mulgan, 2006).

Bec Clarkson is Programme Director at Community Alliance. She has a particular interest in partnerships: how and why they form, how they function and what makes them successful. She has been in the voluntary and community sector all her working life and has worked with a wide range of client groups and organisations. This has given her considerable insight not just into the challenges faced by the sector itself, but also to those faced by real people in real situations. She is therefore an enthusiastic advocate of the community anchor model as promoted by the Community Alliance partnership.

Philip Colligan is the Assistant Chief Executive at the London Borough of Camden and leads the Camden Strategy Unit, which is the strategic centre of the Council responsible for strategy, major projects, performance, engagement and diversity, efficiency, and communications. Prior to this role, he held a range of posts in the Home Office, including on youth justice, race, faith and cohesion, as well as working in private office. Philip continues to play a wider role on issues of community cohesion, advising central government and other councils.

Mike Edley is Senior Lead Manager in the Strategy and Policy Projects Service at Surrey County Council. He is specifically responsible for the learning and development of the 70-strong service as well as being project manager of significant corporate policy and strategy development work. Between 2002-2006 Michael was responsible for managing the Surrey Strategic Partnership in developing and implementing a countywide community strategy and its Local Area Agreement. Prior to joining SCC, Michael has worked as a senior university lecturer and MSc course director, an environmental consultant for two large UK organisations and for a UN Environment Programme in the Mediterranean. He has a D. Phil in population genetics.

John Gaventa is a professor at the Institute of Development Studies, and Director of the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability. He has written widely on issues of citizen participation, power and local governance in the US and UK, as well as internationally. From 2000-2007 he also served as director of LogoLink, an international network on Citizen Participation and Local Governance.

Lucy de Groot is Executive Director of the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). Her career has ranged across the civil service, local government and the voluntary and community sectors, including roles as Director of Public Services in HM Treasury, Chief Executive of Bristol City Council and Head of Policy for the London Borough of Lewisham. Lucy started in local government as an employment policy adviser working for Hackney Council after over ten years in a variety of roles in the community and not-for-profit sectors in both London and Manchester.

Kirstie Haines worked for the Young Foundation, supporting the work of the Transforming Neighbourhoods consortium. Before this, she had worked for a London Borough, a county council and a city council. She now works for Sheffield City Council. Her experience includes implementing changed governance structures, supporting scrutiny by councillors and developing a Local Area Agreement. She continues to pursue practical ways in which the aspirations of local people and community groups can be better supported by local government.

Saffron James is responsible for the Young Foundation's work on neighbourhoods. She project managed the Transforming Neighbourhoods programme between 2005 and 2007, leading on various policy research and development workstreams and web innovation pilots including www.fixmystreet.com with mySociety, and

www.neighbourhoodknowhow.org. Saffron now manages the Neighbourhood Action Network and is developing a new workstream about social network analysis in neighbourhoods. Before joining the Young Foundation, Saffron worked at the Future Foundation managing social research and trend forecasting projects for public sector organisations, and worked as an independent research and communications consultant in the public and voluntary sectors for Citylife, Initiative Ireland, NCH Action for Children, and in the UK for UNHCR.

John Low coordinates work on the neighbourhood agenda at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). JRF has committed funding of over £4m to three major programmes in this field of work. First, the Action on Estates Programme (1992-1995). Next the Area Regeneration Programme (1995-2000) which fed into the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. And finally the JRF Neighbourhood Programme which worked with 20 neighbourhoods in Scotland, Wales and England.

Nicola Mathers joined CABE Space in 2003 as part of the standards and best practice team. Her focus is developing and supporting practical tools for both communities and professionals to improve the quality of local spaces. Nicola manages the Spaceshaper project, launched in February 2007. Nicola previously worked for a community regeneration trust and for Groundwork, managing community-led public space improvement projects.

Anna Minton is a writer and journalist. She is a regular contributor to The Guardian and is writing a book about privatisation, polarisation and fear in cities, which will be published by Penguin in 2008. The book builds on a series of earlier reports on the polarisation of post-industrial societies. This work focused on gated communities and ghettoes and the privatisation of public space, meshing a detailed analysis of policy with a broad overview of contemporary social and economic trends.

Geoff Mulgan has been Director of the Young Foundation since late 2004. Between 1997 and 2004 Geoff had various roles in the UK government including Director of the Government's Strategy Unit and Head of Policy in the Prime Minister's office. Before that he was the founder and Director of the think tank Demos and chief adviser to Gordon Brown MP. He is a visiting professor at LSE, UCL and Melbourne University; on the boards of the Work Foundation and the Design Council; and is Chair of Involve and of the Carnegie Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society. His most recent book is *Good and Bad Power: the Ideals and Betrayals of Government* (Allen Lane, 2006).

Vicki Savage is an Associate at the Young Foundation. She undertook action research projects with 10 of the 15 local authority partners of the Transforming Neighbourhoods consortium. She now manages work with the local authorities who are part of the successor consortium – the Neighbourhood Action Network – and is working with Communities and Local Government on guidance on charters and the Duty to Involve. Before joining the Young Foundation, Vicki was an officer at Sheffield City Council where she worked in community and economic regeneration.

Dean Stokes is Head of Strategy and Projects at the London Borough of Camden and has been with the local authority since 2005. Prior to that he was in central government, mainly at HM Treasury where he has worked as a senior policy analyst on public service delivery. He is also Deputy Chair of the pan-London homelessness and housing charity Broadway and a school governor.

Tricia Zipfel is an Associate at the Young Foundation. From 2001-2006 she was Senior Community Advisor to the Department for Communities and Local Government. Before that she ran the Priority Estates Project, a national housing and regeneration organisation, undertaking research and training, and developing community empowerment and neighbourhood management programmes in some of the most deprived areas of the country.