



Locality Planning Forum  
17 October 2007

## **Community Engagement in Neighbourhood Planning**

This paper reviews the rationale for community engagement in Neighbourhood Networks and invites discussion on the further development.

### **1. Rationale**

#### **Networking**

A networking process has been adopted for neighbourhood planning because it reduces the demands on people's time and agencies' resources (compared to setting up new organisations) and because it can continue our effort to involve a wider range of community views and interests.

Successful community engagement (and ultimately community well being) is dependent on effective community capacity building and in turn flexible, self reliant networks are a key element of community capacity and the process of community empowerment.

By developing both community and inter-agency networking we will facilitate community empowerment by improving access to decision-makers and opportunities for community engagement to emerge.

#### **Networking for community engagement**

The aim of a networking approach to community engagement in neighbourhood planning is to encourage and support a two way cascading flow of information, views and feedback between the community representatives both in dialogue with partner agencies and with as wide a range of interests and sections of the wider community.

In our neighbourhoods, there already exist a wide range of community and service user groups. These can include community councils, area forums, parents forums, residents/tenants associations, community centre management committees, playgroups, youth clubs, over 50s groups, sports clubs, cultural associations, adult learning groups, gala committees, parent-teacher associations, young people's uniformed organisations, churches, etc. In addition people connect through family, neighbours, friends, workplace, pub, bus queue, school gate, etc.

A networking approach tries to employ these connections to pass information, views and feedback in a mainly informal way. And helps community leaders/activists remain connected to their community.

We have staff, who use community learning and development methods, with a remit to build community capacity who can lead and facilitate community networking. They include:

Community Learning Workers, Tenant Participation Officers, Neighbourhood Community Planning Officers, Community Police Officers, Neighbourhood/Community Wardens, Public Health Workers, etc. Work is required to co-ordinate and maximise their efforts and to ensure each neighbourhood receives appropriate support. Tasking & Coordinating Groups have recently been advised to ask their local CLD staff to prepare a position statement on which of the above staff are working in each Neighbourhood and the extent to which they already coordinate their work.

By improving community engagement we can have an on-going dialogue with our communities about priorities, service delivery and community development (and on this one we need to consider the contributions communities can make themselves – there are plenty of examples like credit unions, food coops, fund raising projects)

We can also engage in a more sophisticated debate about the priorities – especially Closing the Gap issues (this is about getting into the complexities of some issues eg health inequality which is multi-faceted but is as much about developing our multi-disciplinary working relationships)

Finally by using the annual cycle to ensure agreed priorities are resourced we give credibility to community engagement.

### **Dialogue about the NCAP**

Overall the focus for on-going dialogue is the Neighbourhood Community Action Plan (NCAP) annual cycle. The process will be facilitated by the NCPO (bringing in staff/info to support informed dialogue). The aim is to sustain a continuing discussion within each Neighbourhood Network that will address:

- Priorities – consideration of the main issues identified by local people, area profiles, elected members, staff and how they might be addressed.
- Action – ensuring quick action where possible and a planned approach where necessary
- Monitoring – keeping track of progress in implementing NCAPs
- Communication – establishing and maintaining an effective two way flow of information between agencies and communities.
- Feedback – feedback from service users.
- Regeneration – for the regeneration priority areas.
- Development – major new projects and innovation.
- Resources – fitting plans to available resources
- Community engagement – maintaining a planned approach to consultation, community empowerment and the involvement of communities of interest.
- Evaluation – in terms of service quality and positive impact in neighbourhoods.

As the neighbourhood planning process develops the focus will move on from the priorities identified in the initial NCAPs. A more complex discussion is required around accountability of services to local people, fuller consideration

of community well being, early participation and community action/self-help. This will include a more balanced consideration of local views, data from area profiles, advice from local members and the experiences of staff delivering local services.

Ultimately, through this development process neighbourhood, service and strategic priorities should begin to converge.

Area Committees will now have a role to monitor the development of Neighbourhood Planning in each Area.

## **2. Developing Community Engagement in Neighbourhood Planning**

The main issues for developing community engagement, with key responsibilities in brackets, are:

1. identifying key contacts in communities that will be at the core of the networking process, (NCPO, CLDW, community reps)
2. clarifying with each community council the role they can play as the focus of a community network, (NCPO, CLDW, community reps)
3. realising the responsibilities of service managers to use the community network to feed-in information and seek feedback, (All service managers)
4. working to the National Standards for Community Engagement and agreeing a framework of performance measures (all participants in the Neighbourhood Networks; with support from CP&R)
5. embedding on-going dialogue and consultation in the annual planning cycle, especially monitoring progress half way through the current year; agreeing priorities by September for the following year, (all participants in the Neighbourhood Networks led by NCPO and supported by CLDW)
6. paying attention to general community development particularly in regeneration priority and at risk areas, (all services that contribute to active, informed and involved communities)

**The Locality Planning Forum are invited to endorse these points as the basis of guidance for Tasking & Coordinating Groups in the further development of community engagement in neighbourhood planning.**

The above was endorsed and the following two points were added at the Locality Planning Forum meeting 17 Oct 07:

- the need for ongoing effective public communication and possibly consistent branding
- continue to make regular efforts to hear the views of residents who are not involved in community groups through innovative and appealing public events