



Neighbourhood Action Network: Year one **Findings from our practical work with local authority partners**

The Young Foundation's Neighbourhood Action Network (NAN) is a two-year programme designed to encourage and accelerate innovation in neighbourhood working, through action learning, action research and experimentation. The first year of the programme ended in April 2008.

This is a summary report of the findings of the first year of the NAN programme, focusing on the practical projects carried out with our 13 local authority partners.

Our partners in the Neighbourhood Action Network for NAN year one are the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, London Borough of Camden, London Borough of Hackney, London Borough of Haringey, Housing Corporation, IDeA, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, LGA, London Borough of Lewisham, Newcastle City Council, Surrey County Council, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, and Birmingham City Council.

1. Summary

- i. Over the past years the debate over localism and community empowerment, the future of local democracy, and the quest to find different ways to improve public services through community engagement has intensified. Renewed interest from the new Prime Minister in 2007 and a new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government have renewed focus and enthusiasm, with the announcement of a new White Paper on Empowerment to be published in 2008. This agenda now has cross party support, with all three of

the main political parties taking broadly similar positions on the value of, and the need to encourage, local voice and influence.

- ii. There is a real opportunity to capitalise on this interest in national and local government, and to create practical opportunities to empower people in communities everywhere to have more say about what happens in their neighbourhood. However, there is a risk that this opportunity will be lost if local authorities, the wider public sector and local political parties are not fully engaged and committed to the community empowerment debate.
- iii. Regardless of variations in type of areas and nature of their populations, the challenges in implementing neighbourhood working, and the issues faced by members and officers, are remarkably similar throughout the country.
- iv. This snapshot of local authority experience suggests that community empowerment is continuing to be a growing priority for local government. We found examples of strong cross party consensus to support localisation, and places where the diversity and energy of locally elected members bucks the national trend. Partners' choice of practical projects was driven by their local experience and need to resolve and unblock local issues.
- v. The NAN programme built on the findings of the Young Foundation's first neighbourhood programme, the Transforming Neighbourhoods consortium. This established that there are four key elements that need to be aligned to create the conditions that encourage successful neighbourhood working: process, people, structures and organisational culture.
- vi. Five themes emerged from the NAN year 1 findings that illuminate our understanding further, particularly of how a supportive organisational culture is necessary to drive neighbourhood working and the importance of leadership and vision; the need to understand the population, particularly where demographics are changing rapidly, and how we can find ways to demonstrate the value of neighbourhood working.
- vii. The lessons from our local work demonstrate how local authorities are taking positive steps to develop new approaches. Neighbourhood and community empowerment are not new endeavours, amongst residents or officers. However new ways of working are constantly emerging, including finding ways to make good use of IT, how to use neighbourhood forums most effectively, new roles for elected members and how to engage new communities.

- viii. With an Empowerment White Paper on the horizon, the time is right to learn from the experience of local authorities, communities and other public sector agencies up and down the country about how to maximise community empowerment.
- ix. The findings of the first year of our NAN programme suggest that the critical factors are often the aspects of local authority work that are less easy for government to control. That empowerment comes from a supportive organisational culture, good communications, a thoughtful approach to diversity and strong leaderships, as much as from the introduction of particular initiatives and spending programmes.
- x. Developing this agenda will be challenging for local government. But local government has demonstrated considerable capacity and political will to take a lead in empowering its citizens and communities.

The NAN work programme

The two key elements of the NAN programme were a series of five action learning days and practical projects carried out with local authority partners:

- Action learning days focused on a range of topics including working with housing associations, dealing with neighbourhood contact and youth engagement.
- Practical projects focused on five workstreams: organisational culture, working with diverse communities, measurement and impact, supporting councillors, and youth engagement, with each partner choosing one of these as the focus of their practical work.

Our local work in the first year involved over 190 individuals – community activists and officers – through face-to-face interviews, focus groups, discussion sessions and telephone interviews.

NAN practical work with local authority partners 2007-08

- **LB Barking and Dagenham** – the impact and aspirations for neighbourhood management
- **Birmingham City Council** – future options for neighbourhood governance in the future
- **Bradford MDC** – capturing the success of working in neighbourhoods
- **LB Camden** – developing area forums
- **LB Hackney** – empowering elected members
- **LB Haringey** – embedding a culture of partnership working at a neighbourhood level (ongoing)
- **King's Lynn and West Norfolk BC** – identifying service delivery strategies for migrant workers
- **Knowsley MBC** – identifying social networks among families to inform service delivery
- **LB Lewisham** – managing expectations within new structures
- **Newcastle City Council** – demonstrating the impact of locality working and building resident responsibility in local change
- **Surrey County Council** – the member experience of locality working
- **LB Tower Hamlets** – young people's participation in service design and improvement
- **Wakefield MDC** – the experiences of migrant workers and the barriers they face in accessing local services.

Wider Young Foundation work on neighbourhoods and community empowerment, plus several additional consultancy projects with local authorities, enhanced our understanding of the programme. Many of our NAN partners took part in these projects. A full list is at the end of this report.

2. The policy context

Over the past years the debate over localism and community empowerment, the future of local democracy, and the quest to find different ways to improve public services through community engagement has intensified. Renewed interest from new Prime Minister in 2007 and a new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government have renewed focus and enthusiasm, with the announcement of a new White Paper on Empowerment to be published in 2008. This agenda now has cross party support, with all three of the main political parties having broadly similar positions on the value of, and the need to encourage, local voice and influence.

There is a real opportunity to capitalise on this interest in national and local government, and to create practical opportunities to empower people in

communities everywhere to have more say about what happens in their neighbourhood. However, there is a risk that this opportunity will be lost if local authorities, the wider public sector and local political parties are not fully engaged and committed to the community empowerment debate. This is a field with a long history, where activists in communities, officers in the public sector and politicians often find their memories of successful empowerment dwarfed by the failures and botched initiatives carried out in the name of empowerment.

All over the country there are strong examples of community empowerment. Many local successes are driven by community and neighbourhood organisations, and community practitioners and neighbourhood managers in local authorities, while significant improvements have been made by the police and health authorities in increasing responsiveness to community voices. Community empowerment is central to any meaningful application of the local authority's place-shaping role. If local authorities do not work closely with their communities they will fail to shape places and spaces. Many local authorities are already doing innovative and effective work to empower communities and there is a wealth of experience across different services. However, in many places this experience remains siloed, sometimes it operates under the radar of corporate policy, and too often agencies working in the same areas fail to find synergies with their empowerment work, wasting valuable resources through duplication and frustrating residents.

63% of people in England **do not believe we can influence decisions** affecting our local area today¹
77% of us **feel we belong strongly to the neighbourhood** in which we live²
73% support changes that would **give local neighbourhoods greater control** over some services and budgets³
63% of us say we **are prepared to invest the time** necessary to influence change⁴
35% say they want a **neighbourhood forum** which anyone can attend, and **23%** a **new kind of neighbourhood council**⁵

As we found in the Transforming Neighbourhoods programme, regardless of variations in type of areas and nature of their populations, the challenges in implementing neighbourhood working and the issues faced by members and officers are remarkably similar throughout the country.

¹ Citizenship Survey (2007)

² Citizenship Survey (2007)

³ LGIU YouGov poll (2006)

⁴ Together We Can poll (Spring 2006)

⁵ LGIU YouGov poll (2006)

3. Our starting point

The NAN programme design was informed by the Young Foundation's first neighbourhood programme, the Transforming Neighbourhoods consortium. This two-year programme of research, innovation and practical action was designed to encourage a major devolution of power to neighbourhoods during the run up to the publication of the 2006 Local Government White Paper. Although the White Paper was far weaker in its encouragement of devolution than was anticipated at the time, it still had the affect of pushing neighbourhood working and community empowerment up the agenda for English local authorities.

From Transforming Neighbourhoods we learnt that local government devolved power and influence to neighbourhoods and local communities for three reasons: to improve services, to empower residents, and to increase engagement in democratic processes. The majority of local authorities are driven by one of these motivations to a greater extent than the other two, although other drivers come into play.⁶

We also developed a model for understanding why neighbourhood working is more successful in some areas than others. We learnt that although solutions are by their very nature local and impossible to prescribe in detail, four dimensions emerged as critical for effective neighbourhood working: **structures, people, process** and **organisational culture**.

The early framing papers generated by the Transforming Neighbourhoods project highlighted that "the closer to the ground you get, the less **structures** matter..."⁷ (and the more that the ways in which work is done become important). Conversely – it's true to say that for neighbourhood working to be effective, the further away from the ground you get, the **more** structures matter. Successful neighbourhood working needs to be driven from the centre of the local authority and embedded within different departments' business plans.

The various **people** involved in neighbourhood working face different challenges and pressures. Members are being asked to 'raise their game' by government and local authorities, but often feel that neighbourhood action has been a core function for years. Community groups often report that they feel exhausted and disillusioned by years of agitating for change and are often dismissed as 'usual suspects'. Officers

⁶ *How local government devolves and why - Part 1: why work in neighbourhoods and communities*. Briefing was commissioned for the IDEa and LGA, Young Foundation (November 2006)

⁷ *Seeing the woods from the trees: The evolving landscape for neighbourhood arrangements*. Young Foundation (November 2005)

face competing demands from members, residents, activists, partners and other services and often carry high levels of risk in their day-to-day work. Nurturing people in each of these diverse roles is important to enable them to develop the skills, experience and trust to enter into the sort of mature dialogues needed to resolve complex local issues.

Authorities take various approaches to structures and change, with decisions shaped by local politics, the geography of their neighbourhoods, pressure from community groups and local activists, and by the legacy of past structures and initiatives. What emerged as key is not the nature of the **structures**, but the **processes** that were put in place to shape, design and implement the structures.

The legacy of all our work with local authorities on this agenda has established that the organisations that progress the development of neighbourhood working most effectively are those where their neighbourhoods agenda go with the grain of organisational **culture**.

An appropriate organisational culture enables agencies to overcome long-standing silo mentalities, to integrate neighbourhood and community engagement at the core of service planning, and to fit neighbourhood strategies into LSPs and LAAs. A supportive culture allows all the different stakeholders to learn from past experience and enables officers and members to take risks and innovate to meet community demands.⁸

Our NAN work took this analysis as its starting point.

4. Findings from our practical projects: five key factors that underpin neighbourhood working

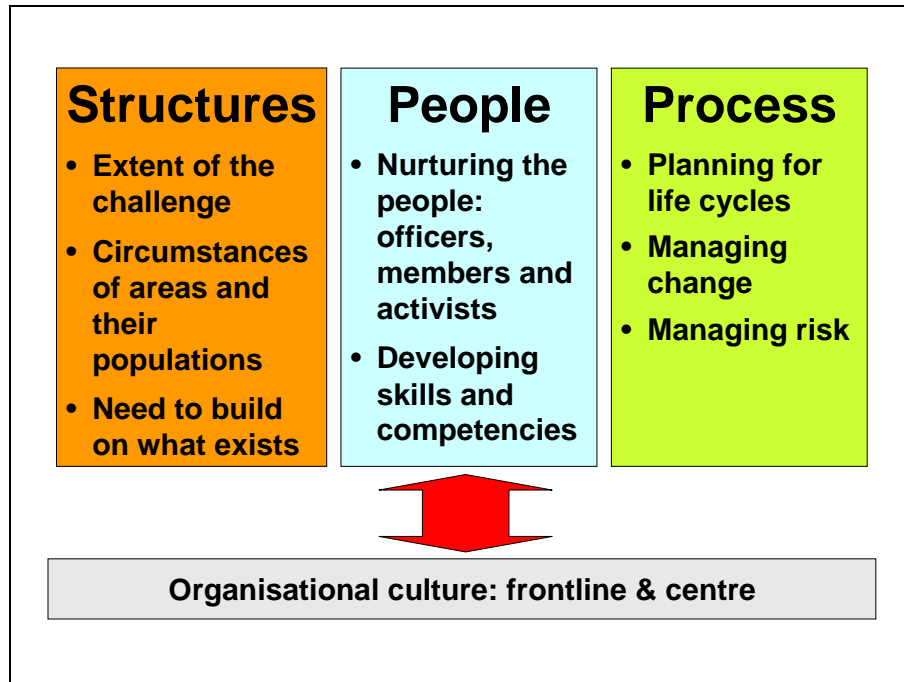
The snapshot of local authority experience that the NAN programme provides suggests that community empowerment is continuing to be a growing priority for local government. We found examples of strong cross party consensus to support localisation, and places where the diversity and energy of locally elected members bucks the national trend. Partners' choice of practical projects was driven by their local experience and need to resolve and unblock local issues.

The findings from our local work illuminate our understanding of how organisational culture, process and people can drive neighbourhood working. NAN year 1 findings focus around five key areas:

⁸ *TransformingNeighbourhoods: lessons from local work in fifteen areas*. Young Foundation (July 2007)

- i. leadership and vision
- ii. developing organisational culture
- iii. understanding the population
- iv. listening and feeding back, and
- v. demonstrating the value of neighbourhood working.

Figure 1: Four dimensions for effective neighbourhood working



i. Leadership and vision

Successful empowerment needs to be led from the top and driven from the bottom. The experience of the Neighbourhood Action Network demonstrates how strong leadership is helping local authorities work in partnership with residents to improve local quality of life.

Neighbourhood working is a constant learning curve. Strong leadership – where direction and vision is communicated throughout local institutions, organisations and communities – helps everyone understand their role in delivering positive outcomes for neighbourhoods.

Strong leadership and direction of the local empowerment agenda:

- unites residents, the voluntary sector and public institutions under a shared vision
- ensures that local authority staff understand their role in empowering local communities
- helps manage the expectations that residents have of what empowerment can achieve
- provides new opportunities for communities to have a voice in local decision making

Neighbourhood working can be challenging; engagement structures need to be appropriate, resident expectations need to be managed, and everyone needs to know what is trying to be achieved. Strong leadership can help overcome these challenges. This chimes well with the local authority place shaping agenda.

Lessons from practical work with our partners

Our findings come from a range of projects with local authority partners. Each of these local projects has been different – in **Barking and Dagenham** we looked at how the success of their new Neighbourhood Management service could be measured and in **Camden** we assessed the initial progress of the borough's Area Forums. In **Surrey** and **Hackney**, our local work focused on the roles of elected members in new resident engagement structures.

Each project has unearthed examples of how successful leadership is driving the empowerment agenda, as well as highlighting challenges that need to be overcome.

The need for a strong message

Barking and Dagenham's newly-created Neighbourhood Management service involves residents, the voluntary sector and statutory services in addressing the priorities of the borough's most deprived neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood Management partnerships are supported by elected members, who attend meetings and are kept updated through regular bulletins from Neighbourhood Managers.

Both councillors and service providers are clear in their aspirations for Neighbourhood Management – they want to see an empowered community which can shape the design and delivery of local services. An important driver has been the corporate wish to improve community relations in the borough and boost local people's trust in public services, against a backdrop of complex local politics. There are barriers to this, notably the lack of engagement from some service providers with partnership boards. Some services are apprehensive of Neighbourhood Management

and are reluctant to commit resources. Strong leadership about the importance of this agenda and what it is trying to achieve will be needed to overcome these obstacles.

Councillors eager to engage in new ways which add value

Hackney and **Surrey** both use neighbourhood forums to engage with their citizens. The forums, which are led by council officers, are designed so that residents can bring local issues and possible solutions to the attention of the council leadership.

In both areas, elected members are optimistic that forums add value, feeling that in the past there have been too few formal structures for engagement and debate locally. Members are also eager to make sure that forums offer something new and do not replicate their existing community engagement activity. This has been a challenge for both Surrey and Hackney; attracting a new, more diverse mix of residents that bring fresh information and social networks has sometimes proved difficult. Nonetheless, council officers and elected members are determined to make forums a success and are expanding their publicity as well as looking at the possibility of devolving small pots of money, or decisions on budgets.

Councillors are also considering the potential to use ICT to engage with their constituents. In Hackney, elected members are keen to learn about how online polls, text voting and internet discussion boards can supplement their additional engagement.

The need for a shared vision to manage expectations

Area Forums are also used by **Camden** as a way for councillors to engage with residents. Forum meetings cover each of the borough's wards and involve a minimum of council staff. Facilitation is conducted by ward councillors and, similarly to Hackney and Surrey, the events are apolitical.

Camden's Area Forums are still in their infancy, but are exceptionally well run and attract a large number of local residents. Residents, councillors and officers are all keen to use forums to improve relationships and build trust. They also feel that forums are an effective way to exchange local information and intelligence. Residents are keen to see action being taken on local priorities and see the forums as a place to do it. Councillors share this desire for action, but feel that forums – at least in the short term – are best used as a consultative tool, where information can be gathered.

The shared vision for Area Forums in Camden is still being developed. Resident expectations of Area Forums differ slightly from those of elected members, in that residents want action from the onset. Without the shared vision, where all participants understand the purpose of the forums and what they are able to achieve,

there is a danger that the expectations of residents surpasses the remit of the forums, and ultimately that people begin to disengage.

Clarity of purpose

In **Birmingham** we explored different options for the City Council to take forward their programme of localism. Birmingham was one of the first big urban authorities to carry out a systematic devolution through their 'going local' programme. We used the model we developed in our earlier work for LGA/IDeA which explored the three dimensions driving local government's devolution of power and influence to neighbourhoods and local communities: to improve services, to empower residents, and to increase engagement in democratic processes. Analysis of the drivers for further devolution in the City focused on how these could be mapped onto Birmingham's structures. We found that the constituency – or area wide – level was the most appropriate tier to focus service devolution; that the ward level – ward committees – were well positioned for community involvement in local democratic processes; and that the neighbourhood level was the logical place to focus empowerment and engagement activities.⁹ Clarity about the expectations placed on different structures will mean that resources can be deployed appropriately and that ways of working can be developed that enhance, rather than frustrate, the implementation of the overall vision.

ii. Developing organisational culture

Over the last decade there has been a growing acknowledgement within the public sector that one of the major impediments to improving service delivery is the culture of the organisation. A local authority can fine tune its departmental structures time and time again, but if the culture of the authority does not support cross-departmental working, fails to accommodate local priority setting or does not put empowerment of residents and service users at its core, then effective working at a neighbourhood level rarely follows.

Our work over the last three years on our neighbourhood programmes has taught us the importance of a supportive organisational culture. Many of our NAN partner authorities have sought to galvanise corporate support for neighbourhood working and empowerment, and to change the way in which services are commissioned or provided.

⁹ *How local government devolves and why - Part 1: why work in neighbourhoods and communities*. Briefing was commissioned for the IdeA and LGA. Young Foundation (November 2006)

Changing and developing organisational culture can play a key part in promoting resident and councillor empowerment through:

- creating a vision of participation and partnership which is a reality of the way people work within the organisation's structure, not just a mantra
- aligning the expectations of key stakeholders
- ensuring residents' views inform service planning and prioritisation
- building a collaborative or joint commissioning approach to problem solving
- encouraging key stakeholders to modify their working practices

Lessons from practical work with our partners

Working specifically with **Lewisham** and **Haringey**, but also drawing on our findings elsewhere, our practical projects revealed a series of recurring themes:

Aligning expectations and changing behaviours

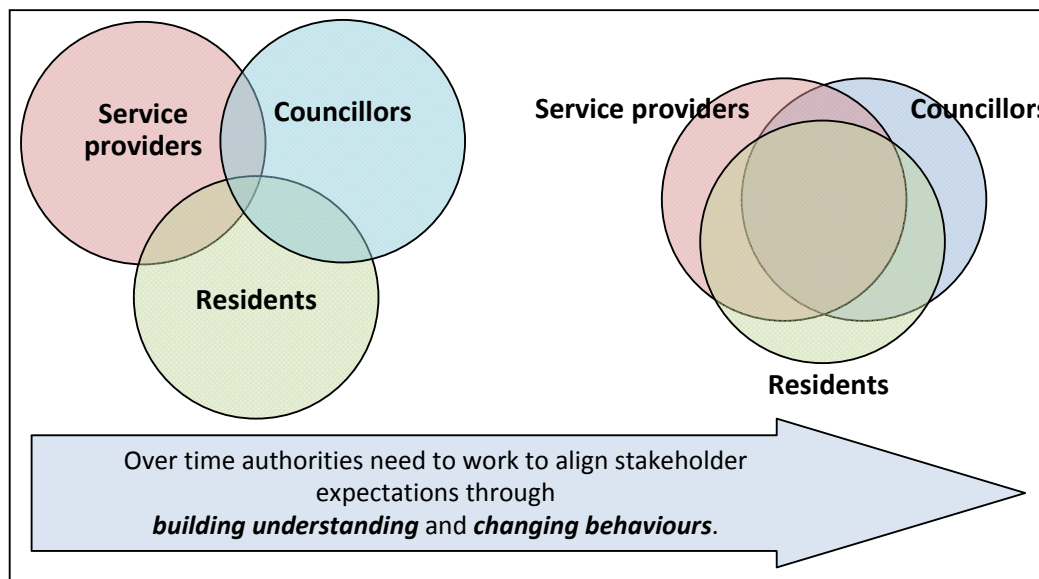
Lewisham has a strong history of both partnership and neighbourhood working. In recent years neighbourhood management has been introduced to the most deprived parts of the borough. Recently a new format of cross-borough localised working has been adopted. 18 Local Area Assemblies based on ward boundaries have been set up, with an emphasis on community empowerment and planning. Our work focused on the expectations of the key stakeholders involved in this transition - residents, councillors, officers supporting the structure and service providers.

Clearly the expectations and working cultures of each of these groups will not be identical, nor should they be. In Lewisham however each of these stakeholder groups spoke highly of the need to involve the community in planning and decision making, there was a strong understanding of the goal of the new approach amongst senior leadership, operational staff and councillors. But different stakeholders sometimes had different expectations of working practices, behaviours, and how organisational resources were being deployed. The structural changes in Lewisham are very recent, so these differences of opinion are unsurprising, but our work confirmed the need to consolidate the shared understanding of the new goal by developing an understanding of the views of other stakeholders, maximising organisational buy-in and, crucially, embedding the necessary change in working patterns and behaviours.

This task is undoubtedly challenging for all authorities. No matter how well thought through a structure is on paper, staff, councillors and residents are likely to continue to use tried and tested methods to contact each other or elicit information. Prior perceptions, some of which may be unhelpful or entrenched, are unlikely to change overnight. Developing a strong organisational culture that supports empowerment requires not only clear leadership and vision but also self awareness from each

stakeholder about the impact of their working practices and behaviours. Trusting other partners is a key first step in building shared expectations amongst different stakeholders.

Figure 2: Building shared expectations



Building a new relationship with residents

Reinforcing a partnership approach between service providers and residents, building a mutual respect for what each party brings to the table, is a key element of empowerment. The government's agenda on multi-agency place shaping, along with a desire to more closely involve residents in decisions about their neighbourhood (and the threat of future public spending reductions) has brought the issue to the fore. Many authorities are now seeking to redefine the responsibilities of both service providers and residents locally. Charters are just one way of doing this, and our work in this field found many good practice examples.¹⁰

Authorities like **Newcastle** are also exploring the issue, in recognition that there is only so much any agency can do in isolation on certain areas. Managing waste is one area where local authorities need to share production of outcomes with residents, both to reduce pressure on landfill and to reduce the area's carbon footprint. The practical contribution of recycling, disposing of litter and refuse to improve public spaces are considerable. However these can only be achieved in residents actively change what they do, becoming partners in change rather than recipients of services.

¹⁰ *How to develop a local charter: A guide for local authorities*. Young Foundation (January 2008)

Our work in Newcastle focused on the West End of the city where the council is hoping to build residents' understanding of the part they can play individually in making changes happen locally. Newcastle currently spends approximately £2 million more on environmental services than other comparable local authorities. Well-intentioned decisions to improve the environment in the most deprived parts of the borough have had the unintended consequence of creating a culture of reliance upon the local authority to solve all local issues, and an expectation of a level of service provision that the local authority cannot maintain indefinitely.

Newcastle is not the first local authority to encounter such a challenge. Traditionally, local institutions like local authorities have adopted a paternalistic, 'top-down' culture. Moving to a collaborative relationship with residents requires acknowledgement of this legacy and a change in the language, style and culture of the authority, as well as a change in the approach and expectations of residents. To reach the goal of two-way partnership, change is needed on both sides.

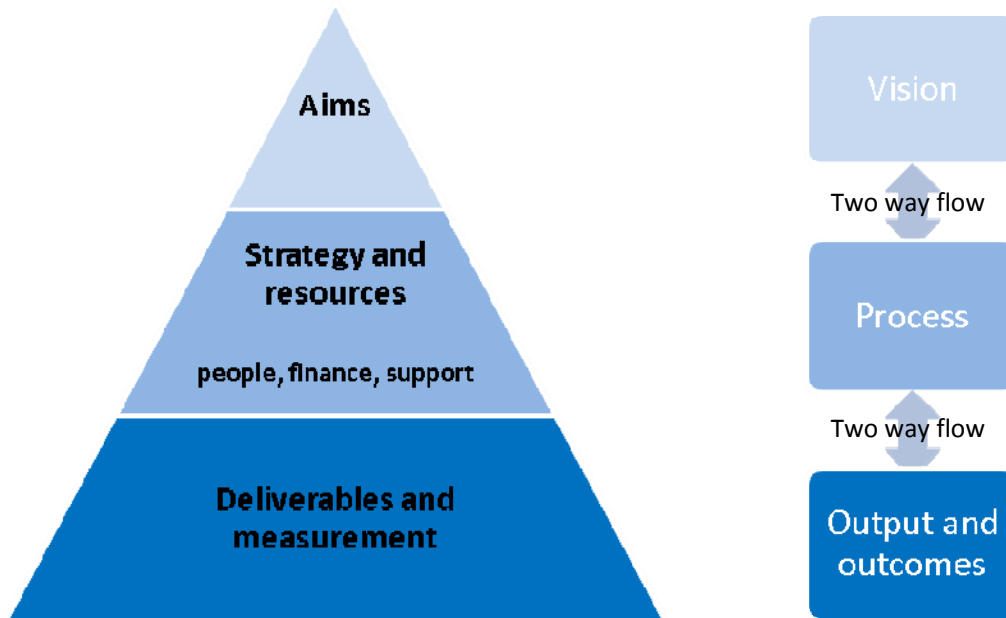
Shaping the vision from the grass roots

Much of the literature to date on organisational culture has focused on the importance of clear vision, strong leadership and defined objectives. Whilst this is undoubtedly important, especially with new structures or working patterns, creating the opportunity for information from the frontline to influence priority setting and direction is vital.

Our work in **Bradford** focused on how to capture and demonstrate the success of working in neighbourhoods. Bradford has a long history of regeneration and community capacity building. It also has strong direction from senior leadership, which is informed by authority-wide data sets. As with many authorities, ensuring that not only does the vision from the top influence the work on the ground but also, conversely, that local knowledge and information from residents and frontline service providers informs strategic decision making and direction of travel, is challenging but crucial.

The flow of information from the 'bottom-up' is often complicated, but capturing data, lessons and even anecdotes systematically can help service providers make better use of local information in service planning. Developing a culture which respects both strategic and anecdotal information is part and parcel of genuinely empowering communities.

Figure 3: Aligning priorities throughout the organisation



Starting afresh

Camden have recently introduced new locality working structures, seeking to better empower residents and clarify the role of the ward councillor at the centre of local decision making. The borough has introduced Area Forums, which have recently started meeting to give citizens a regular opportunity to input into the decision making of the council.

Across Camden there are significant success stories from recent years – good practice projects as well as headway made on persistent local issues. But there is also a degree of resident cynicism born from the experience of past projects which didn't go as expected, a deadline missed or consultation fatigue.

The experience of Camden will be familiar to many agencies throughout the country. Establishing a new structure is a significant step, especially when it comes with additional resourcing requirements or changes to how decisions are made locally. But alongside new structures transparency will be needed – with clarity about what residents will and will not be able to influence, good feedback about decisions and realism about the fact that not all partners have equal power. This kind of clear communication is essential to win over the sceptics and to enable new structures to flourish.

iii. Understanding the population

The need to understand the diverse and fast-changing nature of local populations is growing at the local level. Throughout the country there has been an increase in migration, not only in larger metropolitan areas, but areas that have in the past had stable and homogenous populations, such as smaller rural towns and villages. The composition of new migrants is also changing, with new groups arriving in the country from Eastern Europe and African nations which have formerly had little tradition of migration to the UK. Migration has increased dramatically in recent years, in the UK and internationally. In 1965, across the world, 75 million people lived outside their home country. The equivalent figure today is 200 million.¹¹

Increased diversity has changed many communities. Where previously there may have been a largest dominant minority – possibly from the Caribbean or the Indian sub-continent, now many different groups co-exist. They arrive with different motivations, some following past traditions, others migrate in search of a permanent future in the UK. Others increasingly are migrating for shorter lengths of time, with the expectations of staying in the UK for a few years, earning money to save or send back home, then returning. Many people arrive in the country legally, some however are less formal in their travel and these can remain invisible to public services. Local authorities need to search for answers about the numbers of migrants within their area, what skills they bring, how long they might plan to stay, where they live, which local services they wish or need to access, their engagement in English language courses, and their overall demographics.

Our work focusing on migrant worker populations showed that the impact of relatively small numbers of new residents from different backgrounds on areas with relatively stable homogenous populations can be significant. With few traditions of dealing with difference, amongst agencies and residents, the strain of adapting to changing demographics can be significant. However our two partners' experience revealed that identifying strategies to understand local populations can support neighbourhood working by:

- Promoting increased engagement among new populations
- empowering residents to voice their opinion about services needed
- leveraging their skill set to meet possible local economic opportunities and labour demands
- increasing efficiency and effectiveness by planning ahead to address the service needs of an entire community

¹¹ *Global Economic Prospects*. The World Bank (2006)

Lessons from practical work with our partners

Wakefield and **King's Lynn and West Norfolk** were interested in understanding better the experience of migrant workers, particularly in housing, employment and the community, as well as barriers they face in accessing local services.

Engagement is essential

Like many areas of the UK, the district of **King's Lynn and West Norfolk** is experiencing significant inward migration from new European Union member states. The arrival of migrant workers from countries such as Lithuania, Latvia and Poland, has brought with it a number of challenges and opportunities, both for local public services and the existing community. To understand this particular population, engaging them in the planning and delivery of local services is key. This can be a challenging endeavour as many migrant communities work irregular patterns of shift work, have low levels of English language skills and lack advocates or any local association for migrant workers.

For public services, these challenges confront existing methods of service delivery. Officers working on issues ranging from housing and employment to leisure all stated that learning English was important to successfully make the transition to living in Britain. However, in King's Lynn despite their efforts to promote ESOL courses and meet the needs of migrant workers, some ESOL classes appear to be under-utilised, while others are over-subscribed. The reasons for this is likely due to the location and timing of classes, with those classes in neighbourhoods with very high densities of migrant workers more likely to attract high numbers. Engaging migrant workers in the decision-making process could allow for more accurate information to feed into ESOL scheduling and location strategy.

Empowering new communities

Through our work with both King's Lynn and West Norfolk and **Wakefield** it emerged that migrant workers want a part in shaping services and they are ready to be engaged. The migrant workers living in Wakefield are generally young, educated people who are attracted to the area not just because of employment but because there is already a vibrant, sociable migrant worker community – particularly in the City of Wakefield.

Their experiences of living in the area are largely positive. Nonetheless, most form friendships with other migrants of the same nationality and it has been difficult for them to develop relationships with people in the existing community. The lack of meaningful contact has contributed towards the prevalence of false perceptions of each other, and this can fuel tensions. Thus far it has been the role of locally-based

service providers to be the link between different communities and dispel false myths that exist.

Migrant workers in Wakefield would like to form an association that advocates on their behalf, provides information about local services, develops relationships with existing community groups and also provide social functions. However, they require assistance in forming such an association. Resources that could be used to help such an association to take shape include locally-based staff including PCSOs, Neighbourhood Management structures and council staff from A8 countries. There are also some pro-active employment agencies and voluntary sector organisations in the area.

IT can be used as a tool for engagement

Information technology has changed the way new immigrants communicate with their home countries, as well as friends and families living in the same city. This has altered the relationship people have with the area in which they live, enabling more frequent communication and making it easier to maintain social networks across the UK, with friends and families in different countries and with their home country.

The majority of migrant workers in **Wakefield** are IT literate and use the internet and email to communicate with people in their home countries, as well as build social networks locally. They have begun to find solutions to their own problems, by seeking information and advice via the internet, as well as using an existing independently- monitored online Wakefield Forum (www.wakefield.pl). This forum is a popular source of discussion and information about common issues. This offers the local authority a potential route for engagement, which can be relatively low cost and a valuable alternative to conventional translation services.

Coordinating responsibilities is key

Within local authorities there is often no one person, or department, responsible for migrant workers. In **King's Lynn and West Norfolk** there was no single partnership, department or organisation taking the lead in developing a detailed understanding of the needs and impact of migrant workers. There was a recognition that a much greater degree of inter-agency collaboration was needed to encourage collaboration among service providers, locality workers, the voluntary sector, employers and both long-standing and new populations.

Coping with the new diversity of diversity

In **Haringey**, a borough with very high levels of diversity, the impact of new communities has had a significant impact on very local neighbourhoods, challenging social relationships between long-standing white and black communities, both of which have needed to adapt to living with new communities from Eastern Europe,

African countries and the Middle East. However both residents and agencies in the borough are used to living with diversity, giving a sound starting point for developing new ways of managing the impact of the rapidly changing population. Although the 'uncounted' population in the borough is significant – putting considerable pressures on local services – there are strong examples of good practice at the neighbourhood level. Area Assemblies have been held in community languages, including Turkish, and in one area a series of 'meet the neighbour' meetings took place. Local communities were given small budgets to prepare a range of food, and speakers explained the history of their arrival in the borough.

Encouraging understanding and building diverse social networks

In **Tower Hamlets**, our work on another Young Foundation neighbourhood initiative – Neighbourhood Taskforces – has also focused on the challenge of improving awareness and understanding amongst a very diverse population. We worked in Limehouse, one of the most diverse areas of the borough in terms of ethnicity, the age of its residents and levels of affluence.

The Taskforce process focused on building capacity and communication between some of these different groups, and in Limehouse socio-economic cohesion was the most challenging of all to bridge. Well established populations living in social housing found it difficult to understand the perspective of those who had moved in more recently to the multi-million pound apartments which now line the river front, and vice versa. These entrenched perspectives were often based on negative experiences or even long-standing myths and had led to caution on both sides in interactions with each other and especially with young people.

Our work with a small group of enthusiasts in the area resulted in an action plan to build contacts and connections between the two populations, focusing on how to improve the quality of life and opportunities for young people in the area. The lessons though are applicable to many authorities struggling with how to best encourage neighbourliness and how to deal with the rise in popularity of gated communities which threaten to create mono-cultural islands even in densely populated urban areas.

iv. Listening and feeding back

Those councils which are most successful in their communications with neighbourhoods and communities are those that use a range of methods, targeting particular media for particular groups of residents they want to reach.

Much is known about different ways of communicating with residents, individually and collectively. This section does not attempt a full discussion of these issues but illuminate the aspects that have emerged from our work that can underpin wider neighbourhood working.

Lessons from practical work with our partners

Giving feedback builds respect

Tower Hamlets' work with young people is amongst the best in London. It is well resourced and considerable effort is put into talking to young people about services to find out their views. Staff understand the importance of feeding back outcomes after any consultation exercise and clearly make a real effort to do this. Yet in a discussion at the end of an evening of young people showcasing short dramas, several of them remarked that although they responded to many questionnaires they felt they never heard back, so did not know whether their views were ever noticed. How feedback is communicated is therefore important – particularly making sure that it is appropriate and is heard by target groups.

Making use of neighbourhood forums

Where local authorities have taken the decision to work with residents openly and where awkward questions are responded to with candour, constructive relationships can develop. For those members and officers whose only experience of neighbourhood meetings is one of hostility and rancour, it can be a disconcerting experience to turn up at a well-attended meeting, that is good natured and where explanations of why some particular problem cannot be resolved overnight are listened to and generally accepted rather than producing catcalls. In **Newcastle, Barking & Dagenham** and **Haringey** we found examples of local meetings that worked well, with residents feeling they have a positive and active role to play, and are not just an audience.

Levels of consultation must be monitored

Consultation can create more problems than it resolves. **Surrey** makes good use of consultations but there was doubt amongst some councillors about the sheer number of consultations, the choice of the topics, and whether any use was made of the views received. We heard similar views in other areas and suspect that as greater importance has come to be placed on all councils talking to residents and listening to what they are saying, more authorities have introduced a requirement for departments to carry out consultations as an internal performance management target. As the range of officers who engage with the public expand it is imperative that authorities give them sufficient training and support to implement well planned consultation exercises. There is a good case for some form of corporate management of consultation, and possibly quality standards, both why it is proposed and then how it is done.

Meeting local people's particular needs

In **Hackney** the majority of councillors we spoke with wanted to make much better use of IT as a tool to help two-way communications with constituents. But there was no agreement on how best to do this, rather a general feeling that it would be a good thing. Good ideas produced at local level should be fed into national work on local authority's use of IT process, to avoid duplication and the local reinvention of initiatives already tried elsewhere. It should also be recognised that using IT as a tool can be slow moving due to capacity issues. Identifying and addressing these issues at the national level would be beneficial.

In one instance, we learned that the use of languages other than English in a publication was reported to be counter-productive. Polish migrant workers in **Wakefield** told us they did not want the council to produce too much in Polish as locals resented it, seeing it as giving Poles special treatment. They felt it drew attention to them and said they would prefer information in Polish to be put on the council website where they could read it. This is an interesting illumination of the debate about the use of translated materials, polarised between the need to provide information to people in need in their mother tongue and the wish to discourage dependency on translated materials and encourage people to learn English rather than having information always provided in their own language.

v. Demonstrating the value of neighbourhood working

Demonstrating the impact of neighbourhood working emerged as one of the key issues for our local authority partners this year for a number of reasons. In a climate of growing financial pressures at authorities, it has become increasingly important to be able to make the case for continued investment in locality working both internally, to other directorates, and externally, to central government and key funders.

Additionally, the national focus on empowerment has also been met with mixed responses by local government departments and other public sector agencies. Whilst some are eager to work with neighbourhood structures and can see the benefits for their service, others are keen to maintain their own existing working practices, with some openly cynical of the benefits of locality working.

The focus on place shaping, on working in partnership with a number of agencies to achieve authority-wide change, has hastened an improvement in the way local agencies, including councils, capture and monitor data. From 2009 on, the Comprehensive Area Assessment will focus on authority-wide performance and include a requirement for authorities to demonstrate how they have involved local people in decision making.

Our work with NAN partners this year suggests that demonstrating impact can help:

- to align cross-agency support for locality working and the role it can play in empowerment
- to win the support of local residents and councillors when progress is made
- to encourage and reward neighbourhood-based staff.

Lessons from practical work with our partners

Working with **Camden, Barking and Dagenham, Bradford** and **Newcastle**, our practical projects revealed a series of recurring themes.

Demonstrating improvement over time

Alongside a number of other authorities, **Bradford** have been considering how to align their data capture at all levels to best 'tell the story' of the city's progress and successes. In the knowledge that information, statistics and anecdotes are currently being captured at a neighbourhood, ward, area and city level they have invested in a data observatory, to bring together this information from the different agencies. This approach is allowing them to do several things.

Firstly, to better explain city-wide trends – to show where pockets of investment and time have led to big statistical differences for the city, but also where new authority-wide working practices are changing performance. Our work with the authority highlighted that for this to be meaningful there also needs to be a way to systematically feed in anecdotal evidence, including stories and examples from staff working in neighbourhoods. Bradford's new data capture and analysis system helps information from the 'bottom-up' to inform the city-wide data sets and therefore inform decision making at that level.

Secondly, the new system in Bradford enables information, trends and even future forecasting to inform the work of localities staff on the ground. Bringing together information from different agencies will give the authority a clear sense of local need and what the multi-agency response to this should be. It will therefore allow Bradford to prioritise different areas in resource allocation and provide a template for performance management of targets, for example an area's contribution to an authority-wide LAA indicator.

Building shared expectations of impact

Barking and Dagenham's new locality structures have strong buy-in from the centre. They have been welcomed by many service providers, both within the council and outside, and local ward councillors, who the structures are specifically designed to promote and give additional decision-making powers to. As with many

authorities, the structures have been met with more mixed feelings amongst residents, some of whom are cynical of the impact the new structures will have as previous initiatives did not meet their expectations.

Winning support for new structures is always challenging, but demonstrating progress towards a goal, or the impact of your work can play a big part. Barking and Dagenham are adopting a process of ongoing evaluation of their light touch and more intensive neighbourhood management areas. Our work highlighted the need for stakeholders to agree at the beginning their individual expectations of any new structures. In this case this included changes in awareness and attitude plus some small quick win projects in the first six months; project plans and priorities set for changing some of the longer-term priorities such as isolation or unemployment by the end of year one; and changes in key indicators and outputs on these priority areas by year five.

Building shared expectations can help avoid frustration or fatigue later. In particular, by celebrating the smaller changes in attitude, awareness or other 'softer' outcomes which will not be picked up early on as changes to 'hard' statistical outputs, authorities can demonstrate real impact of locality working structures early on.

5. Next steps

With an Empowerment White Paper on the horizon, the time is right to learn from the experience of local authorities, communities and other public sector agencies up and down the country about how to maximise community empowerment. For agencies, the suspicion will remain that ultimately empowerment is a zero-sum game. If a local authority devolved power to a community group, does this mean that the sum total of its power is proportionately diminished? Or is it that it can by apparently losing power gain benefits in terms of improved services, better community cohesion and more active resident engagement in local community life?

The findings of the first year of our NAN programme suggest that the critical factors are often the aspects of local authority work that are less easy for government to control. That empowerment comes from a supportive organisational culture, good communications, a thoughtful approach to diversity and strong leaderships, as much as from the introduction of particular initiatives and spending programmes.

Developing this agenda will be challenging for local government. It may involve fundamental changes to the way councils prioritise budgets and organise services and structures. It will require sustained investment in strategic and local capacity

over a decade or more. But local government has demonstrated considerable capacity and political will to take a lead in empowering its citizens and communities.

The NAN programme will continue for its second year until March 2009. Year two will focus on three themes:

- i. devolving funds to the local level
- ii. neighbourliness and belonging
- iii. organisational culture, building on the work started in year 1.

As the central and local government policy agenda around empowerment evolves, the Young Foundation will continue to feed the findings of the programme into government and other key agencies. We will aim to maximise the value of the experiences of our partners and to make sure that our shared practical learning about the difficult job of community and neighbourhood empowerment is communicated to those who set the frameworks and strategies that influence future action.

16 May 2008

This report has been written by Nicola Bacon, Mandeep Hothi, Melissa Magallanes, Mandeep Hothi and Vicki Savage.

For more information about the Young Foundation's work on neighbourhoods go to <http://www.youngfoundation.org>



THE YOUNG FOUNDATION

The Young Foundation is a unique organisation that undertakes research to identify and understand social needs and then develops practical initiatives and institutions to address them.

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Annex: Other relevant Young Foundation work on neighbourhoods

- ***How to develop a local charter: A guide for local authorities (January 2008)***
This guide draws together the rationale for developing a charter, simple steps to implementing a charter, a troubleshooting guide and a number of case studies.
 - ***Ward councillor and community leadership: A future perspective (November 2007)*** This study investigates how the role of ward councillors is likely to change over the next five years.
 - ***Good Neighbours: The role of housing associations in neighbourhood governance (July 2007)*** A report into how housing associations can work with local authorities to give their residents a voice in local communities and neighbourhoods.
 - ***Why involve and what are the outcomes? The Duty to Involve for best value authorities (June 2007)*** This briefing was commissioned by the Communities and Local Government Department - it includes initial thoughts on two key elements of the duty – why involve and what are the outcomes.
 - **Piloting the neighbourhood Taskforce model** – using this model of intensive short-term intervention to build social relationships and tackle long-standing problems in areas with complex community politics. This is being piloted in Tottenham and Limehouse in London.
 - ***Transformers: How local areas innovate to address changing social needs (January 2008)*** This joint report by the Young Foundation and NESTA investigates why some places innovate more effectively to meet social needs than others.
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