

wecan!

People and government, working together

 HM Government

Autumn 2006



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- ***Reaching out into the community***
- ***Young people matter***
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- ***Guide neighbourhoods pass 3,000 mark***

togetherwecan



Putting more power in the hands of local people

Phil Woolas MP, Minister for Local Government and Community Cohesion sets the scene

'Welcome to the autumn edition of WeCan!

These are exciting times for community empowerment in government with the theme of devolving power and empowering communities being talked about by politicians from all parties.

The Local Government White Paper which is due to be published soon will make a dramatic contribution to this agenda. Through this we are bringing forward proposals which will put more power into the hands of local people than we have ever seen.

We are addressing through the Community Ownership and Management Review announced by the Secretary of State, the barriers that make it difficult for communities to take on the management or ownership of buildings in their community and so help people play a more active role in improving the quality of life in their neighbourhoods.

The Together We Can annual review which we launched in June shows the progress different government departments have

made this year to involve and enable more people to influence public decisions.

Together We Can is the best example I have seen of joined-up government in promoting policies to empower communities.

In this newsletter you can read about how this work is continuing with the success of the Children's and Youth Board; the guide neighbourhoods programme providing support to other communities trying to tackle problems; and Every Action Counts which is giving people the skills and knowledge to protect the environment.

Local government has been busy too. 24 authorities are now members of the Civic Pioneer network which demonstrates their commitment to involving local people in the decisions that affect them and in the delivery of services. And, through this network the local authorities share their learning and experiences in their approaches to this.

We have worked closely with these Civic Pioneer areas to demonstrate new ways of tackling local problems by empowering local people. In this edition we look at some of these projects. Whether you are delivering public services, or whether you are a citizen or a voluntary or community organisation trying to work with a public body to improve life in your area, or if it is your role to develop policies that influence service delivery, these stories are a great source of inspiration and knowledge for your everyday work.

Thank you for listening and watch this space - with these changes on the horizon, being listened to seriously, and government and people working together to solve problems, should become the normal way of life rather than the exception.'

Phil Woolas MP,
Minister for Local Government and Community Cohesion

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Learning from the pioneers

18 projects, 18 demonstrations of what can be achieved by community-led initiatives to tackle a diverse range of problems... given a relatively modest amount of support funding.

That has been the scope and scale of the Civic Pioneer problem solving projects over the last year, and this issue of WeCan! turns the spotlight on some of the most innovative and successful of them.

Irene Evison has just finished the complex task of examining each of the projects in depth and drawing out the lessons that can be applied.

'The projects really are pioneers, novel, imaginative, often bold initiatives that we hope can act as templates for others to follow.' says Irene

In her report, Irene also studies what - with hindsight - the organisers would have done differently, and this too will assist other projects to avoid mistakes.

So which worked best? 'It's impossible to pick out any project over another,' she says. 'But some really made a big difference in a very short space of time, bringing real, quantifiable change to people's lives.'

The fundamental requirements Irene identified for a successful project include:

- a high level of commitment from all participating organisations;
- maximising local contacts and knowledge;

- being responsive and flexible;
- offering a sustainable solution;
- breaking down barriers between different strands in the community; and
- bridging the gap with young people.

And was there, above all, one overarching lesson? 'The message which came across loud and clear from all the projects,' says Irene, 'is that mutual respect is essential. Civic Pioneers is based on partnership between the public, voluntary sector, and public sector agencies - each project has shown clearly how working collaboratively is the way forward.'

'This not only allies the expertise and experience that all parties can offer, but also it recognises that each party needs to get something out of the situation.'

All project leaders will also tell you that long term funding is also a prerequisite for a project to have a future. So what useful pointers did these projects produce on this?

'Anxieties about long term funding will always be an issue,' says Irene. 'But it was good to see so many projects working with organisations and structures already in place: that will enable the good work that was initiated to be continued after the fixed term financial support has ended.'



Reaching out into the community

Sparkbrook, Birmingham is typical of many inner city wards. It has poor housing, high levels of deprivation and the demographic includes a large BME community, with a large Pakistani community and many Somalis.

The Ashiana Community Project has played a vital role within this community for many years. But as Development Co-ordinator Meena Bharadwa readily concedes, it has proved difficult to reach some parts of the local community - specifically women who are often not engaged because they tend, for various reasons, to stay within their own homes.

So how do you reach those people, and let them know of the services and facilities available - and offer support and advice to them should they need it?

The solution has been a 'bridging' project which has provided training to 12 local women to become 'mentors' - who are then equipped to go out into the community and reach those isolated from the mainstream.

'The idea came from within a women's steering group,' says Meena. 'And it has worked so well because these "mentors" are seen as friends and neighbours who can go into local homes and engage informally with women there. The barriers are broken down and they are trusted.

these "mentors" are seen as friends and neighbours who can go into local homes and engage informally with women there.

'It's a positive way to make services and project activities something to gossip about.'

But the ramifications of the project haven't stopped with a higher take-up of services. It has built valuable capacity. 'We now have a group of people equipped to become involved in decision making locally,' says Meena. 'Women have - traditionally - not been engaged in the Ward Committee, for instance. But now they have the opportunity to act as a representative.' The experience of one member of the new team shows how self-esteem and confidence can be developed in this way. Before

she took part, Shakila, who works at the Ashiana Community Project, felt held back by her lack of English and rarely expressed her views. She now not only contributes more to meetings but has significantly developed her role at the Centre.

Because the project has embraced women from many of

the ethnic groups represented in Sparkbrook - Yemeni, Irish, white British, Indian, Pakistani, Somali, and Afro-Caribbean - these women too have formed bridges between themselves - recognising the common problems they all face.

'Women from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds have worked together, and supported each other,' says Meena. 'And together they have started a change process that will continue.'

Something in the air

Engaging young people from the BME community in local decision-making processes often poses challenges. An innovative approach has been taken in North Lincolnshire. And at the heart of it is a local radio station.

'It was plain that we weren't getting our message across,' says David Hey of Crosby Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder. 'Only one person aged under 24 applied to join the BME regional panel.'

'To engage young people you need to talk their language.'

So we asked Viking FM to come up with ideas on consulting and engaging with them. There were two aims: to find out what young people wanted and to create a bridge between them and the service providers.'

Viking came back with a menu of proposals and the project leaders chose the one best suited to their budget. 'Using commercial radio isn't a cheap option,' says David. 'But it proved highly cost effective to kick-start the process.'

Viking created a branded campaign, starting with a radio 'infomercial'. This directed listeners to a survey on Viking's website - as well as telling listeners about the opportunities to talk to the radio station's street team at local events and at



places where young people gather.

Prizes were on offer - in the form of iPods - to those taking part, and everyone who gave their views were texted back with the results. It concluded with a street event, hosted by Viking's breakfast presenter, using a 'Big Brother' style booth for people to give their views and hold group discussions.

The organisations behind the project, including the local Muslim youth group Madani, were not promoted to maintain an independent feel, and the language of the questionnaires was deliberately 'youth-orientated' - with no jargon. Critically, the project was not aimed specifically at the BME community, but to all young people.

Over 1,000 young people contributed their views - 38% of



them from the BME community. The Madani youth workers have found out about young people's needs - identifying particularly a call for more sports facilities - 12 young people have taken part in training programmes, and the Local Development Framework has been influenced by the survey input.

Neighbouring organisations are already taking a keen interest in the project and looking to replicate some elements.

'It has worked because it was professional, well branded and independent,'

concludes David Hey. 'The next stage is a community-based website where young people can share their ideas, news, views, music and videos.'

Clearing up misunderstandings

The way that a neighbourhood looks - how, clean, green and well managed it is - has many knock-on effects. The better its appearance, the more pride people take; it can also have a direct impact on crime, and just as critically, the perception of safety.

A project in Erdington, Birmingham has not only led directly to the area looking better and feeling safer. It has also stimulated active citizenship and broken down barriers between local people and their service providers.

The Witton Lodge Community Housing Association (WLCA) led the project, with a contracted consultant acting as their regeneration officer. WLCA, together with the Castle Vale Community Housing Association, had identified some key issues affecting local people.

The increasing mechanisation of local cleaning had separated local people from those doing the work: the Council were employing contractors brought in

from other areas. Residents didn't understand how the contractors worked, and felt the Council and contractors weren't receiving, or listening to their views.

To unite both together,

a series of workshops were held, bringing together local residents and council staff for the first time.

This allowed a better understanding to develop, and for ideas to be pooled which would lead to improvements being made - inside existing budgets.





Residents also visited locations around the country where similar problems were being addressed and saw, for instance, how wild flowers could replace mown grass in Liverpool; a visit to Southwark showed how local neighbourhood teams were taking responsibility for improvements by running small budgets from service providers.

The debates were constructive, quickly helping to break down the initial defensive attitudes of some Council staff to working with local residents. Just as importantly,

residents gained a greater appreciation of the constraints and pressures under which service providers work,

and this has led directly to some very positive outcomes. These include awarding individuals with certificates for their hard work, and hearing first hand how they went about their jobs.

Ideas have been generated which have made a real difference to the way the area looks, and already local people are taking more pride in its appearance and assuming greater responsibility for its upkeep.

Longer term, the development of mutual respect between local residents and officers has paved a way forward - and not just within cleaning services. The problem-solving approach, which has worked so well, is now being embedded into the District's Strategic Partnership and its lead officer is keen to replicate the model in other districts of the city.

Young people matter: 'We know a lot of stuff'

'People ask us what we want... well we just hope that this time you are going to do something about it'

By asking young people to get involved in their local community, the co-ordinators of the 'Young People Matter' project got exactly what they wanted: candid feedback baldly stating that - yes - they had something to say... and they didn't want their time wasted.

The project has covered two very deprived Newcastle neighbourhoods: North Benwell and Scotswood.

Where Scotswood is a large, mostly white post-war council estate undergoing a major demolition programme, North Benwell comprises 19th century terraced housing, with a very ethnically-mixed population and a high turnover.

Common to both neighbourhoods was a feeling amongst the young people that their views did not count. A conventional postal survey - even with a £50 incentive - drew a very poor response.

A series of away days were held with consultation in the morning and an activity chosen by the young people in the afternoon.

The workshops used stimulating ways to encourage debate and this then led on to local events at which 37 5-a-side teams competed for a 'World Cup' and the girls enjoyed pampering sessions. At each event the young people were videoed to capture their thoughts about the area.

But the long-term potential is now taking shape: training young people who have shown a willingness to take the project forward - developing their skills and equipping them to act as representatives.



The consultation highlighted two main issues: they wanted more places to go and things to do; and they wanted the place tidied up - as they pointed out, the fly-tipping and dogs mess that fouled the streets were the fault of adults.

'We think that we matter,' was one telling response. 'We live here, go to school

here, and play here. Our friends and family are here and our future is here. Who could have a greater stake in the future?'

But the process has not stopped yet. The next stage is the creation of a 'Constitution for Young People', in the form of a letter to the organisations who provide local services and facilities. A lottery bid is aimed at prolonging the project.

In their own words: 'We know a lot of stuff... we spend a lot of time around the area and we know what's going on and what it looks like. It may be that we know things that are important.'

The young people of Benwell and Scotswood have found their voice.

Turning a negative into a positive

When the Gleadless Valley area of Sheffield saw a rapid rise in racist incidents involving asylum seekers, the news came as a shock to the local community. It has long been a predominantly white working class area with very few 'visibly foreign' people living there.

The spark was a sudden influx of refugees - some 160, including many from Africa - into the area. Trudie Smallwood of the Gleadless Valley Community Forum says 'Because we never knew about their arrival, there was no way we could prepare for them - to make them feel welcome and ease their way into the local community.'

In response to this the 'Negative to Positive' project was born. Its aims were to raise awareness about the presence of asylum seekers and refugees; to provide better services for these people; and to promote integration with the local community.

The project, led by Gleadless Valley Community Forum was underpinned by the energy and guidance of the Refugee and Asylum Worker Group - which has 20 active organisations as members.

A conference was held for service providers and a 'myth-busting'



programme was launched to educate people in the area - particularly young people - about who the newcomers are, where they are from and why they have sought refuge in Britain.

'Lack of knowledge was behind a lot of the racist incidents,'

says Trudie, 'fuelling misunderstandings and resentment'

Another critical element was to reach out to the new arrivals, let them know of the services available and open the door to their integration. A development worker has been appointed, actively encouraging the asylum seekers to come into the centre, and a multi-cultural fun day brought all sides of the home community together with many of the new arrivals.

A summer school for the newcomers provided a double

benefit: it not only brought people from different backgrounds together but - being based on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes - encouraged those who took part to improve their English.

The positive outcomes already achieved include a significant drop in racist incidents, and a big rise in the number of asylum seekers accessing services. Longer term, it has flagged up the need for better communications when new arrivals are placed in a community.

But, critically,

it has demonstrated what can be achieved when there is true partnership working between community groups and service providers.



Drawing social problems

Comics are for kids - right? Wrong. In some cultures, notably India, picture books are often used to encourage people to discuss difficult and complex social issues. They don't demand a sophisticated command of language, but neither do they patronise

Community Pride in East Manchester is using comics to encourage local people - mostly but not exclusively women - to open up on major issues affecting their lives. The very act of a group of young women sitting together and creating a storyboard, which they then draw up themselves, is proving to be an immensely empowering experience. These are then used with service providers to help them better understand the problems faced by the community they serve.

'The comics concentrate on normal events, normal happenings,' says Kazia. 'But the words and the pictures are all the work of those taking part. It's not easy, sometimes, to persuade them that they have the necessary drawing skills - but they have.'

The project has established dialogue between a genuine mix of people in the area - across age groups, social groups and experience backgrounds. Costs have been relatively low, but other factors

have had to be considered - including childcare to release some people to take part.

'We've been using comics in community development work as an aid for expression and communication for a couple of years,' says Community Pride's Kazia Levan. 'Local people were keen to take the idea forward, making the timing of the Civic Pioneers funding absolutely perfect.'

'the comics are then used with service providers to help them better understand the problems faced by the community they serve.'

There is huge potential for the project to develop into an ongoing process of personal development, with fresh volunteers coming in at the 'bottom' of the project and emerging at the top - ready to move onto more demanding challenges such as further

education or professional training.

But the project doesn't start and end with the comics encouraging participants to discuss issues that might otherwise remain hidden.

Four young people in particular have used the experience as a springboard to develop training and communication skills and are now going out into the community and encouraging others to take part. The workshops have given them confidence and self-esteem.

That itself would bring further demands on the project as it would need more funding. But there is a big requirement for those involved to assist in neighbouring areas - and continue acting as a dynamic catalyst for self-expression and self-improvement.

Festival provides international food for thought

There are few more potent ways to bring cultures together and break down barriers than by sharing food.

Which goes a long way towards explaining why Langport's Cultural Festival, held in May, was so successful that one of the biggest problems identified was coping with events that were regularly oversubscribed.

Langport - in the heart of Somerset and with a population of just 800 - is the smallest town in the country. But in the past couple of years it has seen a - relatively - large influx of foreign workers, primarily from Eastern Europe. Some 80 have joined the local workforce although, as Rick Coldicott of the Langport Area Development Trust is keen to point out, 'There have been none of the problems of integration that many parts of the country have seen.'

'In fact there is a general recognition locally that important employers such as the local abattoir could not keep going without them.'

'But we know from neighbouring towns like Chard, where there have been problems involving Portuguese workers, that these situations can all too easily arise. Rather than waiting for something to happen,

we decided to be proactive and create an event which would develop good community relations.'

The local community, with the help of a Polish link worker, held a week-long cultural festival which brought together people not just from Langport,

but the 12 surrounding villages as well. A 'mini World Cup' was keenly contested between teams including Poland, England, Italy, the West Indies and Portugal as well as an 'All Asia' side. An interfaith evening saw Christians, Muslims and



Jews discussing key tenets of their religions. An illuminated boat procession and international food market attracted 3,000 people - from a catchment of just 13,000.

But the main theme of the week was sharing international cuisine - with Langport and the surrounding villages hosting a series of events drawing in large numbers to enjoy different national foods - French, Chinese, Italian, Polish and Indian - and meet the people creating it.

'We wanted to focus on the benefits that a multicultural society brings,' says Rick, 'And food is a guaranteed way to do just that.'

And we wanted to embrace all local groups and cultures - not just the East Europeans'

Anecdotal evidence suggests that perceptions were changed, while other positive outcomes included teaching local children about cooking, as well as other cultures and faiths. The enthusiasm of the local community was so great that organisers are now looking for funding to repeat the success next year.

Bringing people together



St Mary's, Howard Road and Lindisfarne are three Portsmouth housing estates that could easily be mistaken for dozens of others around the country.

There is a lot of petty crime (though no major drug problems), pockets of deprivation, a high turnover of residents and a general lack of community cohesion.

One root problem (again, very typical) is the lack of activities for young people, and disaffection has led to anti-social behaviour and some conflict with older residents.

The 'Bringing Us Together Project' was designed to create activities for local young people with support from local adults as a way of enhancing community cohesion and reducing bad behaviour. It was led by the Portsmouth Housing Association, which manages some 5,000 properties and has a community regeneration team with a brief to work across whole communities.

'The biggest problems are a lack of neighbourliness and community cohesion, and the first challenge was to get the young people to come forward and tell us what they needed,' says Geoff Philpotts, Community Regeneration Manager. 'Several of the estates have no central meeting point. That made it problematic.'

But views were garnered by the Association's Community Officers - from young people and the adults living locally. It was hoped that by bringing them together in a common cause, relationships between them would improve. After the consultation programme, activities were developed, including sports sessions, a drama production and fun-taster events such as circus skills and crafts.

'By listening to what was asked for, the sessions proved successful,' says Geoff. 'But we ran into the common problem of seeing some volunteers putting in a lot of hard work - and quickly getting burned out. One lesson we learned was that some

parents, given the chance, will gladly send their children to us and not feel any obligation to get involved.

'As we progress, we'll be putting into place "contracts" that make clear everyone's responsibilities.'

Despite that, the project is viewed as a success by everyone involved. 'Nine months is not long to see positive outcomes, but we've been pleased,' says Geoff Philpott.

'There has been a noticeable downturn in antisocial behaviour. A lot of local people have been enthused by the project and by the Council's willingness to make changes.'

The youth consultation body formed as a direct result of the work - 'The Estate Crew Forum' - has given young people a voice in the community and the scheme's success has been rewarded with a £140,000 lottery grant to keep it moving forwards.





Supporting neighbourhood policing

The future of policing lies in closer working with communities. That has been the message that has been spread across the country over the summer months as ministers from the Home Office have gone out on the road to see neighbourhood policing in action and provide their support.

Some 13 police forces have been visited and the visits have been very much a two-way process, with the Ministers listening and learning.

'Different police forces have adapted the broad principles of neighbourhood policing to best suit their own localities,' says Amie Shallcross, Neighbourhood Policing Policy Co-ordinator 'and that's exactly what we would hope for. And along the way we can see what lessons can be learned and what best practices can be adapted and adopted for use elsewhere.'

It hasn't just been whistle-stop tours to police headquarters. Ministers have taken the opportunity to walk around areas, see at first hand the challenges faced and talk to residents to get their take on what difference Neighbourhood Policing has made to them. Ministers have also met with the key partners

that local policing teams are working with to ensure that the issues of high importance to local communities are tackled together, thus creating communities that not only feel safe but are safe.

'Lasting solutions will only come from local people and agencies working with the police towards a common goal,'

says Amie Shallcross. 'Nothing less than full engagement with the community and partnership working will do. We have to listen to what volunteers, residents, neighbourhood wardens say - and take on board the experiences of our police officers, community support officers and special constables.'

'They're the people on the ground. They're the people that will make this happen.'

The view's improving in Devon and Cornwall

One innovative scheme came under the spotlight when Vernon Coaker MP, Under-Secretary of State for policing, security and community safety, visited the West Country neighbourhood policing volunteer project in Bude. Here members of the community assist with the monitoring of the CCTV system in the town, helping police officers identify the perpetrators of crime and disorder.

Vernon Coaker also got the inside story on the 'Streetsafe Bus', a double decker which uses police, ambulance and hospital resources to ensure people get home safe late at night, especially those made vulnerable by drink or drugs. It ensures that people in Newquay - a hugely popular seaside resort that has a high incidence of late night revelling - get home safely, and it takes a significant amount of pressure off the local A&E department.



OUTLOOK Home Office

TEAM SPIRIT

LEAD SPIRIT TO ENGAGE YOUR PEOPLE

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- WALK OF ENGAGEMENTS FOR LEADERSHIP
- TECHNICAL CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

THE RESPECT AWARDS FOR TAKING A STAND

With our appreciation and thanks for your exemplary dedication to promoting respect in your community

Grant Ward
Chairman of the Board

John Smith
Director of Operations

John Doe
Director of Finance

John Brown
Director of HR

John White
Director of IT

John Black
Director of Marketing

John Green
Director of Sales

John Grey
Director of Support

John Blue
Director of Logistics

John Yellow
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John Purple
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Director of Sales

John Xenon
Director of Support

John Radon
Director of Logistics

John Polonium
Director of Compliance

John Astatine
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Director of Support

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Director of Logistics

John Lawrencium
Director of Compliance

John Rutherfordium
Director of Security

John Dubnium
Director of Quality

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Director of Customer Service

John Bohrium
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Director of Facilities

John Meitnerium
Director of Research & Development

John Darmstadtium
Director of Operations

John Roentgenium
Director of Manufacturing

John Copernicium
Director of Distribution

John Nihonium
Director of Sales & Marketing

John Flerovium
Director of Finance

John Livermorium
Director of HR

John Tennessium
Director of IT

John Oganesson
Director of Marketing

Why every action counts

Think global, act local... that's a principle which is being put into practice with a bold new government initiative to enable community groups, clubs and societies to help combat climate change and protect the environment.

Every Action Counts, which was launched in June, is designed to help community groups across England get involved in small actions that can make a big difference - to the group, its members and the environment. And, by working together it is often easier to make more environmentally friendly choices.

In the words of David Miliband:

'Every community group big and small, rural and urban can do something to make a difference.'

Every Action Counts aims to give people the tools and training to maximise that potential.

The three-year initiative aims to:

- help national, regional and local voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) embed One Planet Living principles in their programmes, policies and practices;
- train community workers and staff from VCOs in environmental sustainability issues; and
- prepare good practice guides for the voluntary and community sector, covering issues such as sustainable procurement and green office management.

The initiative is also looking to recruit 1000 'Every Action Counts Community Champions'

who will spend some of their time helping groups, clubs and societies within their community to produce their own Every Action Counts Action Plan. Volunteers do not need any special knowledge or previous experience. They will receive full training, ongoing support, access to their own forum, and recognition of their contribution.

More than 200 community organisations will be provided with informal training materials and support on sustainable development to help make every action count. 60 people who already train community workers will themselves be trained on sustainable development.

If you are interested in becoming an Every Action Counts Community Champion you can contact BTCV on **01302 388 888** or email everyactioncounts@btcv.org.uk. The dedicated website - www.everyactioncounts.org.uk - has further information about the programme, including examples of how community groups have already taken small steps towards making positive changes for the better.

Breathing new life into Coventry

One area which has already started making changes is the Hillfields area of Coventry. This had less than one tenth of the recommended amount of public open space and the highest level of unemployment in Coventry. The housing stock is poor and the nearest park was seen as unsafe because of drug users and alcoholics.

Lorella Medici is chair of the Residents' Association: 'People thought of this estate as a dump.'

The creation of Weaver's Green, a new 'doorstep green', was the result of hard work by the Residents' Association. Weaver's Green now has new trees and shrubs, bench seating, a sandpit, a

grassy area and a barbecue. Fencing designed by local children has been used to resolve the safety issues presented by the roads and a canal.

'People come up here and say, "wow, that's amazing" - it's transformed the place into this peaceful and colourful oasis,' says Lorella.

Not that everything remains easy. 'The kids who were involved in its creation are generally quite respectful and use it positively. For others it's a bit of a game, they think they can challenge you,' says Lorella. **'They have to learn a new attitude, that we are all responsible and that we are all its guardians.** But you can't draw everybody in.'

Blog on for greater democracy



As the use of the web has grown almost exponentially in recent years, the UK Government has made promoting communication with the public via the Internet a major priority. Vast amounts of information have been put online for easy access; and the ever-rising standard of public sector websites has encouraged more and more people to engage directly with service providers.

The 'Digital Dialogues' pilot programme represents the next stage of enhanced interactivity.

It's an initiative established by the Department for Constitutional Affairs' Democratic Engagement Branch. Its aim is to equip central government officials with the skills and capacity to really engage with the public - using three web-based tools: weblogs (or 'blogs'), forums and web-chats.

It's a move that is seeing the inner workings of Whitehall being brought into the public gaze, and is stimulating genuine connections between Government departments and the British public.

One of the best publicised - and viewed - has been David Miliband's 'blog' which he describes as 'a notice board for new thoughts' - his own and other contributors' - on the issues he is working on. As he says in his introduction to the site: 'This blog is my attempt to help bridge the gap - the growing and potentially dangerous gap - between politicians and the public.'

It's a move that is seeing the inner workings of Whitehall being brought into the public gaze, and is stimulating genuine connections between Government departments and the British public.

'It will show what I'm doing, what I'm thinking about, and what I've read, heard or seen for myself which has sparked interest or influenced my ideas. My focus will be on my ministerial priorities. This supplements the existing ways of doing day-to-day business with me and my department.'

It's a bold move for a Government Minister - which has encouraged some highly valuable contributions on subjects such as climate change, wave power and young farmers. As one of the comments concludes: 'I appreciate your idea of a blog and the underlying intention of politicians being accessible to the public - well done.'

Other forums include one on the Food Standards Agency, Family Courts and the political hot potato of Party Funding. That last site has played a key role in bringing forward public input for the Hayden Phillips' review.

Several of the sites have now been closed as the exercise is being evaluated, but several remain open - including www.davidmiliband.defra.gov.uk and <http://forum.communities.gov.uk>.

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Young

people



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A central plank of turning 'Every Child Matters' from a policy document into quantifiable results has been ensuring that young people really do have a meaningful input into how services provided on their behalf are designed.

One key initiative to secure that involvement was the establishment of a 'Children and Youth Board' managed by the National Children's Bureau and the British Youth Council. It was set up - initially as a two-year pilot - bringing together 11 young people aged from 8 to 18 years-old from all across the country, each representing a region or country.

The second of the two annual 'intakes' has now completed their stint in office and a celebration ceremony to mark their achievements took place in London on 9th September.

Critically, the pilot has proved so successful that the scheme is now to be extended and another Board is being brought together.

The youngsters have been selected not simply to ensure that each part of the country has a say, but also to take on board the experiences and views of young people who have already gone through a diverse range of experiences - such as being fostered, having special educational needs, being bullied, living in rural as well as urban areas or being young parents.

But just how can you track the impact they have made? 'That's always going to be a difficulty, as they are simply one part of a larger process when new legislation, for instance, is being drafted,' says Eilidh MacDonald, from the Children's Views and Interests Team in the Department of Education and Skills, and who has been working closely with the Board.

'But their input, we know, was greatly valued when the Respect Action Plan was put together. The young people rightly pointed out that anti-social behaviour is not just a youth issue - very often young people are victims of anti-social behaviour themselves.'

get on board

'The views of the Board were important in ensuring that the Respect Action Plan incorporated balanced messages about the behaviour of young people and made it clear that the Government's focus is just as much on tackling the poor behaviour of adults as it is young people.'

Regular meetings with the Minister for Children and other government officials have also afforded the youngsters the opportunity to express opinions on a raft of other issues, and to raise concerns - occasionally in what became known as 'speed debating' events.

'The "impact" has also been two way,' says Eilidh. You only have to see how these young people have grown and matured in the last 12 months to see what a life changing experience it has been for them.'



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Guide pass 3,000

'Guide Neighbourhoods' do just what they say on the tin - they are resident-led organisations providing advice to others involved in community regeneration.

These are community organisations which have exemplified just what can be achieved when local people and agencies work together to achieve a common aim... and then share the lessons learned with others.

15 Guide Neighbourhoods have shared the task of demonstrating

good practices to a growing tide of communities and service providers who are keen to follow in their footsteps.

In fact, in the 12 months to March 2006, over 3,000 people visited Guide Neighbourhoods to observe the improvements made and learn how to achieve similar successes within their

own communities.

To put that into context, some 278 neighbourhoods around the country have been supported by Guide Neighbourhoods and 146 communities are currently directly benefiting from long term mentoring and developmental support.



neighbourhoods mark

The ceremony to mark the achievement was fittingly held at one of the longest-established Guide Neighbourhoods at Pembroke Street in Mount Wise, Plymouth. The drive and spirit of the community on this estate has improved the physical environment dramatically and has also led to active partnerships with services such as the North Prospect 'Healthy Living Centre' to further improve the quality of life for all residents.

'Guide Neighbourhoods represent more than just the very best practice in community working,' says Amanda Beers, Implementation Team Policy Advisor in DCLG's new Community Empowerment Division. 'The people hosting the visits have worked selflessly and tirelessly to share their knowledge and experiences with others.'

'The total contribution they have made - and continue to make - towards better functioning communities and a safer society cannot be overestimated.'



278 neighbourhoods around the country have been supported by Guide Neighbourhoods.



Latest publications

The most recent publications from the Department for Communities and Local Government's Community Empowerment Division and the Neighbourhoods Unit – formally the Civil Renewal Unit – and other publications relevant to community empowerment.



The most recent report produced by the Community Empowerment Division is **Community**

Assets by Stephen Thake. It was published on 18th July at the National Regeneration Convention and provides a detailed analysis of the benefits and costs of community ownership and management. It also documents case studies of successful community enterprises which demonstrate routes to greater sustainability based on asset development. This publication was produced as part of the government's developing programme to promote community management and ownership of assets and will contribute to the recently announced Quirk Review.



Another publication recently produced by the Community Empowerment Division is the **Together We Can**

Annual Review. This reports on the Government's progress to empower and enable more people to influence public decisions a year on from the

launch of the Together We Can action plan on 28th June 2005. It includes examples of this work from each of the 12 different departments involved in the plan and commitments from Ministers from all of these same departments.



Closer to people and places - a new vision for local government is a publication produced by the

Local Government Association (LGA) and details the key proposals the LGA would like central government to take on board around devolving to town halls and local people. It sets out how these changes would allow councils and their partners to deliver better services for citizens and launches a new campaign, on the powers which local people and councils should receive from Whitehall to bring about the improvement of public services.



Improving community involvement in community safety -

commissioned by the Community Empowerment Division - is a document which demonstrates evidence and case studies of how citizens have worked with public bodies to bring about positive changes within their communities. The report includes results of a survey of Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), to find out

how they worked with their communities to reduce crime and improve public safety. By using questionnaires and reviewing the evidence, it has been possible to share success stories and suggest key recommendations for improving community involvement in community safety.

To download these publications please visit:

www.communities.gov.uk or www.lga.gov.uk for the LGA Closer to People and Places publication.

Also coming soon on the Department for Communities and Local Government's website www.communities.gov.uk will be further details of the civic pioneer projects including those featured in this newsletter and more.

Coming soon

These are some of a variety of events taking place this autumn relevant to Together We Can. And, at some of these the Community Empowerment Division which leads on Together We Can will have a presence.

The **GovNet Expo 2006** is being held at Olympia, London on 17th and 18th October. This is the UK's largest event dedicated to public service reform and is about the growing issues of transforming and improving government services. The event is worth attending if you want to learn, discuss and network with public sector professionals and we will be there with the Together We Can exhibition stand.

In early November the **ALAC Learning Framework** will be published and a number of Active Learning for Active Citizenship events will take place in different parts of the country following this. The purpose of these events is to raise further awareness of the

Active Learning for Active Citizenship approach and highlight what active citizens following these programmes have done for their communities.

New Start has organised an event called Effective Research in Regeneration on the 7th November to help you make more of regeneration research you might have to commission.

On 28th November the **Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy** is holding its annual conference. Among other issues this will look at asset management and Phil Woolas MP, Minister for Local Government and Community Cohesion, will be making a speech.

At the end of November, there will be a meeting of the **Together We Can National Forum** where key stakeholders involved in Together We Can come together to influence how we take our work forward.

And, following the success of last year's series of **Together We Can national conferences**, we are now taking the Together We Can message to the regions, so that more people can share in the development of community empowerment through strengthened regional networking. The first region to host its own Together We Can event will be London - often overlooked as a region, but keen to get started. The date is 7th December and the venue will be the Barbican. London Civic Forum and other regional partners are working together to devise a stimulating programme.

For more information on these events and conferences, please see the information below and keep an eye on the Together We Can website

www.togetherwecan.info

Event	Date	More information
GovNet event at Olympia, London	17/18 October	www.govnetexpo.co.uk
Launch of the ALAC learning framework	8 November	
New Start event: Effective Research in Regeneration, Birmingham	7 November	www.newstartmag.co.uk/research or call 0114 281 6130
ALAC South Yorkshire Learning Framework event	13 November	
ALAC Black Country Learning Framework event	23 November	
ALAC Lincoln Learning Framework event	24 November	
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Annual Conference (CIPFA)	28 November	www.cipfa.org.uk
Together We Can National Forum	30 November	
Regional Together We Can event, London	7 December	

Get in touch!

On 2nd October the Department for Communities and Local Government announced its new internal structure which can be viewed at www.communities.gov.uk The Civil Renewal Unit which co-ordinates the Together We Can action plan moved from the Home Office to the Department for Communities and Local Government in May 2005 following machinery of government changes and is now known as the Community Empowerment Division - part of the Local Democracy Directorate of the Department.

WeCan! is available on line at www.togetherwecan.info where you can also subscribe to receive future issues of this newsletter and read more about the work to bring people and government together.

Or you can contact us at:

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Please note that our existing Home Office email addresses will continue to work until further notice.

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