

# Neighbourhood management: empowerment, place-shaping, and social capital

## Short summary

Reviews two recent reports published as part of the National Evaluation of the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders. The documents refer to England. The first reports on all the Round 1 and Round 2 Pathfinders in 2006-2007. They are found to be promoting safer and cleaner neighbourhoods, and actively promoting change in a range of public services well beyond 'crime and grime' services. The second is a focused report on neighbourhood management and social capital, based on three case studies, which draws out the importance of informal networks in improving local quality of life.

## Overview

This briefing reviews two reports published as part of the National Evaluation of the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders: a general annual evaluation and a study of social capital. The documents refer to work in England.

*Neighbourhood management: empowering communities, shaping places: review 2006/7.*

*Neighbourhood management and social capital*, by Marilyn Taylor.  
Both published by Communities and Local Government, 2007.

The thirty-five Pathfinders were established in two rounds, each having a seven year programme which is being evaluated from a national perspective. With the Round 1 Pathfinders approaching their final year, there is interest in the relation between the 'managed wind-down' of project expenditure and the possible mainstreaming of the work. This has to be seen in the light of a shift of funding responsibility to Local Area Agreements, although the review does not identify any particular difficulties in the transition thus far.

It explores the lessons for the growing number of similar initiatives nationally, noting that a stable and appropriately skilled staff team is the most significant factor in success, together with the active support of the local authority.

The other main findings are that:

- (i) neighbourhood management is not only promoting safer and cleaner neighbourhoods, but is promoting change in a range of services well beyond 'crime and grime' issues;
- (ii) the horizontal joining up of service organisations is central in the work of the Pathfinders;
- (iii) there is also frequent focus on improving local access to and take up of services;
- (iv) more neighbourhood management initiatives should consider how they can contribute to employment objectives; and

(v) there is still a need to improve the availability of local service data.

The promotion of social capital was not an explicit objective for Pathfinders, but it is noted that they help to generate it through a range of activities that bring different groups together, promote voluntary activity, and improve links with service providers. The second report looks at social capital explicitly, through a case study lens, and expands on these conclusions. Both reports place value on informal networking, with the social capital case studies suggesting the need to promote face-to-face contact and embed formal structures in looser, more wide-ranging informal contacts.

## **Assessing neighbourhood management**

The thirty-five Pathfinders were established to "*enable deprived communities and local services to improve local outcomes, by improving and joining up local services, and making them more responsive to local needs.*" Twenty were established in the first round (2001-02) and fifteen in the second (2003-04). Each round has a seven year programme which is being evaluated from a national perspective. In most but not all cases the accountable body is the local authority.

The report is important not least because of the extent to which neighbourhood management is being developed elsewhere, beyond the Pathfinders. The evaluation therefore explores the lessons for the growing number of similar initiatives nationally and, as the report says, 'what the wider implications are for public service improvement, neighbourhood governance, citizen engagement and neighbourhood renewal.'

In this respect, it points out key differences between neighbourhood management in deprived neighbourhoods, and approaches across whole districts. These differences are most noticeable in terms of *purpose* ("closing the gap" requires an asymmetrical approach' as opposed to a comprehensive approach); and the degree of potential *engagement* (which is said to be more difficult on a larger scale).

As the Round 1 Pathfinders begin the 'managed wind-down' of project expenditure, the researchers are particularly concerned to consider the issues of mainstreaming and further roll-out. They see good prospects for many Pathfinders continuing beyond their original lifetime and for rolling out the approach to other deprived neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood management is 'relatively inexpensive' and running costs appear to be consistent and predictable, but it is noted that 'no local authority (or mainstream partner) is yet using or proposing to use its own mainstream funds to fund the core neighbourhood management function.' In part this may reflect caution following the recent shift of funding responsibility from a central unit to the greater flexibility of Local Area Agreements, although the review does not identify any particular difficulties in the funding transition thus far.

The most significant factor in determining the overall health and capacity of a neighbourhood management partnership was felt to be having a stable and appropriately skilled staff team, along with the active support of the local authority. Partnerships without such capacity in place were more likely to have problems.

In terms of measured impact, between 2003 and 2006 residents in the Pathfinder areas recorded slight increases in satisfaction (from 71% to 75%) and more noticeable increases in perceived area improvement (22% to 31%). However, their significance has more to do with the cross-cutting nature of neighbourhood management, which can contribute to outcomes well beyond 'crime and grime' services. As they mature over time, the Pathfinders seem to reduce their emphasis on community safety and environmental issues, and to develop activities in relation to other services. Thus in the Round 1 Pathfinders, only about one-third of innovations are now (in 2006) related to community safety and environmental services (the remainder broadly emphasising youth services, housing, health, education and children's services). In round 2 Pathfinders, about 50% of innovations are related to community safety and environmental services. The researchers call for more consideration of how neighbourhood management initiatives can contribute to employment objectives, where they are felt to be under-achieving.

Central to the work of the Pathfinders is the principle of joining up or coordinating service organisations, and the Pathfinders appear to have been broadly successful in this. The report notes that there is frequent focus on improving local access to and take up of services:

'neighbourhood managers were able to establish good working relationships with mainstream providers, facilitate stronger joint working between providers, and engage local residents in ways that increased the responsiveness of the providers.'

An interesting aspect of this is recognition of the *influencing* role played by the Pathfinders in combination with their direct spending. In terms of improving environmental conditions, the evaluation identifies a positive correlation between spend and perceived improvements, because of the influence exerted through mediation activities over the design and delivery of services. 'One without the other was less effective than when both were in play.'

The availability of appropriate data is important for neighbourhood management. The researchers note that in spite of significant improvements in recent years, there are still difficulties in collating a range of relevant indicators for small areas. They call for this issue to be given further attention by central and local government.

## **Neighbourhood management and social capital**

The 2006-07 review includes a section on 'social capital' – the term used to describe the value that is lodged in social relationships. Promoting the development of social capital was not an explicit objective in the programme,

and the Pathfinders were not asked to deliver on it. But it is apparent that they help to generate social capital through a range of activities bringing different groups together, promoting voluntary activity, and improving links with service providers.

Clearly, if neighbourhood management involves collaborating with a range of residents, local groups, and service providers in a positive way, social capital will be generated. The questions that arise are; what kind of social capital, and to what extent?

These issues are explored by Marilyn Taylor in the second report discussed in this briefing. This document is also part of the national evaluation and is based on three case studies in Pathfinders that were thought to be carrying out initiatives which had the potential to contribute to social capital locally: Blacon (Chester), Ovenden (Calderdale), and Leyton (London Borough of Waltham Forest).

The report offers a concise summary of what is meant by social capital, and its applicability to community involvement in decision-making and community-based solutions to neighbourhood problems. The distinction is made between bonding capital (ties within a group or community); bridging capital (ties between groups or communities); and linking capital (ties between the community and service providers or decision makers). All three are important and necessary, and there can be tensions between them. In low-income neighbourhoods it is widely believed that bridging and linking capital tend to be in short supply.

We lack the tools for measuring social capital systematically, but this report identifies relevant activities in the case study partnerships which illustrate the implicit building of social capital. These include for example:

- Establishing and supporting a range of groups in the neighbourhood and increasing activities for children and young people;
- Building organisational capacity;
- Creating opportunities for people from different backgrounds and communities to come together and work towards common goals;
- Giving residents more of a sense of local identity through festivals and community 'hubs';
- Tackling negative stereotypes;
- Intermediaries to link between residents and service providers;
- Formal and informal opportunities for residents and service providers to work together.

These seven areas of activity are used to provide a framework within which examples of social capital are explored. The discussion hints at a surprising amount of inter-generational work being carried out. It's also noticeable that environmental issues, such as recycling and gardening, stimulate a lot of collective activity. Taylor concludes that while social capital is poorly understood within the Pathfinders, more explicit attention needs to be paid to it, especially if a pool of interest and activity is to be built that will outlive the programme. The report calls for more resources to be put into outreach for the

promotion of face-to-face contact and to embed formal structures in looser, more wide-ranging informal contacts.

## **Comment**

These reports point to the increasing acceptance of the neighbourhood management approach in the provision of services and support for citizens at local level. That approach was given added impetus by the local government white paper published last year (DCLG, 2006); so that when the added value of neighbourhood management is summarised in the annual review as follows, it may seem unremarkable:

- Promoting and supporting a local 'customer perspective' in public service provision, identifying local problems, communicating these to providers and pursuing 'joined up solutions';
- Promoting the greater involvement of local people in decision-making and consultation about services, particularly the greater use of deliberative processes;
- Supporting networking, relationship building and joint working between providers at a neighbourhood level;
- Bringing residents, community groups and providers together at a neighbourhood level in a way that improves providers' understanding of local problems and ability to target services on local needs – improving the 'targeting, tailoring and take up' of services;
- Promoting and supporting innovation in working practices by service providers; and
- Facilitating a more active community and voluntary sector, and contributing to the development of social capital in the community.

Reading this list, some citizens might reasonably ask why it constitutes 'added value' rather than basic assumptions about service provision; and why this describes an experimental initiative rather than a universal expectation of local services. But of course, such a response may be read as a measure of progress. Further, as the annual review notes, if broader and deeper citizen engagement processes are to become a reality, it is highly likely to cost more. Neighbourhood management is to some extent therefore a test case for local councils.

It has been curious that the term social capital seemed to disappear from the vocabulary of government in the past few years. Marilyn Taylor's report may be of most significance for the fact that it renews the focus on the concept and on the role of informal networks in the quality of life at local level, within the context of a government programme. It offers material for reflection, particularly in drawing attention to the range of activities being carried out under the aegis of neighbourhood management.

By way of illustrating how sensitive the issues are to different interpretation, we can consider the mention of the growth of neighbourhood watch schemes in Ovenden, given here as evidence of increased social capital. Neighbourhood watch organisations are generally felt to be based not on trust, but on distrust: hence their contribution to social capital is ambivalent. This is a reminder that we still lack sophistication in our analysis of social capital. Hopefully this report will stimulate more work to bring out the implicit contribution of neighbourhood management in the generation of social capital.

## **Weblinks**

DCLG (2006). *Strong and prosperous communities: the local government white paper*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous>

*Neighbourhood management: empowering communities, shaping places: review 2006/7*, <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=1923>

*Neighbourhood management and social capital*, by Marilyn Taylor, <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=1921>

Prepared by Kevin Harris, Local Level, for the Local Government Information Unit, 2007