



TRANSFORMING NEIGHBOURHOODS

LESSONS FROM LOCAL WORK IN FIFTEEN AREAS

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Published by:



Supported by:



CONTENTS

2	Executive Summary
6	Background
10	Local work in 15 areas
14	The findings
24	What works?
40	Conclusions
42	Partners in the Transforming Neighbourhoods programme 2005-2007

Transforming Neighbourhoods: lessons from local work in 15 areas
October 2007

Further copies of this report are available at youngfoundation.org

Publishing Information

This summary was written by Nicola Bacon with Saffron James and Vicki Savage drawing on a series of projects carried out by Nicola Bacon, Kirstie Haines, Saffron James and Vicki Savage between October 2005 and December 2006.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the challenges that local authorities face as they seek to empower communities and develop their approach to neighbourhood working.

For the last decade, there has been increased political focus – both in Whitehall and in local government – on the need to boost opportunities for residents, both as individuals and collectively, to influence what happens in the local areas in which they live. In 2005, when the Young Foundation set up its Transforming Neighbourhoods programme, Ministers began to talk of ‘double devolution’, a debate which culminated in a White Paper with a strong message about the need to involve citizens in decision making and service provision.

Forward thinking local authorities have been testing innovative models to involve citizens, support local councillors and devolve powers to communities for many years. This report highlights the work of the fifteen authorities that became partners in Transforming Neighbourhoods, drawing on the intensive practical work carried out in each area within the programme.

Despite the unique circumstances of each area we found that many of the challenges local authorities faced were the same, but played out in different contexts. This report explores the four areas which we found to be critical to effective locality working: developing appropriate and effective neighbourhood working structures; nurturing and supporting the people involved – officers, councillors, residents and community representatives; managing change, transitions and the processes through which neighbourhood decisions are made; and creating the right organisational culture where clear leadership

fosters and supports good working relationships and innovation at the very local level.

As new Ministers and a new Prime Minister push neighbourhoods to the top of the agenda, with new legislation bringing forward new tools and powers to aid citizens and authorities, we conclude that it is most often the way in which change is managed locally that has the greatest impact on local empowerment. Residents want reassurance that their voice will be heard, councillors want to know that they will be supported to play a central role locally and community representatives, so often labelled the 'usual suspects', want reassurance that their skills and experience will be acknowledged and utilised. Where local government manages these demands well and empowers all the key players – residents, councillors and community representatives – it benefits hugely from their enthusiasm and dedication, and together they can improve local services and create better neighbourhoods.

FINDINGS

1. The Transforming Neighbourhoods programme included intensive practical work with local authority partners to help understand challenges and develop new solutions for neighbourhood working and community empowerment.
2. Between October 2005 and January 2007, over 400 people were involved in this work. In total, 160 people in year one, plus 250 people in year two participated through interviews, focus groups and meetings. The individual pieces of work ranged from small research studies to exercises bringing together stakeholders with different local interests to help their understanding of common problems.
3. The Young Foundation's experience of working closely with a number of local authorities over the past two years is that the debate and discussion generated by the prospect of what was believed to be a strongly devolutionary White Paper has pushed community empowerment and neighbourhood working up the agenda for English local authorities.
4. The eight projects carried out in the first year established a number of common themes running across the different areas, which were being played out in very different contexts. It appeared that in spite of variations in types of areas and the nature of their residents, partner local authorities shared similar agencies and faced the same challenges locally.

5. Building on the priorities of local authority partners in year one, the key focus areas for work in year two were the offer to neighbourhoods and member roles at the neighbourhood level, with a lesser focus on the new theme of embedding community engagement.
6. Four dimensions emerged as critical for effective neighbourhood working: structures, people, process and organisational culture.
7. The early framing papers generated by the Transforming Neighbourhoods programme highlighted that 'the closer to the ground you get, the less structures matter', and the more approaches to work become important. Conversely, it is true 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.
8. 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 may also feel exhausted and disillusioned by years of agitating for change and are often dismissed as 'usual suspects'. Officers face competing demands from members, residents, activists, partners and other services and often carry high levels of risk.
9. 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.
10. The majority of the Transforming Neighbourhoods partner local authorities embarked on reviews or restructuring of their neighbourhood services and governance structures during the two years of the programme. Different authorities took varying approaches, their decisions were 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 was not the nature of the structures, but the processes that were put in place to shape, design and implement the structures.
11. Following two years of intensive neighbourhood and community work in

four shire counties, five metropolitan councils and six London boroughs, it was clear that the organisations that were most effectively progressing the development of neighbourhood working were those where their neighbourhoods agenda went with the grain of broader organisational culture.

12. 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. In addition, culture allows agencies to learn from past experience and enables officers and members to take risks and innovate to meet community demands.

BACKGROUND

The Young Foundation's Transforming Neighbourhoods programme was set up in summer 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 Transforming Neighbourhoods programme was among the first priorities of the newly-launched Young Foundation, which was created from the 2005 merger of the Institute of Community Studies and the Mutual Aid Centre. The mission of the Young Foundation drew both on the legacy of these organisations' work, and on Michael Young's interests in community dynamics and in finding ways to increase individuals' influence over public life and the neighbourhoods in which they live.

Transforming Neighbourhoods was a programme of research and innovation set up to influence policy. It brought together key stakeholders at national level including central government (initially the Home Office and ODPM, following departmental changes CLG), the LGA, IDeA, CABE, the Housing Corporation, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Community Alliance, Community Development Foundation, and 15 local authorities. Partners covered the full range of party political allegiances, and included Staffordshire, Suffolk, Surrey and Wiltshire county councils, metropolitan authorities including Birmingham, Knowlsey, Liverpool, Sheffield and Wakefield, and six London boroughs: Camden, Haringey, Lewisham, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest.

For the last decade, there has been increased political focus – both in Whitehall

Figure 1: Transforming Neighbourhoods local work

and in local government – on the need to boost opportunities for residents, both as individuals and collectively, to influence what happens in the local areas in which they live.

However this is nothing new. There is a substantial and lengthy history in the UK of resident and community activism, based on a long tradition of individual and collective action to tackle a variety of grievances about the state of very local areas or to advocate for neighbourhood improvements.

In many areas, strong residents' groups have emerged, taking various forms; some are working closely with agencies while others keep their distance. Community organisations have sometimes emerged with the support of local authorities and other public sector agencies (for example, tenants' associations within local authority housing stock). However, frequently groups have grown organically and have themselves been a key driver of increased political interest in this issue.

In recent years, the neighbourhoods agenda has been of increasing interest to both central and local government. This is evidenced by the increased priority given to neighbourhood and community empowerment in Whitehall pronouncements and policies. At the same time, there has been a growth in available resources, although much of this has been capital funding for physical renewal targeted at particular geographic areas.

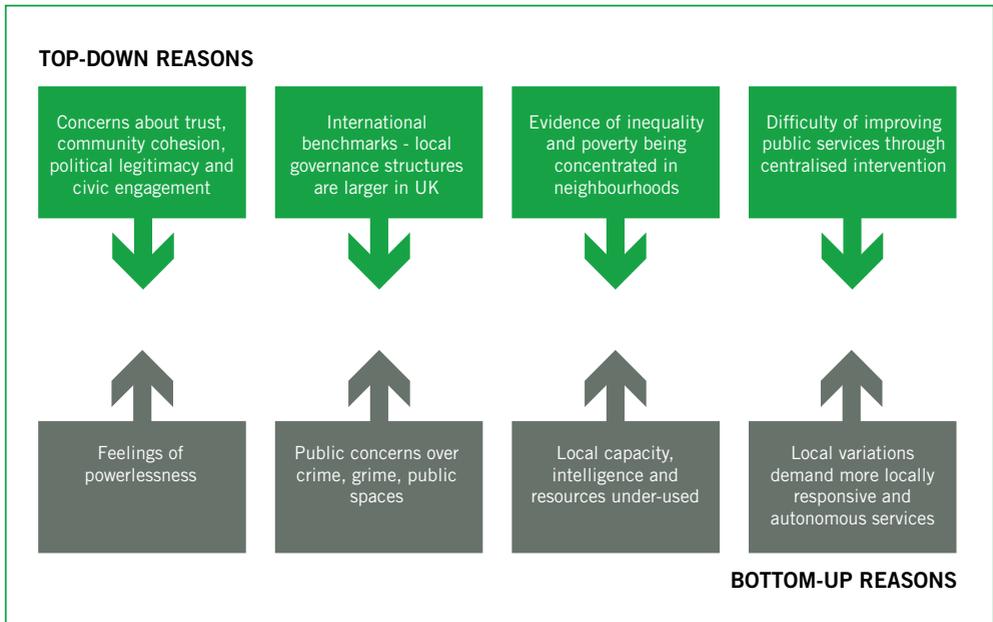
In 2005, the government announced its intention to explore options for increasing neighbourhood involvement in services. In spite of being trailed as strongly devolutionary, the 2006 Local Government White Paper encouraged, rather than compelled, local authorities to explore options for increasing community empowerment and neighbourhood working. Specific measures



included an increased focus on elected members' community leadership role, with greater involvement in area scrutiny and clearer LSP responsibilities, new mechanisms such as the 'community call for action', and encouragement for neighbourhood charters, neighbourhood management and tenant management. This was one strand of a larger package which set out proposals to strengthen local strategic partnerships and build the local authority's role as the 'place shaper', driving change across sectors.

The Young Foundation's experience of working closely with a number of local authorities over this period is that the debate and discussion generated by the prospect of what was believed (and in some cases feared) to be a strongly devolutionary white paper has pushed community empowerment and neighbourhood working up the agenda for English local authorities. For some the motivation was the wish to support this political direction. For others there was a fear of increased government interference in the way they communicate with communities and residents. In response, and to pre-empt central intervention, they wished to strengthen their own activities in advance of the White Paper's publication.

Figure 2: Why have communities and neighbourhoods risen up the agenda?



On a day-to-day level, the outcomes that local authority members, officers, and community activists seek from neighbourhood working include the creation of more cohesive and robust communities, and increased engagement and empowerment of residents in local structures. Neighbourhood working is also promoted as a means to improve services, enhance responsiveness to needs, and bolster multi-agency working.

There is now a relatively high degree of consensus amongst the main political parties, at least in their headline messages, on the need to increase individuals' influence over public services. The Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, has stated that "our system of representative democracy – local as well as national – is at the heart of our constitution. It can be enhanced by devolving more power directly to the people".^[1] Hazel Blears, the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government said "we've been debating localism for many years now. I don't know about you, but I'm sick and tired of talking about it. I want us to get on with it. Time to do, not time to talk."^[2]

The Leader of the Opposition, David Cameron, advocates that "empowering more local democracy is an idea whose time has come", and during a speech in Birmingham stated, "we could be on the threshold of a new era of community life... you are pressing the council to devolve control over parks, leisure and housing to neighbourhoods, and I agree".^[3] Liberal Democrat Shadow Communities Secretary, Andrew Stunell has said "there is a simple way of giving communities more say: giving their councillors more powers to stick up for their areas on vital decisions..."^[4]

^[1] Constitutional Reform Statement (3 July 2007)

^[2] Speech to LGA Conference (5 July 2007)

^[3] *General Well-being – The Importance of Community Life*, Chamberlain Lecture (14 July 2006)

^[4] House of Commons statement (6 July 2007).

LOCAL WORK IN 15 AREAS

The Transforming Neighbourhoods programme included intensive work with local authority partners to understand challenges and develop new solutions which would enable community empowerment and neighbourhood working to flourish. In the first year, projects were carried out in eight local authority areas. In the second year, working with a larger group of 15 local authorities, the emphasis shifted towards action learning, with smaller more focused projects in each area and a greater focus on sharing experiences and findings between partners.

The Transforming Neighbourhoods local work was intended to have three benefits:

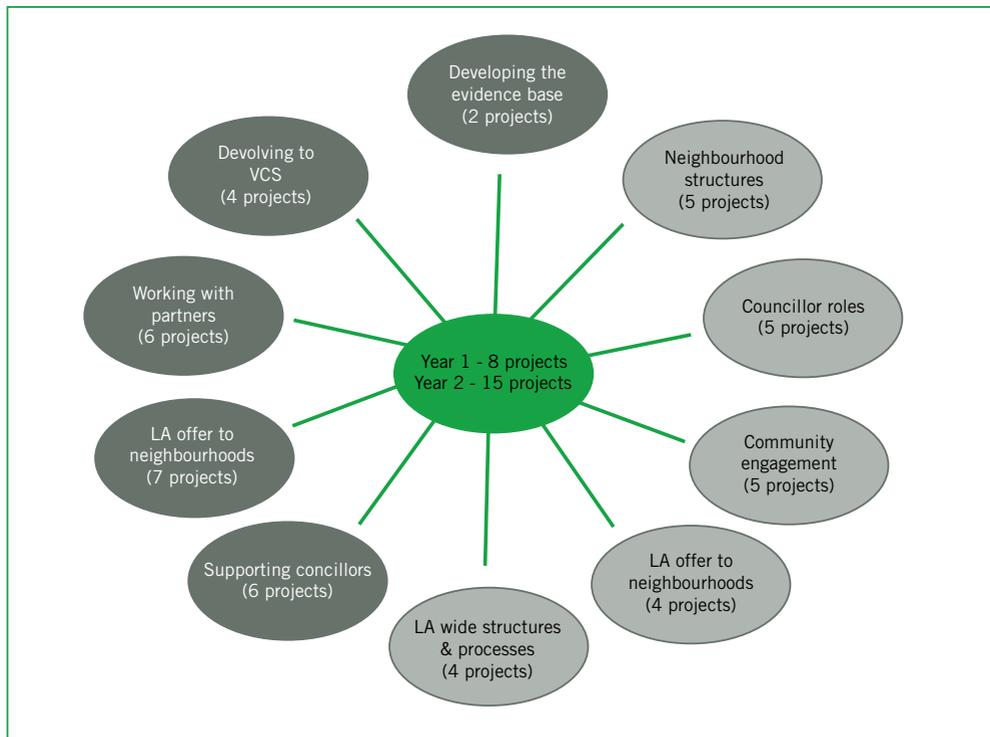
- **for communities and residents:** to remove barriers constraining local agencies' community empowerment activities and to develop new solutions to existing problems
- **for local authorities:** to offer the advantages of an external perspective, and enable sharing of experiences between authorities
- **for the Young Foundation:** to enhance and inform work to influence national policy.

Between October 2005 and January 2007, over 400 people, including 160 people in year one and 250 people in year two, participated in these projects through interviews, focus groups and meetings. The individual pieces of work ranged from small research studies, based on interviews with councillors, officers and community activists, to the facilitation of meetings bringing together stakeholders with different interests to enhance their understanding

of common problems.

The projects represented a wide scope of approaches to neighbourhood working. They included work on councillor roles, on structures at neighbourhood and local authority level, and on relationships with service delivery partners and the third sector.

Figure 3: Transforming Neighbourhoods local work 2005-07



These projects fed into and were informed by policy work, research and advocacy carried out within the Transforming Neighbourhoods programme. Policy papers were written on risk management, service delivery, governance models and neighbourhood finance. The LGA and IDeA commissioned a briefing on the reasons and processes of local government devolution. Additional pieces of research were commissioned on frontline councillors for JRF, and exploring housing association involvement in neighbourhood governance for the Housing Corporation.

Practical pilots and innovations were also important to the programme. New web tools were developed including FixMyStreet, a web-based mapping tool to facilitate communication between individuals and their local authority about broken civic infrastructure^[5], and Neighbourhood Know-How.^[6]

The broader spectrum of Young Foundation work on wellbeing, social innovation, extremism, leadership and studio schools, also informed the development of the programme and enhanced understanding and analysis.

^[5] See www.fixmystreet.com

^[6] See <http://neighbourhoodknowhow.org>

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THE FINDINGS

The eight projects carried out in the first year established common themes running across the different geographic areas. In spite of differences in types of areas and resident demographics, it appeared that both community activists and officers had more in common than separating them. Neighbourhood and community priorities in different areas are *similar*, but are being played out in *different contexts*.

Five community priorities emerged that were shared by the residents and groups throughout the country:

- Improvements to crime, street scene and public realm through crime prevention and youth provision
- Seeing tangible results
- Evidence of being listened to even when their wishes cannot be taken on board
- Respectful attitudes from agencies and their representatives
- Streamlined consultation processes.

Five priorities for local authorities also crystallised:

- The offer to neighbourhoods: how local authorities structure their overall approach to neighbourhoods within corporate plans, Local Area Agreements and through Local Strategic Partnerships
- Member roles at the neighbourhood level
- Developing and evolving neighbourhood working
- Youth engagement
- Embedding community engagement throughout their activities.

These ten themes informed the development of the work in the second year of the programme. Further consultation established the offer to neighbourhoods and member roles at the neighbourhood level as the key focus areas for work in year two. A smaller number of projects were also carried out on the theme of embedding community engagement across service functions within local authorities.

THE OFFER TO NEIGHBOURHOODS

The focus of this suite of projects was broad. As well as drawing on practical local work in Birmingham, Surrey, Newham and Camden in 2005, it included a number of projects in the second year of the programme.

- **Birmingham:** Neighbourhood influence over devolved Local Area Agreements
- **Liverpool:** Exploring neighbourhood charters and local implications of the White Paper
- **Sheffield:** Embedding locality working in service planning
- **Staffordshire:** Exploring the feasibility of a district-wide model for local charters
- **Suffolk:** Developing community involvement in public services
- **Tower Hamlets:** Exploring the role of the local area partnerships steering groups in designing local activities
- **Camden:** Working with officers on the emerging neighbourhoods strategy
- **Newham:** Scoping work to map the impact of community participation on individuals and communities

Several themes and related questions strongly emerged during these projects:

- How to tackle service involvement: in particular, how to involve services that do not traditionally have a locality focus, including Children's Services in many areas
- Mainstreaming neighbourhood working: making neighbourhood activities part of core business and stopping over-reliance on short-term external funding
- Tools and tactics to bring together services at the very local level: in

particular, a question emerged about how neighbourhood charters or mini LAAs can work most effectively?

- The fit between neighbourhood bodies and LSPs: how to align strategic-level partnership with very local partnerships and initiatives?
- Transition to new models of governance: how to evolve existing area structures to accommodate a greater interest in the very local?
- Risk management: balancing the desire to give greater responsibility to residents or the third sector and the need to safeguard the equitable spending of public money. This issue becomes more acute as residents are given more influence over services
- Exploiting new technologies: for example, the joint MySociety and the Young Foundation website, 'Fix My Street'
- Unblocking sticking points: services and neighbourhood groups often face legacies of difficult history and become stuck in conflicts.

The Neighbourhood Taskforce concept is a new model being developed by the Young Foundation for tackling entrenched problems in areas where community capacity is low and where public services have difficulty engaging residents and neighbourhood groups. For further information visit the Young Foundation's website www.youngfoundation.org

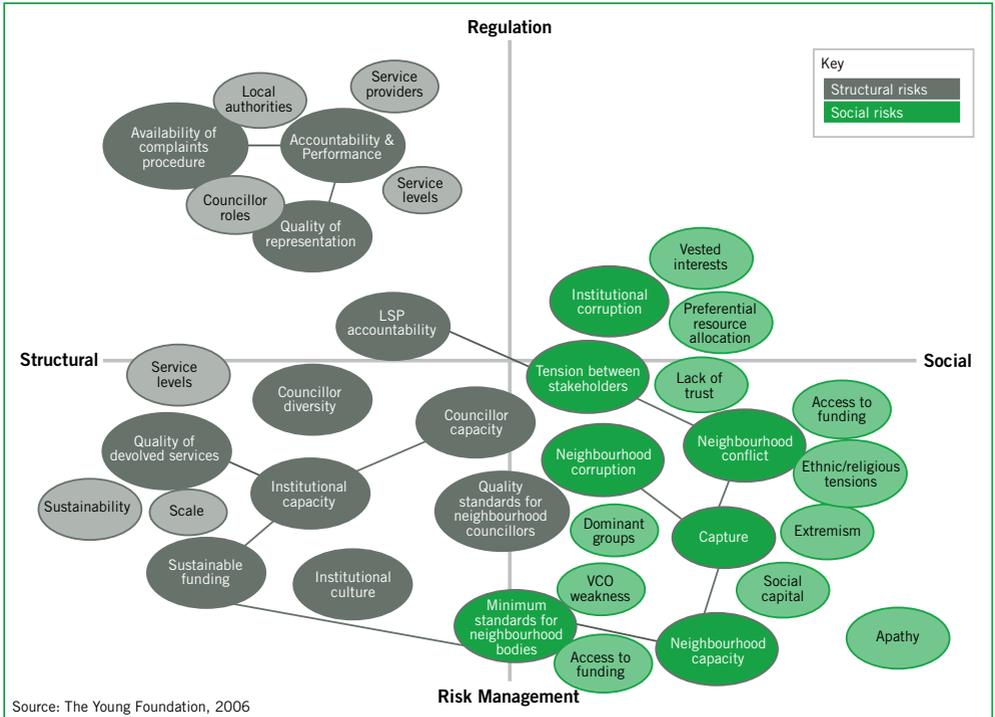
These themes were echoed in separate research that informed the Young Foundation's concurrent policy work on *risks and services*.

Risk

Concern about risk focused on finding ways to achieve a balance between giving communities some influence or control over local issues, and ensuring that local action did not encourage communities to compete or become inward-looking. Some felt that conflict between different social or ethnic groups at neighbourhood level presented too great a risk to give communities direct influence over local decisions or resources.

Previous experiments with devolution have proved that community control over finances, services and assets also brings threats of fragmentation, mismanagement of public goods, politicisation of neighbourhood issues, and the potential for localised power to create or exaggerate community divisions.

Figure 4: Mapping the risks of neighbourhood governance



Source: The Young Foundation, 2006

Our research identified three main categories of risk associated with stronger community governance:

- Risks associated with the inclusiveness, accountability and performance of neighbourhood bodies, raise important questions about the legitimacy and status of neighbourhood organisations as representative bodies, and highlight wide variations in capacity between neighbourhood bodies.
- Risks associated with institutional commitment and capacity to empower neighbourhoods, including lack of political will to support neighbourhood empowerment, and a lack of capacity within local authorities to make neighbourhood governance a practical reality.
- Risks associated with neighbourhood capacity and social capital, such as the huge variation in levels of social support and practical skills within

neighbourhoods. This could mean that more affluent neighbourhoods disproportionately benefit from new opportunities for local action, because they are more able to organise, articulate their interests, and raise funds.

Risk management: lessons learnt

- Political extremism, corruption, and capture are the risks most often cited in arguments against neighbourhood empowerment
- Many communities and local authorities are already dealing with these risks in the context of existing structures such as ward committees, area forums or NDCs
- Other risks, such as lack of capacity and lack of political leadership and support for neighbourhood working, have significant practical implications for the success of the neighbourhood working
- Local government and public agencies need to capacity build their staff and members to manage risks arising from lack of skills and resources
- It is crucial that central and local government accept that experimentation with neighbourhood governance arrangements will require space for local innovation that involves some risk.

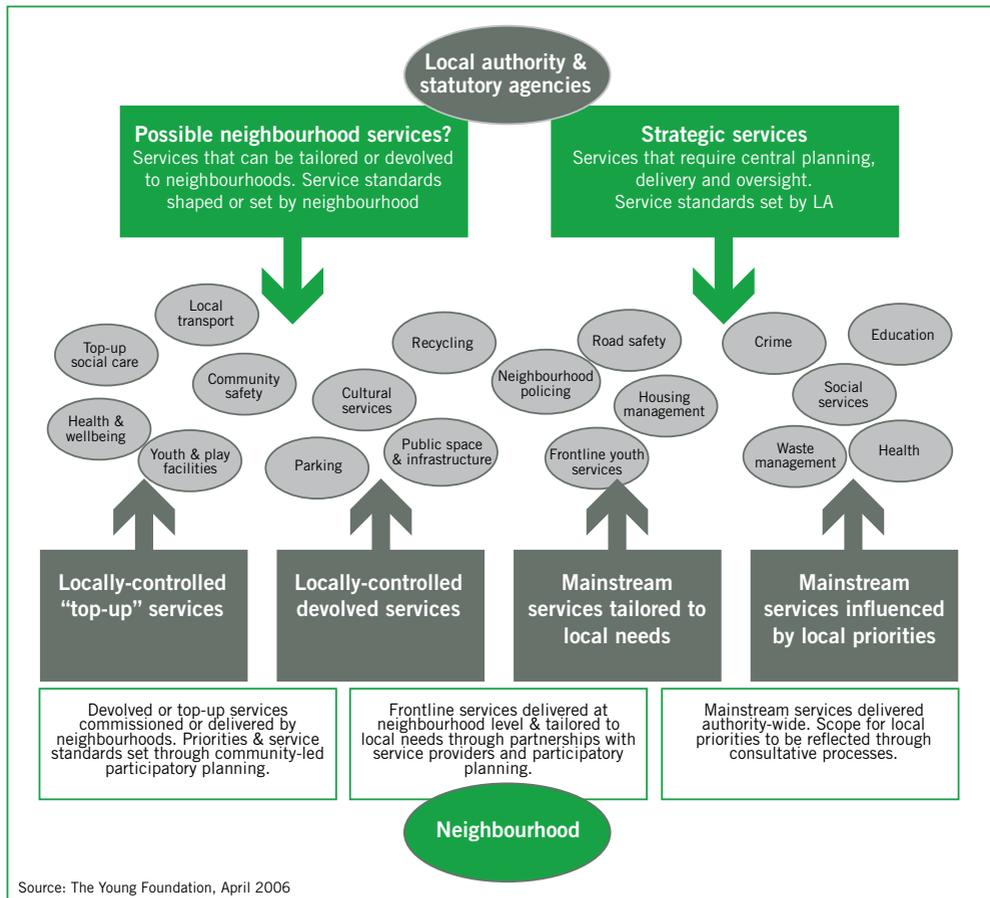
For more information about the Young Foundation's work on risks please see [Managing the risks of neighbourhood governance](#).^[7]

Services

The Young Foundation's research confirmed that local people in many areas would like to see greater resident control and influence over a consistent set of services, primarily concerning crime and grime in their immediate environment. Many communities also want meaningful opportunities to engage in dialogue about how mainstream services can reflect local priorities, with statutory consultation processes often being seen as a tickbox exercise. Many residents and local organisations would welcome the opportunity to become involved in dialogue about services at a much earlier stage than is currently the case.

^[7] [Managing the risks of neighbourhood governance](#), Saffron James, Young Foundation (2006)

Figure 5: A model for neighbourhood involvement in service delivery



For more information about the Young Foundation's work on neighbourhoods and service delivery please see *The potential for neighbourhood involvement in service delivery*.^[8]

^[8] *The potential for neighbourhood involvement in service delivery*, Saffron James, Young Foundation (July 2006)

Neighbourhood involvement in services: lessons learnt

- Common obstacles to localising or devolving services include concerns about efficiency and economies of scale, the need for universal standards, and the difficulties of identifying elements of an authority-wide service contract that can economically be disaggregated to a single neighbourhood or community
- There are many examples of community involvement in service planning and localised service delivery which demonstrate improved services, cost savings and wider benefits to the local community
- Demand for involvement in service planning and delivery varies from place to place depending on the quality of services that neighbourhoods currently receive and the willingness and capacity of community organisations and volunteers to get involved.
- Many voluntary and community sector organisations are interested in delivering local services. However, it is important that local groups do not get pushed into inappropriate service delivery. Contract funding should not completely replace grant funding for the third sector
- Localising public services demands strong commitment to joint working from the key partners in neighbourhoods: community organisations, housing associations, police, councils and other mainstream service providers.

THE COUNCILLORS' ROLE AT NEIGHBOURHOOD LEVEL

Growing interest in the role of elected members was reflected in the 2006 Local Government White Paper. As well as drawing on work in Lewisham, Sheffield, Newham and Wiltshire in 2005, projects in the second year of the programme included:

- **Waltham Forest:** Developing the role of frontline councillors
- **Surrey:** Exploring the member perspective on neighbourhood arrangements.
- **Haringey:** New support needs for councillors

- **Wakefield:** Exploring member perspectives of three different types of neighbourhood governance.

Key issues that emerged included:

- Backbench councillors estrangement from executive-level decision making and LSPs: the widely acknowledged alienation of backbench councillors in many areas after the introduction of new executive structures after the 2000 Act can be compounded by alienation from LSPs and their sub-groups (theme groups, CDRPs, local regeneration partnerships etc)
- Tensions between local authority-wide priorities or party political priorities and local priorities: a recurrent issue for all the main political parties was the balance between allowing members freedom and flexibility to respond to local issues and imposing discipline to deliver party political priorities. This was particularly acute for areas where one party did not have overall political control over local authorities or particular areas or wards
- Strained relationships between members and community activists: often focusing on the opposing legitimacies of elected and participatory democracy
- Distance of some councillors from local engagement: some members are clearly more comfortable with very local working while others prefer more strategic activities
- Changing skill set required for members: including communication skills, conflict resolution and negotiation. Further questions arose about the need for a new role for member support services
- Confusion about roles at local level in multi-tiered authorities: parish, district and county councillors may compete for influence and authority at the very local level.

EMBEDDING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL AUTHORITY STRUCTURES AND PRACTICE

The theme of embedding community engagement in local authority structures and practice emerged throughout the second year of the project. Rather than being addressed by particular local projects, it crystallised some key messages from all of the local work.

- There is a huge body of experience and knowledge about community engagement in local authorities: it is easy to forget the lessons of past mistakes and successes
- Lessons learnt are not easily transferred across different service functions: continuing to ignore lessons from other service function wastes resources and may cause tensions. It may also infuriate community activists
- Experience needs to be mainstreamed to make the most of neighbourhood working: sharing experiences across different services and disciplines can form the basis of integrated working in the future.

Common problems in embedding community engagement

- Definitions of community engagement vary across departments and partner agencies: differences emerged concerning whether the emphasis should be on communities of interest as opposed to communities defined by place. There are divergent opinions as to whether the target of engagement is the residents as individuals (for example, through customer consultation exercises) or collectively as groups
- Community empowerment agendas may conflict with other policy imperatives: particularly when council or government policy, pre-empt the outcomes of consultation exercises or runs counter to the wishes of community groups (for example, on housing stock transfer)
- Cultural and emotional factors should not be underestimated: fear of change, reluctance to abandon established 'comfort zones', relying on entrenched stereotypes may all be common amongst local authority officers, the third sector, other public services and neighbourhood groups.

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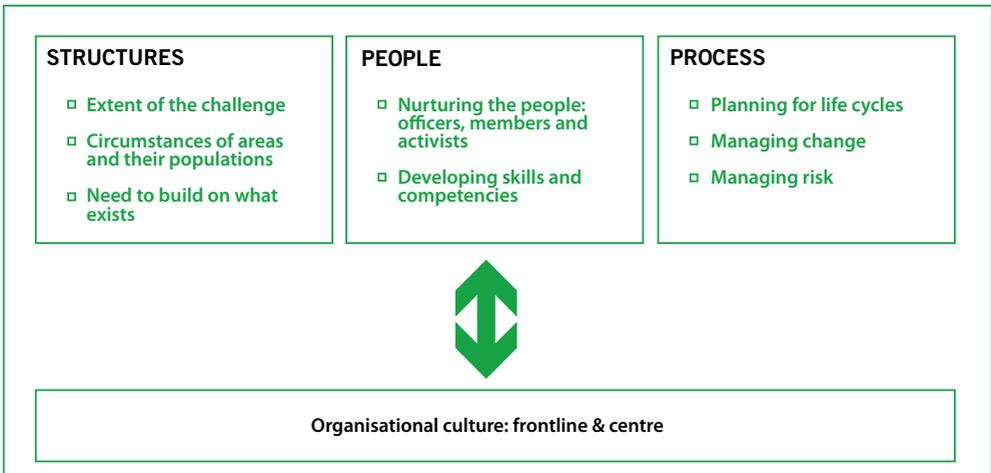
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WHAT WORKS?

Four dimensions are critical for effective neighbourhood working: structures, people, process and organisational culture.

Figure 6: What makes the difference?



STRUCTURES

The early framing papers generated by the Transforming Neighbourhoods programme highlighted that 'the closer to the ground you get, the less structures matter...'^[9] while the ways in which work is done become increasingly important. Conversely, it's true that the further away from the ground you get,

^[9] *Seeing the wood for the trees: The evolving landscape for neighbourhood arrangements*, Paul Hilder and Saffron James, Young Foundation (November 2005)

the more structures matter for effective neighbourhood working. Successful neighbourhood action needs to be driven from the centre of the local authority and embedded within different departments' business plans.

- Neighbourhood strategy needs to be owned by LSPs and LAAs
- Neighbourhood structures need to be owned politically, and at senior officer level
- Corporate structures that support neighbourhood working need to allow for difference – or variable geometry – at the local level
- Although tempting for officers aiming to create coherence, total system change to reconfigure corporate structures is difficult, time consuming, and rarely necessary.

Structures: Lessons learnt

- Area working can support neighbourhood working, or can be seen as a substitute
- Slow incremental change to structures is more successful than big bang changes
- It is important that structures reflect real need and circumstances
- Mapping natural neighbourhoods can be done relatively cheaply
- Avoid prioritising the need for structures to make sense on paper if it is at the expense of local flexibility
- Structures need 'teeth' to avoid stagnation
- Scrutiny and devolved decision making should be linked to appropriate risk management.

Example I: Engaging different audiences *Neighbourhood management pilots in Wakefield*

This project explored members' views in Wakefield's three neighbourhood management pilots and considered different options for governance structures. The three pilots take radically different approaches in their respective areas: Abrigg and Belle Vue, Kinsley and Fitzwilliam and Airedale and Ferry Fryston. The aim is for councillors to play a full role in each pilot, however precise roles within governance structures will be very different in the three areas.

Figure 7: Neighbourhood management pilots in Wakefield

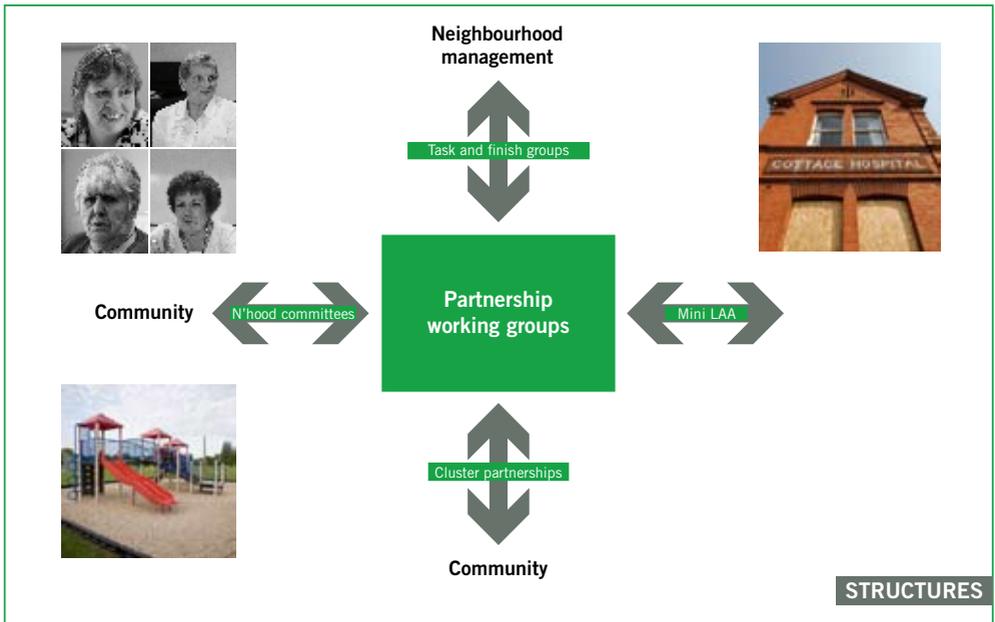


For more information go to www.wakefieldsp.org.uk

Example II: Evolving well-established structures *Strengthening relationships in Liverpool*

This work supported the development of Liverpool's neighbourhood management strategy. The Young Foundation team carried out a series of projects exploring the challenges, opportunities and obstacles to effective neighbourhood working in different places.

Figure 8: Partnership working groups in Liverpool



For more information go to www.liverpool.gov.uk

Example III: Empowering residents

Increasing resident influence over mainstream services, Tower Hamlets

Tower Hamlets' model of local area partnerships revolves around sub-committees of the Local Strategic Partnerships bringing together members, services, local groups and residents in eight areas of the borough. This work explored the extent to which the Tower Hamlets' model could give residents more influence over the local development of services.

Figure 9: Structures to empower residents

8 local area partnerships (LAPs)

LAPs are given community level performance management information

- Monitor LA and other services
- Public accountability where service provision fails to meet agreed standards

LAPs also identify priorities for action

- Local budget to commission new work
- Residents take responsibility for publicising and collating feedback on new initiatives
- Residents give feedback on services and adjustments are made to the service in response



STRUCTURES

For more information go to www.towerhamlets.gov.uk

PEOPLE

The different people involved in neighbourhood working face diverse challenges and pressures. Members are being asked to 'raise their game' by government and local authorities but often feel that neighbourhood action has been core to their work for years. Community groups can also feel exhausted and disillusioned by years agitating for change without results, and are often dismissed as 'usual suspects'. Officers face competing demands from members, residents, activists, partners and other services and often carry high levels of risk.

Nurturing the involvement of each of these players can enable them to develop the skills, experience and trust necessary to enter into the sort of mature dialogues needed to resolve complex local issues.

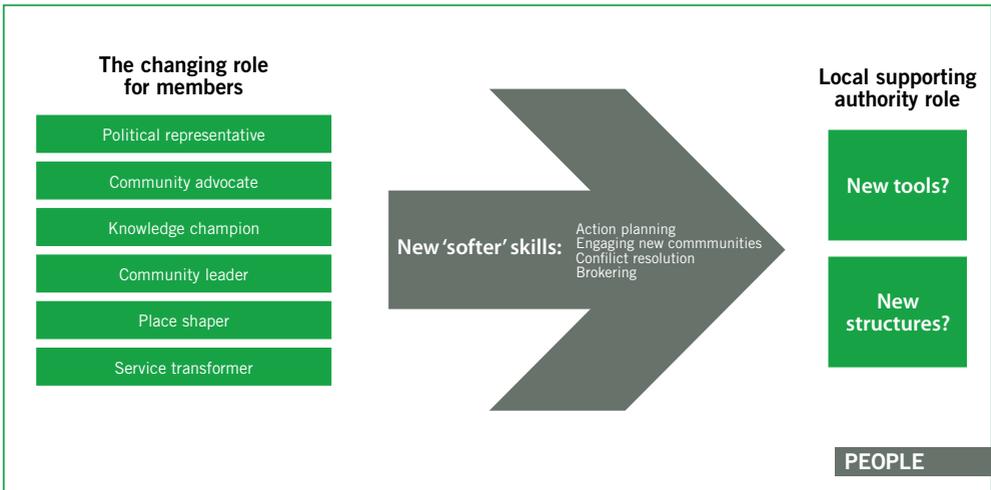
People: Lessons learnt

- At the neighbourhood level, members and officers do different jobs and need new and unique skill sets to work with communities and partnerships
- People working at different levels – backbench and executive members, senior and frontline officers – all need tailored support to work effectively with neighbourhood and community groups
- Middle managers working in neighbourhoods may be subject to many cumulative stresses, facing pressures from communities, members, partners and other services, as well as their own managers
- People within communities reflect the modern world. In many areas there are unprecedented levels of diversity as new communities move into areas, producing new tensions around class, race and faith
- Community cohesion debates and policies play out at the very local level. It is within neighbourhoods that solutions bringing different people together are being tested and developed.

Example 1: A new emphasis on softer skills *The changing role for councillors in Haringey*

In Haringey two projects were completed in year one and year two. The first explored ways in which existing Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) structures in Northumberland Park in Haringey could evolve into new neighbourhood management structures, looking closely at the specific support needed by different groups. The second project involved discussions with members about the support they needed to work at the very local level, change needed in members' roles, the softer skills that would be necessary and local authority support.

Figure 10: The changing role for councillors in Haringey



For more information on the Young Foundation's work in Haringey please see *Implementing a new neighbourhood management structure in Northumberland Park and White Hart Lane*.^[10]

Also see www.haringey.gov.uk

^[10] *Implementing a new neighbourhood management structure in Northumberland Park and White Hart Lane*, Nicola Bacon, Young Foundation (May 2006)

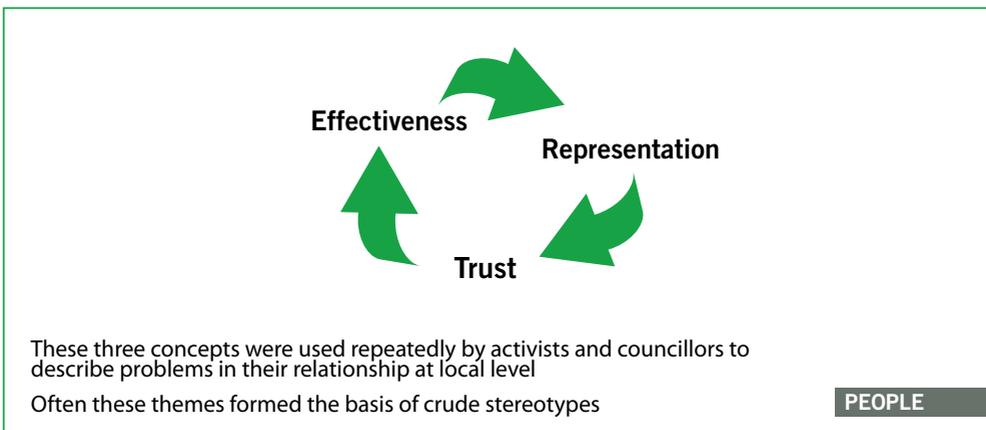
Example II: Tackling longstanding tensions

Supporting councillor and activist relationships in Lewisham

The work in Lewisham during year one involved seminars with community activists and backbench members to discuss their perceptions of each other and explore ideas about how to improve relationships. This was identified as a priority in the development of neighbourhood working in the borough.

The perceptions voiced by each group of each other were very similar. Suspicion and conflict focused on effectiveness, representation and trust.

Figure 11: Councillor and activist relationships in Lewisham



For more information on the Young Foundation's work in Lewisham please see *A fresh start: stronger relationships between community activists and elected members in Lewisham*.^[11]

See also www.lewisham.gov.uk

^[11] *A fresh start: stronger relationships between community activists and elected members in Lewisham*, Nicola Bacon and Saffron James, Young Foundation (January 2006)

Example III: Working in diverse communities
Deprivation, cohesion and satisfaction in Newham

In the first year of the programme, a small research study was carried out in Newham focusing on the council's area structures and assessing their ability to drive Olympic consultation. Newham is a very diverse borough and interesting relationships emerged around ethnicity, levels of deprivation, satisfaction with the local authority and perceptions of whether the area is cohesive.

Figure 12: Deprivation, cohesion and satisfaction in Newham

	Deprivation		Ethnicity	Community Cohesion	Satisfaction
	% of individuals in poverty	Average household income	% of BME residents	% who felt area is cohesive	% satisfied with LB Newham
Stratford	40%	£27,900	55%	74%	53%
Green Street	49%	£25,500	78%	81%	66%
Becton	39%	£31,400	50%	78%	62%

PEOPLE

For more information about the Young Foundation's work in Newham please see *Transforming Neighbourhoods in Newham. Increasing community engagement in the Olympics in Newham.*^[12]

Also see www.newham.gov.uk

^[12] *Increasing community engagement in the Olympics in Newham*, Vicki Savage and Nicola Bacon, Young Foundation (June 2006)

PROCESS

The majority of the local authority partners in Transforming Neighbourhoods embarked on reviews or restructuring of their neighbourhood service and governance structures during the two years of programme operations. Authorities' approaches differed considerably in terms of the size of the population covered by particular structures, whether there was an area, ward or neighbourhood focus, the balance between influence and devolution, the role of members, and the degree of formality of structures. These decisions were shaped by local politics, neighbourhood geography, pressure from community groups and local activists, and by the legacy of past structures and initiatives. What emerged as key was not the nature of the structures, but the processes that were put in place to shape, design and implement them.

The Young Foundation was commissioned by LGA and IDeA to develop an analysis of how local government devolves and why. This work concluded that local authorities are driven by three sets of motivations: engagement, governance and management. Although local authorities respond to all three of these factors, for most, one motivating force is clearly dominant. For more information please see a series of research papers written between April 2005 and March 2006 as part of the Transforming Neighbourhoods programme.^[13]

^[13] *How local government devolves, and why?* Young Foundation (November 2006)

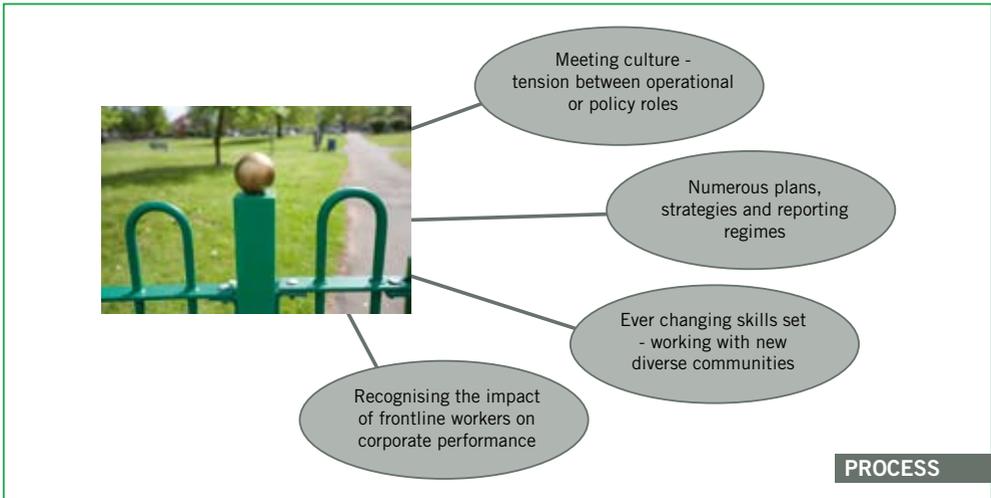
Process: Lessons learnt

- There is a spectrum of approaches to neighbourhood working. Clarity about objectives is helpful for all involved
- Change needs to be managed carefully
- There is a need to encourage innovation and to find a fruitful balance between creativity and constraints
- It is important to accept the inevitability of conflict and to find ways to manage it
- It is important to acknowledge mistakes
- Neighbourhood working involves risk which needs to be tackled carefully
- There is a need to explore the role of political parties at neighbourhood level.

Example I: Managing diverse and complex obstacles *Removing barriers to neighbourhood working in Sheffield*

In the first year, the Young Foundation's work in Sheffield focused on exploring relationships between Sheffield's well-established Area Panels and the many different Community Forums. In the second year, the focus shifted to exploring how one service – Parks and Countryside – could improve its neighbourhood working.

Figure 13: Removing barriers to neighbourhood working in Sheffield



For more information on Young Foundation work in Sheffield please see *Sheffield: Embedding Locality Working in Service Planning*^[14] and *Transforming Neighbourhoods in Sheffield. Working together locally: improving relationships between local authority area structures and neighbourhood organisations.*^[15]

^[14] *Sheffield: Embedding Locality Working in Service Planning*, Kirstie Haines, Young Foundation (February 2007)

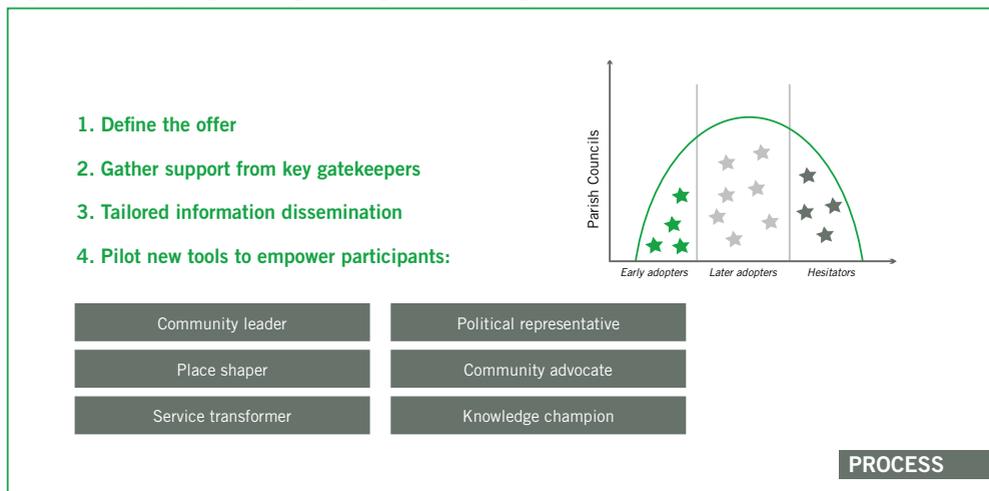
^[15] *Transforming Neighbourhoods in Sheffield. Working together locally: improving relationships between local authority area structures and neighbourhood organisations*, Nicola Bacon, Young Foundation (February 2006)

See also www.sheffield.gov.uk

Example II: Evolving decision-making processes *Winning support for new mechanisms in Wiltshire*

Local work in Wiltshire in years one and two concentrated on the county council's efforts to improve relationships between three tiers of local government – parishes, districts and the county – building on their highly regarded community planning approach. In year one, research concentrated on the experience of parish councillors. The diagram below illustrates an approach to build support for new structures and processes, taking into account the needs of early adopters, later adopters and hesitators.

Figure 14: Employing a change management strategy in Wiltshire



For more information on the Young Foundation's work in Wiltshire please see *Tools to support frontline councillors in Wiltshire*^[16] and *Transforming Neighbourhoods in Wiltshire. Maximising Town and Parish Council Involvement in Community Planning*.^[17]

[16] *Tools to support frontline councillors in Wiltshire*, Vicki Savage, Young Foundation (February 2007)

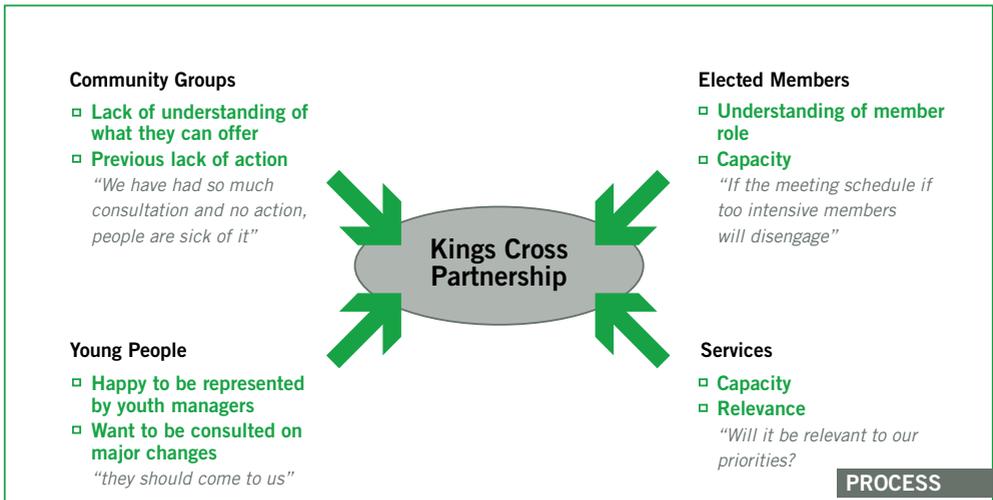
[17] *Transforming Neighbourhoods in Wiltshire. Maximising Town and Parish Council Involvement in Community Planning*, Vicki Savage, Nicola Bacon and Saffron James, Young Foundation (May 2006)

See also www.wiltshire.gov.uk

Example III: Improving engagement processes *Barriers to engagement in Camden*

Project work in Camden focused on developing an engagement strategy for the Kings Cross partnership. The diagram shows the four critical stakeholder groups and the issues that can become barriers to their engagement in the development of the partnership.

Figure 15: Barriers to engagement in Camden



For more information on the Young Foundation's work in Camden please see *Transforming Neighbourhoods in Camden. Developing a Neighbourhood Partnership in Kings Cross*.^[18]

See also www.camden.gov.uk

^[18] *Transforming Neighbourhoods in Camden. Developing a Neighbourhood Partnership in Kings Cross*, Vicki Savage, Nicola Bacon and Saffron James, Young Foundation (May 2006)

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Following two years of intensive neighbourhood and community work within four shire counties, five metropolitan councils, and six London boroughs, it was clear that the organisations that were most effectively progressing the development of neighbourhood working were those where this work complemented the organisational culture. Appropriate culture can enable an agency to overcome long-standing silo mentalities and to integrate neighbourhood and community engagement at the core of service planning. A supportive organisational culture allows agencies to fit their neighbourhood strategies within their LSPs and LAAs, and to learn from past experience, enabling officers and members to take risks and innovate to meet community demands.

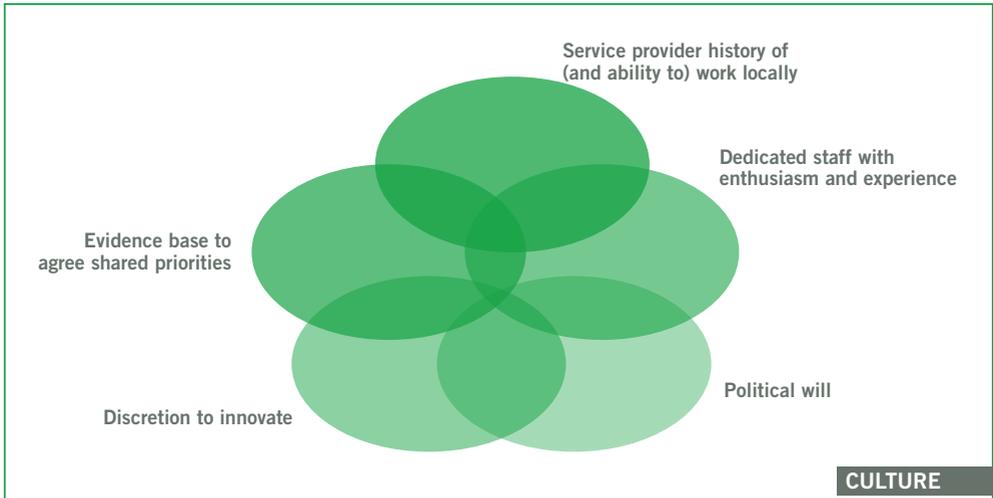
Culture: Lessons learnt

- The right balance is needed between strong corporate leadership and ambition, and innovation and experimentation at the front line and at the centre
- At the frontline, key elements include partnership working, response to community voice and overcoming existing prejudices
- At the centre, it is crucial that neighbourhood working is embedded in corporate services
- Understanding of issues must be shared between officers and members
- Corporate strategies and neighbourhood plans need to adopt a 'healthy' attitude to risk and innovation.

Example 1: Balancing structures, people and process *Devolving local area agreements in Birmingham*

Work in Birmingham over the two years focused on Birmingham's devolution strategies in their ten Districts as well as in a pilot in Balsall Heath. This work attempted to analyse the critical factors underpinning success in devolving LAAs.

Figure 16: Critical factors for success in devolving LAAs in Birmingham



For more information on the Young Foundation's work in Birmingham please see *Neighbourhood involvement and influence in Birmingham's devolved LAAs*.^[19]

See also www.birmingham.gov.uk

^[19] *Neighbourhood involvement and influence in Birmingham's devolved LAAs*, Vicki Savage, Young Foundation (October 2006)

Example II: Involving the voluntary and community sector *Engaging the third sector in service influence and delivery in Suffolk*

Research in Suffolk in year two of the programme explored the barriers to engaging the third sector in service delivery, driven by the need to improve services and efficiency targets and also by a wish to build on Suffolk's growing number of social entrepreneurs, many of whom have moved to the county in search of the good life. This threw up challenges for the local authority's expectations of voluntary and community organisations, and conversely challenged the voluntary and community sector to move beyond their traditional boundaries, to innovate and to take up new opportunities.

Figure 17: Engaging the third sector in service influence and delivery in Suffolk

Suffolk has a strong history and relationships with voluntary and community sector (VCS)

First wave LAA

- Now looking to commission VCS delivery through LAA
- Strong focus on innovation from VCS

Challenges of engaging VCS in LAA delivery

- Appreciating the different between engaging *voluntary providers* and *VCS advocacy groups*
- Attituded to risk - *accountability vs flexibility to innovate*
- Managing differing expectations - *e.g. full cost recovery*
- Making information available





CULTURE

For more information on the Young Foundation's work in Suffolk go to *Developing community involvement in public services in Suffolk*.^[20]

See also www.suffolk.gov.uk

^[20] Developing community involvement in public services in Suffolk, Vicki Savage, Young Foundation (March 2007)

CONCLUSIONS

The experience of carrying out the Transforming Neighbourhoods programme demonstrates that, at the local level, there is an enormous amount of enthusiasm and commitment among community activists, residents, elected members, and frontline officers for localisation and community empowerment.

This summary has highlighted the work that we carried out with some of our local authority partners over the two years of the programme. We also learnt an enormous amount from all our partners in Transforming Neighbourhoods. In Knowsley we developed our understanding of the realities of thinking through how to devolve influence and control over services. In Staffordshire we learnt from their approach to development charters in the Moorlands District. In Waltham Forest we came to understand some of the realities of involving members in neighbourhood management, and in Surrey we learned about the difficulties of developing a strategic county-wide approach to neighbourhood and community empowerment.

The Young Foundation carried out this work because we have a commitment to increasing the empowerment of local communities. For decades community activists have been trying to push Whitehall and local agencies, including local authorities, to be more responsive and to devolve more power and control to their residents. If this work is to be nurtured, it is vital that more residents are encouraged to become involved in local activism and that local authorities and other neighbourhood service providers are supported to develop their neighbourhoods strategies. Government must be clear about the expectations

it has regarding ways in which local people should be empowered and given a voice.

The Young Foundation is continuing this work through our second neighbourhoods consortium, the Neighbourhood Action Network, which we initiated in April 2007 with a new group of local authorities, the IDeA, LGA, the Housing Corporation and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. This has a clear focus on supporting its members to make change happen, and to disseminate the best and most innovative approaches to neighbourhood working as they emerge throughout the country.

For more information about the Neighbourhood Action Network see the Young Foundation's website.

PARTNERS IN THE TRANSFORMING NEIGHBOURHOODS PROGRAMME 2005-2007



Haringey Council



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The City of Liverpool



Local Government Association



TOWER HAMLETS



The Young Foundation

The Young Foundation is a centre for social innovation based in East London – combining practical projects, the creation of new enterprises, research and publishing.

Our main goal is to speed up society's ability to respond to changing needs through innovating and replicating new methods and models. Our work programme has three strands – Launchpad, Local Projects and Research – all of which complement each other in the shared goal of finding practical initiatives to meet unmet needs.

IDeA

The IDEeA works for local government improvement so councils can serve people and places better.

