



NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL

Case examples in getting communities involved

Foreword

The National Audit Office's Value for Money work looks in detail at Government programmes and activities to assess performance, identify good practice and suggest ways in which public services can be improved. As part of our programme of work we recently examined the single Community Programme of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and issued a report to Parliament: "Getting Citizens Involved: Community Participation in Neighbourhood Renewal" (HC 1070 www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/index.htm). That report makes 10 recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the single Community Programme and of Community Empowerment Networks. A summary of the report findings and our recommendations are contained at the end of this pamphlet.

During the course of our work on the single Community Programme we identified many examples of innovative work by Community Empowerment Networks and their support teams. But we also found considerable scope for Networks to learn more from each other. We are therefore publishing this pamphlet alongside our report. The case studies in this pamphlet have been chosen to illustrate the key themes in our report. The pamphlet is based on cases of innovative work we came across during the course of our examination together with examples provided to us by Regional Government Offices. We recognise that the cases only partially reflect the many initiatives being undertaken by forward looking Community Empowerment Networks up and down the country.

We hope that bringing these examples to the attention of a wider audience will help to stimulate ideas and encourage the spread of knowledge and experience between Community Empowerment Networks. Each example includes contact details so you can obtain further information directly to explore its relevance to your neighbourhood.

The examples are grouped under seven themes that we have identified as being the key to successful delivery of community participation in neighbourhood renewal:

Research	Knowing and understanding communities
Communication	Promoting the benefits of getting involved
Capacity	Nurturing the skills and talents of communities
Transparency	Being clear about roles and responsibilities
Focus	Being clear about objectives
Partnership	Working effectively with others
Influence	Strengthening local decision making

Research: Knowing and understanding communities

Knowing and understanding the needs and preferences of local communities is a necessary precursor to shaping local services to meet those needs and preferences.

Finding out what the needs are of particular communities and how best to involve them will strengthen the influence that communities can have over how services are delivered where they live.

Research can be costly and time consuming. Community Empowerment Networks have limited resources to devote to research. And some communities can be hard to reach, especially where there are language barriers, poor race relations or widespread social exclusion.

Before embarking on any research it is always worth checking what information is already available and what research is currently being undertaken in your area. Community Empowerment Networks are exploring ways to influence the research being undertaken by public service providers and the voluntary sector. Some Local Strategic Partnerships have recognised that Community Empowerment Networks are well placed to conduct research on their behalf.



USE RESEARCH TO ENSURE ALL FUNDS BENEFIT THE RIGHT PROJECTS IN THE RIGHT AREAS



The Community Empowerment Network in Rotherham purchased software to map the distribution of neighbourhood renewal grants against neighbourhood levels of deprivation. Statistics used included number of citizens on benefits, number of children receiving free meals, mortality and low birth weight rates, GCSE attainment and incidence of burglary.

The ability to highlight the nature of deprivation by each ward has enabled grant distribution to be more tightly focused on the areas of greatest need and linked more closely to addressing neighbourhood renewal priorities.

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USE RESEARCH TO DEMONSTRATE THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR



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The Brighton and Hove Community and Voluntary Sector Forum commissioned consultants to conduct an independent audit of the economic and social activities of the voluntary and community sector. The consultants asked voluntary and community sector organisations in the city to complete a questionnaire with information about the local services they provided, their volunteers and employees, their income, funding streams and Information Technology support.

The audit raised the profile of the economic and social contribution of the voluntary and community sector. In particular it led to:

- A Local Area Investment Framework being developed
- Statutory sector agencies using the research
- The Forum outreach work being targeted on new priorities, for example sports and health

TAILOR CONSULTATION METHODS TO SUIT TARGET GROUPS



Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network and Wandsworth Borough Council organised a one day conference for youth groups and organisations such as Connexions. The event followed the Network team's presentation to the Council of research it had commissioned from Young@Now, an organisation specialising in young people's issues. The conference sessions provided an opportunity to explore in more detail the issues raised by the research.

Consultation with the under 16 age group involved 10 representatives from 12 schools together with young people nominated by the Probation Services. For the over 16 age group, there was an evening event. Activities included workshops, focus groups, quizzes and interactive voting sessions that allowed representatives to indicate their preferences anonymously.

At the request of the Chairman of Wandsworth Local Strategic Partnership, views expressed at the workshops were presented to key partners including the police and the Primary Care Trust to supplement and complement their own work. A conference report "Box 2004" summarised the findings of the day together with the responses of Council directors.



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CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR YOUR LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Lincoln's Local Strategic Partnership funded Lincoln Community Network to conduct research to update ward profiles of the city. The purpose of the work was to determine priorities for local neighbourhood renewal plans. Lincoln Community Network consulted a range of community sector and statutory sector stakeholders in the design of the research and used the resulting information to produce an analysis of the capacity for community action in each ward.

The updated research produced detailed profiles showing information for each ward on:

- The physical environment, facilities, population and deprivation
- The make up of different ethnic communities
- The regeneration initiatives and resources in place

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Communication: Promoting the benefits of getting involved

Community Empowerment Networks need to reach out as widely as possible to all the communities in their area. Some groups may be more difficult to reach than others.

Relying on existing channels of communication can restrict the reach of Community Empowerment Networks. Most community groups are finding out about the single Community Programme through word of mouth rather than through the media, from leaflets or from mainstream service providers. Many small community groups who are ideal candidates for community participation grants do not know about the grants or the single Community Programme.

Many Community Empowerment Networks are meeting the challenge of widening their reach by using innovative methods to communicate with their neighbourhoods. Placing posters and leaflets in public spaces such as health centres and schools that people use regularly as part of their daily lives can raise the profile of the single Community Programme. Using speciality food shops and faith centres as publicity channels can help to communicate with ethnic minority communities. When planning an event or running a particular programme, it is always worth informing your local newspaper and radio station. Public service providers that are in contact with the public every day, such as the police and health services, are also well positioned to pass on information about Community Empowerment Networks.



EXPLAIN NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL IN PLAIN ENGLISH



Neighbourhood Renewal - What is it all about?

**Lincoln
Community Network**

Lincoln Community Network produced a "Plain English Guide" for its members, using funding from the Local Strategic Partnership. Entitled "Neighbourhood Renewal - what is it all about?", the 24 page booklet provides definitions of key concepts and terms and explains the Local Strategic Partnership, its policy forums and Lincoln Community Network.

The booklet was given to Local Strategic Partnership members, distributed to public, community and voluntary sector organisations and made available at promotional events.

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GET OUT AMONG COMMUNITIES



Ashfield Community Empowerment Network organised a series of road-shows to tie in with a round of grants under the single Community Programme. There were four road-shows, one in each area covered by a single Community Programme Grants Panel, held at a rural community centre, a local shopping centre, a lunch club on market day and a shop on the main high street. The road-shows promoted and raised awareness of the grants and the Community Empowerment Network by means of one-day displays in prominent public areas.

Ashfield Community Empowerment Network also had its own marquee at the Ashfield Show (which attracts around 30, 000 people). In addition to displays about the Community Empowerment Network and the single Community Programme grants, 17 Community Empowerment Network member groups had stands within the marquee. Around 600 people visited the marquee during the day and new Community Empowerment Network members signed up, with many others taking away information to consider.

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USE EVENTS TO FIND OUT WHAT LOCAL NEEDS ARE



Barnsley Community and Voluntary Network used its participation in a community festival to help local people in Cudworth identify the main issues facing their village and to help promote the work of Cudworth and West Green Community Partnership (a village based network supported by Barnsley Community and Voluntary Network). The purpose of "Tea in the Park" was to raise the profile of the voluntary and community work in the village of Cudworth. Representatives from around 40-50 different organisations, including service providers and local businesses, participated. Between 3,000 and 4,000 people attended.

Barnsley Community and Voluntary Network obtained valuable feedback from the local community as a result of the festival. A "youth ideas wall" generated suggestions on what people wanted to see in the area. Residents completed an "impact survey" on the work of the Cudworth and West Green Community Partnership to inform future plans. Single Community Programme small grants will be distributed in line with local priorities identified on the day.

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REACH OUT TO ETHNIC MINORITIES



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Community Network Ambassadors are local people from ethnic minority groups and other minority groups recruited to identify the needs and priorities of their communities in Bolton. The 8 ambassadors are employed part-time to promote the Bolton Community Network amongst their own communities and groups. They have attended a training course at Bolton Community College on "Participation and Involvement", which covered the benefits of participation, the Bolton Community Network, local authority forums and barriers to participation.

The Community Network Ambassadors consulted 68 small and hard to reach ethnic minority groups about how Bolton Community Network could help them. The ambassadors devised their own innovative and accessible means of communication, using a visual tool called the "fruit tree". The consultation focused on the kind of support that groups need to develop their capacity to participate effectively in the future of Bolton. The ambassadors are helping to set up a training programme in response to an analysis of the training needs of Bolton's ethnic minority communities.



WORK WITH MEMBERS OF YOUR LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TO RAISE YOUR PROFILE



West Cornwall Community Network works with the West Cornwall Constabulary in tackling crime. One initiative has been the purchase of 5 "community access vehicles", each carrying the logo of the Local Strategic Partnership (West Cornwall Together). Community workers, environmental officers, neighbourhood watch groups and victim support volunteers use the vehicles. During their normal work they distribute leaflets and information packs about the West Cornwall Community Network as well as information on services provided by the voluntary and community sector.

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TAKE ADVICE FROM PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATORS



Furness Community Network established the Community Press to produce newspapers with local residents. The project was initiated following discussions between Furness Community Network and the North West Evening Mail. The first newspapers appeared in December 2003. There is a separate quarterly paper for each of five wards participating in the project. Each newspaper is distributed to every household in the ward.

Editorial teams of volunteers, identified with the help of community development workers, develop, write and design the newspapers. They receive training on word processing and digital photography from professional staff or through external training courses funded by a dedicated bursary. A journalist and a graphic designer, paid from single Community Programme funding, provide full-time professional support. Each newspaper focuses on events and issues specific to its ward, spreading news and information to create a greater sense of community. Community organisations can submit articles to promote their work. Each edition contains contact details for people who would like to know more about the work of Furness Community Network.

Funding for the project has been obtained through the single Community Programme and European Regional Development grants. Each edition costs around £1,300 to produce and £300 to distribute in addition to the salaries of the two Community Press professional staff.

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Capacity: Nurturing the talent and skills of your communities

Community groups and Community Empowerment Network members need the right skills to work effectively in partnership with colleagues from public sector bodies.

Community Empowerment Network members who have skills in committee work, policy analysis and Information Technology are better placed to be influential on Local Strategic Partnerships. Similarly, community groups are more likely to be successful in achieving their objectives if they have skills in supervising volunteers and in managing funds and projects.

The training needs of community groups will vary according to the different backgrounds and experiences of the people involved and the type of work they are undertaking. Some newer community groups will need help in getting the basics of running projects right while larger groups may require more sophisticated training. Identifying and meeting the training needs of those involved in community work can be challenging and resource-intensive.

Community Empowerment Networks are increasingly influencing the training programmes provided by voluntary and community organisations. Many organisations running capacity-building training programmes could benefit from the perspective the Community Empowerment Networks can provide.



PROVIDE SUPPORT AND TRAINING TO SUCCESSFUL GRANT APPLICANTS

Voluntary Action Stoke on Trent established a training package in performance monitoring and financial management for successful grant applicants. The training also provides a good opportunity for successful grant applicants to meet other community groups in the area.

Evening workshops are held 6 times a year to coincide with grant rounds. Two members from each successful group are invited. Groups introduce themselves, their work and forthcoming events. Presentations follow on basic finance, the requirements for receiving a grant and the work of the City Community Forum (the Community Empowerment Network for Stoke on Trent). At the end of the evening, groups receive their grant cheques along with information on where to find further support. Photographs are taken for local publicity.

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TAILOR TRAINING TO MEET LOCAL NEEDS



Like many grant panels, the b:cen panel (Birmingham's Community Empowerment Network) provides grants to community groups to attend training events and conferences. The panel decided it would be more efficient and effective if training could be provided locally rather than in London.

b:cen commissioned and organised training courses locally on the themes most regularly requested in grant applications. b:cen also negotiated a large purchase of materials from the Directory of Social Change so community groups could receive books and guides on issues such as managing volunteers, fundraising and quality assurance. The training courses and books were advertised in b:cen's magazine and through local community newsletters. b:cen agreed similar purchases of training and training materials with the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums and the Media Trust.

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PROMOTE THE SKILLS NEEDED FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY WORK

"Making a Difference" workshops are held monthly in community venues throughout Great Yarmouth. The sessions, facilitated by professional trainers and community workers, are open to residents or groups wanting to develop their community work skills, and groups who are accessing, or considering accessing single Community Programme grants. Community Development Workers are responsible for signposting people towards the training.

The model for the workshops was developed by the Community Empowerment Framework and in consultation and evaluation processes, involving community partnership representatives and community development workers. Each workshop is themed to address a particular issue that people may face when organising activities and groups. There is a two year curriculum with workshop themes which include 'Marketing and Publicity', 'Working for Equality', 'Confidence Building', 'Conflict and Cooperation' and 'Monitoring and Evaluation'.

In 2003 and 2004, over 200 individuals have attended the workshops representing more than 70 community groups or organisations.

Community Connections, the organisation which facilitates and organises the workshops, has also developed "Community Makers", an accredited programme in Community Work Skills. This is designed as a progression route for those workshop attendees who wish to further develop their skills and become community workers or community development and training officers.

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ORGANISE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT FOR GROUPS RECEIVING GRANTS



Through its small grants programme, b:cen (the Birmingham Community Empowerment Network) was providing funding for around 30 computers for community groups each year. Community groups often bought computers and other IT equipment from high street chains. The b:cen grants panel found that community groups were not getting the support needed to make best use of the equipment.

b:cen bulk-purchased PC packages from two suppliers. One of these suppliers was a local organisation specialising in recycling used IT equipment. Using its links with the Birmingham Voluntary Service Council, b:cen was able to secure cheap licensed software and to set up courses leading to the European Computer Driving Licence. This training was delivered in a dedicated computer suite developed jointly by b:cen and Birmingham Voluntary Service Council. The suite is well equipped and staffed and is open to community groups for training, desk top publishing and building websites.

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IDENTIFY LOCAL LEARNING NEEDS FOR THE WIDER VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

The Local Strategic Partnership in Lincoln subcontracted the production of Lincoln's Local Action Learning Plan to Lincoln Community Empowerment Network. The Learning Plan covers training for the community and voluntary sectors. Courses in book-keeping, project management, funding and managing volunteers are available. Each course includes references to further training from a range of providers and to resources in the Community Empowerment Network's library.

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Transparency: Being clear about roles and responsibilities

To sustain the confidence of communities and public sector partners in the single Community Programme, it is important that grant allocation procedures and election or nomination of community members to Local Strategic Partnerships are clear and well explained.

Community Empowerment Network members of Local Strategic Partnerships also need clarity about their roles and remits so that they can be effective.

There is limited awareness and understanding of Community Empowerment Network governance and procedures. Because of this, public sector partners and the wider community do not understand fully the role of Community Empowerment Networks. This compromises partnership working and the influence that communities can have over local plans and service delivery.



DEMONSTRATE THE PROPRIETY OF ELECTORAL PROCEDURES

Enfield Voluntary Action (the lead organisation for the Enfield Community Empowerment Network) invited Electoral Reform Services to manage the electoral arrangements for 70 community representatives. They included places on the Enfield Local Strategic Partnership Board, each of the six Thematic Partnership subgroups, the Health and Social Care Board and the Local Economic Partnership.

The involvement of Electoral Reform Services helped to ensure the elections were fair and were seen to be fair by members of the Community Empowerment Network and the wider community. It has strengthened the status and effectiveness of the elected representatives.

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'putting the voluntary and community sector at the heart of decision making in Enfield'

MONITOR THE EQUITY OF FUNDING DISTRIBUTION

A steering group made up of representatives of the Government Office for the South West, Bristol Community Network and the Local Strategic Partnership commissioned research on the patterns of distribution of single Community Programme funds in Bristol and the allocation process.

The research concluded that the panel's decision making process had been consistent but there was a need for community involvement in drawing up the eligibility and appraisal criteria. A summary paper of the research and outcomes in this case, together with a check list of good practice, is available on the web site www.renewal.net

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USE INNOVATIVE METHODS TO INVOLVE COMMUNITIES IN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REVIEWS

To achieve community input into the performance management review of Sunderland's Local Strategic Partnership VOICES (responsible body for Sunderland's Community Empowerment Network) used electronic keypad voting. Electronic keypads can allow quick and anonymous feedback in meetings. They are a useful way of gauging how different communities feel about particular issues facing an area and how public service providers are performing.

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INVOLVE COMMUNITIES IN DISTRIBUTING GRANTS



Ashfield Links Forum (the lead organisation for the single Community Programme) and the Local Strategic Partnership established a grants panel for each of the four main areas of Ashfield to ensure community involvement in grant allocation. Each panel has 6 voting members: two Community Empowerment Network representatives, one area group representative, one county councillor, one district councillor and one member with experience of working with community groups.

The panels held an induction event to elect chairs, agree ground rules and the scoring criteria for grant applications. Further training will address issues arising from the initial round of grant applications.

CONTACT: Steve Shaw,
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Focus: Being clear about objectives

Much of the work of community and voluntary groups falls within the five neighbourhood renewal themes of crime, worklessness, health, education and the physical environment.

Explicitly making the link between the work of community groups and neighbourhood renewal themes can foster effective partnership working across different sectors and increase the influence of community groups on public sector organisations.

Community Empowerment Networks are well placed to bring public service providers and community groups together, for example through organising public events to explain neighbourhood renewal priorities to community groups. Community Empowerment Network members of Local Strategic Partnerships can also raise the profile of the contribution the voluntary and community sector makes to meeting targets set within neighbourhood renewal themes.

PROVIDE THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP TO HELP PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATIONS TACKLE NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL



A member of St Helens Community Empowerment Network chairs the Community Safety Forum, which focuses on the neighbourhood renewal priority of reducing crime. The Forum has held discussions with St Helens Drug Action Team, a Commander from St Helens Police and local Community Safety Officers from St Helens Council. It has played a key role in the development of a Home Office pilot called the Reassurance Project, which tackles the fear of crime by identifying issues at a local level and solving them through a joint agency approach focused on two wards. As a result, the Drug Action Team is now working with Community Empowerment Network staff in developing a training course in drug awareness.

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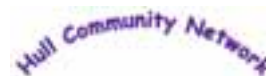
EXPLAIN HOW COMMUNITY GROUPS CONTRIBUTE TO NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL



Hull Community Network, in partnership with the Quest Trust (a community development charity), and Hull DOC (a community development agency) organised an event to explore neighbourhood renewal with community groups. "It's All About You" provided an opportunity for local people to get together and share information, contacts and skills. Throughout the day there was an emphasis on recognising the contribution of the work that community organisations make to neighbourhood renewal themes and targets.

Short presentations and workshops explored how community members could develop neighbourhood renewal and measure progress on neighbourhood renewal in their area. There was a 'marketplace' of displays publicising local activities and a 'speakers' corner' for people to talk about their group's work. The marketplace and speakers' corner gave attendees the chance to see the outcomes that other groups have achieved and to make new contacts. New partnerships and initiatives are being developed as a result of the event.

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Rotherham Community Network held a similar event, "Renewing our neighbourhoods", with Quest to help groups recognise their contributions to neighbourhood renewal and to increase knowledge and understanding about the Community Empowerment Network. The Regional Government Office and the Director of the Rotherham Partnership delivered presentations. Workers from two local projects spoke about the contributions their projects had made towards achieving neighbourhood renewal targets. Delegates discussed their achievements in workshops based around the five neighbourhood renewal themes. The workshops were also used to help groups identify their future support needs in order to continue being service providers.

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WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS ON NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL PRIORITIES

Hartlepool Community Empowerment Network and Hartlepool Primary Care Trust jointly commissioned and funded research that mapped voluntary sector provision in health, which is a neighbourhood renewal priority. The mapping highlighted the significant contribution of the voluntary sector to the health and care needs of Hartlepool. The Community Empowerment Network published the results of the mapping exercise and presented them to the Health and Care Strategy Subgroup of the Local Strategic Partnership.

The Primary Care Trust Board agreed to allocate £320,000 for the 18 months towards the core funding costs of the voluntary sector organisations providing health related services. The LSP also allocated a further £40,000 annually to the "health inequalities community chest fund", to be administered by the Community Empowerment Network.

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FOCUS ON NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL THEMES TO GAIN MORE INFLUENCE

St Helens Community Empowerment Network raised the issue of sustained neglect to the physical environment, a neighbourhood renewal priority, at the Local Strategic Partnership. To obtain evidence, the Community Empowerment Network ran the "Grot Spot Challenge" campaign in local papers. There were over 100 responses. Working with St Helens Groundwork Trust, the Community Empowerment Network set up a database and mapped areas of neglect. This information was passed to the relevant agencies including the Police, Registered Social Landlords, Environmental Wardens and the Local Authority Civic Pride and Community Spaces Manager.

The relevant agencies acted quickly to overcome some of the problems. This has included simple but effective measures such as better provision of litter bins. In the longer term, St Helens Council has allocated £500,000 to improve the environment since the campaign.

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LINK SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES TO NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL PRIORITIES



The Shadow Environment and Transport theme group of the Brent Community Network worked with Brent Community Transport, Brent Council and other partners to develop improved public transport links that help in tackling the neighbourhood renewal priorities of worklessness, health and education. Minibus routes link deprived residential estates with public transport hubs, two major retail areas, primary healthcare facilities, key employment centres and resource centres providing adult education and care for people with physical and sensory difficulties.

The times and routes of operation for the service were identified through consultation with the local community conducted by the Community Empowerment Network. The service will go some way to addressing the key issues raised by Brent Community Network members at the Shadow Environment and Transport theme group, particularly access for people with disabilities. The project is intended to operate for an initial period of two years. Consultation between the project operators and the local community, including representatives from the Brent Community Network, will continue while the service is in operation. Funding for the project has been secured from the Department for Transport and other partners and agencies in the Borough.

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HELP PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS TO CONSULT COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST ON NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL PRIORITIES

The Middlesbrough Community Empowerment Network identified the need to improve the integration of people with disabilities into their community and to strengthen their voice in discussions with local service providers. They are developing a comprehensive disability forum, working with an existing voluntary sector member of the network, the Cleveland Disability Forum. The network currently has a definition of disability that includes physical and sensory loss but they hope to widen their work to include mental health and learning disability groups within the expanded forum. The details of other voluntary groups working with people with disabilities are being collated to form a database.

The forum will serve as a point of consultation for local service providers. It is helping to ensure the local Primary Care Trust's Strategy for Disability properly addresses the needs of its target community.

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Partnership: working effectively with others

People are more willing to get involved in neighbourhood renewal when the benefits are tangible.

Community Empowerment Networks that have already focused work at the neighbourhood level have found that it helps to raise interest and participation amongst communities.

Community Empowerment Networks are in a good position to pull existing networks, partnerships and programmes together to create more focused and joined up approaches to neighbourhood level work and make better use of scarce resources. This can make neighbourhood level initiatives more coherent and easier for community groups to join.

WORK AT THE NEIGHBOURHOOD LEVEL TO BRING TANGIBLE RESULTS



Barnsley Community Empowerment Network is supporting and promoting community involvement by developing "Local Area Networks" that build on work already being undertaken by community partnerships. This approach recognises that local needs vary from area to area. Barnsley's Community Empowerment Team provides staff support and funding to facilitate the Local Area Networks which are run by local residents. The Local Strategic Partnership is supporting the approach, with local authority officers attending the Local Area Network events.

Public events launched the Local Area Networks, based around key themes identified as priorities for each area. At "Let's Get Together", the launch event for the Cudworth and West Green Partnership, people took part in workshops based around young people, community safety and health. They discussed the problems of the area, as well as proposals to address them. Projects, developed with various partners following the workshops, included a women's health day, a walking group and a one year pilot befriending scheme.

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BUILD ON EXISTING STRUCTURES WHEN WORKING AT THE NEIGHBOURHOOD LEVEL

Hartlepool Community Empowerment Network built successfully on structures that existed at neighbourhood level prior to the development of the Community Empowerment Network and Local Strategic Partnership. There are now three Neighbourhood Consultative Forums in Hartlepool, which receive input from residents' groups and to which volunteer resident representatives are elected. All of the 25 resident representatives are given the opportunity to meet to discuss issues prior to forum meetings. These sessions are facilitated by the Community Empowerment Network.

The forums provide an opportunity for residents to talk with the council and service providers and to have a say in the decision-making process at a local level. Resident representatives have gone on to become involved in sub-groups of the Local Strategic Partnership. In the future, resident representatives will also be involved in the council scrutiny process.

Hartlepool Community Empowerment Network staff have also established residents' associations throughout Hartlepool that hold regular consultation and capacity building sessions.

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DESIGN NETWORKS TO FIT THE LOCAL GEOGRAPHY

Inter-Link is an information network that covers the towns and villages of West Penwith and Kerrier Council districts - the West Cornwall Community Network area. Inter-Link evolved from the need for an information exchange to enable community and voluntary groups to network across this rural area. About 1000 community and voluntary groups, statutory agencies and individuals are registered on the Inter-Link service. Inter-Link supports local (usually village based) meetings, bi-monthly newsletters, free training for community members, funding advice and access to a laptop library that enables members to borrow computers (with software) for up to a week at a time. Inter-Link runs a website for the community and voluntary sector in West Cornwall, which provides: information on West Cornwall Community Network and the Local Strategic Partnership (West Cornwall Together); a forum where members can air their views; a membership database of community and voluntary groups; and information and advice on grant application forms. Two workers, funded through the single Community Programme, are employed to support the Inter-Link membership.

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ESTABLISH VISIBLE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN DEPRIVED AREAS

Each of the 6 deprived wards within the Greater Yarmouth area has developed a local Community Partnership that brings together all the stakeholders of the area to work alongside local community, voluntary sector and faith groups. The Partnerships elect members who are representative of all the different sectors involved to make up a steering group to plan and prepare meetings and make sure the work of the Partnership moves forward and that information flows well. Each Community Partnership has terms of reference, a code of practice and is facilitated by a Community Development Worker and each steering group is chaired by a local representative.

Each Community Partnership decides on a venue where information on the partnership and on decisions is made available. This "Community Liaison and Information Point" (CLIP) is set up in a place already used by the community or close to where the community go. It may be in a community centre, a church hall, or a village shop front. CLIPs are maintained and supported by part-time CLIP workers. This approach ensures residents can find good quality information in an easily accessible place. The Community Partnerships have now begun to develop action plans that will be presented to the authority wide Local Strategic Partnership.

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WORK WITH LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS IN ESTABLISHING AREA FORUMS

The Hastings Community Empowerment Network, in partnership with the Local Strategic Partnership and Local Authority established Forums in neighbourhood renewal priority wards. The Forums were based on active resident groups where they existed or were established from scratch where necessary. The Forums are now independent bodies and are active members of the Community Empowerment Network. The Forums have developed special interest sub-groups that address neighbourhood renewal themes or other issues identified as priorities.

The Forums developed Community Local Action Plans, which have informed the delivery plans of local service providers. Each Forum received approximately £40,000 from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund for use in small projects such as better lighting and environmental work.

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Hastings Community Network
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Influence: Strengthening the role of the community in local decision making

An imbalance of power on Local Strategic Partnerships can inhibit the influence of community groups.

Community Empowerment Network members often serve in their own time and may lack the support that public sector members take for granted. Community representatives can be intimidated by structures and processes that are unfamiliar. Public sector partners are working with Community Empowerment Networks to develop imaginative ways of redressing such problems.



PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT REPRESENTATIVES



Rotherham Community Empowerment Network developed a support programme for its members serving on the Local Strategic Partnership. The programme had 3 key themes.

- 1 Resources - to ensure members had the equipment necessary to receive board papers and communicate effectively with the Local Strategic Partnership and the wider Community Empowerment Network membership. This included:
 - A computer
 - Home based technical support and insurance
 - Broadband internet access
- 2 Training - to bring new members up to speed with current issues and to help enable a common understanding of the role of the Local Strategic Partnership and its relationship with the Community Empowerment Network. The training included:
 - A 3 day residential induction programme
 - Individual training needs analysis, a member handbook written in plain English, and a training plan
 - Funding to pay for training and attendance at an annual conference
 - Mentoring support
- 3 Expenses to reimburse costs incurred in attending meetings of the Local Strategic Partnership

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MAKE PROCEDURES CLEAR TO ENCOURAGE THOSE NOT USED TO WORKING IN COMMITTEES

The Social Forum is the largest of five key Forums of the Great Yarmouth Local Strategic Partnership. It has a membership of 40 with one third being from the voluntary and community sector. Meetings are held quarterly in a neutral location with a buffet lunch provided an hour before the start of the meeting to encourage networking and put newcomers at ease.

A system of coloured cards is used during the formal part of the meeting. An orange card can be held up during the meeting to signal to the Chair that the person holding it is unable to follow proceedings, either because the speaker is talking too quietly or is using jargon. If decisions are put to a vote by the Forum, red and green cards are held up which allows a count to be made of all those members either in favour or against the proposal.

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USE MENTORS TO HELP NEW MEMBERS OF LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



When West Cornwall Together (the Local Strategic Partnership for West Cornwall) was established, many members, particularly those from the Community Empowerment Network, found the role of the Partnership and their contribution unclear. This caused delays and hampered work.

In July 2004 the Partnership introduced a mentoring programme and handbook to support its new members. Each new member is assigned a mentor who monitors their progress and development and helps them on such matters as:

- The practicalities of being a member of the Local Strategic Partnership
- Things to know about the Local Strategic Partnership
- Roles in groups and sub-groups

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CONSULT THE WIDER MEMBERSHIP BEFORE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD MEETINGS

Hastings Community Empowerment Network holds meetings before Local Strategic Partnership board meetings to discuss the forthcoming agenda. These meetings are designed to make sure the opinions of all members are taken into consideration by Community Empowerment Network representatives at the Local Strategic Partnership. The meetings are attended by all twenty networks that make up the Hastings Community Empowerment Network. A networks digest is also published at this time to summarise current issues and progress.

Hastings Community Network currently chairs the Local Strategic Partnership for a year long tenure. The chairmanship provides the Community Empowerment Network with an unprecedented opportunity to influence the strategic direction of Hastings. Hastings Community Network hopes to measure achievement on priority themes over the course of the year.

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USE IMAGINATIVE COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES TO INFLUENCE SERVICE PROVIDERS

Empower Gateshead (the Community Empowerment Network for Gateshead) provided 5 community groups with £2,000 each to produce information films and multimedia presentations explaining the priorities and needs of each group. A support worker gave multimedia training and arranged access to equipment. The Gateshead Visually Impaired User Forum produced a short film "Pathway Hazards" that demonstrated some of the difficulties their members face.

The multimedia presentations were given at various events and meetings in the city, including a community event held at the Baltic Art Gallery. The presentations and videos have provided a powerful and effective way of communicating directly with service providers. The groups that took part in the pilot project have also benefited, working more closely as groups and developing new multimedia skills.

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WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES



b:cen, Birmingham's Community Empowerment Network, ran adverts in community newsletters offering £250 to community groups to hold hustings events in the run up to the June 2004 local authority elections. 9 groups took up the offer ranging from existing neighbourhood forums to women's groups. Between 30 to 200 people attended each event. In addition to the grant, b:cen provided support and training that included a workshop with groups who had organised hustings in previous years. The hustings heightened interest in local elections.

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Getting citizens involved: Community Participation in Neighbourhood Renewal

Our report can be downloaded from the National Audit Office website at www.nao.org.uk

Our report concluded that:

- Thanks to simple and straight forward grant application procedures, the single Community Programme has been successful in providing funds to support some 25,000 self-help and community group projects in England's most deprived neighbourhoods. This funding has helped to build confidence locally. More needs to be done to ensure the programme reaches out to all sectors and groups within local communities.
- After a slow start Community Empowerment Networks have begun to establish themselves. The extent of their representation on Local Strategic Partnerships and their consequent ability to influence the decisions of local service providers varies considerably. Tensions between the role of elected councillors and community members of Local Strategic Partnerships need to be managed.
- Community members of Local Strategic Partnerships are exerting influence by establishing links with service providers at a neighbourhood level, complementing their wider work with Local Strategic Partnerships.

Our report made 10 recommendations:

- 1 **Community Empowerment Networks should try new and innovative methods of communication to get more smaller and less established community groups involved in neighbourhood renewal.** This means explaining the benefits of the Community Empowerment Network to groups that are not currently attracted. It means listening to such groups, particularly those that have received grants but not taken their involvement any further, to understand why they do not join. Community Empowerment Networks need to act on the lessons learnt from such listening to change how they work.
- 2 **Community Empowerment Networks should further encourage community groups applying for grants to demonstrate how their projects contribute to wider neighbourhood renewal priorities of Local Strategic Partnerships.** The different elements of the single Community Programme work together best where Community Empowerment Networks use public events to develop neighbourhood priorities and to encourage grant applications linked to them. Such linkages draw groups into greater involvement in neighbourhood renewal, including active membership of Community Empowerment Networks.
- 3 **Community Empowerment Networks and Local Strategic Partnerships should together use neighbourhood-based groups to bring their work closer to communities.** Smaller community groups commonly find such approaches more relevant and less intimidating. Community Empowerment Networks should use sub-groups to promote understanding of how different neighbourhoods face similar issues and can gain strength by working together. Community Empowerment Networks should encourage public service providers to meet their sub-groups, including through sub-groups of Local Strategic Partnerships. This approach might involve working with existing groups or setting up new arrangements, depending on what is in place already.
- 4 **Community Empowerment Networks should promote their role more clearly to local partners and communities.** Decisions on promotion will be taken locally and do not imply spending large sums of money but they must result in each Community Empowerment Network having a clear identity. It requires a clear and succinct message about the purpose of the Community Empowerment Network and its relationship with other voluntary and community sector organisations. Community Empowerment Networks suffer from serious weaknesses in these areas, with the result that they have low profiles in communities and there is little understanding about their purpose.
- 5 **Community Empowerment Networks should make their processes more transparent.** Community groups feel poorly informed about decisions to reject grant applications and about how representatives are chosen to serve on Local Strategic Partnerships. Any lack of clear explanation of working procedures risks isolating Community Empowerment Networks from the communities they serve. Community Empowerment Networks should make information about their processes easily available to community groups by putting it in places such as libraries, schools and community centres.

- 6 **Local Strategic Partnerships should give practical support to Community Empowerment Networks.** Community members of Local Strategic Partnerships often serve in their own time and lack the support that other members take for granted. The balance of power on Local Strategic Partnerships is tipped in favour of public sector members who often set the agenda and determine meeting times and places. Public sector members should help community members by sending meeting papers in good time, organising meetings at times and places that suit community members and avoiding late changes to arrangements. Public sector organisations involved in Local Strategic Partnerships can help community members to develop relevant skills and experience by offering induction training, work-shadowing and mentoring arrangements.
- 7 **Community Empowerment Teams should give practical help to community members of Local Strategic Partnerships, agreeing detailed arrangements locally.** Community members need briefings on meeting papers to operate effectively, particularly since public sector members usually receive equivalent support. Similarly, community members need reimbursement of costs such as travel and childcare.
- 8 **Community Empowerment Networks should maximise their influence by working alongside existing local democratic structures.** Public sector members, including elected councillors, express strong support of community involvement on Local Strategic Partnerships but some tensions remain. Community Empowerment Networks can reduce tensions by working with democratic initiatives and existing structures set up by public sector organisations to provide interfaces with communities.
- 9 **ODPM and Government Offices should set clear objectives to ensure Community Empowerment Networks and Local Strategic Partnerships act on the recommendations in our report.** Government Offices should use Local Area Agreements to ensure that Local Strategic Partnerships provide positive support for Community Empowerment Networks and that they reach local agreement on how to involve local communities in decision-making. The protocols and performance management framework introduced by ODPM provide mechanisms for building this approach into normal working practice. Government Offices should use their own networks and contacts to confirm that Community Empowerment Networks are reaching sufficiently deeply into communities for members. ODPM, through its work with local government, should make sure that the objectives of the programme are properly understood so that the community sector and local authorities can work together to strengthen local service delivery.
- 10 **ODPM and Government Offices should use Local Area Agreements to secure the funding of Community Empowerment Networks and their ability to express views robustly in Local Strategic Partnerships.** Partners will reach local agreements on the best way to achieve this.

Useful links

National Audit Office Website

Our report on community participation can be downloaded at
www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/index.htm

Useful sites for gathering data and information

Office of National Statistics
www.statistics.gov.uk

Audit Commission
www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Home Office statistics
www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds

Department of Health statistics
www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/fs/en

Centre for Neighbourhood Research
www.neighbourhoodcentre.org.uk

Government sites

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
www.odpm.gov.uk

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

Home Office
www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Local Government Association
www.lga.gov.uk

Voluntary and community sector

National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service
www.nacvs.org.uk

National Council for Voluntary Organisations
www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

Ethnic Minority Foundation
www.ethnicminorityfund.org.uk

Regeneration

Quest Trust

www.quest-net.org

Urban Forum

www.urbanforum.org.uk

Regen.net

www.renewal.net

Groundwork

www.groundwork.org.uk

IDeA

www.idea.gov.uk

Community Development Foundation

www.cdf.org.uk

Media

Community Media Association

www.commedia.org.uk