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**Summary of Key Findings from the
Evaluation of The Community Contracts Pilots Programme**

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<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/evaluationcommunitycontracts>

**‘13 things you need to know about Neighbourhood
Agreements’**

Impacts on local services and service providers

1. Community Contracts offered a framework for service accountability, based on existing service standards and levels, in order to ensure delivery met those standards and levels. Through the negotiation of service standards and intense scrutiny of neighbourhood level service performance, it was felt that Contracts had led to a refreshing of attention to, and ‘spotlight’ on, existing standards.
2. Respondents gave evidence of reporting of service and neighbourhood issues by active residents more closely involved in Contracts. Contracts had created more effective structures for active residents to channel information, and for services to respond to reported problems. In the majority of case study areas, the Contracts had yet to demonstrate an increase in reporting by individual users.
3. A combination of service accountability, performance monitoring, and intelligence gathering about local needs and priorities resulted in improvements to services and neighbourhoods. There were many examples of improvements to service delivery and to the neighbourhoods, including efficiency gains, mostly focused on environmental services and conditions, as a result of Contracts.
4. Some stakeholders argued that Contracts in some places were not tackling wider socio-economic problems in neighbourhoods sufficiently, but it should be noted that this was not an aim of Community Contracts, and there were future opportunities to address some wider issues.
5. In all of the areas, the idea of Contracts broadly fitted with wider strategic and corporate priorities. However, there were differing levels of connection through specific targets, structures and processes. Stakeholders in some of the case study areas were having discussions about how to vertically align Contracts with authority and sub-regional strategies through Local Area Agreements and Multi-Area Agreements as they felt this would strengthen their work.

Impact on local communities and citizens

6. Many people most actively involved in Community Contracts were existing community representatives, members of organisations and volunteers, and Contracts enhanced their roles. There were a small number of notable examples where a wider group of residents had been involved, which could be replicated.
7. Levels of awareness amongst residents who had not been as closely involved in Contracts were patchy at best. Many who were aware of the document were not familiar with its purpose or basic content.
8. Contracts had enabled better management of expectations between services, councillors and active residents who were directly involved. There were

examples where resident satisfaction had increased during the period of the Contract where people had noticed service and neighbourhood improvements. However, there was still dissatisfaction with services and agencies.

9. Included in the policy aims for Contracts were hopes that they would help facilitate behaviour change by citizens. Overall, these hopes were not yet realised for the population at large. There were some examples of behaviour change where rewards or enforcement had been used alongside Contracts. Many residents welcomed the emphasis on civic responsibility and behaviour change, but were pessimistic about the prospects of Contracts being able to influence the problematic behaviour of the minority. Many residents wanted a more robust approach to enforcement.

Impact on local democracy

10. Some local elected members had been very close to and supportive of Contracts. Where councillors had been positively involved in Contracts they played different roles, ranging from practical contributions on the ground to strategic roles as 'unblockers' of problems with services and the authority, and as champions of the Contract within the authorities.
11. Contracts had enhanced relationships between councillors and those citizens who were more closely involved in Contracts. However, Contracts had not yet significantly changed the way that councillors interact with individual constituents and citizens. Some local elected members felt that Contracts should help to reduce contact between citizens and elected members on specific service and neighbourhood problems by facilitating the public to deal directly with services.

Implementation lessons and implications for further adoption of Contracts

12. Lessons from implementation suggested that:
 - for Contracts to be successful, neighbourhood or locality based working needed to be in place;
 - there were political and organisational risks that needed to be managed, particularly where the local authority and its Executive were not in the leadership role;
 - the publicity, communications and marketing strategies that were effective in generating a response from the wider group of residents went beyond the conventional 'newsletter and open day' approaches that were most often used;
 - the absence of accessible and smooth running routes for reporting by residents of service and neighbourhood issues to service providers presented a barrier to the effective operation of Contracts;
 - a core group of active residents was needed to develop & deliver Contracts;
 - community capacity building needs differed between neighbourhoods, and provision for building community capacity was a pre-requisite in some places;
 - there was a clear correlation between effective governance and effective contracts;
 - Contracts presented specific issues for middle managers who could be caught between their organisations' performance targets and performance management framework and the demands of the neighbourhood Contract.
13. Based on the variation in the case studies, it is possible to see that Contracts have potential applicability in neighbourhoods of different sizes, in urban, suburban and rural areas, areas with different housing tenures, household profiles and ethnic mix. The evidence strongly suggests that this is not a policy for less affluent areas only.