

Autumn 2007

**DEMAND
FOR
COUNCILLORS**
The rewards of
Local Government



Community empowerment

Hazel Blears on reducing the democratic deficit



CONTENTS

- 04 THE RISE OF THE COMMUNITY CONSULTANT**
- 08 COUNCILLORS IN DEMAND**
- 10 MAKING THE MONEY GO ROUND**
- 14 TO GET THINGS DONE, GET ONLINE!**
- 15 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT DVD RELEASED**
- 16 BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP**
- 18 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: THE HIDDEN PEOPLE**
- 20 COMING SOON: EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS**
- 22 SOLUTIONS FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE**
- 24 CONTACTS**

Momentum is building...

Welcome to the Autumn issue of *We can!*. A lot is happening in the world of community empowerment and this newsletter will try to bring you right up to date.

The 2006 local government white paper signalled the Government's intent, swiftly followed by the commission into the role of local councillors and the publication of the Quirk Review. Momentum is building...

Setting out her vision for thriving empowered communities, Hazel Blears told delegates at the DTA conference there will be a new role for the National Strategic Empowerment Partnership, which brings together the work of a wide range of bodies. CDF's Gabriel Channan discusses the changes afoot on pages 18-19.

Ms Blears also announced the next steps for implementing the Quirk Review's recommendations: 20 demonstration projects will show how asset transfer can be done. More on pages 16 and 17.

Do party politics dissuade people from standing in local elections? Or is it a financial problem? I met a community activist recently, put off by the fear of losing her disability benefit. The report of the Councillors Commission is due in December and you can read an interview with the chair, Dame Jane Roberts, on pages 8 and 9.

The Communities Secretary also announced a public consultation on how petitions could be used more effectively to ensure that local authorities listen to local voices. Your views could feature in a debate in the next issue.

This month also sees publication of the evaluation report of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme; for a taster, read pages 4 to 6.

Finally, The Governance of Britain green paper, published in July, seeks views on a whole range of issues. One chapter is dedicated to 're-invigorating our democracy' and there is genuine debate to be had on the issues above as well as how best to hold service providers to account and involve people in spending decisions (see our feature on participatory budgeting on page 10).

As the new Prime Minister's agenda gathers momentum, don't miss these opportunities to engage.

Robin Lee, Editor



Now is the time

"This is the localist moment. The moment when all of the talk about devolution, decentralisation and empowerment becomes a reality for the majority of people in Britain. There's been so much hard work so far, and so many inspirational and successful examples which *We can!* readers will know about. I want to thank everyone involved in the great work going on around the country.

Now we have an opportunity to make empowerment a reality for every community. It's what people want. We live in a world where we expect choices in our lives. We expect to be able to choose which tunes we have on our MP3 players, when we look at the news on the internet, or when we want to do the shopping. The days of banks, shops and television being run at times which suited them, not us, are long gone. People also expect more power in their lives. Few accept at face value what 'the experts' tell them. Today, people are sceptical and questioning, and that's a good thing. People want to make their own choices, influence the decisions that affect them, and take control over their lives and neighbourhoods.

That's why this is an agenda whose time has come. We have a government committed to passing more power to the people, to trusting the real experts: the British people. We have people in our communities who have never been more ambitious and ready to step up to the challenges. Government and people working together – that's an unstoppable combination for change."

If you've got a good story to tell, why not share it with our readers? Send your stories to Robin Lee, Zone 5/G9, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU.



The rise of the community consultant

Communities look to each other for advice on regenerating neighbourhoods

“Seeing the power of a few right-minded people moving in the right direction is what has kept me going,” was how Bob Thornes (1969-2007), Resident Guide Co-ordinator of Burrowes Street Tenant Management Organisation, Walsall, described the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme.

It’s an endorsement that many people involved in the programme would concur with. Guide Neighbourhoods, of course, have been going for many years, inspiring hundreds of community-driven schemes all over the country, but a 27-month burst of activity between 2005 and 2007 was intended to show just how the experience gained by one forward-looking organisation could best be learned by another.

£4.35 million was made available for the initial ‘action research project’, followed by a further £250,000 to continue the network for another year. Fifteen Guide Neighbourhood organisations were appointed in a rolling programme to disseminate their own good practice on a ‘peer to peer’ basis and to assist other fledgling organisations outside of their own neighbourhoods.

Main aim

Its aim has been to extend the previous ‘Seeing is believing’ model of visits to communities in which local residents share their successes in renewing and regenerating their neighbourhoods to a longer-term approach of consultancy and mentoring support. This process aims to translate the inspiration and the enthusiasms of key individuals into learning for others (including community-based organisations, regeneration practitioners and

“The concept deserves to have a future – although possibly modified from its present form. But that, after all, was the point of the research”

policy makers) so that they too can contribute to the building of sustainable community organisations and action.

And this October sees the fruit of all that research – the publication of the Guide Neighbourhoods Evaluation Report. It’s a weighty document that sets out the key lessons learned and also offers ways in which experience can best be shared in the future – perhaps most intriguingly through the use of ‘community consultants’.

This concept has provided a more formal platform to the process – leading to Neighbourhood Guide personnel receiving skills training where required – as well as a well-deserved recognition of the highly professional role that they can play. One of the organisations chosen to perform this role was Royds Guide Neighbourhood, which has been offering ongoing community development support to nearby groups in Bradford – from undertaking initial needs analyses through to advising on how to implement action plans.

Because of the additional work involved, Royds Community Association recruited two community

consultants, both residents on neighbouring estates, to work intensively in the Goitside area of the city. The consultants have been supported and supervised, and have undertaken training in community development, presentation skills and media relations.

They have also received some mentoring support to contribute to Royds’ own private consultancy wing and develop consultancy skills. Training the community consultants as researchers was seen as helpful to their future employment and both consultants, at the end of the research programme, have gone on to roles with community-oriented organisations – one as a housing development officer with a Neighbourhood Partnership and the other actually with Royds Community Association, delivering outreach employment advice.

Lessons learnt

Barry Schofield has been helping to drive Royds forward for 16 years and he worked alongside the two consultants. What did he learn from the experience, and what lessons can be applied to future Neighbourhood Guide projects?



"With organisations like Goitside we were definitely able to use the community consultants to take them forward – from talking about action through to getting a project up and running," says Barry. "And I suppose if you were trying to explain exactly what we could do for them it was, to use an overused phrase, 'capacity building' – giving them the skills and tools to move the project forward themselves."

"We were able to help them put in place the building blocks that you need – from developing a constitution through to improving their communication and presentation skills."

One of the issues that needed to be addressed with some of the groups that Royds assisted over the 27 months was reframing relationships with local

authorities. "Many people we spoke to started off with communication problems with their local council," says Barry. "Distrust or misunderstandings were usually behind this and one of the critical roles we could play as a Guide Neighbourhood was to show how to establish a working relationship."

So what were the big lessons that he feels should come out of the research? "From my perspective I do know that – for all of the achievements – opportunities have been lost along the way with Guide Neighbourhoods because it's all too easy, sometimes, to 'dive in and dive out' of promising-looking projects, leaving people feeling let down. So longevity is critical if the gains made in helping a community get to the point where they start making a

difference are not to be lost – through the withdrawal of funding or support for instance.

"But the concept deserves to have a future – although possibly modified from its present form. But that, after all, was the point of the research: to establish what mechanisms work well and which don't.

"From that perspective, I'm sure the research will have achieved its main purpose: lessons will be learned on the best way to take forward the concept of communities helping other communities."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

on the Guide Neighbourhoods go to www.housingjustice.org.uk/hjregenerate



Anchors at the heart of the community

Alliance calls for focus on community anchor organisations

The Community Alliance is a unique partnership of three organisations: bassac, Community Matters and the Development Trusts Association. But what does it hope to achieve? Janice Leung, the Alliance's Information and Events worker, sets out their vision.

Our mission is to help establish a 'community anchor' in every neighbourhood – hard working, respected organisations which know their communities inside out and – from this knowledge – can devise tailored activities, services and support for individuals and groups.

As the concept of a 'community anchor' is a relatively new (but increasingly talked about) term, we recently published a book celebrating some of the many different ways in which these organisations are transforming their neighbourhoods and the lives of the people who live there. You can receive a copy of that by going onto our website, which is detailed below.

What is a community anchor?

Community anchors sit in the heart of their communities. They are frequently the driving force in community renewal, often in the most deprived areas of the country and their strength comes from their intimate knowledge of local needs.

For us, a defining feature of a community anchor is that it is based in a building that is either owned or managed by the community. Community anchors are also there for the long run and local people can rely on them being a constant in their lives.



Youngsters from the Lonsdale Centre enjoy a go-karting day

Community anchors at work

Our new publication highlights some excellent examples of community anchors around the country – and which come in a surprising array of shapes and sizes! But typical is the Lonsdale Community Centre. Based in a former Sunday School in west Hull, the Centre has been changing the lives of local people for more than 25 years. In particular, it has consistently made a big difference to the futures of young people who were not attending school. With nothing else to do, many of these young people gravitated to the Lonsdale's ICT suite to use the computers.

Staff at the centre started thinking about how they could help prevent these young people from drifting through life, with the all too predictable consequences. They talked to them about what they wanted and eventually started running vocational training courses, with the help of schools and other organisations.

The Lonsdale Community Centre runs

health and fitness programmes, dance, drama and art classes and activities for parents and children.

Brendan has been coming to Lonsdale Community Centre for the last twenty years, since he was seven. "The centre has always been a focal point in my life. I have increased my confidence, learnt new skills and gained many qualifications here. I even met my partner here and we now have two children together!"

Now the story has turned full circle and Brendan is working in the Centre with the youth clubs. "I found a direction in my life through the Centre and now I want to put something back."

Contact the Community Alliance

Do you know an anchor organisation? Any community organisation can get in touch with us to find out about becoming a member of one of our partner organisations. Call us on 020 7336 9490, email us at info@comm-alliance.org or visit www.comm-alliance.org.

Councillors in

Is being a councillor a thankless task... or one of the most rewarding and useful roles we can play as citizens?

Dame Jane Roberts is in no doubt. Of all the roles contained in her impressive CV, being a Camden Councillor for 16 years ranks as "one of the most fascinating, intriguing and rewarding things I've done. Being a councillor is one of the best kept secrets," she insists.

Ruth Kelly has described councillors as "the bridge between communities and local government, providing accountability and leadership. The best councillors already find ways to raise their constituents' concerns, and make change happen on issues that count, like anti-social behaviour, recycling or social care problems."

Jane Roberts shares this conviction and has carried her energy and enthusiasm into chairing the Councillors Commission, established by Ruth Kelly earlier this year with a wide-ranging remit to find ways to encourage wider participation in local democracy. "The fact that black and ethnic minorities still only account for 4% of councillors may not be surprising," she says, "but we also need to address the fact that only 30% are women – despite being eligible to stand for 100 years now – and a negligible percentage are under 40. It's all out of kilter."

"In general, people have a low opinion of politicians. That may arise from the way the media cover politics"

As she is quick to point out, there's no 'magic bullet' that can resolve the situation and overcome a complex series of barriers which impact upon different sections of the community. The problem lies in a series of factors, not least of which is the poor perception that many people have of local government and the councillors that represent them.

"In general, people have a low opinion of politicians," she concedes. "That may start at a national level and arise – in part – from the way the media covers politics.

"That needs to change. Local government delivers so many vital services and – on a day-to-day level – the decisions and actions of the council often affect people more than the decisions being made at a national level. They profoundly affect our quality of life."

THE WAY FORWARD

Of all the rewarding experiences of her time spent as a councillor, chief amongst them was acting as a 'shuttle' – taking on board someone's problems and getting them sorted out. "Yes, of course there are sometimes frustrations," she says, "and you cannot always resolve an individual's problems because the answer lies at a national level. But you can have an influence there too. When



Jane consults people in Newcastle

we were struggling to provide enough affordable housing in Camden our voice was heard at a national level."

Having identified the barriers to broader representation, the next stage in the process is to suggest ways forward. One of the key ideas emerging from the extensive consultation process that has been going on during 2007 has been training for prospective councillors – helping people from a wider range of backgrounds to have the skills and confidence to compete on a level playing field.

Others include:

- encouraging employers to encourage staff to take part by providing time off for their duties and recognising their experience
- reviewing the time commitments needed to be a councillor and timetables of local meetings
- encouraging councils to look at better childcare support
- establishing shadowing schemes, information and awareness campaigns in BME communities.

Part of the Government's strategy going

demand

forward is to hand over increasing amounts of control to local government; and, for that to work effectively, more people have to be involved at a grassroots level influencing the decision-making process. Making government more representative has never been more critical.

Jane Roberts also makes the important point that working in local government is often an important stepping stone for people keen to make a difference at a national level. "Broader representation at a local

level could play an important part in increasing minority representation at a national level."

The Commission is currently drawing together all the skeins of the research to date, and will make recommendations by November 2007. By any measure, the nation's 20,000 councillors are a vital part of our grassroots democracy but, in the words of Ruth Kelly: "Clearly this democracy will benefit if they are more representative of the communities they serve."

FAST FACTS



- 29.3% of councillors are women
- The average age of a councillor in England is 58
- 45% of the population are under 45, compared to just 13.5% of councillors
- Only 4.1% of councillors come from an ethnic minority background



The Commission: from left to right; Matthew Taylor; Jane Roberts; Margaret Eaton; Yaseer Ahmed; Cathy Bakewell and Jessica Crowe



Making the money go round

Participatory budgeting is a highly effective way of allocating funds that is now helping local communities decide spending priorities whilst improving community cohesion in the process.

"Giving people direct and transparent choice about how funds are allocated in their local area not only makes sure their priorities are being met. It's also a way of making them feel more able to say 'this is my street, my estate, and I'm proud of it'." With those words Secretary of State Hazel Blears expounded her belief at this year's LGA conference that participatory budgeting – or the 'community kitty' – could successfully empower local people in the decisions taken in their community.

She went on to declare her ambition for every local authority area to have a community kitty within five years.

Participatory budgeting (PB)

encourages local people to take decisions on the spending priorities for a part of public budgets in their area for activities that really impact upon their day-to-day lives, such as local environmental issues, community facilities, road safety measures or local crime initiatives.

The concept has already made its mark in other countries, and lessons are being learnt from their experiences. Representatives

from community organisations in Manchester and Salford visited projects in Porto Alegre and Recife in Brazil, where greater participation of communities in municipal decision-making is helping to strengthen local democracy.

The Brazilian projects emerged out of the post-dictatorship constitution in 1988. The Brazilian experience of grassroots participatory budgeting led directly to the renewal of democracy,

Where PB has been introduced it has reinforced the democratic process and endowed the community with a sense of ownership

RECIFE, BRAZIL:
greater participation has
strengthened democracy.
Below: a view of Recife



more transparent government and significant improvement in service delivery in extremely poor areas. The same tools and principles are now being used throughout Europe, Africa and the Americas.

So how does it work?

Part of a public local budget is allocated and community groups and residents come together to debate and decide which projects should be funded. Their priorities, concerns and needs feed directly into the way that local authority funds are allocated.

Where it has been introduced it has reinforced the democratic process and endowed the community with a sense of ownership. The very way in which decisions are arrived at also brings diverse people together and can lead to real improvements in the way local people work with council officials and elected representatives.

What has pleased – and sometimes

surprised – those involved has been the way that ‘interest groups’ have not come to dominate or skew the way money is allocated. The cross section of people involved in the decision-making process has helped, on countless occasions, parts of the community to better understand the needs of others.

Communities and Local Government funds the Participatory Budgeting Unit – a third sector project managed by the Church Action on Poverty, set up to raise awareness of PB and support its introduction to England. For more information, visit www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk

Already there are some excellent examples of participatory budgeting in the UK. Bradford Vision, for example, has held five participatory



budgeting events over the past five years and allocated over £1m of public funds.

Over 400 residents were consulted in Keighley to help allocate £130,000 from the Neighbourhood Renewal fund.

U-Decide: participatory budgeting in Newcastle

Newcastle’s U-Decide team –





A U-Decide event in Newcastle

working with groups of young people – is giving young people from across the city the chance to make decisions about how to spend money in their local areas.

Last year a group known as the ‘Wicked Planners’ helped the city council to design a U-Decide event, which saw youngsters from a range of different organisations submit and vote on ideas to contribute to one or more of the young people’s priorities of: crime and community safety; respect for young people; play; and sports and leisure.

The ‘Wicked Planners’ invited groups to present their idea then 70 young

people gave marks out of ten for each proposal. Those with the highest scores received the funding.

‘Investing in Children Co-ordinator’ at Newcastle City Council, Nick Brereton explains:

“The aim is to find ways of doing this with mainstream budgets in the future, because we are seeking to develop both participatory budgeting and the participation of children and young people in Newcastle more generally. There has been more work since this event, in particular we ran a similar process to guide our bid for Big Lottery funding for ‘play’, which involved over 100 children and young people assessing the bids. We plan to hold three further pilots this year.”

You can watch a DVD of the pilot featuring these projects at www.alreet.com (the city’s youth service website). Just click on the media link.

In the words of Communities Secretary Hazel Blears: “We know participatory budgeting works. We know the benefits go well beyond more focused local authority spending. We will now be working with Civic Pioneer Local Authorities to develop further schemes and making sure that the Audit

Commission is well aware of the benefits. Participatory budgeting is an important tool which we recommend to every Local Authority as part of their strategic approach to community empowerment.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

on U-Decide go to www.newcastle.gov.uk



Young people vote on priorities



“On the soap box”

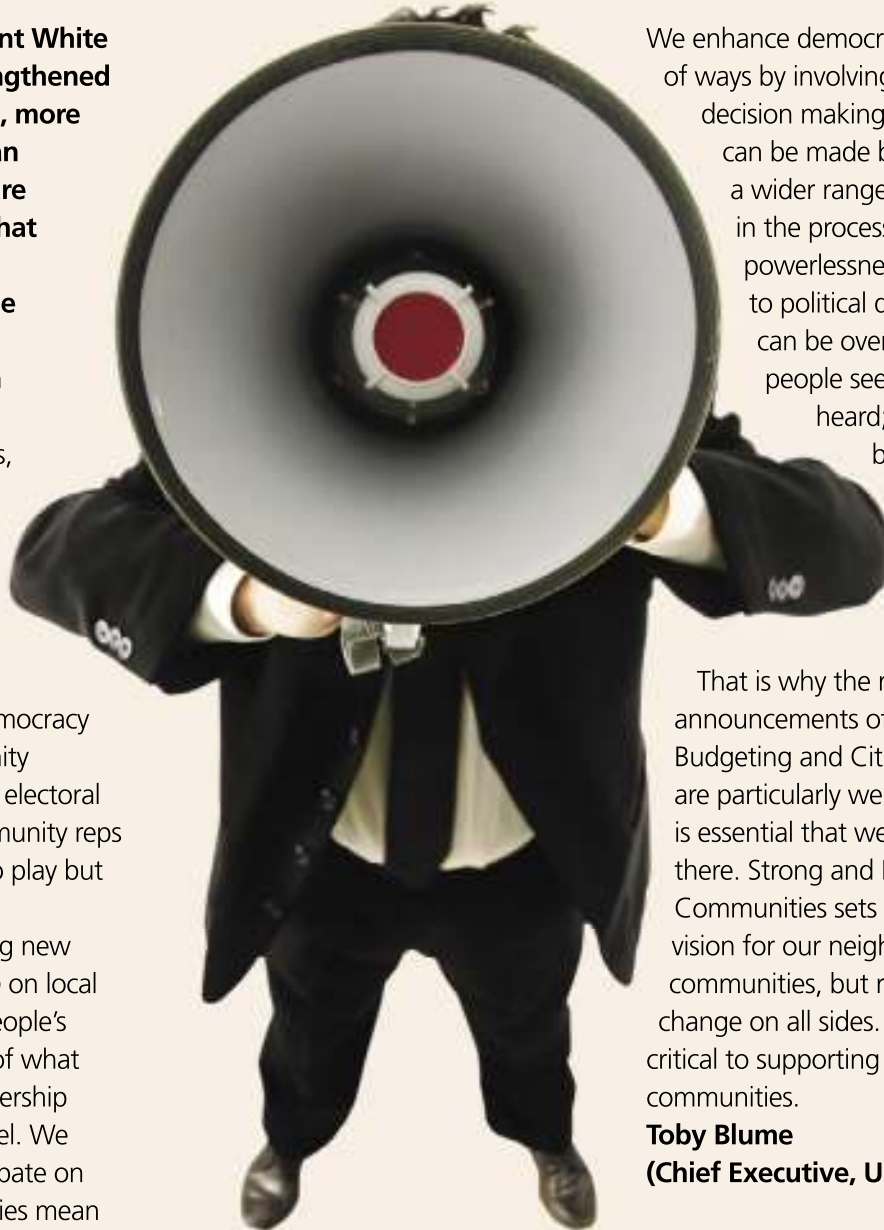
In the first of a series of ‘on the soap box’ features, Chief Executive of Urban Forum Toby Blume shares his thoughts on the future of local democracy...

The Local Government White Paper sets out strengthened roles for councillors, more empowered citizens and an engaged third sector. All are warmly welcomed. But what about where they meet in the middle? Relatively little consideration is given to what these changes mean for each other.

Community representatives, on LSP Boards, have been asked to represent their community or the VCS for some time. Tensions have emerged in some areas over who represents whom. Is local democracy being usurped with community representatives who have no electoral mandate? Clearly both community reps and councillors have a role to play but what’s the difference?

Urban Forum is undertaking new research (with Navca & IDeA) on local representation, examining people’s experience and perceptions of what local representation and leadership should look like at a local level. We want to contribute to the debate on what empowered communities mean for our democratic institutions and elected members.

It’s my belief that the answer must lie in participation. Rather than simply relying on representative democracy, we should aspire to something more inclusive and engaging. Those who claim participation undermines democracy and the mandate elected members have, are simply misguided.



We enhance democracy in a number of ways by involving people in decision making. Better decisions can be made by incorporating a wider range of perspectives in the process. The sense of powerlessness, closely linked to political disenchantment, can be overcome when people see their voices being heard; and stronger links between and across communities can be made, raising social capital and efficacy.

That is why the recent announcements of Participatory Budgeting and Citizens Juries are particularly welcome. But it is essential that we do not stop there. Strong and Prosperous Communities sets out an ambitious vision for our neighbourhoods and communities, but requires significant change on all sides. Participation is critical to supporting truly empowered communities.

Toby Blume
(Chief Executive, Urban Forum)

“Is local democracy being usurped with community representatives who have no electoral mandate?”

To get things done, get online!

Community activists increasingly seek advice from web-based resources

Are you itching to get something sorted in your local area? If you are, you're not alone. A great many people are equally keen to make a difference – and finding that the resources they need are readily available on the internet, if they know where to look. Whether you want to know more or do more, the perfect place to start is on the world wide web. Online empowerment expert Emma Hagan takes you through the options currently available.

"There are some really useful websites out there to help you with various issues," says Emma, "but it can be difficult to know where to start, especially if you're unfamiliar with the web."

So one very good place to begin your search is the Together We Can section of the DirectGov website (togetherwecan.direct.gov.uk).

It was specifically designed to flag up some of the most useful sources of help available for getting involved in your local area and 'getting stuff done' – a mix of helpful websites, publications, organisations, training and funding.

Most resources have already been rated by an independent organisation to give users a starting point, but any user can add their own star rating in a similar way to sites like Amazon and Trip Advisor.

Highly rated sites

Some of the most useful websites recently highlighted on the site are those like Connect to your Council and Neighbourhood Fix-it, where you can report local problems like graffiti, fly tipping, and broken paving slabs or street lighting. Other useful sites mentioned are

the BBC Action Network site, Do-it!, Pledgebank and Every Action Counts.

Drop onto the latest news section – togetherwecan.direct.gov.uk – to find out more and, while you're on the site, why not let other users know what you think by adding a rating to your favourite resource or by letting us know if we haven't included it yet?

The web is also where you can tap into sources of help if you want to go one step further and encourage your community to become more involved in the decision-making processes. Our article on Participatory Budgeting (page 8) highlights, for instance, how members of the public are being invited to help decide where local budgets are allocated. Equally, it is possible for people to respond to national and local consultations online

EMMA'S FAVOURITE SITES FOR GETTING STUFF DONE

www.writetothem.com

A very handy way to contact your local representatives.

www.pledgebank.com

Got a good idea but want someone to provide a helping hand to get it off the ground?

www.hearfromyourmp.com

A neat way to find out what your MP is up to.

www.fixmystreet.com

Got a complaint about your neighbourhood? Fill in the details and your council will soon get to know about it.

www.do-it.org.uk

I love this site, there are always so many opportunities to get involved.

www.direct.gov.uk/en/index.htm
Information on Public Services

all in one place.

www.everyactioncounts.org.uk/index.asp

Great tips for doing your bit environmentally.

www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork/

So many useful guides to help you get something done – and on just one site.

Community empowerment – coming to a screen near you

through www.direct.gov.uk/consultations and many local authority websites.

If you need to ask your community their views on something and don't know where to turn, www.peopleandparticipation.net could be the answer. It includes lots of helpful information but the feature that you'll really want to try is the 'process planner'. Why? Because, if you key in a few basic facts about what you're trying to achieve by involving the community, what your budget is and who you want to participate, then – abaracadabara – out pop suggestions on methods to try. Along with that you'll be given some related links and examples of cases showing what methods have worked for different groups.

What's more, if you don't find the help you need by browsing the site you can always use the 'Ask the Expert' feature and receive tailored help from the team behind the site. Magic!

An inspiring new DVD – produced by Communities and Local Government together with the Improvement and Development Agency – has answered the question: "What is Community Empowerment?"

By showcasing success stories where local authorities have entered into genuine partnerships with their local communities, the film aims to persuade more councillors and senior officers to think about what they can do in their own areas to empower local people.

The ten-minute film was premiered at the recent LGA annual conference and it is hoped that local authorities will show it to new recruits as part of their induction process.

The film covers successful projects such as turning derelict land into a children's play area in Sheffield, the refurbishment of public green spaces in Birmingham and even the staging of a Portuguese-themed evening of song and dance in Somerset. Each of them, in different ways, demonstrates that, by giving people the ability to identify the problems affecting their community, they can be supported by councils to come up with their own solutions.

One of the people who appears in the film is Barry Quirk, Chief Executive of the London Borough of Lewisham, and he's in no doubt that the central message from government comes across loud and clear: "Working together makes life better for everybody, and we all need to recognise that people are often better at identifying problems within their communities and can come up with better ideas on how to improve things."

Perry Common in Birmingham has also shown what can be achieved: a partnership between local people, the police and other statutory bodies has found innovative new ways to tackle crime and succeeded in reducing the

number of burglaries on the estate by 40% in six years.

The biggest underlying problems at Perry Common had been a lack of decent housing and activities for young people. The collaboration between citizens and various public bodies has brought change for the better.

To order your own copy of the DVD, please contact Communities and Local Government Publications, PO Box 236, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7NB (Tel. 08701 226236) and quote ISBN: 978 185 112 8839. The DVDs cost £5.00 for a pack of five.



Breaking down the barriers to community ownership

Asset based development can enable a community to grow and prosper

Just how do you encourage more community asset management and ownership, while taking account of the need to manage risks?

Answering that conundrum was the remit of the 'Quirk Review', announced by Ruth Kelly at the Development Trusts Association conference in September 2006. The task of the three-man review team, led by Lewisham Council's Chief Executive Barry Quirk, was to learn the lessons from around the country where partnership working had succeeded and recommend ways of overcoming any barriers.

As the review – published this May – makes clear: "There are no substantive impediments to the transfer of public assets to communities. It can be done. Indeed it has been done, legitimately and successfully, in very many places.

"There are risks but they can be minimised and managed – there is plenty of experience to draw on. The secret is to get all parties working together."

And so convincing were the arguments made in the review that the Government accepted the Quirk recommendations in full, with Gordon Brown declaring himself to be "personally committed to this agenda."

The Development Trusts Association is one of the Government's main delivery partners and is currently taking forward, in collaboration with Community Matters, ACRE and the Local Government Association, a 12-month demonstration programme. This will show how – in 20 selected areas around the country – local authorities and local community-led third sector organisations can be supported to

develop joint plans for asset transfer.

The 20 areas were chosen for their readiness to participate and the fact that, between them, they represent a wide spread of different types of communities. They are: Ashfield DC, Birmingham CC, Cheshire CC, Cumbria CC, Dacorum BC, Devon CC, Forest Heath DC, Hastings BFC, Kirklees MBC, LB of Lambeth, Leeds CC, LB of Lewisham, Nottingham CC, North Tyneside MBC, Peterborough CC, Restormel BC, Sheffield CC, LB of Tower Hamlets, Tynedale DC, Warwick DC.

So what sort of projects are under the DTA microscope? Here are just a couple of cases, which we'll be following up in future editions of this newsletter.

Regeneration in Lambeth

The London Borough of Lambeth recently approved a regeneration plan for the borough and is now keen to focus on the development of an innovative package of three sites in Clapham. This will involve private developers producing new community facilities and fully refurbishing a historic library before handing the resources back to community use.

A community group has now been formed to work-up enterprising ideas for the use of the renovated space – and is hoping to establish a development trust or community

"There are risks but they can be minimised and managed – there is plenty of experience to draw on. The secret is to get all parties working together"



The Quirk Review team:
Andrew Robinson; Barry
Quirk and Stephen Thake

interest company to own and manage it.

This project is demonstrating how the high land values of many city 'brownfield' sites can be released to put social assets back into the 'system' – in this case, new health, leisure and educational facilities – which are then managed by the local community.

Reclaiming public assets in Devon

Devon County Council currently disposes annually of 20-30 of its diverse portfolio of over 1,000 assets each year – a wide mix including undeveloped farmland, offices and school buildings. The Devon Reinvestment Service (DRS) is supporting communities wanting to take over and manage these assets.

Affordable housing in Tynedale

Tynedale District Council – which has a strong record of effective partnership with local community groups – is investigating the potential for Community Land Trusts in the region and has established a £2m Enabling Fund to acquire property in order to provide additional affordable housing.

Reinvigorating Hemel Hempstead

Dacorum District Council is exploring the benefits of transferring assets inherited from the completion of Hemel Hempstead new town. The three projects being considered include a construction training project which now requires its own building and a variety of community

centres where leases could be upgraded to ownership.

The DTA has estimated that there will be a pool of nearly 1,500 community organisations seeking to develop an enterprise route to sustainability over the next seven years, leading to the accumulation of £500m of assets in community ownership. The 20 partnerships now being supported, and the individual asset transfers they are focusing on, will each point credible ways forward to "Making Assets Work".

FOR MORE INFORMATION

on the Quirk Review go
to www.communities.gov.uk



The hidden people behind community development

Low profile hinders public understanding of community development role

Wherever there is community activity trying to change things for the better, you will often find – behind the scenes – there has been a discreet helping hand from one of the country's 20,000 community development workers. This issue looks at the work of some of these 'unsung heroes'.

Peter Smith has been involved in the Amington ward in Tamworth for three years now. Local residents came up with a wide-ranging agenda for improvement following an open-question survey by council community workers, and then – with Peter's guiding hand – set about creating many of the improvements in co-operation with the authorities.

The results so far have been impressive. A dilapidated local area has been converted into a pleasant green space. Parents and children have met to discuss growing and eating healthy food. A disused council property has been refurbished and is now the setting for a mothers and toddlers group. An empty shop unit is empty no longer. It has been reclaimed as a base for residents to become involved in partnerships and decision-making groups on parenting, policing, debt management, overcoming domestic violence and other issues.

A recent survey showed that 51%

of Amington's 8,200 residents feel they can influence decisions affecting their neighbourhood – that's a much higher proportion than the rest of the borough, or the national average of 37%. That's hardly surprising when the last three years have shown just what can be achieved with a clear agenda, a supportive council, a determined local community – and a local community worker there to help get the ball rolling.

The situation in which Mani Thapa finds herself is different – and so is her approach.

As community development officer with Refugee Action, Mani works with 30 different refugee community organisations across Leeds. "Most of the groups are very new," she says, "and rely on people giving their free time. They don't have staff or office space. It's quite hard for the groups to survive... refugees are often traumatised when they come here... I came here as a refugee myself so I understand some of the issues they face."

Mani's role in the last few years has been to put a structure in place which enables everyone to come together for mutual support and co-operation. "The organisations now come together in a Forum and talk about their issues, what action they want to take and how to make a strong voice," she says. "The forum is acting like a magnet – it's bringing ideas and resources

together to help solve problems and improve services."

Despite hundreds of successes like these, the community development profession is not well known. Workers deliberately take a low profile – there in the background to provide support and guidance when needed, but not to the point where they become the focal point of an initiative.

The aim is to encourage members of the communities to learn how to take a lead and keep developments going, allowing the worker to move on to other communities who need help at an earlier stage in their evolution.

But the low profile also has a drawback. Because the community development role isn't visible to outsiders, it's hard to explain its precise contribution. Government, local government and their partners often fail to realise just how crucial it is to provide community development help, especially at an early stage. Boosting local people's skills and confidence, especially where they

Many players are needed to make it work – both from within communities and from a variety of agencies



are living in disadvantaged conditions, enables them to take the initiative, work together and negotiate with authorities to improve the life of their locality or their network.

To help resolve this dilemma, the Community Empowerment Division in Communities and Local Government asked a working party from the community development field to examine how to raise both the profile and effectiveness of the occupation. The result is a report, "The Community Development Challenge". Published by Communities and Local Government in December 2006, it sets out a fresh approach to the work done by the estimated 20,000 community development workers across the UK – 15,000 of which are based in England.

The 'challenge' in the report is issued in both directions: to government and public agencies to use community development better, and to

the profession itself to produce better evidence of its role and impact.

This work is timed to feed into the National Strategic Empowerment Partnership, which is set to develop a quality assurance framework to pin down exactly what makes empowerment work, and then to ensure that those methods and standards are applied everywhere to achieve more penetrating and lasting effects.

One thing is for certain: many players are needed to make it work – both from within communities and from a variety of agencies. Greater empowerment should lead to improvements in many different services and conditions, but since the core indicator of empowerment itself will be whether people feel they can really influence their locality – and only 37% of people currently do – it's clear that good quality community development work still has a crucial role to play.

Our thanks to: Peter Smith, Mani Thapa, Beth Longstaff and CDX in compiling this report.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Alice.
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Coming soon

Here are some key events and annual conferences taking place over the next few months. To publicise your event in a future edition of this newsletter please email details to nicola.dennis@communities.gsi.gov.uk

17 October 2007

Communities and Local Government is holding a lunchtime reception to promote Hazel Blears' new community empowerment programme to stakeholders and departmental colleagues. It takes place in Eland House, and Hazel Blears is expected to make several announcements and further develop her thoughts on the future of the community empowerment agenda.

**To book your place email
Nicola.dennis@communities.gsi.gov.uk**

18 October 2007

Local Government Chronicle (LGC) and New Local Government Network (NLGN) are jointly holding a conference called Developing Successful Asset Management. The event takes place at the International Coffee Organisation in London and will be a good chance to learn about and debate the challenges and solutions surrounding better asset management. It will be an interactive event – providing an opportunity to hear from the experts and participate in relevant and constructive exchanges. Additional benefits include in-depth advice on developing sound business cases with community partners and how to maintain strong working relationships with your business partners.

For more details contact 0845 156 8341, or visit www.nlgn.org.uk or www.lgcandnlgn-assets.co.uk

7-8 November 2007

Nottingham will be hosting the 7th Core Cities Summit, at the Albert Hall Conference Centre. This key international urban policy event should attract visitors from across the country and will be a great opportunity to engage with major agencies such as Communities and Local Government.

For more details visit: www.corecities.com

16 November 2007

Capita is holding a conference on Public Engagement in Local Government in Central London. The event will focus on how community participation can revitalise and strengthen local authorities, providing a good opportunity to hear from key speakers and organisations.

**For more details visit
www.capitaconferences.co.uk**

20 November 2007

GovNet is holding its 2nd annual conference, 'Creating Public Value through Asset Management', at the QEII Conference Centre in London. The event will provide delegates with practical insights into asset management and plenty of networking opportunities with suppliers and stakeholders.

You'll also meet key players in central and local government and discuss the latest thinking on strategic asset management.

To register, visit www.asset.govnet.co.uk

31 October 2007 North West
13 November 2007 South East
21 November 2007 Yorkshire & Humber
14 December 2007 London
30 January 2008 East Midlands

ADVANCING ASSET TRANSFER – IMPLEMENTING THE QUIRK REVIEW

The Development Trusts Association (DTA) is organising a series of regional events providing useful learning opportunities on ways to manage the transfer of management – particularly beneficial to local authority officers and those working in the public, private and voluntary sectors in particular.

Further details are on www.dta.org.uk, or call Melanie McHugh on 0845 458 8336 or email m.mchugh@dta.org.uk

8 November 2007
Yorkshire/North East
17 January 2008 South East
Viability not Liability – 2007/08

This series of seminars provides advice on asset-based development for enterprising communities around the country. Events will take place between 9 October and 10 March next year.

The Development Trusts Association (DTA), on behalf of Capacitybuilders, will deliver the unique seminars, and each will enable participants to learn key concepts and familiarise themselves with the tools and support available to assist with their asset development plans.

For more details, visit www.dta.org.uk or call Melanie McHugh on 0845 458 8336.

Publications

Communities and Local Government has published a number of key reports over the past few months. For a printed copy of a report, call 08701 226236 and quote the relevant product code.

Making assets work

Published in May, Making Assets Work is the final report of Barry Quirk's review of asset transfer from public bodies to local communities. This independent review covered both the management and ownership of land and buildings by communities and recommended ways of overcoming the 'barriers' currently inhibiting transfer. Product code 06GC04436

Opening the transfer window

Published a week after Making Assets Work, the government's response sets out an action plan for delivering on Quirk's recommendations and signals a partnership-based approach to confronting the largely 'cultural' barriers to asset transfer to community management and ownership. Product code 07GC04635

Learning to change neighbourhoods

17 October sees the publication of Learning to change neighbourhoods, an evaluation report of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme. The Programme ran from 2005 to 2007 and this report, written by independent academics, highlights the key lessons learned by participants. Packed with illuminating comments from people whose neighbourhoods have been transformed, this report was published as part of a strategy to disseminate the learning more widely. The full version of the report is available online only, at www.communities.gov.uk Product code 07PRO04798/a

Councillors commission report

Not enough women, ethnic minorities or young people are standing for election as local councillors. Established by Ruth Kelly earlier this year, the Councillors Commission was asked to find ways to encourage wider participation in local democracy and its report is due to be published on 12 December. Covering issues such as councillor pay and remuneration, routes into the role and the practice of political parties in local government, this report is bound to provoke much debate in the public arena.

Solutions for the people, by the people...

Civic pioneers continue to show the way as people come together to solve local problems

Last Autumn's WeCan! put the spotlight onto some of the most innovative and successful Civic Pioneer learning projects – each of which is harnessing community-led solutions to solve local problems.

A lot has happened since then. Irene Evison – an Associate of the Community Development Foundation and Resources for Change – has been involved in overseeing the projects and here she looks at some of the valuable lessons being learned.

There are 12 more learning projects now under way, 12 more ways to explore new and imaginative ways to solve problems in the community.

The projects being supported this year have introduced 'restorative justice' in schools, brought people from different communities together to resolve conflict and helped people to improve their local streets.

But a common strand running through all of them is that each is gathering information to show just how effectively they are addressing problems. Already we're seeing some interesting innovative practices beginning to emerge, as well as the sound application of tried and tested approaches.

Restorative Justice at Barlow Hall Manchester

Proving that you're never too young to become an active, involved citizen, pioneers in Manchester are trialling 'restorative justice' in a primary school,

which involves everyone in the school working together to show there is an alternative to conflict.

Pupils, teachers, teaching assistants, parents and governors have all been learning about what restorative justice means in the context of their primary school and how they can use it to improve conflict situations. Tackling unruly, disruptive behaviour and reducing conflict in schools is vital if teachers are to create a comfortable and supportive learning and growing atmosphere for children.

The idea sprang out of a discussion between parent governors and the overriding aim is to reduce the number of pupils being excluded from school. Already a publication has been produced – 'Restorative Approaches: A





Guide for Schools' – which has gone out to schools across Manchester, and it may well be used as a national guide.

Communities come together in Leeds

Areas of the city like Beeston and Hunslet have seen serious tensions between different ethnic communities, and now pioneers are bringing people together to learn more about each other.

Community development organisations including 'Leeds Racial Harassment Project', 'Stop Hate UK', 'Leeds Together for Peace' and 'Leeds Community Mediation Service' have come together to run activities aimed at tackling misunderstanding and tensions between individuals and communities.

To find better ways to get through to

EMERGING LESSONS

- **Working together:** many of the projects are providing new and creative ways for local people, community groups, council officers and other service delivery organisations to talk to and work with each other.
- **Joining up in service delivery for the long term:** those taking part see the projects as the spur to enable everyone to work together.
- **Communicating:** as local authorities and other agencies improve the ways they communicate with local people, public expectations – of their understanding of local needs and what they can deliver – are also rising.
- **Particular techniques:** projects have used a number of communication tools to excellent effect, for example film and websites, and these can be used as good practice examples.
- **Getting to know each other:** many projects have helped 'put a face to faceless people', which has made a huge impact on perceptions – and behaviour.
- **Organisational change:** the new ways of working and communicating adopted for the projects could become standard practice, leading to long term organisational change – for the better.

people, the pioneers are using all sorts of creative techniques. Young people are making and sharing short films about life in the community and about the perceptions of other communities. Other people are being trained in conflict resolution, while focus groups are exploring some of the issues causing tension.

The lessons learned are being presented as simple 'menu cards' which explain techniques and approaches that can make a difference.

The people behind the project hope that increasing mutual understanding will reduce the levels of so-called 'hate crimes', lower tensions between communities and give local people the skills and confidence to identify the cause of problems and find their own solutions.

Improving the streets in Southwark

People are more likely to feel proud of and responsible for their local area if

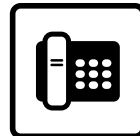
their streets are clean and they like the way their area looks.

But how do they have their say in making it happen? In Southwark, pioneers are bringing different communities together with the borough council to take on board the views of local residents when planning street improvement works. Residents can now get involved at all stages of the process – from influencing designs through to overseeing the building work.

Southwark is not alone. Civic Pioneers are also trialling community-led solutions in Birmingham (Selly Oak and Kingstanding), Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Portsmouth, Salford and South Somerset.

The aim of all these schemes is to improve communication between the local authority and residents in order to increase public satisfaction with street improvements in the borough. And the results to date are proving the point.

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 2006 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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