



THE YOUNG FOUNDATION

To all news desks

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How to make localism work? New book tells local experience of empowering neighbourhoods

A new collection of stories today shows why there is growing interest in passing power right down to very local areas – and the new challenges that it brings.

Engaging with the ultra-orthodox Charedi Jewish community in Haringey, rural innovation by a Wiltshire parish council, managing the challenges of globalisation and diversity for neighbourhoods, and recruiting women councillors, are some of the topics covered in a new collection of stories about community empowerment published today by The Young Foundation and Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA).

'Transforming Neighbourhoods - A collection of stories about community empowerment' reflect the findings and lessons from Transforming Neighbourhoods, a two-year programme of research and practical action to encourage community empowerment and the development of neighbourhood working, which brought together 22 partners from central and local government and other national organisations with an interest in neighbourhoods. The 21 stories have been chosen to reflect perspectives and challenges that are common to neighbourhoods and local authorities right across the country, including pressing questions for local government such as: What is a neighbourhood? What encourages neighbourliness and social interaction between different groups and communities? How can agencies and communities respond to the growing levels of diversity in neighbourhoods? How can we develop new and innovative ways to encourage community participation to address the lack of public interest and trust in local politics?

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP said;

"Localism is about giving people the opportunity to provide local solutions to local challenges, whether it's improving a park, making streets safer, or clearing up graffiti. The stories in this book show just how it can be done. There's the mayor committed to spending more time out on the front line than in the town hall. The estate in Birmingham, once dogged by crime and grime, where local people rolled up their sleeves and found a new a new sense of pride. Or the town halls that have got local people involved in deciding how budgets are spent. They are an inspiration to everyone who wants to make devolution to the doorstep a reality."

The book captures lessons and experiences - both good and bad - about what makes neighbourhood working effective in a variety of different geographical and political circumstances, and examples of innovation that need to be shared widely across local government and other public agencies. These can be reduced to four factors that are essential for effective neighbourhood working:

- **Flexible and responsive structures that reflect real need and circumstances:** structures matter much less at street level than they do at the Town Hall, but to be successful neighbourhood working needs to be driven from the centre and owned politically. Councils need structures but they must allow for local difference.

- Structures matter, but the **processes put in place to shape, design and implement them are also crucial**. How change and risk are managed can make the difference between whether neighbourhood working succeeds or fails.
- **Enthusiastic and dedicated individuals make community empowerment a reality** by working day after day to make change happen in neighbourhoods, often in challenging circumstances. They need strong support to develop the skills, experience and trust needed to work in such a complex environment.
- **An organisational culture that is committed to embedding community engagement at the heart of council business is crucial** - this requires clear political and corporate leadership to transform an ambition into a way of working from the centre to the frontline, and the right balance between innovation and risk management.

Saffron James, programme leader for Transforming Neighbourhoods said: *“The stories reflect the mood of these conversations and the growing political interest in neighbourhoods. In the last decade the political spotlight has focused on the need for individuals and communities to have more opportunities to influence the decisions that affect their day-to-day lives and immediate environment. Over the past two years we have seen this interest gather pace as debate about the Local Government White Paper pushed community empowerment and neighbourhood working up the agenda for English local authorities and for all the main political parties. There is now cross-party consensus on the need for a new type of relationship between citizens and the state, one where power and influence are increasingly devolved to people and to communities to shape their own futures.”*

Lucy de Groot, Executive Director, IDeA said *“ The debate has moved on from whether community engagement and empowerment is a good thing to what it should look like. Councils have already demonstrated that they can lead the way with innovative mechanisms for achieving real engagement at the neighbourhood level; the IDeA is keen to be involved as we feel it’s important that all communities and individuals throughout the country feel that they have the opportunity to influence decisions that affect the places they live and work in and the services they use. Our support for this work and the publication is important to ensure that all councils can learn from this innovative and best practice”*

The report will be launched at 7pm, **Portcullis House**, London, SW1A 2LW. The speakers will be: Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, **Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP**, Executive Director, IDeA, Lucy de Groot and Young Foundation director Geoff Mulgan, and Shirley Mucklow, a community activist from Bellingham in Lewisham.

For further information please contact Faizal Hakim, press at the Young Foundation on 0208- 709-9265 or 07899-931-477 or faizal.hakim@youngfoundation.org

Project manager and editor of the book Saffron James will be able for interview on **07909 912444**

Notes to Editors

1. *Transforming Neighbourhoods- A collection of stories about community empowerment* is published by the Young Foundation, with support from the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA). The book is priced at £10.00 and is available from The Young Foundation, 18 Victoria Park Square, Bethnal Green, E2 9PF or www.youngfoundation.org/publications/books. Eight stories from the collection will be available as free downloads from the IDeA Knowledge website (<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=7193648>).

2. The Young Foundation's Transforming Neighbourhoods programme was set up in the summer of 2005 to promote and accelerate the development of community empowerment and neighbourhood working, with a specific focus on the Whitehall localism agenda that was then starting to gather pace. The programme combined intensive practical work with local authority partners to help understand challenges and develop new solutions, with research about a range of issues of importance to neighbourhoods and to our partner organisations. Transforming Neighbourhoods ended in March 2007.

3. The programme brought together key stakeholders from national and local government and other organisations interested in the neighbourhoods agenda including: Birmingham City Council, London Borough of Camden, London Borough of Haringey, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, London Borough of Lewisham, Liverpool City Council, London Borough of Newham, Sheffield City Council, Staffordshire County Council, Suffolk County Council, Surrey County Council, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council, London Borough of Waltham Forest, Wiltshire County Council, Department for Communities and Local Government, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, Community Alliance, the Housing Corporation, the Improvement and Development Agency, the Local Government Association and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

4. The Young Foundation is a centre for social innovation that undertakes research to identify and understand social needs and then develops practical initiatives and institutions to address them. For more information go to www.youngfoundation.org.

5. The Improvement and Development Agency works for local government improvement so councils can serve people and places better. We do this in many ways: Identification and dissemination of best practice and innovation through our IDeA Knowledge website and through supporting beacon councils; through an on-line community of practice, where councillors and officers can share their experiences, challenges and solutions to neighbourhoods working; and we also directly support capacity building through our councillors and managerial leadership programmes.