



Your neighbourhood – getting involved and having a say



An introduction to the discussion document
Citizen Engagement and Public Services:
Why Neighbourhoods Matter

Anne Glover from Braunstone in Leicester is involved in the New Deal for Communities Pathfinder, which has turned her life around. Anne says that “it never occurred to us that we were so ‘deprived’”. Having the information to understand our situation has enabled us to challenge decisions. You need to have the confidence that there is no such thing as a foolish question and that nothing is impossible”. With fellow residents she helped reverse a decision to demolish 200 vandalised houses – now refurbished and fully occupied.

Crime Concern ran a project in Birmingham asking local people what should be done to prevent crime in their local area. John Clarke, one of the residents involved said, “We sat down and talked to police and housing and they talked back to us. We were part of the set up”. By drawing up action plans with local people, crime in the five areas fell by an average of 14%, compared to 7% in comparable areas in the city.



What do we want to see?

- More people everywhere getting actively involved in their neighbourhoods.
- Local people able to influence decisions about their own neighbourhoods and public services.

Why?

- Experience is showing that by far the best way to get services delivered effectively is for local people to take an active role in solving problems.
- The trouble is that most people don't understand how they can do this, or lack confidence in their own abilities.
- But once people get started, they nearly always come up with the best solutions for their community. And people living there make sure things go on getting better.

How can we achieve this?

- By encouraging local authorities and service providers to give local people more influence over what is delivered, and how;
- And by ensuring that local people have the opportunities, support and tools to get together to drive

The Droylsden Road Tenants and Residents Association in East Manchester received a grant of £25,000 to tackle the lack of green space. Instead of a dingy wheelie bin alley, they now have a community garden for everyone to enjoy. A resident said that “it’s made such a difference to the area, what was once an abandoned, graffiti covered space, is now a community garden. I am proud to live in this neighbourhood”.

The Lambeth Youth Council is run for young people by young people. This forum has supported and enabled members to discuss and implement changes on issues such as teenage pregnancy and stop and search. A member of the Youth Council said, “Being part of the youth council means that for the first time I feel like my views really count and the great thing is we get some of our ideas put into practice – so it’s not all talk”.

improvements in their neighbourhoods, and in the services delivered to local people.

- Building on all the neighbourhood activity that is currently going on, the Government wants to see:
 - council services, health services, schools and policing that are more responsive to the wishes and priorities of local communities;
 - more communities taking active control of their own neighbourhoods, managing and owning their own assets (such as playgrounds and community buildings), setting up parish councils, and triggering action when things aren’t working properly;
 - elected councillors who actively lead communities, and speak for everyone in it.
- The Government has recently published a document – ***Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*** (January 2005) – setting out the Government’s ideas as the start of a debate on the way forward.



Branxton in Northumberland has just 130 residents, no post office nor shop. Like 3,000 rural communities, Branxton set out their priorities in a Parish Plan. Clive Hallam-Baker, Parish Council Chair, says “The Parish Plan has brought the village alive and generated real community spirit.” The outcomes include £92,000 for renovation of the village hall (with a new kitchen and computer room), grants to reconstruct the play area, a revitalised parish council with newly elected members, and £30,000 lottery funding to promote tourism to the local battlefield.

What does it mean for people?

- People will be able to say:
 - “We make lots of the decisions that shape our community”
 - “We have a real say in the way local services are provided”
 - “Even though we are a minority in the community, we feel fully included and able to influence decisions like everyone else”
 - “We like living here – it's a nice place”
 - “We know who to turn to when things aren't as they should be”

What does this mean for councils and other service providers?

- Working directly with people at neighbourhood level should be at the heart of how councils and other service providers do business.
- All councils, in partnership with other service providers, should make sure that they give every neighbourhood the right opportunities and support for them to say what they want, and to be heard.

The village of West Horndon in Essex had nowhere for young children to play. A group of villagers formed the West Horndon Park Association and set about raising the £250,000 needed to transform a site in the middle of the village. The new park opened in May 2004. The West Horndon Park Association has taken out an 80-year lease on the park from the landowners Brentwood Borough Council and is responsible for its maintenance and upkeep. A resident said “the park’s been a real success and has been used by local people of all ages...and we all take pride in keeping it clean and tidy”.



What does this mean if I am a ward councillor?

- Things are going to change in the next few years. We want elected ward councillors to be at the heart of neighbourhood activity – leading and listening.
- They may be asked to take responsibility for budgets so their neighbourhoods can make things happen for themselves.
- And they will play a key role in representing the interests of their neighbourhoods in the council’s overall planning processes.

How can you have your say on the neighbourhoods agenda?

We want a genuine debate and would welcome your views. To make your views count, e-mail:

neighbourhoods.localvision@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

Copies of the full document and the other local:vision documents can be downloaded from the website (www.odpm.gov.uk/localvision) or are available from:

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Other documents you may find interesting

- *'Neighbourhood Policing – your police; your community; our commitment'* is available on the police reform website at www.policereform.gov.uk
- *'Firm Foundations: The Governments Framework for Community Capacity Building'* is available on the Home Office website at www.homeoffice.gov.uk
- *'Together We Can: people and government, working together to make life better'* is available on the Home Office website at www.homeoffice.gov.uk

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