



**Report of the NWTWC Learning Exchange Seminar -  
Measuring Community Empowerment – What does the White Paper  
require? How do you do it?  
Ditton Community Centre – 18<sup>th</sup> March 2010.**

Introduction

This NWTWC learning exchange seminar, hosted by Halton Borough Council, explored what local authorities are required to do to measure empowerment and how a range of local authorities have used frameworks. It was designed to enable participants to consider how to choose the best framework for their situation and how a framework might help an authority understand their empowerment work and take it forward.

The seminar was aimed at people working at a strategic level and included an opportunity to question the speakers more closely on specific elements of the frameworks they had presented on. It was attended by 25 people.

Welcome

Dwayne Johnson, Strategic Director, Health & Community, Halton Council welcomed participants. He said that the day was important for Halton as new shops were opening which they knew were wanted by local people through community engagement activity. Dwayne felt that events like this helped Local Authorities carry out their new duties to involve communities since Strong, Safe, Prosperous communities was published in 2009.

Like other authorities, Halton did not always hear people that are seldom heard. The venue was an example of good practice. It is well used by disabled people. When disabled people in Halton had been asked what they wanted, they had said they wanted to use community centres.

Eve Davidson welcomed participants on behalf of NWTWC. She explained that NWTWC is the regional Empowerment Partnership. Their role is to ensure that services are delivered better and more effectively. She advised people to look at [www.nwtwc.org.uk](http://www.nwtwc.org.uk) to find out about reports that have been produced, events and the NWTWC Community Empowerment & Social Cohesion Award

**Key note speaker : Valuing community empowerment – building an evidence and business case** Stuart Pate, Head of Community, Cumbria County Council

The powerpoint of Stuart's presentation can be found at [http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/Microsoft\\_PowerPoint\\_-\\_SPatePresentation.pdf](http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/uploads/Microsoft_PowerPoint_-_SPatePresentation.pdf). His presentation covered what local authorities need to do in terms of evaluation and details of how Cumbria are addressing this and what others might learn from this.

Some key points that Stuart made were:

- There is no single way forward, every authority will need to develop their own approach, but there is lots of good work going on around the country

- It has to make a difference to how the community feel and not just the people who are easiest to involve; councillors must be involved
- The guidance is loose knit. You can do what you want as long as you can justify it.
- It is critical business, not just an add on
- Keep the evaluation simple
- Your definition of empowerment is important and must drive evaluation

## **Case studies**

The key note address was followed by 3 case studies:

Nicola Goodwin, Community Development Manager, Halton Borough Council, *Halton's Framework for Auditing Community Engagement Activity*

Christina Bebbington, Community Engagement Manager, Wirral MBC. *Community Engagement Framework – The Wirral Way*

Garreth Wilkinson, Neighbourhood Development Officer, Salford City Council *Salford's Community Empowerment Wheel*

The powerpoint presentations for these can be found at

<http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/events/recent-events.php> After the presentations participants were asked to use a handout to think about what they had learned so far and what they wanted to find out more about. The four presenters were then available to respond to questions and participants were advised to join and leave discussions to get the most possible out of it for themselves.

## **Discussion Groups**

Key points from the discussion groups are outlined. In the workshops based on frameworks used in Halton and the Wirral, participants were interested in how the frameworks had been used with partners. Both LAs had started using the framework internally and saw including partners as a next step once it was working well within the LA.

*'Start council wide, as it is too big for partnership level. Hopefully do next step at partnership level.'*

### **Nicola Goodwin, Community Development Manager, Halton Borough Council, *Halton's Framework for Auditing Community Engagement Activity***

- Summary Table of Activity

It is split into 4 columns, the last 2 columns 'Deciding Together' and 'Acting Together' blur into each other. Activity is ongoing so it is difficult to document as there is no end point, so it can't be ticked to say activity done. It was suggested that there be a separate document for 'Deciding Together' discussions, which could form the evidence base for inspections. Every one of the tiers is equally valid. It is used as a pilot using evidence base to work on.

- Need to work together and learn off each other.

Jayne (Sefton) is in process of information gathering and now needs to categorise information captured. That could lead to peer review.

- Using measurement to protect work

Hugh Wignall. Engagement is a soft target in current climate. There is no understanding of how much engagement costs to do. That information is needed to protect the work in current climate.

Halton have used the framework in relation to community development eg shared with councillors. It has been a key to sustaining CD as it has provided an understanding of what is spent and financial outcomes.

Evidencing what has changed as a result of the consultation. Community Engagement wasn't strategic. By identifying a base of what is going on it has been possible to gather and inform at a strategic level.

It enables capture of previously unrecorded data. E.g. Libraries have a teenage panel to choose books for teenagers. That was under the radar. How good is that activity?

Doing a piece of work locally to support place survey results reduces reliance on place survey.

CDF document 'Duty to Involve' had proved to be a great resource.

This work is a slice of Halton's activity across the council, it was never meant to be a full view.

- Time

The process took a couple of months. Information went out end of June, back mid July, ready end of October and report to CEO end of November.

- Getting support from senior officers

There is a high level of support. 1 of 4 strategic lead directors have owned this work and driven it. Suggest you send out a questionnaire from CEO to get buy in.

- Other points

Warrington Partnership approach –Nicola has papers.  
Internet based toolkit – not used.

### **Christina Bebbington, Community Engagement Manager, Wirral MBC. *Community Engagement Framework – The Wirral Way***

- Discussion about potential of the database

The database is in Microsoft Access and the first version is a spreadsheet which asks people from departments to identify engagement under 3 headings; information, involvement and consultation.

Getting people to use it, can be difficult. If they have to write regular reports, that can encourage as it can help and it can get results. In Wirral it was introduced when they failed to get a level 3 for Equality work because they could not show impact. Once they had introduced the database, they got the Level 3.

- Sharing with other agencies/ community

If partners can share data and intelligence it can open up debate on a range of issues. Other possible areas for sharing info across organisations identified were:

- Information on who is funding which groups. Knowsley have a funding matrix
- Volunteer strategy

Would be possible for community to access but not been considered at present

- How can conflict with communities be prevented when changes of services are proposed, such as re-organising libraries where lots of small libraries?
  - Essential to engage communities in the process
  - Do quality impact assessment
- Impact - this is something to work on in Wirral, perhaps using Halton's 4 levels for an evaluation framework.

### **Garreth Wilkinson, Neighbourhood Development Officer, Salford City Council *Salford's Community Empowerment Wheel***

- Residents Delivering Services - In theory residents can do work themselves or commission others to carry it out.  
This could be a challenge to current service providers over the quality of service delivery  
Questions of community ownership.

Role of Councillors – perceived loss of control.

Role of councillors will change as role for residents and partners increases.

There is a need to act strategically with all partners to discuss shared budgets – 'participatory budgeting'.

Good examples of co-production – Taff Housing is worth looking at.

Community involvement needs to be valued properly at all levels of engagement and involvement – this needs to be done with care.

Community Reporting can be very effective but there are still gaps with changes to delivery of services.

- Use of consultants to carry out research and evaluation within neighbourhoods - Annoys residents and is costly.
- Media City – How will/has this benefitted local people?

Overseen by a Public Sector Partnership

- Work opportunities will be in ancillary services, attempts have been made via contracts for local people to be employed where possible.
- Working with local residents to develop local priorities i.e Lowry Walkabouts
- Control remains with Landlord and other businesses who are tenants

### Summary and concluding remarks

- Eve will offer an action learning set to enable further sharing of frameworks
- Chris will make the Engage Wirral database info website accessible

Stuart concluded by saying that organisational culture is crucial. Staff must be empowered to empower communities. They must feel they can speak on behalf of their authorities and take decisions.

### Feedback

Eleven people completed a feedback form. The table below shows which aspects of the seminar were most useful. Some individuals noted more than one in their response:

<b>Aspect</b>	Presentation	Case Studies	Workshops	Networking
<b>Number</b>	2	7	2	1

Suggestions:

3 responses concerned, what could have improved the learning - to have more focus on the workshops, possibly an audit / regulatory body perspective and in the future data management in relation to the hard to reach.

3 responses concerned improving the format - little more time, something for two tier authorities and regional examples of mapping engagement across LSPs.

11 individuals said they had made new contacts at the event and 9 said they would be following them up whilst the other 2 were keeping them for future reference.

Suggestions for future NWTWC events or action were as follows:

- Frameworks - how people have progressed within a year.
- Quality assurance/ performance.
- Standards for engagement – a partnership approach.
- Using social media to improve engagement.
- Changing roles of the councillors.
- Working with service delivery partners.

### Conclusions

This event generated a good and positive response. The quality of the speakers was excellent and the information presented and opportunity to network it proved to be very worthwhile for those who attended.

There was good opportunity for people to address specific areas of concern and problems in a more in depth way in the workshops and the evaluation sheets were marked very highly with good evaluations given for most of the content of the day. People were inspired to hold future events and had some good ideas for future topics.