

How Hyndburn Works

Communities and neighbourhoods

Quick Guide 2c

BACKGROUND

This quick guide is a summary of what the Department for Communities and Local Government is doing for communities and neighbourhoods and how they are taking forward the 'community empowerment' agenda. The websites and documents mentioned give more detailed information.

What is community empowerment

Community Empowerment is about people and government, working together to make life better. It involves more people being able to influence decisions about their communities, and more people taking responsibility for tackling local problems, rather than expecting others to.

The idea is that government can't solve everything by itself, and nor can the community: it's better when we work together.

There are three key ingredients to community empowerment:

- **Active citizens:** people with the motivation, skills and confidence to speak up for their communities and say what improvements are needed.
- **Strengthened communities:** community groups with the capability and resources to bring people together to work out shared solutions.
- **Partnership with public bodies:** public bodies willing and able to work as partners with local people.

Note: The vision for empowering communities was set out by the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett MP, in two key speeches: the Scarman Trust Forum Lecture on 11 December 2004 and the Edith Kahn Memorial Lecture on 11 June 2003

Community Empowerment Action Plan

On 19 October 2007, Communities and Local Government published "An Action Plan for Community Empowerment: Building on Success".

The Action Plan, produced in partnership with the Local Government Association, sets out how the government will deliver on its commitment to bring about greater devolution and empower communities.

It contains over 20 actions towards giving residents and communities a greater say in the facilities and services in their local areas.

- Secure more citizen-focused services
- Implement the new Sustainable Communities Act
- Give tenants a greater role in housing management
- Give citizens a greater role in planning
- Embed community empowerment in cohesion activities
- Develop more community kitties
- Establish citizens' juries to help shape policy
- Consult on petitions

- Develop more local charters: voluntary agreements between local authorities and communities
- Continue to develop online tools to support empowerment and democracy
- Support the National Empowerment Partnership
- Facilitate a national network of empowering authorities
- Develop a 'Take Part' campaign
- Mainstream empowerment as an improvement priority
- Open up direct dialogue with local activists
- Transfer more assets to communities
- Provide timely information about performance
- Invest in local community anchor organisations as resources to support local community activity
- Support Community Land Trusts
- Measure empowerment and make it visible
- Establish a concordat between central and local government
- Strengthen the role of local councillors
- Increase local accountability and have clearer local leadership of public services

Note: An Action Plan for Community Empowerment: Building on Success, Published: 19 October 2007

Site: Communities and neighbourhoods -

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/actionplan/>

Community Empowerment commitments in the Local Government White Paper

Responsive service and empowered communities is the second chapter of the White Paper. It proposes:

- More choice for local people in the way local services are designed and delivered
- A new duty for councils and other best value authorities to 'inform, consult, involve and devolve'
- People will have more and better information about their local services and how their public authorities are performing
- People will have the right to an answer when they put forward suggestions to their councils or ask for action
- The Community Call for Action already a success in tackling anti-social behaviour will be extended, giving Councillors more power to demand action on behalf of their communities
- More neighbourhood management
- More opportunities for communities to take on the management and ownership of local facilities and assets, with a new fund to encourage them
- An independent review, the Quirk Review, looking at how to overcome the barriers to community ownership and management of assets.
- More opportunities for Tenant Management Organisations
- A new 'power of well-being' means that Quality Parish Councils will be able to respond better to their communities' needs
- Local charters in which communities and their councils can agree the services to be provided
- More co-ordinated support for citizens and community groups to help them take advantage of empowerment opportunities.

Site: Communities and neighbourhoods -

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/communityempowermentcommitments/>

What we are doing to promote community empowerment

The Government's Community Empowerment Unit is taking forward the empowerment initiatives outlined in the Local Government White Paper.

Community management and ownership of assets

Sometimes community groups, social enterprises or groups of local people think that they could make better use of a local asset - for example a run down building or underused piece of land. And the government recognises that there can be real benefits to these

groups having a direct ownership stake in their local community. But at present too often such groups can be frustrated in their ambitions.

A review has taken place to consider the powers, policies and barriers that affect the transfer of public assets to local communities, and to make recommendations.

There are already a range of powers and policies to enable and encourage local people to take control of the public land and buildings that are at the heart of their communities, but too little use is made of these powers. Local authorities who want to transfer assets say that there are regulatory and legal barriers that prevent them from doing so.

The review will bring forward an action plan to make community ownership and management a regular part of local life. These assets could include, for example, community halls, libraries and sports facilities.

Note: Communities Taking Control:

Community Management and Ownership of Assets: Final Report from the Work Group to the Neighbourhoods Project Board

Community Assets - the benefits and costs of community management and ownership

Site: Communities and neighbourhoods -

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/whatweare/communitymanagement/>

Community Development

Government is increasingly seeking to involve citizens in public decisions and community development (CD) plays an important role in the implementation of these policies. The people who work in community development, such as the staff at Hyndburn Community Network, have an increasingly important role to play in involving citizens in decisions about public services. The Community Development Challenge report looks at the current state of community development and how its effectiveness can be strengthened.

Note: Community Development: The Community Development Challenge

Site: Communities and neighbourhoods -

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

Firm Foundations

Firm Foundations describes the steps being taken by government to enable more communities to help themselves and engage more effectively with public bodies. It highlights the importance of long term resourcing for community organisations, the need for easier access to funding, better and more consistent training of community workers, more awareness and acceptance that 'one size does not fit all', the need to encourage a 'bottom' up approach and the importance of support for citizens and communities at neighbourhood or community level.

The themes emerging from the consultation were:

- the importance of long term resourcing for community organisations: this would show commitment to the civil renewal agenda and lead to sustainability
- the need for easier access to funding
- better and more consistent training of community workers
- more recognition of the good work already being undertaken at community level and the will to build on this
- more awareness and acceptance that 'one size does not fit all'
- the need to encourage a 'bottom' up approach
- the importance of support for citizens and communities at neighbourhood or community level, and endorsement of the key components set out in the consultation paper

Note: Firm Foundations: The Government's Framework for Community Capacity Building

Site: Communities and neighbourhoods - <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/firmfoundations>

Connecting with communities: improving communications in local government

In October 2006 the Government published the Local Government White Paper, **Strong and Prosperous Communities**. The White Paper set out proposals aimed at supporting local government to deliver more responsive services, extend choice and control, empower individuals and community groups, as well strengthening the role citizens and communities play in shaping the places they live. To give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives. It is about creating strong, prosperous communities and delivering better public services through a rebalancing of the relationship between central government, local government and local people.

*Site: Local Government White Paper, Strong and Prosperous Communities.
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous>*

Citizen Governance

The Community Empowerment Division is preparing a study on how to encourage more people to take part in public governance.

Guide Neighbourhoods

The Guide Neighbourhoods programme received £4.35 million government funding to enable strong, successful resident-led neighbourhood organisations, to share their knowledge and experience with other neighbourhoods trying to tackle similar problems. Fourteen Guide Neighbourhoods were directly involved in the 27-month action research phase of the programme, which ran until March 2007; along with a number of other neighbourhood organisations through the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations.

*Note: Learning to Change Neighbourhoods: Lessons from the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme - Evaluation Report
Published: 17 October 2007*

*Learning to Change Neighbourhoods: Lessons from the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme - Summary Evaluation Report
Published: 17 October 2007*

Site: Communities and neighbourhoods –

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/whatweare/guideneighbourhoods/>

Together We Can

Together We Can is the government campaign to bring public bodies and communities closer together. The campaign is led by Communities and Local Government. Its website, available on DirectGov, provides advice and guidance to community activists and anyone with an interest in community engagement. 12 government departments are taking part in the Together We Can plan and it covers a wide range of area. The plan is divided into four strands:

- Citizens and democracy
- Health and sustainability
- Regeneration and cohesion
- Safety and justice

Together we can problem solving projects

Civic Pioneers are local authorities who are committed to working with communities to enable more people to influence the way local services are designed and carried out.

Site: Communities and neighbourhoods –

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/whatweare/216473/>