

# Engaging with communities

– lessons from the frontline

By Thomas Neumark



# Engaging with communities – lessons from the frontline

By Thomas Neumark



How to cite this publication:

Neumark, Thomas. (2010) *Engaging with communities*  
– *lessons from the grassroots*, London: Community Development  
Foundation

First Published in 2010 by the  
Community Development Foundation  
Unit 5, Angel Gate  
320–326 City Road  
London EC1V 2PT  
Registered charity number 306130

Copyright © Community Development Foundation 2010

**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A record of this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-907633-00-3

Typesetting by Bearcomm.com, Penzance  
Printed in Great Britain by Crowes of Norwich on Cocoon  
Pre-print and Cocoon Offset 100% genuine recovered waste paper

# Contents

	Page no.
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Who are we?.....	v
<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 What is involved in community empowerment?.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Outcomes for individuals.....	3
Community groups.....	5
Communities.....	7
Public agencies.....	9
<b>3 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>4 Works cited .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>5 Case studies .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Witton Lodge Community Association.....	21
Jean Haines .....	24
Tower Hamlets Participatory Budgeting Events .....	25
Community led planning in Cradley.....	26
Nottingham City Council .....	28

## Acknowledgements

With thanks to Phil Teece (PBU), Jen Wingate (IDeA), Annemarie Naylor (ATU), Sarah Eustace (ATU) and Stephen Rolph (ATU).

‘The test of our commitment to democracy is not merely the changes we make to the institutions at the centre: it is how far we are prepared to give power away; to give citizens themselves greater control over their lives.’

*Gordon Brown*

‘[By] Giving people more power and control over the services that are delivered in their areas, we can inspire a new spirit of civic pride in our communities.’

*David Cameron*

‘Progressive liberalism has always been and always will be about the dispersal and distribution of power.’

*Nick Clegg*

## Who are we?

The **Participatory Budgeting (PB) Unit** is a project of the charity Church Action on Poverty. It receives grant funding from Communities and Local Government to support the development of PB in England. Recognised as the lead delivery agency for PB, it promotes good practice, produces tools and resources for practitioners and provides hands-on expert support for PB projects.

The **Asset Transfer Unit (ATU)** is the leading provider of expert advice, guidance and support concerning the transfer of underused land and buildings from the public sector to community ownership and management – helping organisations to develop those assets and deliver long-term social, economic and environmental benefits. ATU is funded by Communities and Local Government and led and managed by the Development Trusts Association, the UK's leading network of community enterprise practitioners, in association with Community Matters and the Local Government Association.

The **Network of Empowering Authorities (NEA)** was a group of 18 councils taking part in a two-year project to promote good practice in community empowerment. The councils were chosen because they represented a range of current approaches to community empowerment. The project was funded and commissioned by Communities and Local Government as part of the National Empowerment Partnership. The Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA) supported the NEA to develop and share its practice and to develop resources that support improvements in community empowerment across the local government sector.

The **Take Part** approach helps people gain the skills, knowledge and confidence to become empowered, enabling them to make an active contribution to their communities and influence public policies and services. There are currently 18 Take Part pathfinders

and a national support programme dedicated to rolling out the Take Part approach.

The **National Empowerment Partnership (NEP)** is a programme committed to supporting and improving empowerment activities across England. It gathers evidence of effective community empowerment activities and promotes the powerful benefits of involving communities in decisions that affect them.

Both Take Part and NEP are funded by Communities and Local Government and are managed by the Community Development Foundation (CDF), the leading source of community development expertise and delivery. As a public body and a charity CDF bridges government, communities and the voluntary sector.

## Chapter One

# Introduction

Community engagement and community empowerment should not be seen as optional extras by public authorities; they should be considered as an integral part of how public authorities operate. This is more, not less, important during times of strain on public services and community cohesion.

We are a group of bodies who work in the field of community empowerment. We have gathered a wealth of evidence on the benefits of community empowerment and how to manage the associated risks. This evidence should be of great interest to policymakers as they design policies to support and encourage greater community empowerment.

We have found that successful efforts to support community empowerment result in a variety of positive outcomes, in addition to giving people a greater sense of control over their lives. We present that evidence here so that policymakers can understand the benefits arising from community empowerment. In our experience, individuals involved in these activities have raised aspirations both for themselves and their areas, community groups are better able to work in partnership with public authorities, community cohesion is improved and public agencies deliver services which are valued by their users.

To achieve these outcomes, policymakers should ensure that policies to support community empowerment:

- support a change in culture among public authorities so that engagement and empowerment is seen as core to their work

- give the necessary time for community empowerment activities to bear fruit
- have enough flexibility to accommodate the special characteristics of the areas implementing these policies
- use an integrated approach which ensures coordination between all public authorities concerned
- support and build on the unique role that local government and, in particular, local councillors have in their communities
- make certain that community development values and techniques are at the heart of any activities designed to support the process.

## What is community empowerment?

In *An Action Plan for Community Empowerment* Communities and Local Government defined community empowerment as ‘the giving of confidence, skills and power to communities to shape and influence what public bodies do for or with them’ (Communities and Local Government, 2007a, p. 12).

This definition should be used in tandem with that used by the Scottish Government, that ‘community empowerment is a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them’ (The Scottish Government, 2009, p.8).

Underlying these definitions is an acknowledgement that there are both subjective and objective aspects to community empowerment, both of which are important. In a recent publication MORI and Involve neatly brought these definitions together, stating that ‘Empowerment is when people feel they can influence the decisions that impact on their lives and are provided with meaningful opportunities to make this an actuality not a mere possibility’ (McLean and Andersson, 2009, p.13).

## Chapter Two

# What is involved in community empowerment?

No one agency has a monopoly in bringing about community empowerment. Local authorities, small community led groups, informal networks, large voluntary organisations and a variety of other agencies can help citizens to have greater control over the decisions that affect their lives. This document is full of examples of the types of activity that support community empowerment, drawn from our practice. These include: participatory budgeting events where residents decide how public money is spent, the transfer of ownership of assets from the public sector to community groups, informal learning events aimed at giving people the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to influence decisions, citizens' juries and establishing local action teams.

### Outcomes for individuals

Community empowerment activities can have a profound and transformative impact on the individuals who take part in them. Participants feel, and are, better able to influence decisions in their local areas. Sixty-two per cent of those who took part in the PB events in Tower Hamlets felt that these events had strengthened their level of influence over local decisions (PB Unit, n.d, a). Research by South East Rural Community Councils found that participants in community led planning events were better able to influence service delivery as a result of these exercises (South East Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d.). Jean Haines, a Redcar resident who had been reluctant to attend training courses because of negative school experiences, found that as a result of attending "Take the Lead" training organised by Skillshare, she is now a more effective citizen. pressing for change in her community (Skillshare, n.d.).

We have also found that community empowerment activities often lead to improvements in individuals' confidence. In Dorset, for example, a strong network of senior forums, (local independent action groups which aim to influence local services and provide a social network for many isolated older people) has grown up across the county, with support from an independent forum development project hosted by Age Concern Dorchester. Members of the forum found that the training Age Concern provided to support them in putting their views across to the authorities more effectively led to greater confidence (South West Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d., a). This increased confidence can be seen in the response of one participant on a neighbourhood board in Great Yarmouth: 'we're not influencing decisions, we're leading decisions' (Network of Empowering Authorities, 2009a).

This improved confidence is only made possible by a corresponding improvement in participants' skills. A mental health service user in Devon said that 'because of the work I have been doing on the In My Shoes programme, I have now qualified as a trainer and can work with the professionals on an equal basis' (South West Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d., b). Or, to take another example, as a result of attending 'Speaking Up' courses at Exeter Council for Voluntary Service, Gillian, a full-time carer for her husband, now chairs the Exeter Carers Focus group (Take Part Exeter n.d.). The skills people develop through these processes have additional benefits. Novas Scarman found that, of the individuals to whom it awarded small grants to run projects in their communities, 82% reported project management skills development (North East Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d., a).

As a result of individuals' improved confidence, skills and knowledge from community empowerment activities, their aspirations are raised. Vicky Rose describes how the self-advocacy group 'Our Vision, Our Future', which is run by, and for, adults with learning difficulties in the Chesterfield, North East Derbyshire, Amber Valley and Bolsover area, has affected her: 'It's changed our lives because we've learnt that we do have choices and we're encouraged to be independent' (East Midlands

Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d., a). Workers at the Salford Take Part pathfinder have found that a technique known as ‘the school of participation’ can raise participants’ aspirations. For example, deafblind people who took part have gone on to develop ten key recommendations for Salford Social Services Sensory Team to improve local services, in partnership with the deafblind community (Salford Take Part Pathfinder, n.d.).

The raised aspirations of individuals who take part in community empowerment activities often result in an improved likelihood to volunteer and a greater willingness to take on new responsibilities. The organisers of the ‘Your Voice, Your Choice’ PB process in North Lincolnshire found that an unintended consequence of their work was an increase in the number of young people volunteering (PB Unit, n.d., b). Officers on Peterborough Council’s Street Leaders Scheme have found that, as their project has developed, they now receive unsolicited requests from people who want to volunteer with them (East of England Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d., a). Tina Smith, a 45-year-old single parent, describes how, following training at the local resource centre, she started to help older people affected by a regeneration scheme (Yorkshire and Humber Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d.). The village of Cradley in Herefordshire underwent a community led planning processes and, as a result, residents decided there was a need for a more activities for young people. Acting on their own initiative they set up and are now running their own youth group (West Midlands Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d.).

### **Community groups**

Given that we have found that community empowerment is linked to a greater likelihood to volunteer, it is not surprising that we have also found that community groups benefit from the process. As in the previous example, new community groups are often created as a result of community empowerment activities. A local action team in East Ridings helped to establish a BMX and skate park after youth activities were identified as a priority for the area (Network of Empowering Authorities, 2009b). This park is now owned and run by the local community. Similarly, working in

partnership with Salford police, members of the Yemini community in Eccles were able to secure the tenancy of a building, which they now run and which has been designated a hate crime reporting centre (North West Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d.).

Existing groups also benefit from community empowerment activities, through improvements in their capacity and finances. A group of young Asian women who applied for funding at the Keighley West Yorkshire PB event had initially been reluctant to take part. In their experience the more well-established local community centre had tended to ‘crowd out’ other bids. Following their success at the PB event they successfully bid for £60,000 from the Youth Opportunities Fund (PB Unit, n.d., c). Similarly, after undertaking a process of ‘participatory appraisal’ in South Tyneside, the community group Spirit in the Community was supported to secure £7,000 to run a weekly term-time club for 5-11-year-olds (Network of Empowering Authorities, n.d., a).

Related to this improved individual position, we have found that community empowerment activities also improve relationships between community groups. An evaluation of the Up2U PB process run by Greater Manchester Police found that 61% of community groups that took part had made new contacts (PB Unit, n.d., d). A member of the East End Community Alliance, which supports a parent and toddler group, explains how ‘through the Alliance I met with the JET Project to work with the black and minority ethnic community. Between us we have created sports and cooking sessions’ (North East Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d., b). Similarly, the Burton Street Project in Sheffield, established by local people to turn a disused Victorian school into community buildings, now provides a home for 100 groups that can readily network with each other (Communities and Local Government, 2007b).

As well as improved relationships between community groups, in our experience activities to support community empowerment also lead to improved relationships between community groups and

public bodies. Witton Lodge Community Association benefited from the transfer of land previously owned by Birmingham City Council. It now has such a mature working relationship with public agencies that it has worked with North Birmingham Primary Care Trust in building a new £5 million health centre (Network of Empowering Authorities, 2008a). Similarly, a small group of residents in Kendray established the community group Laying the Foundations. When a neighbourhood management pathfinder was established in the area the group found that it could establish an effective working relationship with this new public agency, working with it on the design of a new park and to reduce the number of void properties in the area (Yorkshire and Humber Regional Empowerment Partnership, 2008).

### **Communities**

In some policy debates a strong distinction is drawn between efforts to empower communities and efforts to empower individuals. However, in our experience it is possible that both individuals and communities can become more empowered.

For example, an integral part of many community empowerment activities is people who have never met before coming together to undertake some collective action or decision. This results in the creation of new social networks, as happened when Praxis ran a community empowerment event for the hidden communities of London (London Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d.) or when Disability Wessex started the Autistic Spectrum Disorder Parent Support group network (South West Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d., c). Similarly, when Hunworth and Stody Village Room Ltd was set up to manage the local parish's church hall this led to new bonds being created between Christians and other villagers (Communities and Local Government, 2006).

These new connections also have a beneficial effect on community cohesion. Seventy eight per cent of those who took part in Greater Manchester Police's PB events felt that they had brought different parts of the community together (PB Unit, n.d., e) and a similar percentage felt that Lewisham Council's local assemblies helped

build good relationships within the community (Network of Empowering Authorities, n.d., b).

We have found that empowered, cohesive communities are more likely to be healthy communities. A seminar organised by the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Empowerment Partnership found that empowerment is strongly linked with better outcomes in mental health (Yorkshire and Humber Regional Empowerment Partnership, 2009). Similarly, the East of England Regional Empowerment Partnership found that community empowerment can be linked with greater awareness and access to health services (East of England Regional Empowerment Partnership, 2008). This chimes with academic research such as the Marmot Review *Fair Society, Healthy Lives* which found that when communities are ‘involved in developing and delivering their own regeneration programmes and initiatives’ and when this involvement is ‘real and fit for purpose’ these communities benefit from reduced social isolation and improved health (The Marmot Review, 2010, p. 137).

Linked to improvements in cohesion and health are improvements in the resilience of communities to withstand external shocks. For example the Gujarat Hindu Society and Centre, a ‘community anchor’<sup>1</sup> in Preston, helps to raise the local community’s skills and capacity (North West Regional Empowerment Partnership, 2009). Similarly, after residents in Henley-in-Arden in Warwickshire set up *Henley News* online, public opinion was more easily mobilised to oppose a high density redevelopment plan (West Midlands Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d.). A further example is provided by Coin Street Community Builders, which took ownership of a derelict site in 1984. They established a housing association and also support education, arts and community activities in the area.

Perhaps most importantly of all we have found that activities to support community empowerment result in communities feeling an improved sense of satisfaction with their local area.

---

1. Community anchors are independent, community-led, multi-purpose buildings, see <http://www.comm-alliance.org/Communityanchors/>

When Newcastle City Council adopted a new approach to neighbourhood working that prioritised community engagement, it found that residents' satisfaction with their local area quickly increased from 54% to 66% (Network of Empowering Authorities, n.d., c). Nearly two thirds of participants in Tower Hamlets PB events agreed that the process had improved their satisfaction with their local area (PB Unit, n.d., a).

### **Public agencies**

Many public agencies already view supporting community empowerment as their core activity and therefore require little further evidence of the benefits of such activities. However, in our experience there are other, substantial benefits for public agencies that arise from community empowerment activities.

Since community empowerment is concerned with enabling people to have greater influence on decisions that affect their lives, increasing people's empowerment naturally means that public agencies become more aware of their citizens' needs and aspirations. This in turn leads to more responsive, effective public services. For example, through its community engagement work, Haringey Council Sports and Leisure Services became aware that young people in the borough wanted supervised evening social clubs, which have now been provided (Network of Empowering Authorities, 2008b). Similarly, Wolverhampton City Council's approach to neighbourhood management led to the introduction of a system of neighbourhood tasking, in which services respond to community priorities (Network of Empowering Authorities, 2009c).

Public bodies have to be aware of, and manage, the risk that these processes will accentuate power imbalances. This is one of the reasons why community development work should be at the heart of all public bodies' efforts to support community empowerment, since community development workers support those individuals whose voice would not normally be heard. When managed properly, community empowerment activities

can enable public agencies to hear from residents or users whom they have previously found hard to reach and design services to serve them. This happened in Haringey, where registrars are now available 24 hours a day to accommodate those religions where the deceased must be buried within 24 hours (Network of Empowering Authorities, 2008b). Stoke-on-Trent provides a powerful example of activities designed to support community empowerment resulting in increased influence for those who previously found it hard to have their voice heard. As a result of the support provided to the citywide forum for members of the city's black and minority ethnic communities, these communities were able to influence the city's local area agreements in a way which would otherwise have been impossible (Network of Empowering Authorities, 2008c).

The providers of public services also benefit because empowered communities are better able to work with these services in a process of 'co-production'. The Wansbeck District Council Street Pride scheme was able to improve the appearance of public spaces by directly engaging local residents in the identification, delivery and management of improvements (Network of Empowering Authorities, 2008d). We have found from local authority officers that the transfer of ownership of assets from the public sector to community groups not only contributes to a stronger voluntary and community sector but also increases local authorities' ability to work in partnership with this sector (SQW Consulting, 2009, p. 11). In Bagworth and Thornton, Leicestershire, the parish plan process resulted in the local authority working with local volunteers to establish a drop-in centre for older people (East Midlands Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d., b). The Goodwin Development Trust started in 1994 when a handful of Thornton Estate residents opened a resource centre offering services including advice services on disability rights advice and IT training. The trust now employs over 300 staff, has a turnover of £9.2 million and works in partnership with public authorities. Similarly, the Hastings Trust in Sussex now chairs the area

investment framework for the entire Hastings area, as a result of an asset transfer exercise (Communities and Local Government, 2007b).

Proof of how community empowerment can bring about improvement in services is the higher satisfaction scores that public agencies receive. When Shepway District Council introduced neighbourhood management in 2004, satisfaction with the area as a place to live stood at 81%; within three years this had increased to 88% (Network of Empowering Authorities, 2008e). Similarly, in Manton, a large housing estate in Worksop, Nottinghamshire, 56% of residents said that area had improved over the previous two years as a result of the neighbourhood management initiative, while only 10% thought that it got worse (East Midlands Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d., c).

Equally powerfully, community empowerment is strongly linked with people believing that they are getting value for money from public services. Nationally, MORI has found that people feeling they can influence decisions locally is one of the key drivers to increasing their perception that they are receiving public services that offer good value for money (MORI, 2009, p. 36). One participant in Newcastle's PB process summed this up by saying that, if the money had not been spent in this way, 'it would all go into the mysterious pot, where nobody knows where it goes' (PB Unit, 2009).

This perception of value for money is also linked with the greater legitimacy and trust that public agencies observe as a result of activities to support community empowerment. As one participant in a PB process put it: 'we see the difference we've made, as a community, as a ward – you know, with our councillors on board, backing us; but you know, it's not just the councillors backing us, we're backing the councillors' (PB Unit, 2009).

This strengthening of the relationship between councillors and residents is, in our experience, a common outcome from community empowerment activities. For example, the Citizens

on Patrol scheme in Alvaston, Derby has facilitated a far closer working relationship between councillors and constituents. Similarly, in Nottingham City Council a combination of delegated budgets to ward members and 'ward walks', in which councillors, members of the public and neighbourhood action officers inspect the ward, has resulted in many 'quick wins' and an improved relationship between councillors and residents (Network of Empowering Authorities, 2009d). As John Shipley, Leader of Newcastle City Council said: 'I don't see it [PB] as a threat. I see it as a real help. I think it enables us all to make better decisions. I don't think everything has to be done simply by those that have been formally elected. I think that helps renew democracy'.

We have also found that activities to support community empowerment lead to improved relationships between public agencies' staff and the public. This was certainly the experience on the Triangle Estate in Ipswich. Staff worked with residents to develop a neighbourhood action plan and found that, as well as seeing a dramatic fall in the number of anti-social behaviour complaints, they reported improved relations with members of the community (East of England Regional Empowerment Partnership, n.d., b). As one resident of Eastfield, North Yorkshire reported after attending a PB event: 'The programme has changed our relationship with agencies [for the better] beyond all recognition' (PB Unit, n.d., b).

## Chapter Three

# Conclusion

Our considerable experience of empowerment practice and outcomes, across the various initiatives, has provided substantial evidence that these processes and tools have huge benefits for communities, the groups that work with them, individuals and public agencies. Our aim here has been to provide a series of snapshots that demonstrate the range of approaches in the field and the tangible benefits they produce.

Although we have been able to include some detail about a handful of initiatives, this paper cannot do full justice to the weight of current evidence. We hope, however, that it will serve to persuade policymakers that, while not every project or initiative will succeed, taken collectively there is a substantial, proven case for community empowerment as a means to:

- raise aspirations for individual citizens
- enable community groups to work in effective partnership with service delivery organisations, including councils, police authorities and housing associations
- bring different parts of the community together and strengthen cohesion
- enhance the confidence and capacity of individuals and communities
- help rebuild trust in representative democracy and strengthen the role of elected councillors
- provide more responsive and effective services.

In the present climate, when difficult spending choices have to be made and public services and community cohesion are under strain, it is more important than ever for citizens to feel that they can engage with and influence the decisions that affect their communities and their lives. Of course there are risks – those who find it difficult to have their voices heard may still be ignored and/or elected politicians may feel their role is undermined – but practitioners, with growing knowledge and experience, are increasingly aware of how such risks can be successfully managed and mitigated.

We believe that the evidence for continuing the community empowerment agenda, which we have only been able to touch on here, is compelling, especially when viewed holistically. Participative and representative democracy are mutually beneficial and policies that give citizens a sense of ownership of the decisions that affect them will deliver better services, stronger communities and greater trust.

# Works cited

Communities and Local Government (2007a) *An Action Plan for Community Empowerment*: Wetherby, Communities and Local Government Publications.

Communities and Local Government (2007b) *Making Assets Work*: [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/321083.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/321083.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).

Communities and Local Government (2006) *Community Assets*: [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/151999.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/151999.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).

East of England Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d., a) *Street Leaders Scheme*: [www.inspire-east.org.uk/streetleadersscheme.aspx?NavPageId=4140](http://www.inspire-east.org.uk/streetleadersscheme.aspx?NavPageId=4140) (accessed March 4, 2010).

East of England Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d., b) *Partnership Working on the Triangle Estate*: [www.inspire-east.org.uk/partnershipworkingonthetriangleestate.aspx?NavPageId=4140](http://www.inspire-east.org.uk/partnershipworkingonthetriangleestate.aspx?NavPageId=4140) (accessed March 4, 2010).

East of England Regional Empowerment Partnership (2008) *Research on Community Empowerment in the East of England*: [www.inspire-east.org.uk/FileAccess.aspx?id=1710](http://www.inspire-east.org.uk/FileAccess.aspx?id=1710) (accessed March 4, 2010).

East Midlands Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d., a) *Making Choices*: [www.emep.org.uk/images/stories/CaseStudyPDF/emep-our%20vision%20our%20future-cs20.pdf](http://www.emep.org.uk/images/stories/CaseStudyPDF/emep-our%20vision%20our%20future-cs20.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).

East Midlands Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d., b) *Community Champions Change*:

- [www.emep.org.uk/images/stories/CaseStudyPDF/bagworth%20parish%20plan%20-%20final.pdf](http://www.emep.org.uk/images/stories/CaseStudyPDF/bagworth%20parish%20plan%20-%20final.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- East Midlands Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d., c) *Residents Building a Better Neighbourhood*: [www.emep.org.uk/images/stories/CaseStudyPDF/emep-manton%20pb-cs18\\_layout%201%202dec09.pdf](http://www.emep.org.uk/images/stories/CaseStudyPDF/emep-manton%20pb-cs18_layout%201%202dec09.pdf) (accessed 2010 4, March).
- London Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d.) *A New Voice in London*: [www.shapeyourcity.org.uk/fileadmin/\\_temp\\_/PRX\\_summary\\_report\\_4.pdf](http://www.shapeyourcity.org.uk/fileadmin/_temp_/PRX_summary_report_4.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- The Marmot Review (2010) Fair Society, Healthy Lives: [www.ucl.ac.uk/ghcg/marmotreview/Documents/finalreport/FairSocietyHealthyLives](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ghcg/marmotreview/Documents/finalreport/FairSocietyHealthyLives) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- McLean, Sam and Andersson, Edward (2009) *Activating Empowerment*: London, MORI.
- MORI (2009) *People, Perceptions and Place*: [www.ipsos-mori.com/DownloadPublication/1270\\_sri-localgov-peopleperceptionsandplace-revisedsept.pdf](http://www.ipsos-mori.com/DownloadPublication/1270_sri-localgov-peopleperceptionsandplace-revisedsept.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (n.d., a) *Participatory Appraisal in South Tyneside Neighbourhoods*: [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=5515326](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=5515326) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (n.d., b) *Lewisham's Local Assemblies*: [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8984411](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8984411) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (n.d., c) *A Mixed Approach to Neighbourhood Working in Newcastle*: [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8444337](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8444337) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (2009a) *Locality Working in Great Yarmouth*: [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=12545870&aspect=full](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=12545870&aspect=full) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (2009b) *Making Services Available to a Dispersed Rural Community*: [www.idea.gov.uk/](http://www.idea.gov.uk/)

- idk/core/page.do?pageId=13451952&aspect=full (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (2009c) *Neighbourhood Working in Wolverhampton*: [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=13445498&aspect=full](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=13445498&aspect=full) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (2009d) *Members' Role in Community Empowerment*: [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=13401327&aspect=full](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=13401327&aspect=full) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (2008a) *Witton Lodge Community Association: Perry Common, Birmingham*: [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8966679](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8966679) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (2008b) *Transforming Services: Citizen Engagement and Empowerment*: [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9410576](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9410576) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (2008c) *Stoke-on-Trent: Engaging BAME Communities in the LAA Process*: [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8039087&aspect=full](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8039087&aspect=full) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (2008d) *Wansbeck Street Pride*: [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9443397&aspect=full](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9443397&aspect=full) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Network of Empowering Authorities (2008e) *Shepway District Council: Using Neighbourhood Management to Manage Expansion and Develop Community Engagement*: [www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9065770&aspect=full](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=9065770&aspect=full) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- North East Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d., a) *Empowerment and Small Grants to Individuals 2004 to 2006*: [www.vonne.org.uk/z\\_includes/inc\\_getasset.php?srcpath=..%2F..%2F..%2F&type=file&id=1020](http://www.vonne.org.uk/z_includes/inc_getasset.php?srcpath=..%2F..%2F..%2F&type=file&id=1020) (accessed March 4, 2010).

- North East Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d., b) *Releasing the Potential of the People*: [www.eastendalliance.org.uk/assets/doc/Alliance%20Case%20Study%20June%202008.pdf](http://www.eastendalliance.org.uk/assets/doc/Alliance%20Case%20Study%20June%202008.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- North West Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d.) *Routes to Empowerment*: [www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/documents/NWTWC\\_routes\\_to\\_empowerment\\_07\\_08.pdf](http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/documents/NWTWC_routes_to_empowerment_07_08.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- North West Regional Empowerment Partnership (2009) *The Importance of Community Anchor Organisations to Empowerment Issues in the North West*: [www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/CLES\\_Report.pdf](http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/CLES_Report.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- PB Unit (n.d., a) *You Decide!, Tower Hamlets (London)*: [www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/you-decide-tower-hamlets-london](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/you-decide-tower-hamlets-london) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- PB Unit (n.d., b) *Your Voice Your Choice in Eastfield, Scarborough*: [www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/voice-your-choice-in-eastfield-scarborough](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/voice-your-choice-in-eastfield-scarborough) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- PB Unit (n.d., c) *Keighley Decision Day, Bradford*: [www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/keighley-decision-day-bradford](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/keighley-decision-day-bradford) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- PB Unit (n.d., d) *It's UP2U in Tameside*: [www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/its-up2u-in-tameside](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/its-up2u-in-tameside) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- PB Unit (n.d., e) *Acorns Your Voice, Your Choice Ballot*: [www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/acorns-your-voice-your-choice-ballot](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/acorns-your-voice-your-choice-ballot) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- PB Unit (2009) *People Taking Control. Bradford*: University Salford Take Part Pathfinder (n.d.) *Schools of Participation*: [www.takepartsalford.org.uk/downloads/Schools%20of%20Participation.pdf/at\\_download/file](http://www.takepartsalford.org.uk/downloads/Schools%20of%20Participation.pdf/at_download/file) (accessed March 4, 2010).

- The Scottish Government (2009) *Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan*: Edinburgh, Housing and Regeneration Directorate.
- Skillshare (n.d.) *Jean Haines, Redcar*: [www.takepartnetwork.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9:jean-haines-redcar&catid=4:case-studies&Itemid=5](http://www.takepartnetwork.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9:jean-haines-redcar&catid=4:case-studies&Itemid=5) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- South East Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d.) *Mainstreaming Community Led Planning*: [www.serep.org.uk/resources/community-led-planning.pdf](http://www.serep.org.uk/resources/community-led-planning.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- South West Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d., a) *Engagement and Empowerment Among Older People: A Case Study*: [www.creatingexcellence.org.uk/ceimages/ECReport4OlderPeople.pdf](http://www.creatingexcellence.org.uk/ceimages/ECReport4OlderPeople.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- South West Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d., b) *Learning to Involve – Empowering Service Users and Carers to Work with Public Sector Bodies*: [www.creatingexcellence.org.uk/regeneration-renewal-article245-p1.html](http://www.creatingexcellence.org.uk/regeneration-renewal-article245-p1.html) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- South West Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d., c) *No Boundaries*: [www.creatingexcellence.org.uk/ceimages/ECReport7Networks.pdf](http://www.creatingexcellence.org.uk/ceimages/ECReport7Networks.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- SQW Consulting (2009) *Asset Transfer Unit Evaluation*: <http://atu.org.uk/Document.ashx?ID=223> (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Take Part Exeter (n.d.) *Gillian: Community Group Member*: [www.takepartexeter.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=30:case-study-gillian&catid=7:case-studies&Itemid=12](http://www.takepartexeter.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30:case-study-gillian&catid=7:case-studies&Itemid=12) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- West Midlands Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d.) *Parish Plans, Community Empowerment and Engagement*: [www.evcwm.org.uk/sites/www.evcwm.org.uk/files/EMPOWERMENT\\_PP\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.evcwm.org.uk/sites/www.evcwm.org.uk/files/EMPOWERMENT_PP_FINAL.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).

- Yorkshire and Humber Regional Empowerment Partnership  
(2009) *Mental Health and Wellbeing*: [www.yhep.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/MH%20report%20with%20titles%20draft%20\[1\].pdf](http://www.yhep.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/MH%20report%20with%20titles%20draft%20[1].pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Yorkshire and Humber Regional Empowerment Partnership  
(2008) *Empowerment at the Grassroots*: [www.yhep.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/753626%20Empowerment%20at%20the%20grass%20roots%20FINAL%20Proof.pdf](http://www.yhep.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/753626%20Empowerment%20at%20the%20grass%20roots%20FINAL%20Proof.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).
- Yorkshire and Humber Regional Empowerment Partnership (n.d.)  
*Voices from Experience*: [www.yhep.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/activists%20stories.pdf](http://www.yhep.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/activists%20stories.pdf) (accessed March 4, 2010).

# Case studies

## Case study I

### Witton Lodge Community Association

Full details at:

[www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8966679](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8966679)

Perry Common is an estate of around 1,000 homes. By the end of the 1980s the defects in the experimental building method used for the homes were becoming clear. Structurally, the houses were failing. Significant cracks began to appear, rising damp took hold through damaged damp-proof courses and the houses were at risk of being declared unfit.

In 1989 Birmingham City Council found that the cost to undertake a full repair programme was far in excess of the city's financial capacity. No central government money was available and no other source of funding had been identified. The council decided in principle to demolish all the houses. Nine hundred and eight families received a letter from the council telling them that their homes had to go.

Perry Common residents formed the Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA), which was established as a company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity. Birmingham City Council was then able to gift the land to the WLCA who could then use the value of the land as an asset and to build a new housing development. This development would have three parts; one third of the land would be sold to developers for private housing, one third would be sold to three housing associations for social housing and one third

would be retained by WLCA to build houses for rent which would secure its own asset base. This business plan was put to all the residents in a local referendum: the majority were in favour. The overall development scheme eventually provided 129 houses for the association and a further 40 self-contained apartments in Sycamore Court, an extra care scheme completed in 2000.

The Witton Lodge story does not end here. The rebuilding programme has continued. Through its subsequent phases, nearly 600 houses have been built by the private developers, the housing associations and WLCA. A cohesive mixed community is emerging, with a diversity of property types. Residents have been involved directly in the design of the WLCA property and have influenced the standards of the houses built by the partners. The success of WLCA has resulted in residents gaining the confidence and skill to aim at developing a fully transformed neighbourhood. The outcome has been dramatic.

Other key services have been attracted to Perry Common. A new extension to the local junior and infant school has provided a base for Sure Start staff who offering support to local families. The North Birmingham Primary Care Trust is building a £5 million health centre, including a GP surgery and other services. The residents' pragmatic and informed approach has encouraged significant partnerships to be developed with service providers, including the police.

Staff from the relevant agencies remark on the positive atmosphere in Witton Lodge, which encourages collective problem solving. There has been a fundamental change in the approach of service providers, which see their work there as part of a coordinated effort at neighbourhood improvement involving colleagues from other departments and agencies.

There has also been a major effort to improve the neighbourhood environment. Local schoolchildren have planted 6,000 daffodils in flower beds to beautify the green area at the centre. This natural village green, known as 'The Ring', has been restored with support

from the Countryside Agency and Groundwork, the environmental charity.

WLCA has reopened the community centre, which had been closed for years, and has established a community shop. Faith groups are represented by Urban Devotion, a charity committed to supporting young people through after-school clubs, holiday activities and a mentoring programme. Urban Devotion does not aim to divert young people from anti-social activities, but to build positive relationships that value their input and enable their voices and visions for the future to be heard.

Karen Cheney, from Birmingham City Council, who is coordinating the council's Community Asset Transfer Development Programme, explained that the programme was about 'giving community organisations the opportunity to have a stake in their communities by the management of assets'.

## Case study 2

### Jean Haines

Full details at:

[www.takepartnetwork.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9:jean-haines-redcar&catid=4:case-studies&Itemid=5](http://www.takepartnetwork.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9:jean-haines-redcar&catid=4:case-studies&Itemid=5)

Jean is passionate about her local community but had been reluctant to attend formal training because she never liked school. Her husband convinced her to go to a ‘Take the Lead’ course, which was a revelation for her. She found the trainers friendly, helpful and relaxed; sessions were enjoyable and light-hearted while still enabling participants to gain high levels of skills and knowledge. This training also enabled her to gain her first educational awards.

Jean gained other benefits from the training: previously, she says, she would not have had the courage to stand up in a group to make a point, but the training gave her the skills and confidence to do this. She also feels that the practical knowledge gained about local government structures was invaluable: previously she may have been put off by what she saw as red tape, but knowing how structures work made it much easier to progress an issue. She believes that the courses helped her to become a more effective active citizen, pressing for change in her own community.

## Case study 3

### Tower Hamlets Participatory Budgeting Events

Full details at:

[www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/you-decide-tower-hamlets-london](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/you-decide-tower-hamlets-london)

In spring 2009, Tower Hamlets Partnership decided to use £2.4 million of area based grant to allocate using participatory budgeting. The money, which is mainstream funding, was to be allocated to mainstream services, essentially a 'top up' of the basic services provided in each of eight local areas, called local area partnerships.

The Partnership asked all partners to provide projects or services to go into a menu of options for residents to vote on. The projects had to help achieve either previously determined local priorities or local area agreement targets.

The voting process was split out into the eight local area partnerships. More than 800 people were involved. Participants at the various PB events heard a short presentation about each of the services on offer, there was then time for questions and facilitated discussion on tables before taking a final, electronic, vote.

Sixty two per cent of participants felt that the process had strengthened their level of influence over local decisions; 68% felt that the event was a good way of deciding how money should be spent locally; 61% felt that the process had improved their satisfaction with their local area and 77% of participants would like to see the process repeated.

## Case study 4

### Community led planning in Cradley

Full details at:

[http://www.cdf.org.uk//c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=7c6c99c8-1652-4964-af18-81b08c46522d&groupId=10128](http://www.cdf.org.uk//c/document_library/get_file?uuid=7c6c99c8-1652-4964-af18-81b08c46522d&groupId=10128)

Cradley Parish Council held a public meeting to start the parish planning process. People were asked to join various working groups, which were coordinated by facilitators who provided the groups with a clear brief.

Cradley also used the Planning for Real<sup>2</sup> process in three village locations to ensure maximum engagement with different parts of the parish, for example farmers.

A survey was also sent to every household in the parish, which had a 59% response rate.

This variety of approaches meant different sections of the village that had traditionally been seen as separate (for example the social housing estate) were now seen as part of the same community.

There is a sense that the parish plan brought together a village which had previously been divided between those who lived in the social housing estate and owner occupiers. Since its completion people from the social housing estate are now represented both on the parish council and the village hall management committee.

The parish council and Herefordshire Council adopted the completed Cradley Parish Plan. As well as having an impact on

- 
2. A process in which participants make a 3D model of their local area and add suggestions of the way they would like to see their community develop. They then prioritise these in groups and create an action plan for decision-makers to take away <http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/Planning+for+Real>

planning decisions in Cradley, the parish plan also acted as a catalyst for a range of other activity, including the following. People in the village are providing services which were previously unavailable but which the parish plan demonstrated a need for, for example a youth group.

- Funds have been raised, partly through the Football Association, for a new playing field, which will provide a much-needed facility for young people.
- New road signs have been put up and members of the community have been trained in using speed cameras.
- A Grade II listed building was refurbished to become the village hall, which includes a community resource centre.
- A ‘safe routes to school’ project was developed.

## Case study 5

### Nottingham City Council

Full details at:

[www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=13401327&aspect=full](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=13401327&aspect=full)

Nottingham City Council has developed a programme of opportunities to increase local people's involvement at a neighbourhood level. These include local issue group meetings, park life community celebration events, development of the community newsletter *Community Arrow*, circulated to every household in the city and activities to support ward councillors. The aim of these plans is to increase the numbers of residents satisfied with the area and their perception of their ability to influence decisions (as measured by National Indicators 1<sup>3</sup>, 4<sup>4</sup> and 5<sup>5</sup>).

In 2008/09 and 2009/10, each local councillor was allocated £10,000 to support their role as 'Champion of place'. Further funds were allocated, based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the ward population. This budget allows councillors to allocate funds that support ward initiatives and projects put forward by the community such as family fun days, community BBQs, play equipment and park benches. Feedback both from councillors and residents has been extremely positive.

To support councillors' role as 'Champions of place' further, ward walks have been successfully taking place in all nine areas of the city. As well as aiming to raise improve the appearance of public spaces, these walks are a way to reach out to communities and

- 
3. The percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area
  4. The percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality
  5. Overall / general satisfaction with local area, for more detail on National Indicators see <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/735112.pdf>

bring key officers together. Neighbourhoods are leafleted before the walks and residents are encouraged to put the flier in their window if they would like the Councillors to call as they pass. Ward walks provide an opportunity to join up the services of Nottingham City Council, Nottingham City Homes (NCH) and the police. This partnership working has the potential to improve value for money, not least in streamlining the number of meetings. For example NCH's estate inspections have, where possible, been merged with ward walks.

Empowering communities takes both time and resources, but feedback from residents and the recent place survey<sup>6</sup> results confirm that the council is heading in the right direction.

---

6. A survey of citizens' views and perspectives administered by each local authority, see <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/audit/nis/Pages/placesurvey.aspx>



ISBN 978-1-907633-00-3



9 781907 633003 >

**take part**

