

English Regions

Getting Citizens Involved: Community Participation in Neighbourhood Renewal



REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL
HC 1070 Session 2003-2004: 25 October 2004

NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE

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TOGETHER**

ENGLISH REGIONS



Our work in the English regions

Government is changing. Decision-making is being decentralised to take account more effectively of the particular needs and opportunities in each English region. A range of regional institutions provides a framework for development.

- The role of the Government Offices in the regions has expanded so they now carry out functions on behalf of ten departments.
- Eight Regional Development Agencies and the London Development Agency provide strategic direction to economic development.
- Regional Chambers outside London scrutinise the work of the Regional Development Agencies and contribute to Regional Economic Strategies.
- The North East region will shortly hold a referendum to decide whether or not to have a directly elected Assembly.

The National Audit Office is well positioned to help government meet the challenges of this new regional focus. We have audited the eight Regional Development Agencies since their establishment, along with the Government Offices and all the departments represented in them. We have embarked on a regional work programme that is tailored specifically to developments in the regions. This report is part of that programme.



Success in the regions
HC 1268 2002-03



An early progress report on the New Deal for Communities programme
HC 309 2003-04

Preface

An increased focus is being placed on the involvement of community leaders, voluntary groups and neighbourhood residents in the policy decisions that affect their lives and in the design and implementation of services, especially at the local level. The "new localism", as it is often termed, is aimed at enhancing civic life, deepening democratic involvement and contributing to more effective neighbourhood renewal and sustainable communities. A move to greater community participation poses challenges to public sector organisations' existing work practices, often demanding institutional and behavioural change.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal places community involvement at the heart of the strategy and integral to the process of improving the most deprived neighbourhoods in 88 local authority areas. The single Community Programme provides central government resources to local community and voluntary sector organisations to support self-help activity and networks of community groups with representation on Local Strategic Partnerships, the bodies designed to link service providers, councillors and the community and voluntary sector.

We studied the single Community Programme because of its important role in supporting local people's influence over public sector expenditure and service delivery in deprived neighbourhoods. It is the third of a series of reports in which the NAO examines new approaches to regional and local regeneration and follows on from our recent report on *The New Deal for Communities*.

Our current examination focuses on the extent to which the single Community Programme is helping to get deprived communities involved in neighbourhood renewal, influencing local decisions and shaping local policy-making. As part of our work we have derived seven key principles which should underlie effective engagement of local communities (Annex 1 to the Executive Summary on page 16).

In summary our findings show that:

- Thanks to simple and straightforward grant application procedures, the 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 Empowerment Networks are exerting influence by establishing links with service providers at a neighbourhood level, complementing their wider work with Local Strategic Partnerships.

executive summary

- 1 Those most in need of support from public services can be alienated if they regard services as having been designed by remote officials with limited understanding or no direct experience of users' needs and circumstances. This can have serious consequences. Programmes intended to alleviate social deprivation or tackle long term unemployment can have reduced impact resulting in taxpayers' money being wasted. In recognition of this, the Government is giving priority to involving intended users in the design of public services. One such initiative is the single Community Programme, expected to cost £182 million between 2001 and 2006.
- 2 The single Community Programme is about providing the means for communities to participate in local policy-making, influencing changes to where they live and to the services they receive. This is done by providing grants to community groups so they can become more involved in improving their neighbourhoods and by supporting networks that influence local decision-making. The single Community Programme aims to represent diverse needs by taking account of communities characterised by particular identities and interests as well as those identified by geography.



- 3 This report draws lessons that have wide relevance for community participation initiatives across the whole of government. The Home Office aims to promote active citizenship so people can tackle themselves the underlying causes of the problems they face. Police reform is driven by a commitment to citizen-focused policing. The NHS Improvement Plan involves local communities taking greater control of budgets and services. The Department for Culture Media and Sport sees culture as having the potential to increase social cohesion provided projects are done with a community, not to a community. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister lists improving citizen engagement and participation as one of three key challenges facing local government. Other examples of community participation across government include initiatives in rural areas and in learning and skills.
- 4 The need for community engagement has been identified in successive National Audit Office reports (**Figure 1 overleaf**).

1 Users should be involved in developing public services

"Improving Service Delivery - how auditors can help"

National Audit Office and HM Treasury; *November 2003*
The National Audit Office and HM Treasury developed this guide to share lessons and highlight examples of good practice.

"Services are more likely to deliver intended outcomes if they are developed on a sound knowledge and understanding of what people want, believe or need. An important way of determining expectations and satisfaction with services being delivered is through consultation with key stakeholders".

"The Royal Parks - an executive agency"

HC 485 2003-2004
The report examines management of a backlog of works maintenance in 8 Royal Parks.

"The Agency should consult under-represented groups, using methods such as consultation groups, to identify the main obstacles to more frequent use of the Parks".

"Compensating Victims of Violent Crime"

HC 398 1999- 2000
The report examines the quality of service at the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

"The Authority should survey applicants on a regular basis, liaising with the Appeals Panel regarding its surveys, so that they are jointly aware of any concerns and take action to address them".

"Modern Policy Making - ensuring policies deliver value for money"

HC 289 2001-2002
The report draws lessons on policy-making based on past reports from the Committee of Public Accounts and National Audit Office.

"Consulting stakeholders is also important in testing whether a policy is likely to work in practice".

"Better public services through e-Government"

HC 704 2001-2002
The report examined how well departments were implementing e-services for the public.

"People have different needs. Departments, therefore, need to have a good understanding of the needs and preferences of the users of their services. There is, however, considerable variation in the quality of information which departments have on their key users".

"Improving Service Delivery: the Veterans' Agency"

HC 525 2002-2003
The report examined performance in meeting targets and improving service delivery.

"More developed approaches to quality assessment now ask customers about their expectation of what the service should provide and then how far this expectation is being met. This information provides a much better yardstick because the results ... can help target action on introducing improvements that are likely to be of most benefit to customers ... The Agency does not compile information on how claimants initially find out about the Veterans' Agency ... This information is useful because it would allow the Agency to target potential users of its services better ... would also help assess the cost effectiveness of campaigns run by the Agency".

"Making a Difference: Performance of Maintained Secondary Schools in England"

HC 1332 2002-2003
The report notes the need to take account of prior academic achievement and economic, social and cultural issues in measuring schools' performance.

"A range of information collected during the visits suggested that an effective school ethos is derived from a shared understanding between management, staff, pupils, parents and governors, and incorporates recognition of, and links with, the wider community".

"Inpatient and outpatient waiting in the NHS"

HC 221 2001-2002
The report identifies a number of areas where the Department of Health and NHS trusts have taken positive steps to reduce waiting lists and waiting times, but argues that further changes could be made.

"Initiatives to reduce waiting lists and times ... a revised Patients' Charter in December 1998 which recognised the importance of identifying and responding to patients' needs".

"The 2001 Outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease"

HC 939 2001-2002
The report examined contingency planning for foot and mouth disease, how quickly and effectively the disease was eradicated and the cost-effectiveness of the action taken.

"Any strategy for dealing with the disease and its wider impacts also depends for its success on the active co-operation of those closely affected. However, in preparing the national contingency plan and the veterinary instructions for foot and mouth disease, the Department had not formally consulted other key stakeholders, such as ... representatives of farmers and the veterinary profession".

"Access to the Victoria and Albert Museum"

HC 238 2000-2001
The report looks at work to increase access, understanding and knowledge in relation to collections and to share expertise.

"For the Victoria and Albert Museum to attract new visitors, it needs a clear appreciation of what potential visitors might want - it has yet to carry out research amongst non-visitors to find out why they do not visit the Museum".

Source: National Audit Office reports

- 5 This report assesses the impact that the single Community Programme has made in helping communities to get involved in improving where they live. It also draws out general principles of good practice relevant to community organisations and public sector bodies seeking to engage effectively with local communities (Annex 1 on page 16).

The single Community Programme

- 6 The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) is responsible for the single Community Programme across England. Government Offices oversee the single Community Programme in England's nine regions and voluntary sector organisations administer it locally (**Figure 2**).
- 7 The single Community Programme is part of ODPM's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, which targets the 88 most deprived local authority districts in England. Over 40 per cent of England's population, and around 70 per cent of the ethnic minority population, live in areas covered by the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the single Community Programme. These communities have unemployment levels more than three times the national average, twice as many people on means-tested benefits, three times as many children living in poverty, one million homes derelict or hard to fill and significantly higher crime rates. The problems are linked and can become entrenched, with great social and economic costs to the country.

2 Different organisations administer the single Community Programme nationally, regionally and locally

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (ODPM)

- Sets policy
- Secures programme funding
- Manages Public Service Agreement targets
- Conducts overall financial management

Government Office (in each region)

- Selects the Responsible Body from the voluntary sector
- Conducts quarterly monitoring
- Provides advice and support
- Releases finances

Responsible Body (in each local area)

- Employs the Community Empowerment Team
- Is responsible for financial management
- Comes from the voluntary sector - most often a Council for Voluntary Service

Community Empowerment Team (in each local area)

- Provides policy and secretariat support to the Community Empowerment Network
- Markets the programme
- Co-ordinates the panel for awarding grants
- Has on average 4 paid staff
- Brokers partnerships between communities and service providers

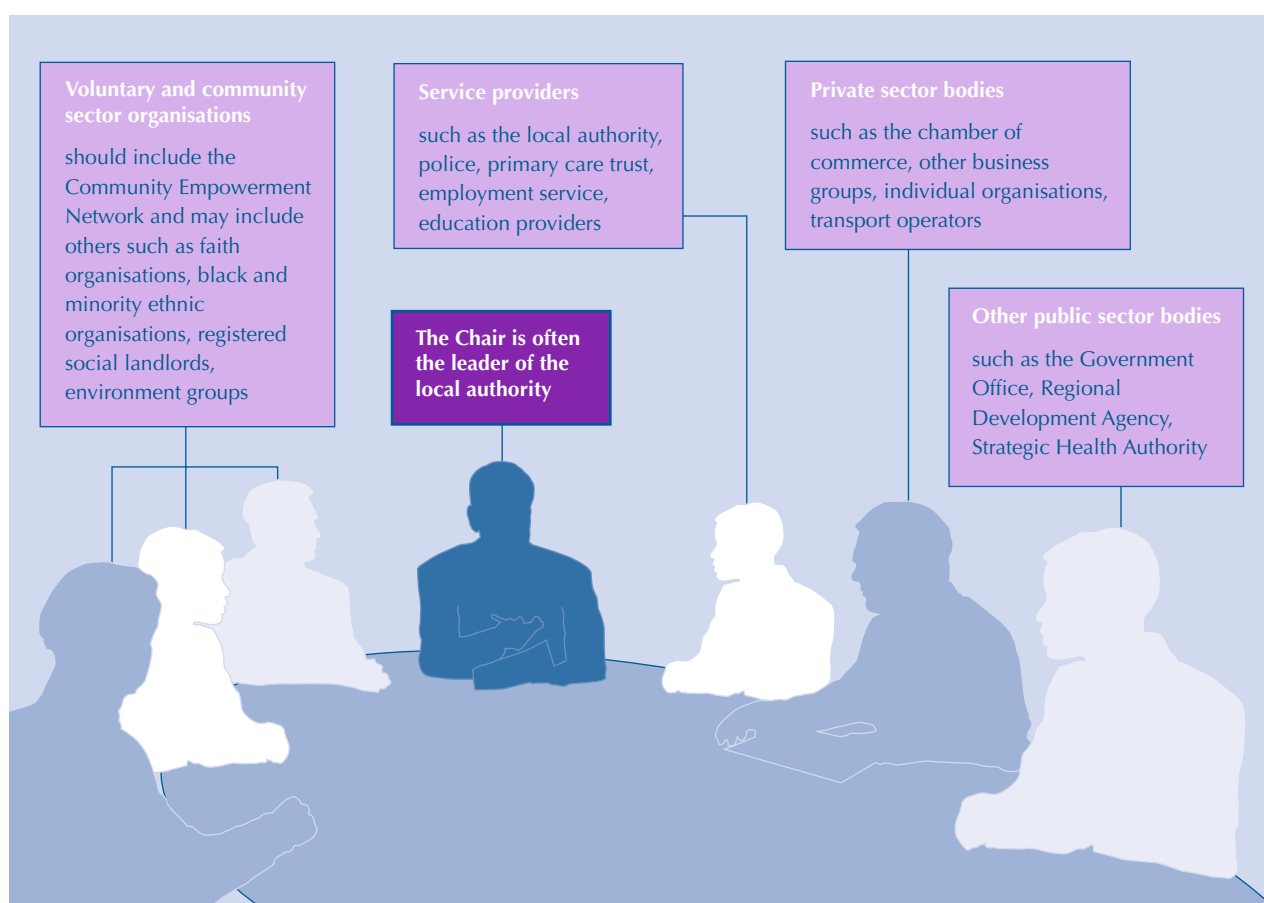
Community Empowerment Network (in each local area)

- A network of local community and voluntary groups
- Elects representatives to the Local Strategic Partnership
- Influences local decision-making
- Provides a context for shared learning
- Provides opportunities for capacity building
- Enables direct contact with local service providers
- Encourages more active communities

Source: National Audit Office analysis

- 8 Community participation is important in regeneration and neighbourhood renewal. Local people understand the problems of an area, can generate ideas about how to tackle them and help decide what is important to do. Community involvement can help to ensure the benefits of regeneration are sustained by ensuring communities have ownership of the improvements made.
- 9 The single Community Programme brings together streams of money previously labelled as the Community Chest, the Community Learning Chest and the Community Empowerment Fund. The single Community Programme is designed:
 - to fund and support community activity with grants of up to £5,000 so people may become more involved in the regeneration of their communities and neighbourhoods (for example, the Company Fierce dance group in Manchester received £5,000 to start "The Boyz Project" to give direction and confidence to young black men through positive role models); and
 - to establish and support Community Empowerment Networks to enable community and voluntary sector involvement as equal partners with public service providers in Local Strategic Partnerships (**Figure 3**) and more widely (for example, the Barnsley Community and Voluntary Network held a convention for community groups to influence the Barnsley Community Plan and to consider the implications of the government's citizenship agenda).

3 Local Strategic Partnerships bring local organisations together to co-ordinate public services



NOTE

A Local Strategic Partnership typically has between 21 and 30 core members

Source: National Audit Office analysis

- 10 ODPM is allocating £182 million to the single Community Programme between 2001 and 2006. This money aims to give communities influence over the spending decisions of public bodies such as local authorities, the police, primary care trusts and the Learning and Skills Council. These bodies and others represented on Local Strategic Partnerships control total public spending of over £60 billion¹ a year, including ODPM's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund of £3 billion between 2001 and 2008, which the single Community Programme potentially opens up to community influence.
- 11 ODPM has defined four strategic goals for its approach to community participation:
- **governance** - to develop a community voice that enables communities to participate in decision-making and increase the accountability of service providers;
 - **social capital** - to increase the confidence and capacity of individuals and small groups to get involved in activities and build mutually supportive networks that hold communities together;
 - **service delivery** - to ensure that local communities are in a position to influence service delivery and, where appropriate, participate in service delivery; and
 - **social inclusion and cohesion** - to develop empowered communities capable of building a common vision, a sense of belonging and a positive identity where diversity is valued.
- 12 The single Community Programme is one among several models used by ODPM to promote neighbourhood renewal (**Figure 4 overleaf**), with a particularly strong focus on community involvement. We examined another approach in our report on the New Deal for Communities.² ODPM has recognised the potential for confusion from multiple programmes addressing similar issues and plans to merge three neighbourhood renewal programmes (the single Community Programme, Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Wardens) with its Liveability Fund and the Home Office's Building Safer Communities funding stream.³ The new Safer and Stronger Communities Fund will be administered under Local Area Agreements between Government Offices and local partners. ODPM intends to use Local Area Agreements to safeguard the benefits of the single Community Programme. Annex 1 (page 16) sets out principles that will help with this aim.

How the programme aims to support the community to play a greater role in local decision-making

- 13 The single Community Programme is intended to support community self-help activity in deprived neighbourhoods and to draw community groups into wider decision-making about local public services. The following example illustrates how the single Community Programme is designed to work.
- A residents association may identify a lack of recreational facilities for young people as one of the factors behind local incidents of anti-social behaviour. Single Community Programme funds may be available to enable the association, with the support of a local faith group, to establish a youth club in the evening and provide facilities in a local hall.

¹ National Audit Office estimate based on spending across England by local authorities, primary care trusts and the Learning and Skills Council, on "Sure Start" and social exclusion by the Department for Education and Skills and on grants to bus operators by the Department for Transport, adjusted for the proportion of England's population in single Community Programme areas.

² An early progress report on the New Deal for Communities; National Audit Office; February 2004; HC 309 2003-2004.

³ 2004 Spending Review.

- Once established, the youth club may identify better facilities at a local school or sports centre that are not currently available in the evenings. Through the local Community Empowerment Network it may establish contact with other community youth groups with similar concerns. The Community Empowerment Network can raise this wider issue with the local authority and local education authority at the Local Strategic Partnership. The Community Empowerment Network can work with these organisations, and with other agencies such as the police and social services, to influence neighbourhood community plans to address needs identified by community groups who work with young people.

4 ODPM oversees a range of neighbourhood renewal programmes

National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal
Public Service Agreement target: Tackle social exclusion and deliver neighbourhood renewal, working with departments to help them meet their Public Service Agreement floor targets, in particular narrowing the gap in health, education, crime, worklessness, housing and liveability outcomes between the most deprived areas and the rest of England, with measurable improvement by 2010

	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund	Single Community Programme	Neighbourhood Management	Neighbourhood Wardens	New Deal for Communities
	To help local authorities in England's most deprived districts, in collaboration with Local Strategic Partnerships, to improve local services	To build social cohesion through community activity and to help the community and voluntary sector to participate in Local Strategic Partnership decision making	To join up service providers in deprived communities to respond to local needs	To tackle anti-social behaviour in small neighbourhoods, foster social inclusion and to reduce crime and the fear of crime	To tackle deprivation in small neighbourhoods through boards of local service providers and community representatives
Amount	£3 billion	£182 million	£120 million	£91 million	£2 billion
Period	2001-2008	2001-2006	2001-2011	2000-2006	1999-2009
Coverage	88 local authorities, average population 250,000	88 local authorities, average population 250,000	35 pathfinder schemes, average population 10,000	245 neighbourhoods initially, reducing by transfer to mainstream funding, average population 6,000	39 neighbourhoods, average population 10,000
Administration and staffing	Local authority advised by Local Strategic Partnership	Responsible Bodies appointed by Government Offices	Teams appointed by neighbourhood management pathfinder board	Local authority, registered social landlords or voluntary sector organisation	Executive staff appointed by NDC board
Body accountable for funds	Local authority	Responsible Body from the voluntary and community sector	Local authority, registered social landlords and development trusts	Local authority, registered social landlords or voluntary sector organisation	Local authority
Spend authorisation	Local authority	Responsible Body	Neighbourhood management pathfinder board	Local authority	NDC board

these programmes involve Local Strategic Partnerships

these programmes involve communities, local authorities and service delivery agencies

The potential benefits and risks of the single Community Programme

14 There are risks as well as potential benefits to the single Community Programme (**Figure 5**). The research for this report considered how ODPM has managed these risks. We focused much of our work on six case study areas (Annex 2 on page 17).

5 The single Community Programme brings risks as well as benefits

Benefits	Risks
Public sector organisations are more likely to give value for money because they design and deliver services that people want and use.	Unclear relationships between Community Empowerment Networks and local authorities may create tensions and difficult working conditions.
Communities contribute their energy, enthusiasm and knowledge to find solutions to problems, rather than feel powerless in the face of bureaucracy.	Community Empowerment Networks may struggle to bring all community and voluntary sector organisations together to be represented on Local Strategic Partnerships.
The benefits of neighbourhood renewal initiatives are sustained because communities own and are committed to the solutions developed.	Funding uncertainties may make it difficult to sustain community involvement.
	Professional voluntary sector organisations may dominate smaller groups, limiting the influence of the community sector.

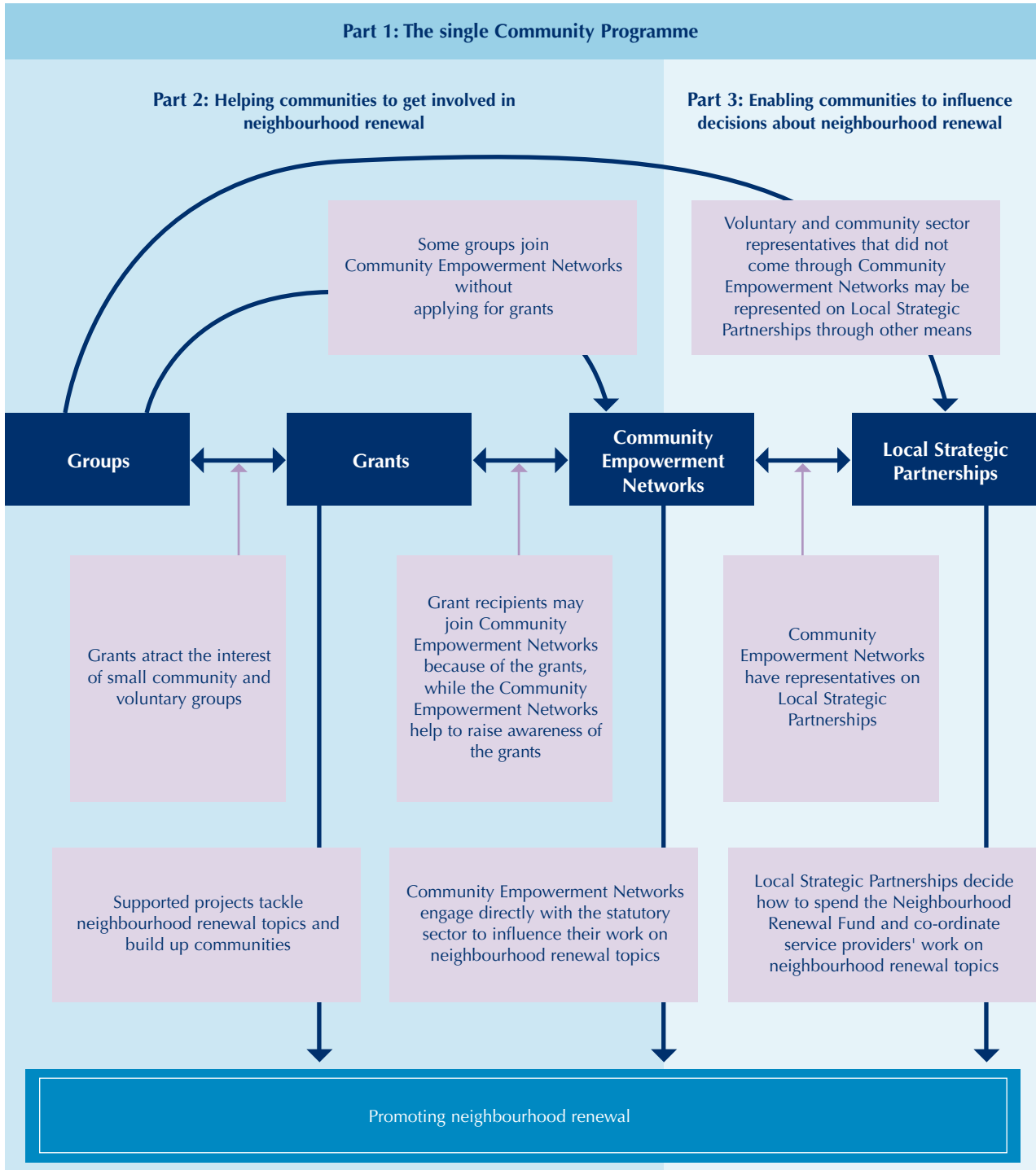
Source: National Audit Office analysis

15 This report assesses (**Figure 6 overleaf**):

- how the single Community Programme is helping to get communities involved in neighbourhood renewal (Part 2); and
- how the single Community Programme is helping communities to influence local decisions about neighbourhood renewal (Part 3).



6 Our report covers the different elements of the single Community Programme



Source: National Audit Office analysis

FINDINGS

Part 1 findings: Helping communities to get involved in neighbourhood renewal

What is working well

16 The single Community Programme has so far supported around 25,000 separate self-help and community projects in the country's most deprived neighbourhoods. Most of these projects (88%)⁴ contribute directly in some way to neighbourhood renewal targets (reducing worklessness and crime and improving local skills, health, housing and the physical environment) or to the broader neighbourhood renewal goal of promoting community involvement and social cohesion. The remainder contribute indirectly by funding activities such as transport and organisations' running costs. **Figure 7** provides some examples of the types of funded projects.

7 The single Community Programme funds projects that contribute to neighbourhood renewal

Employment	Sparkbrook Women's Group in Birmingham received £5,000 to contribute to an IT and business support centre. The centre runs courses for local women to help them return to work.
Crime	QDOS Dance Theatre in Barnsley received £5,000 towards a project called "Kick Off" - a touring production visiting local schools. The production used a workshop to explore the dynamics of gangs. It raised awareness of issues surrounding racism, homophobia and anti-social behaviour. QDOS worked in partnership with the police, victim support and the primary care trust.
Health	Seaham Stroke Club in East Durham received a grant to pay for audio equipment and a microwave. The club helps stroke victims to develop their speech and mobility in an informal setting.
Education and skills	Birmingham Somali Community Family Support received £5,000 to set up homework support sessions and language classes for Somali children.
Housing and physical environment	Hayle Allotment and Produce Association in West Cornwall received £2,000 to rebuild paths and improve access. The association worked with the primary care trust to arrange for people undergoing drug rehabilitation programmes to lay the new paths.
Social cohesion	The All Community Group received £1,500 for a community festival in Ardwick (Manchester). The festival, which was partly funded by the European Social Fund, brought together different communities who do not normally mix, promoting good race relations.

Source: National Audit Office survey conducted by MORI

17 Providing funds directly to the voluntary sector is building the confidence of community groups. Single Community Programme funds go to local voluntary sector organisations to administer for the benefit of the wider community. Community groups value the independence they gain by having access to money that does not come through local public sector organisations because they can express views robustly in the knowledge that doing so will not

⁴ National Audit Office survey.

FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

compromise their funding. ODPM intends to use Local Area Agreements to protect this independence when the single Community Programme joins other programmes in the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund.

- 18 Participants consider the application process to be straightforward and grants are helping small community groups that have not previously received public funding.** Most grant applicants (78%) find the application process very or fairly easy.⁵ The straightforward grant application process is a particular success of the single Community Programme and a direct consequence of ODPM's decision to reduce bureaucracy by delegating administration to the voluntary sector.
- 19 Holding public events in deprived neighbourhoods raises community involvement.** Linking the grants to Community Empowerment Networks has been successful where Community Empowerment Networks have used public events to develop neighbourhood priorities and encourage grants applications related to them. Doing so has meant that community groups are more aware of the contribution that their activities will make towards neighbourhood renewal.

What needs more development

- 20 Publicity about the grants could be better targeted.** Most groups (69%) hear about the grants through word of mouth and existing contacts, favouring groups that are already well connected. Many areas have made progress in supporting local groups that are hard to reach but further progress can be made by publicising grants more effectively at neighbourhood level.
- 21 The link between the grants and wider involvement in Community Empowerment Networks is weak.** Most groups (59%) do not go on to join Community Empowerment Networks after receiving grants. Newer and younger groups are even less inclined than others to join. ODPM has strengthened the link between grants and Community Empowerment Networks but further work is needed, including clearer promotion to distinguish single Community Programme grants from over 40 other area-based initiatives.
- 22 There is scope to improve advice to Responsible Bodies on monitoring.** ODPM has issued guidance but different local arrangements have led to information being collected inconsistently. Some Community Empowerment Networks need more support from Government Offices.
- 23 Some aspects of the single Community Programme are not transparent enough to sustain the confidence of communities.** In particular, there is limited understanding about how Community Empowerment Networks select members to sit on Local Strategic Partnerships. The details of how Community Empowerment Networks operate will be of little interest to some community groups, but Community Empowerment Networks could do more to make this information easily available to demonstrate openness and fairness. Community Empowerment Networks are likely to gain greater recognition and influence if they practice such good governance.

Part 2 findings: Enabling communities to influence decisions about neighbourhood renewal

What is working well

- 24 Communities and public sector service providers are increasingly working together outside Local Strategic Partnerships.** Community Empowerment Networks are having practical influence by working directly with individual public sector service providers outside the main boards of Local Strategic Partnerships. These interactions help community groups to gain confidence and to influence neighbourhood renewal.
- 25 The recent focus on developing neighbourhood-based sub-networks is proving successful in bringing communities and service providers together to develop local solutions to local problems.** Focusing on neighbourhoods helps to bridge the gap between debate in authority-wide Local Strategic Partnerships, which can seem remote, and the action that community groups want to see in return for their involvement. The commitment of public sector organisations is vital to the success of neighbourhood-based sub-networks. In some areas, public sector bodies send representatives to meet Community Empowerment Networks in their neighbourhood-based sub-networks. Community Empowerment Network members in smaller semi-rural areas are much more involved and more confident of their influence on Local Strategic Partnerships than those in major cities, confirming the benefits of an approach based on smaller areas.

What needs more development

- 26 Community Empowerment Networks have so far had a limited influence over local decision-making.** Despite examples of success, community participation will take time to become established because it "can pose challenges to existing and accepted work cultures and practices".⁶ Different members of Local Strategic Partnerships need to share responsibility for successful community participation, which "requires multiple strategies of institutional change, capacity building and behavioural change".⁷ Community members need adequate support to help them participate effectively in Local Strategic Partnerships.
- 27 Timing problems compromised Community Empowerment Networks' credibility and damaged their trust in Local Strategic Partnerships.** Many Community Empowerment Networks were not running by the time ODPM required the first local neighbourhood strategies to be designed and local decisions made about how to spend the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. ODPM found some public sector members of Local Strategic Partnerships felt similarly excluded from early decisions. These problems are beginning to be redressed in subsequent revisions of strategies and funding decisions. ODPM has recently required Local Strategic Partnerships to design protocols and to operate a performance management framework, which may further improve working relationships between different members.

⁶ *Neighbourhood renewal policy focus; Audit Commission; 2002.*

⁷ *Representation, Community Leadership and Participation: Citizen Involvement in Neighbourhood Renewal and Local Governance; J Gaventa; prepared for ODPM; 2004.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

We support the approach ODPM has taken to encourage local flexibility and decision-making. Clearer objectives and improved communication across the programme will strengthen this approach and help to increase the involvement and influence of communities. ODPM's definition of four strategic goals has given some further clarity but more remains to be done. ODPM, Government Offices, Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Empowerment Networks now need to work closely together to implement the following 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.

