

The Future of Community Empowerment Activity in the North West Region

Report prepared
for
Voluntary Sector North West in partnership with the
North West Community Empowerment Networks
Forum

by
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Supported by:



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THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ACTIVITY FUNDED THROUGH LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS BY COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT NETWORKS AND THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

1. Introduction

In January 2008 Voluntary Sector North West (VSNW) in partnership with the North West Community Empowerment Networks Forum, funded by North West Together We Can Partnership, commissioned research to identify the future of community empowerment activity funded through Local Area Agreements across the region. This was with particular reference to Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) and other Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations carrying out similar functions. They sought to identify how local authorities are delivering community empowerment in areas without a CEN; the type of activity undertaken; the current level of funding for CENs; and the VCS activity in areas without a CEN.

This report presents the findings of this research.

2. Background

2.1 Community Empowerment Networks

In 2001 the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal sought to reduce the gap between England's poorest communities and the rest of the country by influencing change at a local level. In order to achieve this the government introduced the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, provided grants to 88 Local authority areas to fund the work of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and established CENs, funded through the Community Empowerment Fund. 21 local authority areas in the North West region benefited from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and the establishment of CENs. The purpose of the CENs was to provide the LSPs with access to a neighbourhood perspective and, as a network of neighbourhood, community and voluntary groups, the CENs would add value to LSPs.

In 2003 the Community Empowerment Fund was merged with the Community Chest and the Community Learning Chests into the Single Community Fund (SCF). The SCF guidance said that with this funding the CENs would be expected to -

- play a strategic role by influencing the strategic direction of the LSP;
- have a learning role and increase the social capital of communities by providing small grants and developing learning strategies;
- develop the capacity of local communities to enable them to influence service delivery and participate in the renewal of their neighbourhoods.

Since 2006 funding for the CENs has been through the LSPs via the LAA's block funding, in particular from the Safer and Stronger Communities block, although the LSP had the freedom to use funding from other blocks if their work contributed to LAA targets.¹

National research in 2006² into the impact of LAAs on Community Empowerment (undertaken with 39 CENs and 10 VCS respondents) found that for most CENs funding had diminished and this had affected their service delivery to smaller organisations and disadvantaged groups. Many though were having a better than previous relationship with the local authority and had contributed to shaping the LAAs, despite an expressed concern that the LAAs did not reflect the CENs' priorities.

2.2 The services provided by CENs

To deliver their remit CENs may provide a number or all of the following services.

- Creating and maintaining networks to consult with and inform the voluntary and community sector about the work of the LSP and LAA.
- Operate at a neighbourhood level to influence neighbourhood renewal decisions.
- Provide representation to the LSP, LAA and their sub/theme groups.
- Enable the VCS to influence the decision making of the LSP and LAA.
- Support and develop those representing the VCS on the LSP and LAA.
- Undertake outreach with small community and neighbourhood groups to engage them with the work of the LSP and LAA.
- Provide support for work that builds the capacity of the community to participate in the renewal of their neighbourhood and local partnerships.
- Provide small grants to support the capacity of the community to get involved in renewal or LSP activity and/or support community learning.

2.3 Current and emerging influences

The overall remit of a CEN's role is to engage with and influence the work of the LSP and LAA, therefore their work can be influenced by the changes and influences that these partnerships experience. Some of the current and emerging influences are now be outlined.

Local Area Agreements

Originally piloted in 2004 LAAs have now been rolled out nationally. They are a three year agreement between a local area and central government. The LAA is negotiated by the local authority on behalf of its LSP and it is the local authority that is accountable for delivery. The

¹ Urban Forum Research (2006)

² Urban Forum Research (2006)

LAA is the delivery plan for Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and it should also link to the Local Development Framework (LDF). All outcomes delivered by local government, whether in partnership or alone, will be in the LAA.

From April 2008 LAA funding will no longer be targeted and ring fenced into four themes (or service blocks), instead the funding streams have been merged into a single pot of funding referred to as an Area Based Grant (ABG). In addition local authorities have gained increased flexibility over the use of their mainstream resources with the moving of over £4bn of grants into the ABGs thereby increasing what is available to support local priorities³. In two tier authorities it is the County's decision as to whether they retain this grant for delivery of the LAA or allocate it to the district.⁴

The Working Neighbourhoods Fund has also been introduced in 2008. It is part of the ABG and made up of the former NRF and the Deprived Areas Fund. Its aim is allow for more concentrated community led approaches to get people in the most deprived areas back into work.

A new set of 198 Performance Indicators (PIs) have been introduced and each LAA will contain up to 35 relevant local targets taken from the 198 PIs, with the likelihood that each LAA will have very different targets.

Performance Indicator NI 7 – 'Environment for a thriving third sector'

NI 7 is one of the 198 performance indicators that an LSP may choose to include within their 35 target indicators. The purpose of NI 7 is to –

*'Measure the contribution that local government and its partners make to the environment in which independent third sector organisations can operate successfully'*⁵

The Office for the Third Sector suggests that LSPs might want to include it as an indicator to address gaps in that area; 'unlock the full potential of the third sector'⁶; and to address other priorities. Whether or not LSPs include it as a target their performance against NI 7 will be measured and reported in every area, using perception surveys with the VCS.

³ Communities and Local Government

⁴ Suffolk local authority

⁵ Office of the Third Sector

⁶ Office of the Third Sector

Local Involvement Networks (LINKs)

An initiative arising from the Department of Health (DH), LINKs aim is to give individuals a greater say in local health and social care services. Local authorities have been allocated £84 million to support these activities between 2008 – 2011. The focus is on individuals rather than groups.

An Action Plan for Community Empowerment: Building on Success

Published in October 2007, this is a joint action plan for Communities and Local Government and the LGA to take forward community empowerment. It contributes towards preparing for the statutory 'duty to involve' local people that will be introduced in 2009. The actions in this plan are across the three areas of, widening and deepening empowerment opportunities locally; supporting and enabling people to take up empowerment opportunities; and strengthening local representative democracy. Its focus is on the participation of citizens in decision-making and the development of a sense of citizenship that will bring about an improvement in public services and the quality of life. Whilst there are examples of good practice in this document, some in areas that benefit from NRF, the work of the CENs is not specifically referred to.

3. Findings from the surveys and case studies in the North West

3.1 LSP community empowerment activity

Community engagement strategies and frameworks

Five out of seven NRF LSPs answered yes when asked if they have a community engagement strategy or framework in place. They said these defined how community engagement and empowerment will be delivered including through surveys, citizens' panels, forums, events and toolkits based on Compact principles.

The two NRF LSPs that no longer have CENs provided more detail. One has a model that sets out four equal types of community engagement: information giving, consultation, involvement and devolved responsibility and the strategy is supported by an on-line toolkit. The second respondent describes the LSP as a community empowerment network with representation from neighbourhoods and interest groups. It is currently developing standards for community engagement that will be underpinned by the principle of 'participation not consultation'.

Only five or 35% of non NRF LSPs answered that they had a community engagement strategy or framework. One LSP has just completed its consultation and two others use the district council's strategy, which is more widely applied and shared by the LSP. Only two said that their community engagement strategy provided a framework for community empowerment, including a toolkit and required outcomes.

Funding

When asked about their 2007/08 budget for community empowerment and engagement, some NRF LSPs found this difficult to answer. In part this was because for some there is no specific budget as such for this purpose and monies were drawn from various departments and budgets.

The funding made available to CENs was known and ranged from £65,000 plus underspend in 2007/08 to £554,000. Most respondents felt that the funding made available to the CEN for community engagement and empowerment was 'fairly adequate' and one describe the budget as 'very adequate'.

In response to a question about the 2008/09 budget two NRF LSPs said the budget for the CENs would stay the same, one will increase and another with decrease. The pressure on funding for one LSP meant that the CEN had been asked to merge with the CVS as a means of reducing overall costs.

The two LSPs that no longer have a CEN could not provide an estimate of future funding for community engagement and empowerment.

Most non NRF LSPs said that they had no budget or specific allocation for community engagement in its work. Any funding was reliant on the agreement of the LSP partners to fund or provide other forms of assistance for specific projects.

In a small number of non NRF LSPs a budget was identified, for example, £60,000 per annum for three years to fund a voluntary sector network and £13,500 to fund specific work for community engagement with the LSP. Where funding was made available to carry out engagement work with the LSP this was usually met by the local authority and not the LSP.

Most non NRF LSPs either did not know what the budget for engagement would be in 2008/09 (as this would depend on agreement of LSP partners to specific projects) or, if a sum would be made available by the authority, thought that it would remain the same.

Delivering community engagement and empowerment

The NRF LSPs were asked to describe the work that the CEN undertakes that enables them to consult with voluntary and community groups and engage them in the LSP's decision making processes. In response they described a range of initiatives including:

- Working in deprived neighbourhoods by targeting voluntary and community groups using community ambassadors to take this forward
- Providing representatives from the VCS to the LSP and theme groups with support
- Undertaking consultations on behalf of the LSP, for example, for the review of the community strategy
- Establishing and supporting local Ward committees and other community networks

The two LSPs that no longer have a CEN undertake a range of community engagement and empowerment activities through the neighbourhood management teams and through neighbourhood and interest based forums and partnerships. One of these LSPs commented that: 'we make a distinction between community empowerment and VCS empowerment. They are not the same thing'. Community empowerment is interpreted by that LSP to mean 'active citizenship'.

Of the 13 non NRF LSP respondents five said that an organisation is funded to consult and engage with voluntary and community groups; for two this is a CVS and for three another voluntary organisations. Of

the five that said that an organisation is funded to consult and engage with voluntary and community groups, only two of these LSPs said that they have a community engagement strategy or framework in place.

These five LSPs described the work undertaken by these organisations as:

- Hosting quarterly forums specifically about the work of the LSP
- Having in post a voluntary and community sector forum development officer and a liaison officer
- Providing training and consultation mechanisms to engage with a voluntary sector network
- Establishment and regular liaison with a community network
- Supporting representation on the LSP

The eight non NRF LSPs that do not fund an organisation described how they consult and engage with the voluntary and community sector. They conduct this through:

- Representation of the voluntary and community sector on the LSP and theme groups (the main channel for most of the LSPs)
- Participatory events, including community conferences on key issues
- Regular engagement with on-going community networks

In one example, the chief executive of the voluntary and community sector forum is on the Partnership executive board and is said to 'act as the interface between the LSP and the sector'.

All of the LSPs were asked if they undertake any additional community engagement and empowerment work to that provided by the CENs and the other organisations that are funded. The majority of LSPs (86%) undertake additional work including:

- Citizen's panels
- Empowerment delivered through neighbourhood management programmes
- Local area and issue-based partnerships or forums
- Health networks
- Ward committees and parish councils
- Community planning workshops
- Compact arrangements

Consideration of the CEN model

Non NRF LSPs were asked if they had ever considered developing and using the CEN model of community engagement and empowerment in their area. Only two of the 14 respondents said that they had ever considered the model. One commented that it had 'not been rejected

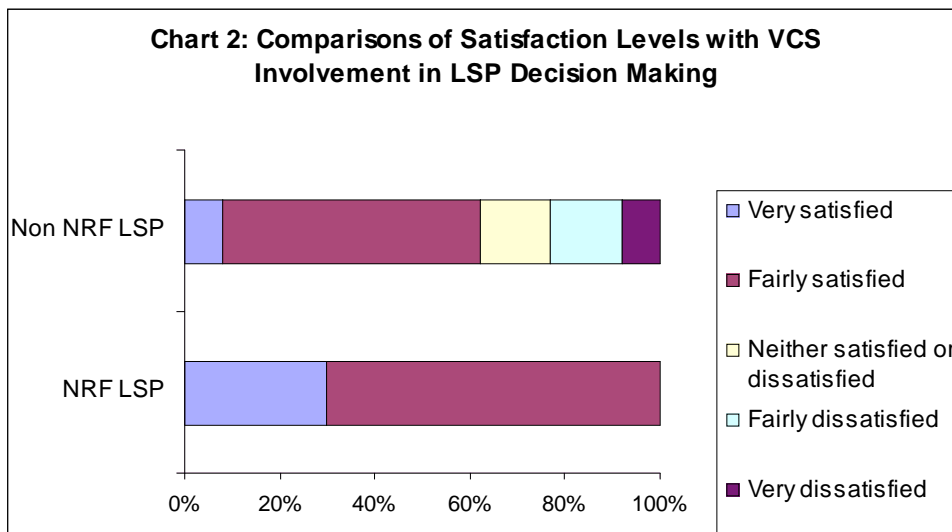
simply not yet exploited' and another that it had been rejected following consultation with other authorities in the region.

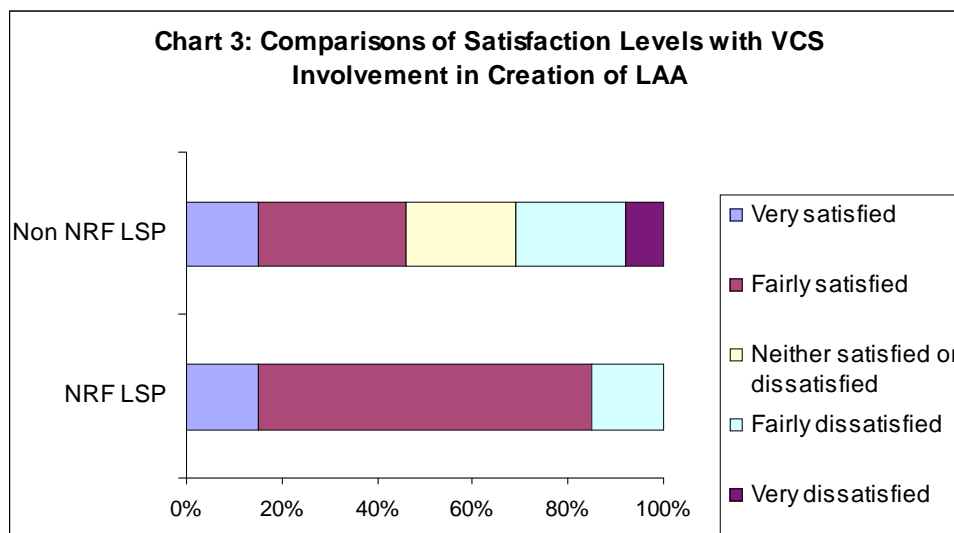
Two non NRF LSPs identified that a lack of resources for implementation had been a key factor in not even considering the CEN model.

When asked whether the model would be considered in the future, six said they would consider it, six did not know and one said it would be unlikely.

Satisfaction with the voluntary and community involvement in decision making and creation of LAA

All NRF LSPs were either 'fairly' or 'very satisfied' with the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in LSP decision making (see Chart 2). They were more likely to be 'fairly satisfied' rather than 'very satisfied' with their involvement in the creation of the LAA (see Chart 3). One LSP was 'very dissatisfied'. The lower level of satisfaction with the involvement in the creation of the LAA was consistent with the views of the CENs – many of whom were also less satisfied with the involvement of the sector in the creation of LAA priorities and targets.





Non NRF LSPs were not as satisfied as NRF LSPs with the level of involvement in LSP decision making and expressed mixed views. Whilst one was ‘very satisfied’ and seven were ‘fairly satisfied’, two were ‘fairly dissatisfied’ and one was ‘very dissatisfied’. There were two that were ‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’.

These levels of satisfaction did not appear to be directly correlated with the amount of activity conducted for engagement with the voluntary and community sector or whether there was or was not an organisation supported specifically to carry out this work.

As with NRF LSPs these LSPs also indicated lower levels of satisfaction with the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in the creation of the LAA priorities. Although two were ‘very satisfied’, only four were ‘fairly satisfied’, three were ‘fairly dissatisfied’ and one ‘very dissatisfied’. Three were ‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’.

Support provided to voluntary and community LSP representatives

All of the LSPs were asked whether they provided support for developing the skills and knowledge of the voluntary and community sector representatives and the majority said that they did, including those without a CEN and who do not fund an organisation.

The type of support provided by NRF LSPs included: offering induction sessions to new representatives; general and specific skills training sessions; providing funding for the CEN to deliver the support; and hosting learning programmes and events.

Non NRF LSPs provided training or funding for training, including for partnership development and IDeA support training. In addition, there were pre-meeting briefing sessions and support for organisational development.

Delivering the new Community Empowerment Action Plan

All LSPs were asked about their proposals for delivering the new Community Empowerment Action Plan.

Two of the NRF LSPs said this was being discussed and a third was not aware that there was a requirement to produce such a plan. Others said it would deliver the requirements of the Action Plan through:

- The Sustainable Community Strategy
- Increasing the level of engagement by residents and local groups
- Neighbourhood management programmes
- Increasing the role of local councillors and the work of Ward committees
- Development of Participatory Budgeting

Three non NRF LSPs said this was being discussed and one was awaiting the outcome of the Compact review. Others said that a range of proposals were being developed, although many were still at an early stage. These proposals included:

- Further development of neighbourhood teams
- Continuation of current arrangements
- Encouraging partners to work together
- Development of a new neighbourhood model including delegated services, participatory budgeting and community planning
- Use of Lottery funding for a partnership and participation worker to develop community engagement mechanisms

3.2 CEN and CVS community empowerment activity

Funding

Funding for CENs in 2007/08 varied widely - from £30,000 to over £1 million. Half the CENs received funding from the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund and seven from the NRF. No CENs received other forms of LAA funding.

Most CENs received additional funding from other sources including Primary Care Trusts and ERDF Objective One. The monies from the Primary Care Trust were often for specific projects linked to consultations for health and social care. In a County where no CEN received core funding, the CENs were said to rely on other sources such as reserves and the Big Lottery.

2008/09 funding appeared to be uncertain, despite the survey being carried out in February/March 2008. The majority had some funding agreed, sometimes for an interim six months but not for the whole year, and many had sources of funding that were yet to be agreed or identified. In all cases where core funding had been made available in 2007/08, it was expected or known to be less in 2008/09.

Whilst most CENs received core funding in 2007/08 for their work, a significant majority of CVS organisations (75%) undertaking work with the LSP did not.

Of the minority of CVS organisations that did receive funding these tended to be for specific consultation processes (for example £14,000 to facilitate a number of community health events and develop a health network) or for a small grants programme. One CVS received an allocation of £5,000 from the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund and another received an allocation of £15,000 for engagement work, including funding for events.

The funding picture for 2008/09 was unlikely to be any different, although there is some indication that where funding did exist in 2007/08 it is likely to be reduced.

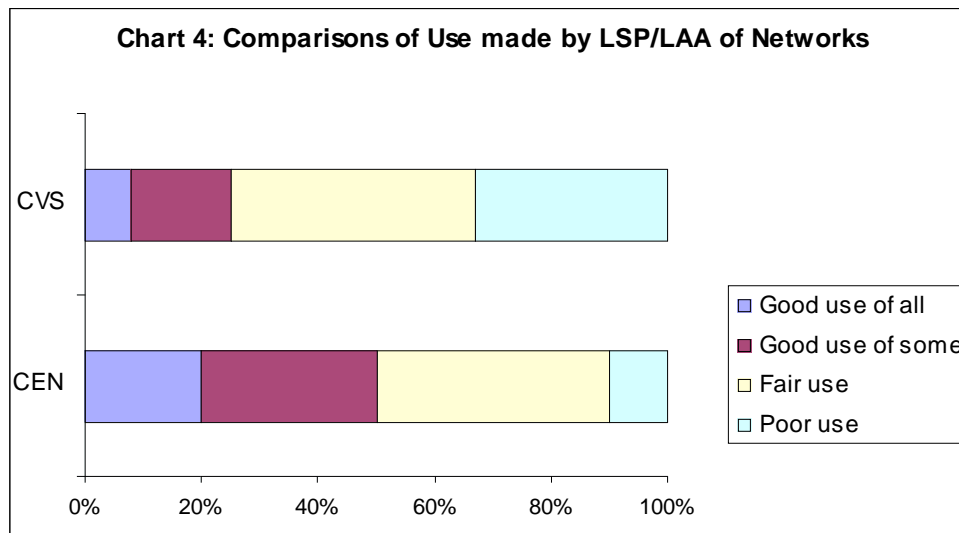
Delivering community engagement and empowerment

Both the CENs and CVSs were asked about their work organising networks, support and help with capacity building, grant giving and engaging with the LSP and LAA.

Networks

The majority of CENs maintained a range of networks or forums with the number ranging from two to 14. Only one CEN does not maintain networks but had a general membership. The majority of the networks or forums had all or almost all of their membership drawn from the voluntary and community sectors. All of the CENs said that they operated at the neighbourhood level to influence neighbourhood renewal decisions.

When asked if the LSP and LAA make good use of these networks the response was mixed (see Chart 4). Two responded that 'good use was made of all the networks' with a further three identifying that 'good use was made of some of the networks', two felt that 'fair use was made of all of the networks' and a further two that 'fair use was made of some of the networks'. Only one CEN said that 'poor use was made of all of the networks' – but this was a CEN that relied on general membership and did not maintain networks as such.



All of the CVS respondents maintained at least one network with a minority (five) maintaining a higher number of networks ranging from two to seven. All or almost all the representatives on those networks were groups from the voluntary and community sector. Five CVSs said that they operated at the neighbourhood level to influence neighbourhood renewal decisions.

The CVSs were also asked about the use LSPs and LAAs made of their networks and, consistent with the views of the CENs, they gave a mixed response (see Chart 4). Only one organisation thought that they made 'good use of all the networks', two that it made fair use of all the networks' and two thought it made 'good use of some of the networks'. Three organisations felt 'only fair use was made of some of the networks' and three thought that 'poor use was made of all the networks'.

Support and help capacity building

Most of the CENs were engaged in outreach work to encourage and maintain engagement from the voluntary and community sector. All provided support to build capacity in the sector and for communities to participate in neighbourhood partnerships.

Most of the CVSs also said they were engaged in the same way. A majority also said they provided support to build capacity in the sector and for communities to participate in neighbourhood partnerships.

Grant giving

Six out of the 10 CENs had a small grants programme to support capacity building and slightly fewer (five) had a programme for supporting community learning.

The proportion of these grants that were made available to black and minority ethnic groups was not always known. Those that were able to respond identified that grants to black and minority ethnic groups ranged from 5% to 40% of the total – in part this will of course depend on the ethnic profile of the population.

Conversely only two CVSs had a small grants programme to support capacity building and community learning (between 5% and 10% for black and minority ethnic groups). One organisation said that it provided small grants for community learning.

Engagement with the LSP and LAA

All of the CENs had representation on the LSP and on some or all of the LSP sub or theme groups. The majority of CENs were represented on all of the four LSP theme groups, two only on some of them and two not represented at all. Almost all of the CENs (eight out of 10) had representation on the LAA partnership.

All of the CVSs were represented on the LSP and most (10) were represented on the LAA partnership. Almost all the organisations were represented on some of the sub groups of the LSP and on the four theme groups. There was one organisation that was not represented on the sub groups or the theme groups.

Support provided to voluntary and community LSP representatives

All of the CENs said they provide support for their representatives on the LSP, for example providing mentoring, briefing, training and induction for voluntary and community sector representatives. Half of the CENs said that the LSP also provided support to develop the skills of the CEN representative.

None of the CVS respondents said that they provided support for their representatives on the LSP and only a quarter of them said that the LSP provided support to develop the skills of the CEN representative. This is less than the half who gave support to the CEN's representatives.

Community empowerment work for engagement with the LSP and LAA

In addition to providing and supporting representation on the LSP and LAA the CENs described the other forms of community empowerment work they undertake in their role with the LSP and LAA. These included:

- Community based events and forums
- Providing opportunities for personal and organisational development
- Establishment of a local faith forum

- Maintaining a key role in equalities partnerships

The CVSs also provided other forms of community empowerment in their role with the LSP and LAA, for example:

- Providing training on voluntary and community sector skills
- Facilitating and supporting neighbourhood forums
- Offering support that enables groups to get involved or to deliver services that meet the LSP or LAA targets
- Disseminating information about the work of the LSP and LAA

Adding value to the work of the LSP

All respondents were asked to provide examples of how the empowerment work undertaken adds value to the work of the LSP. CEN respondents were able to provide much detail of the way their work adds value. Essentially much of this work was to bring local knowledge, expertise and experience to inform and guide the work of the LSP. One respondent referred to the CEN as ‘the conscience of the LSP, bringing local people to the table to “tell it as it is”’. It also meant that services could be designed and delivered in the way that local people wanted and this adds value and cost effectiveness to LSP decision making.

The CVS organisations also gave quite a lot of detail when asked this question. Their work ensures that the voice and experience of the third sector ‘stays on the agenda’; helps to deliver a better quality service; ‘increases people’s influence on the decisions that affects their lives’; enables active involvement with groups that are helping to deliver the LSP’s targets; and helps to involve the community directly in the decision-making process.

Informing and influencing the LSP and LAA

LSP

There were a range of examples given by the CENs of how the voluntary and community sector were said to have informed the strategic planning of the LSP. The examples given were contributing to: the development of strategies and PSA targets, and to a review of the LSP and the balance of stakeholder influence.

However, half of the CVSs said that no examples came to mind. Of those that did give examples, these included: the lead taken by the third sector on the Safer and Stronger communities group had ensured that volunteering and community cohesion are included in the community plan and being delivered; developing a play strategy and having a strong influence in developing the community strategy; and in the selection of national and local indicators.

One CVS commented that, despite being pleased with the level of engagement, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the sector has influenced the strategy. The number of themes on which they were initially asked to comment was significantly reduced and, as a consequence, many of the detailed comments were lost.

LAA

Much less detail was provided by the CENs when asked about informing or influencing the shaping of LAA priorities or targets. For three no example came to mind and one respondent said that they could not provide an example because 'the voluntary and community sector has virtually been left out of the decision-making'. However, there were some positive responses about the engagement of the voluntary and community sector in helping to set priorities and indicators but these were small in number.

The survey asked for one example of how organisations had influenced the delivery of LAA outcomes. One respondent commented 'that it is much more difficult for voluntary and community sector groups to influence the delivery of the LAA' with very little engagement of groups 'at an operational level'.

There were some positive examples (but again small in number) in the delivery of services for older people and influence on a small grant scheme for local groups to improve their neighbourhoods. In one CEN, the voluntary and community sector partnership is responsible for delivering five of the LAA indicators. If the CEN ceased to exist because of lack of funding, it was anticipated that the partnership would find this role much more difficult.

The CVSs were far less able to provide examples of influencing the shaping of LAA priorities or targets, with seven out of the 12 saying that no example came to mind or their involvement had been minimal and they could not comment. The examples that were provided were of successful lobbying for the inclusion of additional indicators.

The picture was similar for the CVSs when asked for an example of influencing the delivery of LAA outcomes, with no examples coming to mind for nine organisations out of a potential of twelve responding to this question. Of the remaining three, one referred to the inclusion of the voluntary and community sector in the statement of involvement, another through volunteering statistics and measurement and a third indirectly through partnership representation.

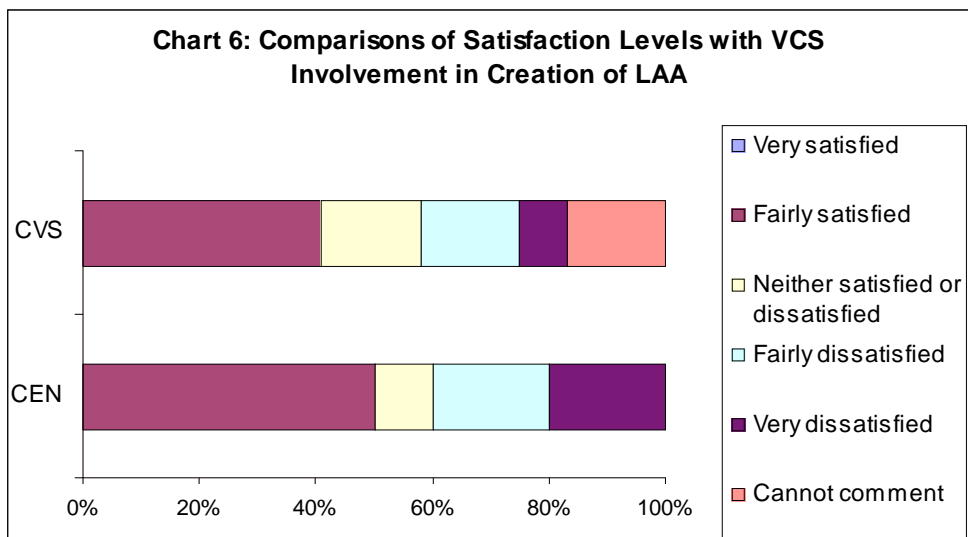
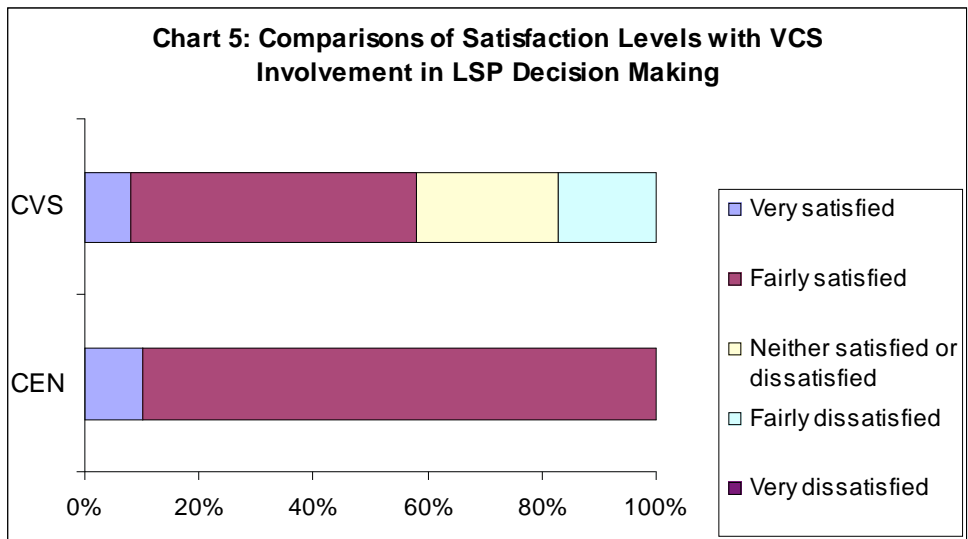
Satisfaction with the voluntary and community involvement and decision making in the LSP and LAA

Both the CENs and CVSs were asked if they were satisfied with the involvement of the voluntary and community sectors in the decision making process of both the LSP and the LAA.

LSP

The majority of the CENs responded positively saying they were ‘fairly satisfied’ and one was ‘very satisfied’ with the involvement with the LSP (see Chart 5). This is in contrast to those areas without CENs that reveal much lower levels of satisfaction.

Only one CVS was ‘very satisfied’ and six were ‘fairly satisfied’. Two were ‘fairly dissatisfied’ and three were ‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’ with the involvement in the LSP. This response suggests lower levels of satisfaction compared to that of the CENs.



LAA

The CEN's levels of satisfaction were much more mixed in relation to their involvement with the creation of the LAA. Half of CEN respondents were 'fairly satisfied' but two were 'fairly dissatisfied' and two were 'very dissatisfied'.

The levels of CVS satisfaction with involvement with the LAA were much more mixed. Less than half of respondents said they were 'fairly satisfied' but two were 'fairly dissatisfied' and one 'very dissatisfied'. Of the remainder, two were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' and two could not comment – both because of a lack of involvement with the LAA.

The future of community empowerment work

The survey asked all organisations what they saw as their emerging role in delivering community empowerment and engagement with the LAA with the introduction of the 'single pot'.

CENs gave a very mixed response about the future: some that services will remain much the same as in 2007/8; and others that services will retract as funding is reduced. One CEN identified that they will close down sometime after June and another that without core funding, the CEN is likely to end in summer 2008.

Even those CENs with most of their funding agreed (or agreed for a six month period) usually identified some reductions in the work that they provide. Only a small minority were confident that they could continue most of their current work and/or could express positive views about a stronger future role.

Many CVSs were uncertain about the future and as most do not receive any funding for this work (often except for specific projects), it was difficult them to identify what of this role would change or remain.

There were also changes in the structure of some authorities and in the LSP, adding to the uncertainties and fluidity of the future.

The view was expressed that in the future the work of the CVS in respect of the LSP and LAA would be recognised and supported but there was no indication that this would be reflected in funding or other support.

There was no lack of commitment to the role of ensuring voluntary and community sector engagement with the LSP and LAA and, for example, the development of neighbourhood empowerment boards in one authority are seen as an opportunity in which the CVS expects to be closely involved.

3.3 Case study comparisons

The individual case studies are found in the Appendix 2. Here a comparison of their services is provided.

Current model and service delivery

All three CENs were established using Community Empowerment Funding and all made changes to their service delivery to respond to the remit of the Single Community Fund, which placed more emphasis on going out at a neighbourhood level and community participation.

Case study A re-profiled its work and reduced its workforce with the introduction of the LAA and Safer and Stronger Communities Fund. It reduced its staff levels to two from its initial deployment of five. It now has a more strategic focus with the LSP and LAA and it no longer delivers direct services. The Co-ordinator's role is geared solely towards strengthening the CEN's work with the LSP and LAA. It receives funding through the LAA for the operation of the core team and the programme management of 10 projects that deliver LAA indicators.

These projects include a small grant project, workforce development project, a volunteer centre, a community cohesion project, a community empowerment project and a community engagement team of five officers. All of these projects are external to the core team, as they are delivered by and through various organisations in the area. They are answerable to the CEN for achieving their targets and the CEN report on progress to the LSP.

The CEN also funds 14 networks that are established and maintained by the projects that it manages. Representatives from these networks attend the CEN steering group.

Case study B has become an independent organisation and has increased its staff team to five from the original three. It is an association of voluntary and community groups with 180 members who elect the executive committee. It diversified its work with the introduction of the Single Community Fund, for example to develop equality and diversity activity.

This CEN delivers a range of services, for example, the facilitating of the election/selection of voluntary, community and faith sector representatives on the LSP; one to one support to the 30 VCS representatives on the LSP board or its thematic sub groups; community cohesion work, which included a small grant fund; working with Neighbourhood Management schemes; and equality and diversity training. It has worked at a county level, as part of the Safer and Stronger communities working group, to develop the county LAA.

Case study C identifies two 'growth spurts' in its development and its staff team has grown to 24 (full and part time) staff from three at its inception. A number of this team are based at other sites in the city. With the introduction of the Single Community Fund the CEN expanded its services to deliver work with neighbourhood groups, as well as thematic networks of identity and interest. In 2006/07 it expanded again when it was identified as the organisation to deliver on a large ERDF Objective 1 city-wide programme of enabling and empowering communities, in small geographical pockets, experiencing deprivation.

It has nine networks of identity and interest and one network of place under which there are five other neighbourhood networks. It holds 90 ward level events each year and supports 100 voluntary, community and faith representatives to participate in the LSP and LAA structures. It facilitates and actions problem solving at a local level and also co-ordinates the priorities from across all the networks and uses these to help shape and deliver the targets of the neighbourhood agreements of the city wide LAA. The CEN also undertakes community consultations for the LSP, local authority departments and other LSP partners.

The CEN engages and empowers local individuals as well as voluntary, community and faith groups. Over 1000 residents have attended the last two rounds of ward events.

Current and future funding

In 2007/8 the two case studies in the unitary authorities received funding of £800,000 to over £1.4 million whilst the district level CEN in a two tier authority received £190,000. Sources for this funding originated from the Safer and Stronger Community Fund; Neighbourhood Renewal Fund; Cleaner, Safer and Greener money; European Regional Development Fund; the PCT; and the Second Homes Fund.

Case study A, in 2008/09 has been allocated a six month extension of funding, at the same rate whilst they await a decision about future funding which is reliant on decisions about the Area Based Grant. They have no reason to doubt that they will be awarded a similar sum to that of 2007/08 and are hopeful this will be formalised in a three year funding agreement.

Case study B's 2008/09 funding position is still in negotiation with the LSP and whilst they believe they will receive some funding they will be less well resourced. They believe the decision by the county LAA to distribute the Area Based Grant to the districts and the introduction of the Working Neighbourhood Fund has had an influence. The decision for spending the grant rests with the local authority and not the LSP and there is a suggestion that savings could be made by the CEN merging with the CVS.

Case study C, in 2008/09 will receive over £1 million, and additional small grant money, from the Working Neighbourhoods Fund and ERDF Objective One.

Activity that has influenced the work of the LSP and LAA

Case study A is a thematic partnership of the LSP, which entitles them to have six members on the LSP board. They also have representation on the LAA, all of the LSP sub groups and four themed groups. The co-ordinator attends the LAA co-ordinators' meetings and the CEN programme manage projects on behalf of the LSP to achieve LAA targets. The co-ordinator has been on the LSP planning group that has overseen an appreciative enquiry review of the LSP. She has been engaged in the development of the recommended indicators for the new LAA and is negotiating that NI 7 (creating an environment for a thriving third sector) is among the 35 key indicators.

Case study B represented three other district CENs, at the Safer and Stronger communities working group of the county LAA. They have provided supported to up to 30 VCS representatives on the LSP and thematic sub groups. These representatives reflect the diversity of the area. A recent survey of representatives revealed that 85% of respondents felt they were influential at these meetings. Five of the seven thematic working group leads felt the VCS representatives were able to influence decision making and service delivery. By supporting the smaller community and voluntary sector groups to attend the LSP structure they have enabled '*the faintest voices to be heard*'.

Case study C influences the work of the LSP and LAA by bringing to these structures the issues and priorities raised across their range of networks. They believe they are trusted and respected by the LSP and as such are its lead agency for community engagement and empowerment. In addition they, together with voluntary, community and faith representatives are putting together the LSP's Community Engagement Strategy. The CEN's key achievement is bringing credibility and authority to community engagement showing that it can tackle real issues and inform service delivery.

Anticipated changes in the future

Case study A works with an LSP that is restructuring, becoming more slim line and reducing its representatives, including those through the CEN. The CEN will no longer be a thematic partnership of the LSP rather the LSP want to support it in becoming an equal partner to the other members – how this is to be achieved has yet to be decided.

As an organisation it is undertaking its own strategic futures review therefore its longer term role may change. They have also undertaken a review of their services against their strategic priorities that are

directly linked to the LAA targets. As a result they have discontinued funding to three projects.

Case study B has an uncertain future and knows that in the immediate future they will have to go forward with fewer resources, staff, focus on a narrower agenda and may lose their premises. They believe that the smaller voluntary, community and faith sector will suffer with this change. As funding is only guaranteed for this financial year planning ahead will be difficult and staff morale will be an issue.

Case study C will receive a cut back in funding (although its overall budget still remains sizeable). It will aim to work smarter to address this cut back rather than lay off staff. In the longer term future they feel well positioned to benefit from funding that is focused on empowering individuals, for example the Working Neighbourhoods Fund and are looking to contribute to the forthcoming duty in which public bodies will have to involve and co-operate with local people⁷. It has also positioned itself to work beyond the LSP and is developing working relationships with other agencies to deliver community engagement work.

Other local authority and LSP community empowerment practices

Case study A believes that the LSP regard them as the vehicle that undertakes the community engagement and empowerment activity in the area. The LSP and local authority have not made any reference to how they will respond to the newly published Community Empowerment Action Plan.

Case study B reports that the local authority undertakes community engagement but not empowerment. They hold area forums and are developing the neighbourhood management model in non NRF areas. They do not know of the LSP or local authority plans to respond to the Community Empowerment Action Plan. They feel that within this plan and other developments, for example, Local Involvement Networks, the focus has shifted away from groups towards individuals.

Case study C is aware that the local authority and LSP also undertake other community engagement and empowerment. It respects this work and will support wider engagement but asks that the deliberated responses gathered from communities through the work they do are adequately weighted against those received from one off 'cold' responses the local authority and LSP may achieve.

Their local authority response to the recent Community Empowerment Action Plan will be via the Community Engagement Strategy, which the CEN is the lead agency for. It does not feel that the Action Plan's

⁷ Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act

strong focus on individuals is a challenge to it as they have already anticipated and prepared for this development.

4. Methodology and Response Rates

The research methodology employed in this study is as follows:

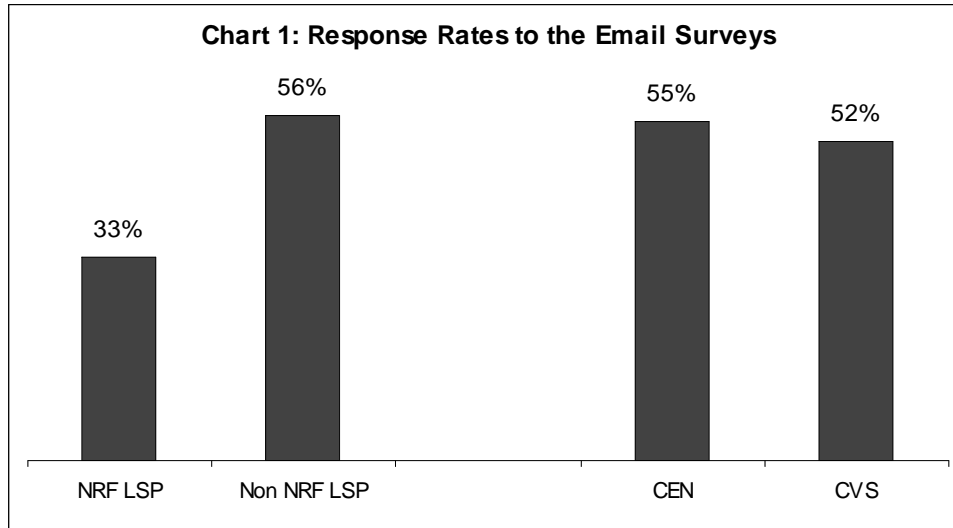
- 4.1 Desk research was undertaken to provide a context for the research as well as a mapping of the 46 local authority areas in the North West to identify those benefiting from Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF); those that had a CEN operating in their area; and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) contacts for each Authority. In the local authority areas where CENs did not operate a search was made of the lead contact at each Council for Voluntary Sector (CVS) in the area.
- 4.2 Self-completion email surveys were designed and distributed to capture data on the funding and community engagement and empowerment activity undertaken across the region. Two basic email questionnaires were designed and customised for the different characteristics of each group of respondents. To encourage participation in the survey, potential respondents were given the assurance that individual responses would not be attributed to their LSP or organisation.

In mid February 2008, the questionnaires were emailed out to:

- 18 CENs in NRF LSP local authority areas
- 25 CVSs in non NRF LSP local authority areas
- 21 NRF LSP contacts
- 25 non NRF LSP contacts

To encourage good response rates and ensure that there was an acceptable return from across the North West region email prompts for the completion of the questionnaires were sent out and followed up with telephone contact. A list of all those responding to the surveys is provided in Appendix 1.

Out of the 46 LSPs contacted through the survey, 21 responded yielding an overall response rate of 46%. As Chart 1 reveals there were differences, with a much higher response rate (56% or 14 respondents) for LSPs in non NRF local authorities and only 7 responses (33%) from LSPs in NRF local authorities. All but two of the NRF LSP respondents have a CEN in their district. There was good geographical coverage across the region with LSP responses from Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Lancashire, Cheshire and Cumbria (see Appendix 1).



In total 23 CENs and CVSs responded to the survey – providing an overall response rate of 53%. Unlike the response from the LSPs, there was a similarly high response rate from the CEN and CVS sectors. Again, there was good geographical coverage with CEN/CVS responses from Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Lancashire and Cumbria (see Appendix 1).

Other research shows that the response rates are good for a self completion survey. The questionnaires were completed fully and provide detailed information representative of experience and views about community engagement and empowerment across the North West.

4.3 Case studies were undertaken with three CENs to provide different models of working. These were:

- Case study A is a partnership that has undergone change; it is based within a host organisation, and works within a unitary authority.
- Case study B is an independent organisation working in a two-tier authority.
- Case study C is a large organisation and works in a unitary authority.

5. Key findings

The key findings of this research are:

- The majority of NRF LSPs have a community engagement strategy or framework in place compared to a minority of non NRF LSPs.
- Most LSPs thought that their budget for CEN work was 'fairly adequate' and one described it as 'very adequate'.
- In 2007/08, funding for CEN work was said to range from £30,000 to £1 million plus. Sources of funding were identified as the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal, ERDF Objective 1; Second Homes Fund and the PCT.
- 2008/09 CEN funding appears uncertain with evidence of some funding being reduced or discontinued.
- In 2007/08 a significant majority of CVS organisation did not receive funding for their community engagement and empowerment work. What funding there was ranged from £5,000 - £60,000 and was usually linked to specific projects for community engagement or empowerment.
- In 2008/09 the funding picture for CVSs is unlikely to be any different, although there is some indication that where funding did exist in 2007/8, it is likely to be reduced.
- There is evidence of community engagement and empowerment activity in all non NRF LSP areas. This work is mainly undertaken by a CVS whether or not they receive funding.
- All CVS respondents maintain at least one network but the number of networks do not compare with those of the CENs.
- Both the CVS and CENs had a mixed response as to whether the LSP and LAA made full use of these networks.
- All CENs operate at the neighbourhood level to influence neighbourhood renewal decisions yet only five CVSs undertake similar work.
- Most CENs and CVSs engage in outreach work to encourage and maintain engagement from the VCS and build capacity in the sector.
- Six CENs have a small grant programme to support capacity build with only two CVSs having similar grants.

- All CVSs and CENs demonstrate representation on the LSP and most are represented on the LAA partnership. Both types of organisations also demonstrate good representation on the LSP sub groups and four theme groups.
- All CENs provide support for the representatives on the LSP but none of the CVSs provided support. However, the majority of *all* types of LSP said they provided support for developing the skills and knowledge of the VCS representatives.
- Both CENs and CVS provide other forms of community empowerment work in their role with the LSP and LAA. These include providing information, training, delivering services to meet the LAA targets; providing opportunities for personal and organisational development and undertaking equalities work.
- Both CENs and CVSs were able to provide examples of how their work adds value to the work of the LSP. This included: bringing local knowledge, expertise and experience to inform and guide the LSP; informing the design and delivery of services.
- Whilst the CENs could give a range of examples of *how* the VCS were said to have informed the strategic planning of the LSP, half of the CVS said that no examples came to mind.
- Much less detail was provided by the CENs when asked about informing or influencing the shaping of LAA priorities, targets and outcomes. The CVS were even less able to provide examples.
- All NRF LSPs are either 'fairly' or 'very satisfied' with the involvement of the VCS in LSP decision making. There was a slightly lower level of satisfaction with their involvement in creation of the LAA. This is consistent with the views of the CENs.
- Non NRF LSPs were less satisfied than NRF LSPs with the level of VCS involvement in LSP decision making and also indicated lower levels of satisfaction with their involvement in the creation of the LAA. The CVS response suggests lower levels of satisfaction than that of their LSPs and the CENs in the other areas.
- Only a small minority of non NRF LSPs had considered the CEN model. Lack of resources for implementation had been a key factor in not even considering it.
- The majority of all LSPs undertake additional community engagement and empowerment work to that they fund. This is the form of citizen's panels, neighbourhood management activity; local area partnerships; health networks; Ward committees; Parish councils; community planning workshops and through Compact arrangements.

- Proposals for delivering the new Community Empowerment Action Plan across all the LSPs include: interpreting it through existing strategies; increasing the role of councillors and the work of Ward committees; using neighbourhood management structures; developing Participatory Budgeting; and appointing a new worker to develop community engagement mechanisms.
- There is uncertainty amongst the CENs as to their emerging role in delivering community empowerment and engagement with the LAA with the introduction of the 'single pot'. Some believe that services will remain; others that they will retract and some believe they will close.
- Many CVSs are also uncertain about the future but as most did not receive any funding for the work they undertake it is difficult for them to identify what of their role would change or remain.

Sally Neath
Geraldine Pettersson

Appendix 1

Response to the Email Self Completion Surveys

NRF Local Strategic Partnerships

Bolton
Liverpool
Preston
St Helens
Salford
West Cumbria
Wirral

Non NRF Local Strategic Partnerships

Bury
Carlisle
Cheshire County Council
Chester
Crewe and Nantwich
Cumbria County Council
Eden
Lancashire
Macclesfield
Rossendale
South Lakeland
Stockport
Wyre

Community Empowerment Networks (CEN)

Bolton
Burnley
Hyndburn
Liverpool
Pendle
Preston
Rochdale
St Helens
Sefton
Wigan

CVS

Bury
Congleton
Eden (Cumbria)
Hyndburn and Ribble Valley
Macclesfield
Stockport
West Lancashire

Carlisle
Crewe and Nantwich
Ellesmere Port
Lancaster
South Lakeland
Warrington

Appendix 2

CEN CASE STUDY A

1. Background and current model of working

The CEN works within a unitary authority area. It was established in 2001 using the Community Empowerment Fund and employed five members of staff and was hosted by the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS).

In 2006 the CEN underwent change and the current model of working was introduced. It moved to a new host community organisation and adopted a more strategic focus around the work of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Local Area Agreement (LAA) and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). It currently employs one and a half members of staff being a full time co-ordinator and a part time administrator.

The CEN programme manages 11 projects that include a small grant project, workforce development project, a volunteer centre, a community cohesion project, a community empowerment project and a community engagement team of five officers. All of these projects are external to the core team, as they are delivered by and through various organisations in the area. They are answerable to the CEN for achieving their targets and the CEN report on progress to the LSP.

Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisation receive up to £2,000 each to establish and maintain a range of 14 networks, which make up the CEN. The CEN is updated on the networks' progress through minutes, quarterly reports and other communication. This can sometimes make the networks and CEN steering group feels somewhat distant from each other.

All 14 networks and four other geographical representatives send representatives to the CEN partnership steering group which co-ordinates the VCS views and feeds them into the LSP. The CEN partnership is a thematic partnership of the LSP and, as they deal with cross cutting themes, they can put forward 6 members to the LSP board; these are selected from the 14 network representatives. Each of the four geographical representatives also has a place on the LSP board. As a thematic partnership the CEN partnership is responsible for five LAA indicators.

The CEN partnership co-ordinator attends the LAA Co-ordinators' meetings at which the Co-ordinators from all the thematic partnerships come together. She reports back from these meetings to the CEN partnership members and feeds back their views into the LAA meetings and negotiations.

2. Funding and the impact of different regimes over the life of the CEN

In 2006/07 and 2007/08 the CEN partnership received £1.6 million in total through the pooled Safer and Stronger Communities (SSCF) Fund and the

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) to fund the work of the core team and the 11 community projects.

Funding for 2008/09 has still to be decided. A six month extension has been agreed by the LSP. This has yet to be ratified by Cabinet who, at the same time, will decide not only if the following six months can be funded through the Area Based Grant allocation but also if this can be done as a three year funding agreement. The position though is hopeful.

Since its inception the CEN has been in receipt of three modes of funding. In 2001 the CEN was established using the Community Empowerment Fund. In 2004, with the introduction of the Single Community Fund and the remit for community participation the CEN changed its outcomes and staffing increased from five to nine. With the introduction of the LAA and the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund the CEN re-profiled its work and reduced its workforce. Its delivery mechanism changed from delivering direct services (which often lead to confusion with the work of the CVS who was its host) to being strategic and undertaking partnership working.

The impact on services delivery is that the CEN partnership no longer delivers direct services, rather it programme manages projects that are delivering the LAA indicators. The Co-ordinator's role, uncommonly for CENs, is solely geared towards strengthening the CEN's work with the LSP and LAA therefore the partnership feels very involved with both. It has representation at the LSP, the LAA steering group, the LSP sub groups and the LSP thematic partnerships. This has influenced the work of the LSP and the shaping of LAA priority targets, as outlined below.

3. Activity that has influenced the work of the LSP and LAA

For almost 12 months the LSP have been undergoing an appreciative enquiry review. It has been a key piece of work that has called on all stakeholders being involved in. The CEN co-ordinator has been on the planning group and part of the reviewing process. One of the results of the review is that the CEN partnership should no longer be a thematic partnership of the LSP but be an equal partner. Statutory partners recognise they have a responsibility to support the development of a sustainable 'corporate entity' for the sector enabling VCS representatives to be truly empowered in the partnership process. What this means in practice has yet to be thought through but it is seen as a positive move.

The co-ordinator has also been fully engaged in the development of the recommended indicators for the new LAA, particularly in trying to ensure that the NI 7 indicator, 'environment for a thriving third sector', is amongst the 35 key indicators. The LSP is anxious that they may not reach the measure for this indicator and it may negatively affect their chances of receiving the reward element attached to the LAA. The CEN has argued that its inclusion will show a tangible commitment to the sector and the indicator has been

included in the final set of recommended indicators for submission to Government Office⁸.

4. Key achievements

A current key achievement is that the CEN partnership is undergoing a strategic futures review in which it is considering both its own future and the future of the VCS. This feels like a beneficial process to go through as it is looking to the future, strengthening their partnership and enables them to identify potential gaps in current activity.

5. Anticipated changes in the immediate future

The key change in the immediate future is that the CEN partnership will no longer be a thematic partnership of the LSP rather the LSP wants it to be regarded as an equal partner to the other members. The LSP want to support it as a 'corporate entity' with representatives that are properly empowered to take part in the partnership processes. The LSP's internal review has resulted in a more slim line LSP so the number of VCS representatives on the LSP will reduce. Attendance at other thematic partnerships is set to increase and the representatives at these will be nominated through the CEN partnership enabling more consultation and reporting back to the sector.

The CEN is hopeful for this new structure but recognise it is a big change and they have already re-drafted the roles and responsibilities of the VCS LSP representative. They also need to explore with the LSP the concept of a 'corporate entity' and what support will be provided. One idea might be in the form of access to training opportunities that statutory partners receive, for example in performance monitoring for LAAs, and they would like this support to be at thematic partnership level as well as at the LSP board level.

6. Anticipated changes in the long-term future

They have recently undertaken a review of their services against their strategic priorities which has resulted in them discontinuing funding to three projects which did not fit their delivery criteria which are directly linked to the LAA targets. This has been a difficult process to go through as it was essentially voluntary sector organisations cutting funding to other voluntary sector organisations.

The strategic review that is currently being undertaken is raising considerations, for example, around their corporate identity, and their role in enabling the sector to campaign; the findings from the review, as well as any developments arising from the LSP, may well change the CEN partnership's longer term role.

7. Other local authority and LSP community empowerment practices

⁸ Since this interview the indicator has been removed by Cabinet but negotiations are in place to include it again.

It is felt that the LSP view the CEN partnership as undertaking the community empowerment activity. The local authority does not appear to undertake any community empowerment work but they do have a Community Affairs Team that deals with any voluntary sector issues.

The CEN partnership Co-ordinator has a good relationship with both the LSP Co-ordinator and the local authority Community Affairs Manager both of whom recognise that more could be done.

The LSP has not referred to delivery of the actions in the recent Community Empowerment Action plan but the CEN hope that the inclusion of the NI 7 indicator will go towards proving a commitment towards the VCS.

CEN CASE STUDY B

1. Background and current working model

The CEN works in a two tier authority in one of twelve district council areas. There are three other CENs in the same county. It was established in 2002, using the Community Empowerment Fund and had three staff.

The CEN is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It is an association of voluntary and community groups with 180 members who elect the executive committee and has five members of staff. The CEN delivers a range of services.

It facilitates the election/selection of Voluntary, community and faith sector representatives onto the LSP. Whilst some group capacity building is undertaken, the main focus is on the induction and one to one support to the 30 VCS representatives that sit on the LSP board or its thematic sub groups. Whilst the representatives from larger VCS organisations do not require much support those from small community groups need a lot in order to help them attend and be effective.

The CEN is also funded by the LSP to undertake work with them on community cohesion. This includes a small grant fund and other varied activity. They also received funding to work on the Compact and undertaking research with the public sector members of the LSP to assess their engagement with disadvantaged communities.

They work with the four Neighbourhood Management schemes in the area to enhance their community engagement by, for example, identifying the training needs that are common for all four and establishing and developing neighbourhood partnerships.

The CEN also undertakes equality and diversity training which generates some income from the local authority. This results from a previously funded project that developed an innovative form of training for the VCS and the public sector around understanding faith and belief in their area. It later encompassed disability and age awareness. At that time the CEN was also able to run residential events for residents to help them explore issues like conflict in the community or how community groups could have a voice alongside a well resourced VCSs.

2. Funding and the impact of different regimes over the life of the CEN

In 2007/08 the CEN received £100,000 from the LSP's Safer and Stronger Communities Fund, £25,000 from the PCT and £65,000 from the Second Homes Fund. There is no commitment from the LSP, PCT or local authority to continue this funding in 2008/09 and the CEN are drawing on under spend until June 2008.

Since its inception the funding for the CEN has changed. Initially it received funding from the Community Empowerment Fund and the main focus of the work was to attract membership that reflected the community and to recruit representatives for the LSP and theme groups. The Credit Union was the accountable body for the Community Empowerment Fund and the Community Chest and the CEN became associated with having money and being able to help groups. Whilst the Community Empowerment Fund was later replaced by the Single Community Fund it was still felt that the network was well resourced and at this stage the CEN took the decision to become an independent organisation with its own infrastructure.

The Single Community Fund placed more emphasis on going out at a neighbourhood level and they worked with residents on how to represent their community, as well as working with the VCS. With additional funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) the CEN diversified and developed new work, for example developing the equality and diversity work.

With the introduction of the LAA and the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund it was still felt that there was support for the CEN's work as their funding was ring-fenced. At the end of 2006 the funding was no longer ring-fenced and although the LSP thought they had provided effective voluntary, community and faith sector representation they were not able to back this up with any financial commitment.

In 2007 the CEN worked at a county level, as part of the Safer and Stronger Communities working group to develop the LAA and were hopeful of receiving support from county wide funding but the decision for the Area Based Grant to be distributed to the districts worked against them in two ways. Firstly, they believe that the majority of area based funding for their area is in the form of the Working Neighbourhood Fund with its focus on community engagement with individuals to get them back to work. Secondly the decision about spending the grant now rests with the local authority and not the LSP. In addition both the district and county councils have suggested that savings could be made by the CEN merging with the CVS.

The impact of the earlier funding changes were positive, funding was generous, the CEN could concentrate on delivering services and staff morale was high. The current funding position means that work is concentrated on fund raising and staff morale is low. It is a well established CEN with skilled staff who had felt valued but now feel insecure and undervalued.

There appears to be opportunities for funding in that there is a broader political agenda for community engagement; the LSP is breaking into sub partnership boards and wanting more individuals from communities to sit on them; and there is the county wide Local Improvement Networks (LINKs) programme. However, much of this community engagement is at an individual level or specifically for health and social care. The CEN works at a group level, they may not have the necessary structures at present to deliver at county level and their charitable aims may preclude them. They are also

applying to the Capacity Builders' Improving Reach Programme, the Lottery and trust funds but feel this is a competitive arena.

3. Activity that has influenced the work of the LSP and LAA

The CEN has represented the four CENs in the county at the LAA's Safer and Stronger Communities working group. The support that is provided to the VCS representatives helps them influence the decision making of the LSP and its working groups. A recent survey of representatives showed that 85% of respondents felt they were influential and five of the seven thematic working groups leads felt the representatives were able to influence decision making and service delivery.

They have full network meetings and members report feeling informed about the work of the LSP.

4. Key achievements

The CEN's membership is inclusive and truly representative of the diverse local community, and has recently started to outreach to groups in the rural areas of the City.

It has built up a constructive and positive relationship with the LSP and other partnerships, which has led to successful partnership working in many areas

The CEN has built up a good reputation within the VCFS and has a good level of representation in terms of both numbers and effectiveness at all levels of the LSP. Effective structures for election/selection of representatives and mechanisms for reporting back and input from the sector have been developed and ensured a good level of involvement and accountability throughout the sector

The CEN has successfully brought in additional funding for a wide range of independent equality, diversity and community cohesion projects, as well as working jointly on these issues with the LSP

It has met the challenges of constant changes in the structure and focus of partnership working, for example, neighbourhood-level working and neighbourhood management, floor target action plans, the Local Area Agreement.

In December 2007 the CEN won a national Compact Commendation for excellence for their work in raising awareness of the local Compact.

5. Anticipated changes in the immediate future

Whilst the CEN were worried that they might close the situation is currently that they will continue but with fewer resources and staff, focusing on a

narrower agenda and may lose their premises; this will be a loss to the voluntary, community and faith sector; especially the smaller groups who hold meetings in the building free of charge.

6. Anticipated changes in the long-term future

Although it looks like the CEN will continue, albeit as above, the basic representation and accountability issues will be addressed. However, funding is likely to be guaranteed only for this up until 2009 so uncertainty about the future remains. Planning ahead will be difficult and the staff morale issues will remain.

7. Other local authority and LSP community empowerment practices

The local authority undertakes community engagement but not empowerment. They hold area forums and are developing neighbourhood arrangements in non NRF areas. Whilst these are ways that the public have an opportunity to be consulted it does not provide empowerment.

The CEN is on the group that is piloting the neighbourhood arrangements.

The recently published Community Empowerment Action Plan refers mainly to individuals, for example residents, opportunities for petitioning, the transfer of community assets and participatory budgeting. The focus appears to have shifted away from groups and the Community Empowerment Networks are not mentioned despite all they have achieved.

CEN CASE STUDY C

1. Background and current model of working

The CEN works within a unitary authority. It was established in 2001, using the Community Empowerment Fund, had approximately three staff and was based in a CVS.

Currently it has a staff team of 24 working both full and part time. This team is made up of the co-ordinator, two managers, two administrators, a community involvement office and 19 development officers. The community involvement officer is responsible for election processes, consultations, requests for information and research and policy analysis. The development officers support the networks.

The CEN have 14 networks. Nine of these are networks of identity and interest. Networks of identity are those representing, for example Black and Racial Minorities, senior citizens and children and young people. Networks of interest are, for example, health and social care. There are five networks under the theme 'networks of place' that correlate with the five Neighbourhood Management areas in the city. A manager is responsible for the overall 'theme of place' networks and oversees 10 staff – five neighbourhood development officers and five network assistants. The neighbourhood teams are based off site with the Neighbourhood Management teams. As the local authority do not employ officers to link with the communities, the CEN staff are a key dedicated interface between the authority and the community.

The networks of place engage and empower community representatives, and individuals, to take part in community consultations and ward level events; three of which are held each year across the each ward in their areas. These are multi-agency meetings with representation from, for example, ward councillors, police, fire and rescue services, the PCT, community groups and residents, Neighbourhood Management and CEN staff. Micro level priorities evolve from these meetings, for example graffiti or alleys that may need closing and the CEN staff work with local task groups to resolve the matter. Not only does micro level action happen but this work shapes and helps deliver the targets of neighbourhood agreements and public agencies.

The networks of identity and interest also meet to discuss issues and decide priorities and reports of these meetings are presented at ward level events. The priorities from all of the networks are then combined and cross referenced and used to create an overall list of priorities for the networks. Some of these networks have demonstrated significant successes, for example, the Black and Racial Minorities Network received £170,000 NRF funding to undertake work around its priorities which resulted in joint work with the local authority on reducing under achievement in a specific minority community. The Disability Network undertakes street audits on pedestrian areas to inform local authority activity and informed the LAA indicators by identifying their five key priorities.

The CEN supports 100 nominated voluntary, community and faith representatives to participate in the LSP and LAA structures, from board level to sub and theme groups as well as council committees.

Community consultations are also undertaken for the LSP and local authority departments. This work ranges from making communities aware of local authority consultations, undertaking consultations on the LAA priority indicators to organising focus groups with communities of identity as part of the local authorities housing need assessment. The CEN and community members also sat on the steering group for this assessment and contributed to the writing of the consultation brief.

The CEN believes the LSP and local authority trust and respect them as a partner and this is born out with the CEN being the lead agency for community engagement and empowerment for the LSP. In addition they, together with voluntary, community and faith representatives, are putting together the LSP's Community Engagement Strategy.

The CEN also engages and empowers local individuals as well as voluntary, community and faith groups. Over 1000 residents attend local ward meetings throughout the year and in February there was a 33% increase in attendance from October of the previous year.

2. Funding and the impact of different regimes over the life of the CEN

In 2007/08 the CEN received funding of over £1 million from a combination of Neighbourhood Renewal Funds (NRF) and ERDF Objective One. They also received £440,000 through the LAA, Cleaner, Safer and Greener strand, for small grants.

In 2008/09 they will receive funding of over £1 million, this time from the Working Neighbourhoods Fund and ERDF Objective One but they estimate their overall funding will be reduced by approximately £100,000. They will again receive money for small grants but this is also reduced to £200,000. The CEN believes that having developed their work in the last 18 months to encompass individuals as well as groups they are well positioned to benefit from funds such as the Working Neighbourhoods Fund with it's individual outcome focus.

The CEN identifies two 'growth spurts' in its development. Firstly in 2004 when the funding for the CEN changed to the Single Community Fund and brought the added remit of working with neighbourhood groups. The CEN not only expanded to deliver neighbourhood work but also continued to maintain their thematic networks of identity and interest. Secondly, in 2006/07 the local authority used NRF money to co-finance ERDF Objective One money to deliver a city wide programme of enabling and empowering communities in small geographical pockets experiencing deprivation. The CEN was identified as the organisation to deliver on this work.

3. Activity that has influenced the work of the LSP and LAA

An area of 'good practice' is the opportunity for the CEN to influence the service delivery of the LSP and LAA in developing the Community Engagement Strategy. This will enable the voluntary, community and faith sectors to use their expertise in shaping future strategy. The intention is to achieve a shared understanding, both within and across sectors, of what community engagement, representation and participation are. The CEN aims to demonstrate that true community engagement can tackle real issues in neighbourhoods and that it is not a soft underbelly or a purely social undertaking.

The Black and Racial Minority networks activity around educational attainment was also good practice as too was work undertaken by the Health and Social Care networks. In response to a poor audit commission report these networks made the local authority aware of the reality of service delivery and the improvements that could be made. As a direct result of this engagement an SLA was drawn up with the local authority for the CEN to run user forums that could inform the city's Supporting People Programme.

4. Key achievements

The CEN's key achievement is their understanding of what community engagement can do. That is, it is a serious undertaking where service policies and deliveries can be looked at by experts who can identify gaps and weaknesses and identify solutions. The CEN believes it enables a mature dialogue between partners and that it has credibility and accountability.

5. Anticipated changes in the immediate future

The reduced funding in 2008/09 will lead to some cut backs but rather than loose staff they are aiming to working smarter and may consider cutting back on items like newsletter production for example. Currently they 'backfill' for chairs of networks in that they estimate a nominal wage that correlates with the time network chairs are away from their organisation and make a financial reimbursement; this may now have to be discontinued.

6. Anticipated changes in the long-term future

The CEN want to contribute to the local authority achieving the duties outlined in the recent Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act – Creating Strong Safe and Prosperous Communities. Public bodies will have a duty to involve and co-operate with local people and the statutory guidance makes clear that the LSPs are to communicate the progress of the LAA targets to local people. This duty comes into effect in April 2009.

The CEN is also positioning itself to work beyond the LSP and is developing working relationships with other agencies to deliver community engagement work.

7. Other local authority and LSP community empowerment practices

The CEN is aware that the local authority and LSP also undertake other community engagement and empowerment. Work funded through the NRF will contain elements of empowerment and the LSP will consult widely on, for example, its Community Strategy. The CEN respect this work but ask that the deliberated responses they acquire from the networks on issues are put into context and adequately weighted against those received from one off consultations.

The local authority response to the recent Community Empowerment Action Plan is to ask the CEN to be the lead organisation in developing the Community Engagement Strategy. The CEN does not feel that the Action Plan's strong focus on individuals is a challenge to them as they had already anticipated this development and sees it as contributing to civic renewal, effective service delivery and legitimising public agencies.