



## **Report on the NWTWC Learning Exchange Seminar Neighbourhood Charters: urban and rural – what do you need to know? 13<sup>th</sup> January 2010 at Preston County Hall.**

### 1 Introduction

This timely learning exchange seminar, attended by 31 people, was designed to disseminate national research and highlight case studies illustrating the use of Neighbourhood Charters in rural and urban areas.

The seminar was targeted at Local Authority officers with limited previous knowledge or experience of Neighbourhood Charters; to inform and enable them to assess whether and how they might use Charters in their own situations.

The format was innovative, with three case studies, the keynote speaker presented her findings in written form, a panel and workshops. The format aimed to maximise opportunities for participants to identify what they know, need to know and to get their questions answered for informed action.

### 2 The seminar

**County Councillor Mike France**, lead member for Communities and Partnerships, Lancashire County Council welcomed everyone. He pointed out that it was thanks to the road gritters who had been out for 30 days that we were there and that we were lucky not to be in Haiti. He was very positive about events which got people together. The County Council is a new administration, keen to try things that are working elsewhere, wanting things to work better. As the 4<sup>th</sup> largest council in the country they have big challenges.

**Eve Davidson**, Programme Manager welcomed everyone on behalf of NWTWC and gave a brief introduction to the organisation which encourages learning and networking concerning empowerment in a range of ways including a community empowerment award. She pointed out that the seminar was very topical as Communities Secretary; John Denham called on councils to sign Community Contracts or Neighbourhood Charters the previous week. The first two case studies were pilots in the CLG pilot programme and Liz Richardson evaluated it.

Sadly, **Maxine Moar**, was ill and unable to attend. Maxine is Community Participation Co-ordinator at Oldham MBC. A DVD, 'Neighbourhood in Agreement', describing work she had been involved in was shown, (copies available from NWTWC). The DVD showed the optimism of both residents and officers about Neighbourhood Agreements and the involvement of residents of different ages and ethnicities in an inner city environment.

Liz Richardson, who evaluated the pilot said she had been very impressed with the level of involvement of local people in the Oldham pilot. Most of the twelve residents initially involved were still involved two years later. Their reasons were they wanted to make a difference, cared about where they lived and about their children. They had formed a Residents Association and worked as equal partners with services and politicians. They had actively helped develop the agreements. It is very important that residents feel it is their process and important to have a strong champion who might be an MP, councillor or

Chief Executive and a mechanism to deal with things if they go wrong. The Oldham case study had 5 Neighbourhood Agreements concerning Crime, Environment, Health, Community Involvement and Housing. Health was an unusual choice. People in the area now think there are more police and road sweepers; it is their perception, the numbers have not changed. Charters are a powerful tool for involving people and for accountable services.

The charters can be accessed at <http://www.oldham.gov.uk/ndc-home.htm>.

**Vicky Etheridge**, Neighbourhood Manager, Kings Lynn and W. Norfolk works in a very different urban area with no history of Government initiatives, community development and outside funding. They received Safer Stronger Communities Funding to pilot a neighbourhood management approach in the five most deprived wards in the town.

### *Tips*

Vicky advised that

- Building relationships and trust between service providers, residents and councillors is central to the work and this takes time.
- You need to give people the chance to contribute and to inform as many people as possible about what you are doing; they have used newsletters, flyers, posters and letters to residents to do this.
- Take your time, do it properly and trust others – the first couple of meetings were spent getting to know one another.

### *Advantages of doing Community Contracts*

- A neighbourhood charter / agreement can provide a mechanism for holding services / one another to account
- It can encourage residents to take responsibility and shift dependency from services
- Provide better information about, and access to services, the only extra things that have been provided are bins for dog poo and litter.
- Highlighted the need for services to promote what they do more effectively

### *Some Challenges*

- Once launched the challenges were how to keep it alive and assure people that things were happening
- The services and councillors feared that residents would ask for things they could not deliver so had to be reassured at the start of the process.

### *What's happening now?*

Neighbourhood Partnerships have been set up in each of the 5 areas each with their own Neighbourhood Action Plans and a small budget.

**Ruth Reeves**, Locality Partnership Officer, Staffordshire Moorlands DC see, presentation <http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/events/recent-events.php>

In Oldham and W.Norfolk the Neighbourhood Agreements include service standards whereas Staffordshire Moorlands Local Charters focus on community priorities. Service standards may be included at a later date.

**Liz Richardson**, the keynote speaker, Research Fellow at the Institute of Political and Economic Governance at Manchester University, presented her findings in written form, see <http://www.nwtwc.org.uk/events/recent-events.php>

After reading these, participants were asked to complete a handout to identify:

- 3 things you found most interesting in the morning so far

- 3 things you can do in your area
- 3 questions you want to explore more

The aim of the handout was to give them an opportunity to reflect on what they had heard and what they would be most useful for them to find out in the remaining time. A lively panel discussion followed.

### Points from panel discussion

- Neighbourhood or community agreements or charters go by many names. Local areas in the pilot did not like 'contract'
- It is a voluntary agreement which is monitored
- Where **service standards** used, it makes these public knowledge eg in Oldham the Agreement covering Community safety say 90% of fires will be reached within 7 minutes. Residents are encouraged to report people who attack the fire-fighters, to enable fire-fighters to get to as many fires as possible as fast as possible.
- The **pilot evaluation** considered 6 diverse areas. It involved interviews and focus groups with stakeholders, residents and volunteers, some of which were supported by CLG and some not. Available on: [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/evaluationcommunitycontracts](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/evaluationcommunitycontracts)
- CLG will be rolling charters out nationally. IDeA will be setting up an on-line discussion forum and mentoring support will be offered; Maxine Moar will be one of the Mentors and is happy to support others wanting to develop charters.
- Oldham did different Neighbourhood Agreements for different areas of the Borough but are not sure they would do the same again. The main theme was the Environment, cleaner, greener. Ruth advised not to be too ambitious and that the environment is a good focus.
- In West Norfolk Neighbourhood Management was introduced when the housing stock was transferred. Residents did not know where to go for what and introducing Charters was one way of directing them and getting providers to clarify for themselves who does what. When tenants sign the tenancy agreement they also sign up to the community agreement.
- Important to park other issues that come up and come back to them after you have finished the first agreement without disappointing people
- **What is a community?** Staffordshire Moorlands and W. Norfolk did it on a ward basis. Vicky advised that you never get it right, so to make a decision and stick with it. In Staffordshire Moorlands where communities cross ward boundaries they encourage councillors to work together. Liz said there are some natural neighbourhoods eg a village or an Estate which often leads to the best community engagement. 1000 properties, 1-2 wards, 15000 people are used as size indicators of a community.
- **Young people** are a big issue for all generations, they have been involved in developing agreements and should not be left out.
- **Buy in from different tiers of the system** eg Town, District and County Council In Staffordshire Moorland, the District Council works closely with Town Councils. In some wards there are 6-7 parishes. The District Council will decide how they want to work with them and then the County Council will be approached
- **Costs** In W. Norfolk, there were 1.5 officers working on the agreement for 3-4 months but they would recommend it should not be done so quickly. They needed funding for events including hiring meeting rooms; for newsletters, personal letters, publicity and distribution.  
The costs were cut out of the evaluation report. Liz said Neighbourhood Agreements cost £35.40 per person per year compared to £25.50 for other forms of community engagement.
- **Members role.** It is a good way to involve elected members. Start with wards where members are positive

- **Communication/Publicity** As well as newsletters and web-sites, radio, posters on billboards and in bus shelters and roadshows were suggested
- **Engaging with less heard communities** Liz pointed out 2 examples where less heard communities had been heard; Asian people in Oldham and older people in Brighton
- **Sustainability** W Norfolk Neighbourhood Charters had been mainstreamed and issues taken forward in local action plans
- **Outcomes and measurement – improvements/ perception additional to other services/ cost effectiveness**  
 It can be hard to measure the specific impact of Charters as other things may be changing too. The charters are predominantly about existing services, not new ones. Speakers feel that they are providing better , SMARTER services  
 Liz thought the kind of things that could be measured are the increase in reporting by residents as a result of publicising contact numbers and efficiency gains in services  
 It is possible to measure residents contribution – in one areas of Staffordshire Moorlands tenants of a social landlord got involved in an environmental audit which involved talking to a lot of residents. Afterward there were changes in feeling in the area and gardens were tidier. These things are important to capture.
- Need basic organisational capacity, resourced community engagement so that service providers can respond to requests in an area.
- People interested in doing charters re Economic Development. W Norfolk are doing one with Job Centre Plus

## Workshops

Participants were encouraged to circulate between workshops which were facilitated by the speakers to ensure they got their questions answered. Key points discussed were:

### Vicky Etheridge's workshop

- There was no mention of parishes because there aren't any in Kings Lynn
- In one rural area only 11% of residents liked living there; providers had no idea. Once they found this out they ran an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) because AI values what is there.
- Community and voluntary sector are very involved which is helpful
- More work on how Charters can shape service standards could provide good evidence
- Baseline information is very important, can show satisfaction of people involved
- **How to reduce the negatives and get diverse views** – It helps if you know your service providers and community beforehand, have well structured meetings and involve people who do not come to meetings. Work with everyone – eg District, Parish and County Councils, get agency with most influence to lead, lead through facilitation. Ask people to sign at the launch and send to all households – In Kings Lynn, 30% signed; then get people who have signed to encourage others to. Did get beyond people usually involved – had names and addresses of people interested in involvement from 2007 Quality of Life Survey, kept people informed, had good publicity. Involved primary school, High School harder. Difficult to get the ethnic minority community involved, mostly Eastern Europeans, as out working a lot.
- **A win:win** Open dialogue encourages realism and better understanding of constraints. Want to explore brokerage between tiers further
- **What does success look like?** Reporting or doing? Less litter to less expenditure?
- **Issues for officers:** May be threatening. Why will I buy into it if it going to get rid of me?

## **Liz Richardson's workshop**

- No national lead from a LA point of view
- Shouldn't communities be identifying themselves (rather than councils saying what a community is)
- Tenant profiles can be useful for establishing needs
- Can they be used as a mini LAA – there will be less resources not more
- Useful to get issues identified into Neighbourhood Action Plans as this commits them to paper. There may be additional and new things but not necessarily
- Can promote transparency and communication eg re the Benefits Agency
- LSP involvement in pilot; the best managed the process; the worst was not connected
- Area wide agreements can ensure entitlement access across the patch
- Electorate will be more knowledgeable and services more accessible
- Managing expectations and giving truth
- County Councils and District Councils need to work together. 12 Districts in Lancashire all with different approaches. In Cumbria, the County Council do Locality based work and therefore work with Districts.
- Services need to be agile
- Neighbourhood Agreements is one of many alternative ways of working with communities
- Agreements are a process and need 'mapping'.
- Size of areas different requiring different forms of communication depending on needs
- Some things can be worked out at a strategic level and others local eg communication

## **Ruth Reeves workshop**

*How has it been managed to date?*

- Been given ownership
- An example agreement has been set up, standard set and measurable
- 1:1 supervision – action plans set
- Daily team brief –reminders
- Reason why – continuity and purpose, used as a tool

*What has been the outcome of this intervention?*

- Nothing at this stage

*What do the group advise re further action?*

- Let people know what the consequences are
- Young people involved through detached projects. Issue can be fear rather than anti-social behaviour. Eg 10 young people who meet at the bottom of the street, need to get communication, can use Facebook and Twitter. Options also youth cafes, shelters, forums supported by Neighbourhood Management and Unitary Council
- Continuity important for police and other officers
- 3 tiers for priorities – issues, co-operation and community development,
- Transform tension between residents and councillors to win:win – joint education and training can help
- Service providers need to think outside the box in terms of responding
- Neighbourhood data – how monitored? Prioritise themes and activities

### Closing Remarks

Liz closed the workshop saying the main questions that people needed to address if going for Charters are:

- How to encourage service providers to buy in
- How to encourage residents to buy in
- Who does the work – residents, councillors and others working together
- Evidence that it is working

NWTWC are keen to set up an Action Learning Set on this issue. Anyone interested should get in touch with Eve.

### 3 Evaluation

The evaluation feedback will be used to inform future learning and support activity. 22 feedback forms were received.

The table below shows which speaker/presentation attendees found most useful. Some individuals noted more than one in their response:

<b>Speaker</b>	Vicky Etheridge	Ruth Reeve	Oldham DVD	Liz Richardson
<b>Number</b>	10	8	5	15

The table below shows which aspects of the seminar were most useful. Some individuals noted more than one in their response:

<b>Aspect</b>	Presentations	Networking	Panel	Workshops	Group Discussion
<b>Number</b>	8	6	7	6	8

In response to the question around improving the format there were 7 responses suggesting more time needed, extend by ½ hour, felt a bit rushed, more time in workshops, needed to be longer and more time to discuss issues. Also a suggestion for better structured workshops (themed), encourage movement between workshops do not have chairs closed in circle and have sample agreements to look at and discuss and ask questions.

With regard to individuals changing aspects of their practice as a result of learning on the day, intended actions identified were:

- 6 were to speak to or share information with colleagues, feedback to managers, LSP and steering groups.
- 6 were to progress thinking, identify pilot schemes and start working on a charter.
- 1 would develop community responsibilities alongside existing service commitments.
- 1 was to build relationship with V Etheridge to support ongoing activity.
- 1 was to incorporate some ideas within Parish Councils & Community Relationship.

19 individuals made new contacts at the event.

Suggestions for future NWTWC events or action were as follows:

- Evaluating return on investment – community empowerment.
- More on charters – more on monitoring neighbourhood action plans.
- Resident buy in and resident's view.
- Car parking in towns with mostly terraced houses.
- How to better support Councillors in role as community champions.
- Working with Councillors / Parishes.
- 2 x Engaging with the 7 strands of Equality & Diversity.

Future LEXs:

4 attendees may be interested in hosting a LEX.

Future Support Information Requested:

20 attendees would like to be contacted regarding the Award Scheme, Action Learning Sets and Learning Events and 2 requested a copy of the DVD.

#### 4 Conclusions

Although this event was held during adverse weather conditions given the timely nature of the subject matter following John Denham's recent speech, the quality of speakers, information presented and opportunity to share information and network it proved to be worthwhile for attendees. Implications for officers were mentioned but not in any depth, this might also be a useful topic for a future seminar.