Developing active networks in local communities: A review of Local Links, a pilot programme in West Yorkshire

Susie Hay

This study reports on an action research programme designed to assist local people to be better informed, empowered and more effective in their community roles.

The pilot 'Local Links' programmes, run by Common Purpose in four areas of West Yorkshire, were designed to support active networking, skills development and information sharing for locally based decision-makers and active citizens. This report explores whether the scheme was effective, and what benefits this approach has for communities. It examines:

- the benefit of informal networking in communities – meeting other people active and involved in the area, knowing what they do, taking and working together and forging stronger links;

- ways of valuing diversity (in all its aspects) within communities, and enabling participants to see the world through other people's eyes;

- ways of overcoming some of the barriers to participation faced by local people.

- Local Links as a model of good practice for work with and by communities.

An evaluation of this action research project, *An evaluation of Local Links: Reviewing a pilot programme to develop active networks in local communities* by the Icarus Collective, is also available.

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1 Introduction

Common Purpose, the UK-based leadership organisation, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, implemented this action research project, Local Links, which took place over a two-year period from April 2005. It piloted four programmes in different areas of West Yorkshire: Todmorden, Heckmondwike, Shipley and Bradford BD5.

Context

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and others has shown that senior decision-makers have become increasingly well networked at local authority level. There are demonstrable advantages in increasing mutual understanding, developing common aims, creating a shared language and establishing trust between partners.

Such benefits of networking and partnership are neither widely nor sufficiently available to more locally based decision-makers and active citizens. School governors, for example, often have no links with tenants' groups, who themselves have no knowledge of the voluntary group providing support to single parents and the Sunday footballers using the park. The Local Links project is based on the premise that improved neighbourhood networking will assist local decision-makers and active citizens to be both more effective and better supported in their roles. Potential benefits include:

- improved decision-making supported by an increase in knowledge of local context;

- mutual support for local governors, decision-makers and active citizens;

- joint working and improved co-ordination of services;

- skills sharing;

- community benefit from a more holistic approach to locality governance;

- increased community power and influence;

- higher visibility for community-based decision-makers.

Accordingly, *Local Links* set out to:

- investigate the proposition that local networking will support better governance and civil engagement within disadvantaged communities;

- pilot a process of networking, support, skills development and information sharing for locally based decision-makers and active citizens.

Policy context

The relevance of this project is underscored and contextualised by a great deal of governmental policy emanating from different ministries and departments, and at regional and local level. Furthermore, there is a vast array of independent research and accompanying recommendations that point to the appropriateness of the Local Links approach in order to make a difference to local voice in decision-making, sustainable, cohesive communities and community development.

Governmental sign up to community voice is not new; national government policy has over decades sought to promote participatory democracy and a stronger voice for communities in local governance. Among many examples are City Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budgets in the 1980s and 1990s, New Deal for Communities, the work of the Government's Active Communities Unit, as well as very recently the Commission on Integration and Cohesion,[1] and a plethora of initiatives and policies.

Community influence and participation in decision-making

The Department of Communities and Local Government underscores as central to its work that:

> Communities should be able to influence and protect their own future. Communities and Local Government has a vision of confident, vibrant, sustainable communities where everyone has a say in shaping their environment.

> Giving people and communities more of a say on the services they receive and where they live.

> Community empowerment means getting people more involved in the decisions that affect their lives.[2]

The need for this participation and call for ways of achieving sustainable communities is also underscored by research carried out by leading research institutions and 'think tanks' such as the JRF, Demos and others.[3]

In the past year, the Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, enshrined in legislation in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill 2006–07, underscores the Government's continuing commitment to building capacity at local, community level:

- enabling communities 'to have a bigger say in the services they receive and the places where they live';[4]

- supporting community groups and the 'third sector';[5]

- promoting community cohesion and stronger, more confident communities.[6]

The Future Role of the Third Sector in Social and Economic Regeneration, HM Treasury's December 2006 Interim Report, which was prepared to inform the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), also underscores the importance of the engagement of communities and their role in decision-making.[7] While *Place-shaping: A Shared Ambition for the Future of Local Government*, Sir Michael Lyons' March 2007 final report from his independent inquiry into the future role, function and funding of local government, emphasises the need for local government to *engage more effectively with local people*.[8]

Just one example of independent research that underlines the need for effective community voice is the Young Foundation's (2006) *Local Democracy and Neighbourhood Governance* research, which states:

> Frontline councillors are most empowered where they channel the collective will of their citizens, through sustained and positive engagement with communities, encouraging local initiative, self-belief and leadership.[9]

At regional and local level (and through government offices, regional development agencies, local authorities as well as other public sector service providers),

local strategic partnerships, compacts, local area agreements and community empowerment networks seek to engage with local communities (and other partners and stakeholders from different agencies, organisations and sectors) to deliver sustainable services and change and increase local influence and voice.

Diversity, community cohesion, poverty and disadvantage

These are cross-cutting themes that are central to the context of Local Links and that are also at the heart of policy. Local Links was designed and delivered against the identified need, embedded in policy research and strategies, to address these issues effectively at local level.

Strong and Prosperous Communities cites the need to improve local authorities' performance with regard to social inclusion, and recommends placing a 'Best Value' duty on local authorities and other local (public) agencies to 'reach out to citizens who are disadvantaged, and support marginalised or socially excluded communities to have their say'.[10]

The recent final report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) found that:

> … integration and cohesion are crucial at a local level. It is at a local level that leaders can understand in detail the profile of the population, the changes that are taking place, the impact of these changes on the local economy and services. And most importantly it is only at this level where specific initiatives can be crafted and delivered to build better integration and cohesion.
>
> The local focus of work moves forward in the context of a national government commitment to integration and cohesion. This is a welcome mosaic of activity and one that needs to be built upon, supported and enabled to make an even greater impact.[11]

Networking as a community development approach

Local Links has informal networking at its heart, and the aim of the project, was to build stronger and more active community networks in the areas where the programmes took place.

Independent research points to and documents the effectiveness of informal networking including, to cite just two examples, Gilchrist (2004) and Skidmore *et al.* (2006), which found that:

> There is growing evidence that certain kinds of social networks enable citizens and communities to access certain resources that they can use to work together to tackle problems for themselves.[12]

The author of this report, Susie Hay, was the leader and facilitator of the project. Her principal aim in writing this main report is to describe the project in detail in terms of its context, aims and objectives, and how these were delivered; it also assesses and evidences the extent and nature of its impact. The intention is also, slightly more subjectively, to tell the 'story' of Local Links, describing something of the colour and vibrancy of the programmes as we experienced them, and giving examples of the enthusiasm and energy of the people who participated and were involved in them.

We also commissioned Icarus Collective to undertake a separate independent and objective evaluation of the project, which took place in parallel with the action research. The results can be found in the accompanying evaluation report, which should be read in conjunction with this.[13] The main conclusions of that report are also included in the *Findings* report on the project.

2 Methodology and the Common Purpose approach

Local Links set out to undertake action research that would:

- identify four pilot sites including communities within a rural area, a market town, a city suburb and an inner-city area;

- map levels and sites of governance and participation at the local level to determine the appropriate structure and membership of local networks – the intention is to link with, though not duplicate, existing local structures;

- establish and support networks of active, neighbourhood-based citizens (volunteers, activists, decision-makers, locally based community leaders and other stakeholders), providing a tailored programme of meetings and activities designed to improve participants' knowledge of their locality and understanding of each other's organisations, and to help create a supportive self-help structure;

- evaluate the success and viability of the networks, principally through the independent evaluation project;[1]

- construct sustainability plans building on the results of the evaluation process.

One of the desired outcomes of the project was to strengthen community voice and influence. We identified, therefore, as prerequisites, the following, which contribute to the bank of good-practice of sustainable community skills:

- access and routes to influence;

- ability to deal with difference and diversity;

- knowledge and information;

- skills for place making and action.

The 'human' context for the project was the diverse communities in various places in West Yorkshire. In this report, we refer at times generally to the 'Asian community' or to 'black and minority ethnic (BME) communities'. Clearly these broad definitions

do not reflect adequately the diverse, complex communities that comprise the South Asian population of West Yorkshire. Where appropriate, we identify specific cultural groups within those communities. In the areas where Local Links programmes took place the largest minority ethnic culture was Pakistani, but it needs to be recognised that the rich mix of South Asian cultures in West Yorkshire and the individual places where we were working also includes others, for example the Indian, Bangladeshi and Punjabi communities.

The project team comprised the following.

- Julia Fell (Development Director, Common Purpose) provided line and project management support.

- Susie Hay (Associate Programme Director, Common Purpose) led delivery of the project, from development and recruitment through to design and facilitation of the programmes; she also authored this report.

- Charmaine Myers (Senior Programme Manager, Common Purpose) provided co-facilitation, curriculum and administrative support.

- Steve Smith and Nicola Stenberg of Icarus Collective carried out the independent evaluation and wrote the accompanying evaluation report.

In addition, a Project Advisory Group advised and supported the project, and met four times for this purpose.[2]

Appendices annexed to this report add further information and detail in terms of context and delivery.

Selection of locations and recruitment of participant groups

Locating the pilot programmes

The selection of the locations for the four pilot programmes was an integral part of the research. Common Purpose, in consultation with the JRF, selected West Yorkshire as the sub-region for the pilots because of the following:

- presence of diverse communities, with significant BME populations and associated issues of community cohesion;

- wide geographical spread and diverse types of local community areas – from rural to inner city and everything in between;

- presence of areas of significant poverty, disadvantage and deprivation, and accompanying issues including the need for economic regeneration;

- range and degree of regeneration activity, focus and public funding interventions;

- presence of established Common Purpose programmes (Bradford and Kirklees offices) with extensive local knowledge and access to Common Purpose networks as well as JRF programme staff and projects in the area.[3]

We drew up the following criteria for selection of places within the sub-region.

- Four areas should include one each of the following: inner-city area, outer-city area, 'market town', outlying district.

- There should be different levels of regeneration across the four areas.

- Demographics should be different in each of the four areas.

- In terms of deprivation, the areas should to some extent vary with regard to the degree and the manifestations of deprivation.

- Areas chosen should have manageable sizes of population (i.e. electoral ward/ small town equivalents).

- Some areas and communities in West Yorkshire have been the subject of extensive regeneration activity and associated consultation, and our initial overview work and discussions with local agencies and organisations revealed that some of those communities were feeling that they had been over-consulted in the past; this was particularly the case in so called 'super output'[4] areas. In the initial contact with potential locations for the project, we touched on this issue with local organisations. Our aim was that this project should 'add value' and leave a positive legacy rather than duplicate or interfere with existing activities and initiatives, for example by calling yet again for the voluntary time of residents who were suffering from 'consultation fatigue'.

The starting point for selection was consultation with the Common Purpose programme offices in Bradford and Kirklees where programme directors have a wide and detailed knowledge of local communities and places.

We invited input from local and regional agencies and other key individuals at this stage, including local authorities, key service providers, housing bodies and voluntary and community sector organisations and others. Narrowing down the selection of places was not entirely straightforward, as we had to balance strong and differing views as to the most appropriate areas including locally focused views based more on subjective criteria (e.g. the extent of local authority community development coverage) with the wider objectives of the project. These concerns called for careful consideration of others' needs and perspectives in order to ensure endorsement and support from the agencies and individuals involved, which we consider vital.

On the basis of the above criteria and process we chose Todmorden, Heckmondwike, Bradford BD5 and Shipley town centre for the Local Links pilot programmes. Below we give an overview of each location and the particular context at the time of selection. Further information, including statistical data, is found in Appendix 8.

Programme one: Upper Calder Valley, centred on Todmorden

Location: the outlying district

- The most remote of the five towns in the Upper Calder Valley within the Calderdale Metropolitan District Council area, and the geographically most westerly point of the Yorkshire and Humber region.

- Closer to Manchester than Leeds and historic links with Lancashire and the cotton industry as well as with Yorkshire and the woollen industry.

Levels of community development and community dynamics

- Some community development support is provided by Calderdale Council and voluntary/community sector organisations.

- There is a perceived need to address issues of community cohesion; there are projects already established including JRF's Integrate project,[5] and others run by Todmorden Together, Calderdale Council and other organisations.

- Relatively vibrant community and voluntary sector, substantial number of

organisations and groups, and wide range of communities of interest in the town and wider geographic area.

Other indicators of need for Local Links

- During the scoping and development work for the project, local people expressed the view that Todmorden needed to have a stronger voice and to 'join up' better in terms of connecting both organisations and interests, not only within the town but also beyond.

- Local Links was seen as an opportunity by the local community and service providers to add value to existing provision and regeneration progress.

Programme two: Heckmondwike

Location: the market town

Heckmondwike, formerly a prosperous carpet manufacturing town, is situated between Dewsbury and the M62 in the densely populated area clustered around Leeds, Huddersfield and Bradford. It is close to Dewsbury, Batley and Cleckheaton in the Spen Valley area of Kirklees Metropolitan District Council, the administrative centre for which is Huddersfield.

Levels of community development and community dynamics

- Local workers reported to us that Kirklees Voluntary Action Network (the community empowerment network) was not active in the area.

- Recruitment to Local Links coincided with the appointment of the first dedicated community development worker for the town.

- A number of community and voluntary sector groups and organisations were active, including buoyant ones such as Scouts and the Barnardo's Centre, a wide range of Christian and Moslem faith groups (including several mosques) and interest groups including the Chamber of Trade.

Community cohesion

- According to local people we spoke to in the preparatory phase of the project, the London bombings of July 2005 exacerbated the fact that the different cultural communities in Heckmondwike tend not to come together to any significant degree. For example, we met with members of the Pakistani community (by far the majority BME grouping in the town) who particularly referred to an increase in overt racism. For example, one young woman told us that just after the London bombings she had been spat at on the bus. In addition, conversations with key contacts including front-line workers from a range of services and organisations referred to little connection in the daily lives of the respective cultural communities – for example, primary schools are attended predominantly by either white or Asian communities. For members of both the Asian and the white communities, the activities and profile of the British National Party (BNP) in the area were having a significant impact.

- A leading member of the Pakistani community in West Yorkshire commented to us that his view was that 'Heckmondwike is 30 years behind Huddersfield as far as community cohesion is concerned and 40 years behind Bradford'.

Other indicators of need for Local Links

- Perceived need for things to 'join up' locally.

- Need for a stronger local voice – according to many local people we spoke to Heckmondwike was 'below the parapet', especially in relation to Kirklees Council.

Programme three: Shipley

Location: outer-city area

Shipley is a former woollen textile manufacturing town on the edge of the city of Bradford, at the foot of Airedale and within the Bradford Metropolitan District Council (BMDC) area.

Levels of community development and community dynamics

- Good range of community and voluntary sector organisations supported by BMDC Area Team, Bradford Vision and CNet (the Community Empowerment Network for Bradford).

- More happening in the 'super output'[6] areas like Windhill and other parts of Shipley East than in Shipley town centre.

Other indicators of need for Local Links

- Third-sector groups see a need for better joining up locally.

- Those working in the voluntary and community sectors have perceived a need for a 'town team' or similar to come together for Shipley and see Local Links as potentially laying the foundations for this.

- Pressing issues that need addressing in the town – such as young people, community cohesion, affordable housing.

Programme four: Bradford BD5

Location: inner city

This postcode area is close to the centre of Bradford, some of it within walking distance of the city centre.

Levels of community development and community dynamics

- The area is one of much and diverse community activity; the Trident programme has provided support with a team of dedicated development workers. Both within the Trident area and in other areas, there is a plethora of community groups and voluntary organisations providing a wide range of activities, and serving both geographical communities and communities of interest.

Community cohesion

- In the context of an area with a 60 per cent BME population (predominantly Pakistani), some local people describe the area as being racially harmonious while others cite the existence of cultural barriers and tensions.

- Local contacts and front-line workers told us that racial tensions in the area were exacerbated by the presence of 'newcomers' (mostly Eastern European migrants) and these tensions were seen even in the primary school playground. Trident staff

described the existence of what they refer to as 'subdued racism', i.e. tensions within and between the different communities.

Other indicators of need for Local Links

- Despite the fact that the community is 'well developed', there is a generally perceived need, as the Trident New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme winds down, for local people to have increasing skills, confidence and knowledge to sustain the community. As the Trident Chief Executive, Steve Hartley, commented to us 'We can't get enough of this kind of stuff'.

- Local people told us that there was a need for more joining up between the NDC area and the other communities of BD5.

Recruiting the participants

Todmorden

Through the presence of the Common Purpose programme in the area over a number of previous years, we had good links both within Calderdale Council and in the town itself. We were therefore able to key into existing networks and organisations – particularly through Todmorden Together and the local media.

The participant group comprised some 30 local people representing all sectors and age groups, with a significant proportion of white, middle-class, professional women (both in work and retired) heavily involved in voluntary activities and service provision in the town.

Heckmondwike

A community development worker, the first dedicated to this area, was appointed just as we were launching Local Links, and she was key to engaging with existing networks and community activity in parallel with her induction period in the town.

The Local Links group here had 15 participants, with strong representation from the (Christian) faith communities and from the Chamber of Trade and front-line workers.

Shipley

Recruitment targets were wide – and involved making considerable efforts to link with the communities in Baildon, Frizinghall, Wrose, Windhill and Shipley East. Twenty people participated from a range of organisations and projects in the town, including young people from the Bradford City Centre project and from the Motor Engineering Project on the canal, as well as faith community leaders. This group, uniquely in the pilots, included two participants who were Common Purpose Matrix programme graduates.[7] There was a spread between the 'usual suspects' (faith workers and Area Forum voluntary sector stalwarts who knew each other) and the new faces (e.g. former community activists who are now community work apprentices, new workers, young people, grass-roots tenants and residents' group members, school governors and youth leaders).

Bradford BD5

Recruitment in this area was not straightforward, largely because of the size and complexity of the area and its communities. We did not expect this, given the volume of community activity in the area. Workers and community members said they simply did not have the time to give to Local Links, given the other pressures and demands on them.

Our first impressions, borne out in the programme, were that there are a great many people working in the area within and alongside communities but perhaps without a great deal of mutual support and wider synergy. We found that there were so many 'ways in' to the communities that it was difficult to cover them all – compared to other areas where there were very clear inroads, often through one key contact or agency. The positive result of this was a group that contained 'unusual suspects' including young people involved in the Margaret McMillan Adventure Playground Association (MAPA) youth project and front-line housing workers.

General recruitment process, engagement and make-up of the groups

Thus all four locations presented 'fertile ground' for recruitment to the pilots. The process included well attended 'marketing' events, media coverage, engaging with the 'bush telegraph', attending meetings with community groups, community leaders, key businesses, schools, council and front-line workers. We made presentations to community groups and forums, partnership boards and individual organisations.

The balance on the programmes of workers and volunteers varied with local contexts. In some the latter predominated, while in others – particularly the Bradford programme, which was held during the daytime – front-line workers were able and keen to access Local Links.

In selecting the programme groups, we did not recruit as participants people who might dominate or imbalance the group in terms of power and confidence (perceived or actual) – for example, elected members and others with a 'powerful' profile. We used other ways of including them, for example by inviting them to participate in the programmes as advisers and speakers, as well as by keeping them informed generally of progress and outcomes. Despite these efforts, however, we did encounter potential participants who identified barriers to joining the group, such as lack of confidence and feelings of 'it's not for me if so and so is there'.

The recruitment process/phase in the project was itself an important part of the network-building process. We ensured that leads and opportunities were followed up (within the constraints of time and human resources) so that the final groups would be inclusive, diverse and have the potential for maximum commitment, energy and creativity. When the final groups came together, our view was that 'who came were the right people'.

Learning points

The following factors made recruitment easier:

- presence of initial good links and existing networks, and the 'bush telegraph';

- presence of active community groups;

- media support (in many cases coverage in the press and/or community radio);

- local authority, local strategic partnership (LSP) and other structural support and endorsement;

- presence of active community and other front-line workers;

- presence of community leaders and motivators/mentors to help bring in hard or yet to reach participants (e.g. for young people, less confident community members);

- direct contact by the co-ordinator and personal endorsement of Common Purpose approach by key individuals;

- recruitment events co-ordinated by local organisations (Todmorden Together, the Shipley Area Team and, in Bradford and Heckmondwike, information/recruitment sessions organised by Common Purpose and held at local restaurants).

Difficulties and barriers to recruitment were due to:

- cultural divides (because of, for example, ethnicity, age, class, 'them' and 'us', status);

- fragmented and divided communities with little or no history or experience of working together;

- limited time and resources for learning about the local area and gaining access and trust, especially where the above is true;

- timing of sessions not suitable for everyone;

- lack of confidence of those not used to participating in a diverse group;

- deeply embedded class and gender divides ('not for us');

- other demands/priorities on people's time;

- lack of knowledge/familiarity with the Common Purpose 'brand';

- getting the message right – Local Links is not a straightforward training course and we needed to communicate the impact of its strategic 'offer' to umbrella organisations and service providers, and also to express in a straightforward, appealing way the practical and immediate benefits to those active on the 'front line' of communities; thus the language and information used had to be targeted and suitably drafted to be accessible to the different and discrete audiences.

The Common Purpose approach

Common Purpose has developed over nearly 20 years a range of programmes designed to strengthen civil society and develop local leadership. The Local Links project draws on this expertise and transfers the tools and techniques to 'community

level', engaging participant groups made up of people active within smaller, local areas. Like the organisation's established programmes, Local Links brought together diverse groups of individuals from a wide range of organisations, groups and communities of interest.

Common Purpose's experience demonstrates that these approaches help to develop:

- better informed, skilled leaders in organisations, public services and businesses;

- leaders who are able to see the wider picture and context;

- more people active, not only in their immediate circles of influence, but also in 'civil society' – who are 'leading outside their authority'[8] and making a difference;

- wider and more diverse, creative and active networks of leaders;

- leaders from different sectors and diverse organisations doing business together;

- local leaders who join up in and for their place.

Local Links' aim was to achieve similar outcomes and at very local level. Accordingly, Local Links would give participants an understanding of the bigger picture within which it operates. Furthermore, and unlike other training programmes for community volunteers and front-line workers, Local Links would take participants to different organisations and venues in the area – deeper into the context, enabling them to inquire beneath the surface of current key issues and to engage with organisations with influence in the area. Local Links would not seek to present issues simply, but in their complexity and at times the reality of their 'messiness'.

- Local Links would provide potent learning experiences that were frequently set in unfamiliar territory and locations for participants who would grapple creatively and collectively with change in the context of the area. The programme sessions would demand high levels of participation and engagement, and would increase the sense of shared community ownership of problems and solutions.

- Local Links would facilitate participants' learning, rather than *teach* them; the diversity of programme content and structure would respond to different individual learning styles within the participant group. Thus Local Links was highly experiential, including a variety of sessions with speakers and panels, group problem solving, visits to a wide range of organisations and projects, debates, panels, role play and energised sessions as well as group and personal analysis and reflection.

- Local Links was designed to constitute both individual and collective learning journeys through which knowledge, confidence and skills were enhanced and developed. Interaction and experience of working with different people and organisations also deepens and promotes working relationships that bond and engage people in effective networks in and beyond the group – operating across sectors, organisations and areas.

- Local Links sought to build stronger people relationships and links and, to maximise this potential, sessions would provide the informal or 'white space' (the coffee break, lunch or supper) where people got to know each other better. Programmes provided food, refreshments and 'feel-good', relaxed aspects (all of which are essential parts of the Common Purpose particular offering).

Common Purpose's independence as an organisation without political or other affiliations would remain fundamental in Local Links, with views expressed by contributors being their own and not Common Purpose's. Similarly, it was crucial that Local Links emphasised Common Purpose's position that diversity of opinion, as well as of background, are strengths that, if taken beyond consensus and harnessed and understood, make for creative place making and positive change.

Ground rules, the Common Purpose conventions,[9] operated in every programme event to enable participants and contributors to learn and contribute in a safe, respectful, truthful but challenging environment. The five conventions are:

- be open to learning;

- adhere to the Chatham House Rule of Confidentiality;

- avoid both giving and taking offence;

- be a leader;

- show commitment.

Programmes were facilitated by the Programme Director (Susie Hay), who led the group, enabled the learning, and provided the pastoral support to help build stronger relationships and networks.[10]

Finally, Common Purpose programmes are based on a team approach, and accordingly both a programme director and programme manager/programme co-ordinator collaborated on Local Links session design and delivery. The two-person

team, as well as ensuring good organisation, also enables the crucial input of an extra pair of 'eyes and ears', alert to what is happening in the group and providing additional contact points for participants. This enabled changes and responses to local need to happen.

The curriculum framework set out to be flexible – rather than to stick rigidly to the pre-set agenda. Local Links presented a positive alternative to the formal papers and business conducted in many partnership and forum meetings, particularly those that involve local people/community representatives.

To sum up, Local Links shares the following objectives with other Common Purpose programmes:

- building relationships and promoting active networking within and beyond the group;

- widening knowledge of how the area works and what impacts on/influences it.

By adapting the established Common Purpose methods to the local level, it also set out to enable participants to make a difference in the community, specifically by:

- identifying issues for the area and examining the role of the community 'voice';

- facilitating the group's engagement with and action to address those issues;

- building skills such as confidence, public speaking, problem solving and leadership;

- widening opportunities for access/influence by local people;

- building awareness, both within the participant group and in local organisations and structures, of the potential (positive) role of such informal groups/networks in neighbourhood governance.

3 Networking, access and influence

As described in Chapter 2, Common Purpose's way of creating networks was the starting point for Local Links. This involves linking social capital, bringing people together in positive relationships, and the energy that makes networks more productive, worthwhile in practical ways and with more likelihood of sustainability.

We considered it important to communicate to participants (e.g. in information and marketing materials) the non-threatening nature of the programmes, as well as to emphasise that the programmes aimed to build social capital, not to create or extend cliques of power. Thus Local Links would add value to other partnerships, forums and initiatives involving community, rather than undermining them or competing with them.

For example, both within some programmes and in follow-up meetings, the participants were invited to bring others to widen the network, some of whom remarked in feedback:

> I came to watch and listen but soon became very interested and wished to participate.

> As a guest purely for this final session … I found the experience inspiring and enjoyed the chance to make new contacts.

Doing business together

A key motive for joining Common Purpose programmes is to extend networks and build new ones. The most obvious opportunity and compelling reason is the pure business one – to make connections with other participants and their organisations that lead to new opportunities and enhanced 'performance', whether in terms of profit or improved service provision. There were many examples of this happening in the course of the Local Links programmes and in a range of ways.

Examples of opportunities for business or service development included:

• fund-raising help from community worker to a range of groups/organisations;

- community enterprise business that specialises in video training and documenting change in communities was invited to evaluate a regeneration project in the Local Links area;

- a participant with her own business received invitations to provide her professional services to some of the participating groups;

- Local Links itself used catering services provided by and through the participants (this happened in all four programmes);

- community centres, church halls and community rooms used as venues for Local Links secured more 'business'.

In-kind and reciprocal exchanges

Local Links gave rise to in-kind and reciprocal exchanges that demonstrate that building community and social capital through volunteering and skills exchange can be achieved through the Local Links informal networks – for example:

- primary school was able to use Local Links contacts in a recruitment drive for new governors;

- the Hindu dance group with the white rural primary school;

- young people from supported housing project with faith group;

- through the worker participant being on the programme, a group of Muslim women now use the United Reformed Church for their meetings;

- new stakeholders to the young people's housing initiative and Work Aid Scheme – grant aid going to Windhill Furniture Store;

- Sunrise Radio profiled a number of the projects from the participant group, which was a great resource for the group and provided material for the broadcaster;

- profile increased of the Bradford Motor Education Project and interest from British Waterways;

- the manager from the Citizens Advice Bureau in Todmorden now refers people to the women's group, and so it has more members and greater impact;

- projects for disadvantaged young people and several women's groups linked in many ways with the other organisations from within the Local Links group;

- links between housing association in Bradford and MAPA youth initiative – to organise a foreign youth trip and to trade housing advice.

Exchange of ideas; scope for influence

The networking component of Local Links also enabled the exchange of ideas and increased capacity and routes for influence – for example, the following.

- Community radio stations had access to more stories and thus the group providing those stories got access to the media – the win-win situation.

- The community in Heckmondwike made links with the press to further their issues, and in Shipley to support the petition to parliament regarding young people's housing.

Impacts beyond the immediate participant groups

Local Links also facilitated the dynamism of network to have wider impacts beyond the immediate participant group, demonstrating the self-energised nature of informal networks – networks *sans frontières*. Examples include the following.

- A community partnership in BD5 with the Polish community recently arrived in the area.

- Participants connected between programmes and beyond – Bradford connected with Heckmondwike, Shipley with BD5, Todmorden with Kirklees and Halifax.

- Trading and sharing connections was the lifeblood of Local Links and operated from the development and recruitment phase, through delivery and beyond the completion of the programmes. Local Links became a hub for this activity. Some aspects of the Shipley programme illustrate the point. The tour of the town centre hosted by the Town Centre Manager enabled the participants to meet and connect with youth workers working on the new youth centre project, while the minibus tour of social housing in the area brought in architects and housing workers through the good offices of a contributor from the Common Purpose graduate community.

- In Todmorden: 'There was a direct result for my partner. He's become a scout leader. I met [another participant] on the programme who talked a lot about scouts and said he was looking for leaders. I told my partner and he got involved.'

- Senior decision-makers (e.g. from local authorities, Yorkshire Forward, West Yorkshire Police, government office, elected members, editors) met lay community members and front-line workers whom they did not meet in the course of their work, and vice versa.

Case study – support for young people through Local Links networking

The network provided the support and pooling of ideas to get things done, and was there when it was needed. For example, as a direct outcome of the Local Links connections, the drugs outreach worker in Heckmondwike reported the following some months after the programme ended:

> Local Links connections supported work with a group of girls in Heckmondwike – the vicar from Local Links offered free use of a room, Rohm & Haas *[private sector participant]* provided funding for refreshments, the participant owner of the local restaurant is running healthy cooking/eating sessions for the girls, and another participant is supporting the girls to apply for funding for another project. Representatives of the business community *[Chamber of Trade]* connected and enhanced the work with young people's projects.

Getting beyond 'them' and 'us'

Local Links encouraged what one contributor (an elected member in Bradford) referred to as 'neighbourliness', by which she meant that problems could be solved, not by taking them to the council, but by talking to your neighbour about them. In this respect, our delivery approach sought to break down barriers and grow mutual understanding by enabling the group to get beyond the usual turf wars and 'them' and 'us' impasses.

Thus, halfway through one programme, a controversial issue about housing arose and a lively and edgy debate took place, and this resulted in the critic of a local partnership being invited to stand for the partnership board. This underscores the value of an ethos of inviting people in rather than keeping them out, and of solutions coming from the many not the few, which makes for the win-win situation.

One participant's feedback to the evaluation team summed up the personal impact of the Local Links network. He reported that it had 'reduced my isolation and elevated my energy levels'.

Sustaining Local Links networks

With funding available only for pilot projects in different areas, it is not possible to guarantee the sustainability of these first Local Links networks.[1] However, the following was put in place to help this.

- A 'class secretary' from the participant group to keep people in touch and arrange meetings. Follow-up meetings have happened in each place, notably in Bradford BD5 and Shipley. In Bradford the group felt the pressing need just to keep having these chances to meet informally in different places outside usual formal meetings. In Shipley there was significant support in place from the Area Team as well as motivated participants to help sustain the network and where the group's 'campaign' for social/affordable housing is being taken forward.

- The worker from Todmorden Together has included four Local Links meetings a year in her Big Lottery programme.

- Email contacts between the groups are being maintained – as 'notice board' and update opportunities.

4 Community cohesion and diversity

Background context

This project does not aim to re-examine the history of race relations and immigration, nor to map diversity in West Yorkshire or within the Local Links locations. Clearly, however, these had a bearing on the context and need for Local Links, and the rationale for selecting the particular places for the pilot programmes. Community cohesion in this geographical sub-region has both a long-term, chronic, slower-changing dimension and a faster-paced one that is happening as a result of global and national events, and the movement of people and resultant demographics.

We believe at Common Purpose that diverse communities should be a strength and that embracing difference and making opportunities of 'encountering the other'[1] need to be embedded as a habit in communities. Local Links sets out to do precisely this, in line with the Comedia's recent findings:

> In comparison to many other countries, the general policy discourse around cultural diversity in the UK treats it as a problem to be solved, rather than an opportunity to be grasped.[2]

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion's (2007) Final Report also recognises this potential in the Foreword thus:

> Where people recognise that while there will always be difference, it need not always be divisive … As a Commission our vision of society is one where people are committed to what we have in common rather than obsessing with those things that make us different.[3]

It is also apparent across the country that there are increasing schisms arising from not only the fact of economic migration but also a widening poverty gap.[4] This is manifesting itself particularly in established communities (both BME and white) where young people and particularly young males[5] are not achieving educationally, and consequently neither aspiring to nor accessing employment opportunities; self-esteem, confidence and worth are on a downturn, with associated negative consequences for community cohesion.[6]

In some of the Local Links areas, people expressed the view both publicly and privately that 9/11 and 7/7 significantly set back race relations in the sub-region, and this came up both in the development phase and in the course of participants identifying big issues within their communities.

For example, in Heckmondwike, Pakistani women whom we met in the course of developing the project reported that 'We have lived here all our lives but since the London bombings we are now being spat at on the bus'. In one of the Local Links sessions in Bradford BD5, participants identified and discussed the negative impact on young Asian men's self-esteem of media stereotyping, and how this was impeding good relations with their white neighbours. In one particular session, a Moslem participant evidenced his own decision to disengage from media coverage and to some extent withdraw into the 'safety' of his own culture and community, and concentrate on building good relations with his immediate neighbours.

Other local community leaders and front-line workers told us that political correctness and the tendency (as they perceived it) for the Moslem communities to be more inwardly focused now added to other barriers to talking and providing support in sensitive areas like mental health, domestic violence and marriage breakdown. Other issues mentioned included 'positive discrimination' activities such as the appropriateness of targeting services towards the Asian community when this might be seen as putting white deprived communities at a disadvantage.

The political impacts of historical and recent events can be seen in West Yorkshire in the increasing success in local council elections of the British National Party (BNP). In the course of Local Links this was particularly notable in Heckmondwike, which at the time of writing has two BNP elected members, but also in other areas, particularly in Bradford where the BNP increased their share of the vote in the 2006 local elections.

In addition to ethnic and cultural difference, the Local Links programme aimed to cross other social divides – age, faith, gender, class, economic status, geography, educational achievement, and particular communities of interest, for example.

Local Links groups

The participant groups tended to reflect in numbers the dominant community in the particular area and the degree of confidence within minority communities. Each programme group was generally diverse in areas of age, gender, length of time working/living in the area, roles (i.e. worker/activist/resident), and also in representation of activities, issues and communities of interest. The groups also reflected the amount, range and trends of community activity in the area – for example, in Todmorden, there was a significant representation from recently retired professional women who were active in community groups.

As noted previously, there were some significant barriers to participation noted both by ourselves and by the independent evaluation, especially where involvement was sought from (minority) Pakistani organisations and groups (in Shipley, Heckmondwike and Todmorden), pensioners' groups in Heckmondwike, and tenants and residents' representatives in Shipley. This may have been because of perceived power/class/ gender divides and, crucially, related confidence issues.

In Bradford BD5, there was good representation of Pakistani and African-Caribbean communities in particular reflecting in their numbers the make-up of the area in terms of ethnicity. However, there were significant barriers to participation even here; 'Is there something separate for the ladies?' came up several times.

In Heckmondwike, a strong motivation for participation was clear concern about community cohesion and little history or habit of crossing the cultural and faith divides – for example, the following.

- The new community development worker needed to support community groups from all sections of the community.

- A primary school head teacher from a 'white' school wanted to broaden the horizons of his pupils and their parents, and also to work with young people from both white and Pakistani communities using conflict-resolution techniques.

- The Hindu dance group leader wished to use dance and cultural activities to cross divides.

- The Scout leader wanted to extend use of the new centre to wider sections of the community.

- Faith group representatives wished to cross religious divides.

Extending the network of influence – an impact story from Heckmondwike

It is worth looking in greater depth at the community cohesion ramifications of Local Links in Heckmondwike, both what the programme revealed and also the 'small fires' that it achieved, despite the difficult territory that we first encountered and a participant group that had no young people on it and no representatives of the 'harder to reach' Asian groups (particularly women).

Continued

Common Threads

The Common Threads project arose from the local community worker's participation in Local Links; she adopted the ethos and issues identified by the group (diversity, cohesion, celebration, joined-up working, bridging divides) and applied them to her own work. Accordingly, instead of supporting community groups separately, she brought several together in a creative project – the older women's group from the white community (Silver Ladies), the Khoosh Women's Group (Asian community) and Global Women (newer migrants) – on a sewing project with a cross-cultural theme.

The women met together in the United Reformed Church (offered by the minister, a participant on Local Links), which, though a Christian venue, was familiar to Asian women as a polling station and therefore there were no barriers to going there). They also went together on a bus trip to buy materials from a shop in Bradford serving the Asian communities. The result – a lovely 'banner' – can be seen in the photograph.

The Common Threads group with their banner

There is ongoing activity and an increasing demand for meetings, as well as new members from the asylum seeker and migrant worker communities. The worker reports that, after a sceptical start, the women involved have increased their confidence, and trust has grown and barriers have broken down. She sees this as leading to more involvement by and in the community, and to small but significant inroads into establishing improved cohesion.

The Khoosh Women's Group also started meeting in the Salvation Army Centre (again, through the Local Links participant group).

Connecting with the 'yet to reach'/'hard to reach'

Finding, connecting and seeking involvement was difficult in respect of the 'hard to reach' and the 'yet to reach' communities, whether these are excluded because of ethnicity or other reasons. However, participation by young people, notably in Shipley and Bradford BD5, was very much valued and gave participants opportunities for overcoming traditional divides. The role of youth workers and volunteers running youth projects as mentors either encouraging young people to come along or by participating in Local Links together with the young people was very significant in overcoming the barriers to participation.

Routes into some communities can be difficult and we found it so particularly in Heckmondwike. In Bradford BD5, the presence of the New Deal for Communities workers from the Asian communities, as well as the presence of vibrant community centres, made this easier. We had built into our programme model that it should be flexible and respond to local needs, and so we looked for ways of engaging with hard and yet to reach groups, especially by providing opportunities for people to participate and meet together but not necessarily as regular members of the group, for example by the following.

- Hiring the facilities at the Khandaani Dhek Bhal centre in Heckmondwike for the first Local Links session (many participants did not know of this centre's existence).

- Similarly, using the Attock and Light of the World centres in Bradford and Frizinghall Community Centre in Shipley.

- Visits to youth projects in the BD5 area.

- Diversity of food and catering (where possible from community catering enterprises). Light of the World, an African-Caribbean church and community centre in Bradford BD5, which provided food at the Local Links session at the Attock centre for the Pakistani community, did not know of that centre's existence and vice versa).

- Accepting that some participants might attend only once or twice – when and where it was easy for them to do so. (This was, for example, the case with several participants from Pakistani organisations who participated when the sessions were held in their community base and when their other commitments permitted.)

Thus workers and volunteers in the areas took part in some of the sessions and achieved some, albeit not sustained, engagement and participation, and people were able to share views, ideas and different perspectives and networking opportunities.

The concept of hospitality that is highlighted by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) Final Report was an important part of the Local Links approach to bridging divides, and fits with its recommendations:

> … an ethics of hospitality – a new emphasis on mutual respect and civility that recognises that alongside the need to strengthen the social bonds within groups, the pace of change across the country reconfigures local communities rapidly, meaning that mutual respect is fundamental to issues of integration and cohesion.[7]

Dealing with conflict, controversy and difficult issues

Common Purpose programmes do not promise participants an 'easy ride' and, though the curriculum did not aim to be deliberately challenging and uncomfortable, the diverse perspectives and experiences of the groups made for degrees of uneasiness. Resulting turbulence and challenge to some extent provides the creative energy that leads to action and motivation – and therefore to sustaining and keeping the networks active.

For example, an honest and heated debate with a local newspaper editor during a programme session on the role of the media, and a challenge to the 'town team' by the tenants and residents' representative led to the opening of new channels of communication and dialogue. We would argue that positive opening up of turbulence and challenge also strengthens the confidence and courage of participants.

As one Todmorden participant put it:

> Excellent to have full-bodied discussions and get some arguments going
> – I like the sessions most when I get a sense of how much everyone
> *cares* (which is a lot). Let's have more controversy and stimulation.

It was abundantly clear in Local Links that we might well deal with diversity and divisions in communities that involved real experiences of racism and other forms of exclusion (not theoretical scenarios), and fragile, genuine and deep sensitivities. In this respect, Local Links groups are potentially less robust than other Common Purpose programme groups, and so dealing with these issues demands respect for sensitivities, and therefore this aspect of facilitating sessions needed a considered approach.

The project therefore included individual support sessions for the project co-ordinator from Pravin Patel, a consultant in anti-oppressive behaviour. These sessions equipped her for dealing effectively with potentially uneasy or difficult sessions where diversity and difference might lead to challenging and highly charged occasions. This support looked at ways in which topics could be investigated and differences and challenge opened up without people feeling oppressed or taking offence. Key aspects were ways of building confidence and establishing rapport within the participant group, and also reinforcing the facilitator's personal (but undeclared) values and beliefs, and ability to interpret the needs of participants both individually and as a group. These techniques built on the careful use of the Common Purpose conventions and facilitation training.

These edgy situations at times came into play in unexpected ways. For example, the Local Links project included (for the first time in Common Purpose) a session with a contributor from an extreme right wing political party. Careful preparation was made for this session, but in the event the discussions were relatively uncontroversial, despite a tangible sense of apprehension and 'self-censorship' (privately voiced to the facilitator) on the part of some members of the group.

This was noted, and so the next session opened with a wide-ranging reflections session with the participant group during which issues, observations and feelings were more freely aired. It was quite clear that this reflection time was absolutely critical in enabling the participants to move on and share their views openly – there was talk of the 'elephant in the room', observations about what the session had revealed about political and societal complacency, the role of the media and the implications of these for cohesion. It was important in this session to ensure that particularly those participants who might have been at risk of being offended or

who had found participation in the session difficult for other reasons could have the time, space and safe environment to express their views. Feedback was positive in this connection and one participant reported to the Icarus evaluation team: '[Local Links has] given me the contacts which I feel can support me in future work around diversity'.

It was also critical that in this and other programmes we incorporated into sessions with the media the community cohesion issues and minority voice concerns that the participants had themselves raised. These came up as topics such as coverage of race relations and also access to the media by minority groups and excluded communities. The perception among the participant groups was generally that the dominant and powerful have more access, and that negative stories and stereotyping dominate the coverage of community cohesion. For example, in the Bradford group, there was considerable concern voiced about the impact of media stereotyping of young people, Moslems and coverage of race hatred incidents almost to the exclusion of more positive stories.

Bridging divides

Other ways in which Local Links worked to bridge divides included the following.

- Frequent small group work – with participants from diverse backgrounds working together – overcoming the tendency to flock together and form cliques. This was especially useful in bringing together young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with older, more experienced community leaders and workers. '[It was] good to meet people young and middle aged together', as one participant from Shipley commented to the evaluation team.

- Encouraging 'doing business' between more unlikely collaborators – for example, in Shipley, the more established community and faith groups provided the young people with furniture in exchange for babysitting, gardening and other 'exchanges'.

- Providing lots of opportunities to experience other people's lives – in Shipley, for example, the group visit to social housing and, in Bradford, the visits to youth projects across the area.

- The group visit to the City Hall in Bradford was a key occasion for bringing together parties that did not often meet, while the town centre tour in Shipley broke down some myths about vandalism and young people.

- Work shadowing (in Todmorden) and meeting up to prepare positive and negative images in all four areas.

We did also notice, however, that there was a tendency in all of the pilots for participants, when left unfacilitated, to revert to the tendency for 'birds of a feather to flock together' – in the context of not just race but also gender, age, faith, or community of interest. In some instances, this was quite unsettling, as in one case when one 'clique' commented that another group was doing precisely the same thing that they were – i.e. having lunch in a 'flock'. Getting out of the box and casting aside assumptions and traditional barriers may be easier said than done.

There were, nevertheless, some positive outcomes of Local Links in this connection.

- In Todmorden, 'them' (i.e. the town team, Todmorden Pride) and 'us' (residents' association) came closer together after a challenging debate about housing demolition. One of the participants reported to the evaluation team '[it was] very useful and I met many interesting [new] people who I can co-operate with in the future'.

- Ideas for different approaches to conflict resolution within community groups were offered.

- Older and younger generations worked well together and barriers were overcome – in the case of Shipley, on a particular 'campaign' – and not in the usual way of 'young people doing something to help older people to make them appear more useful', but by young people taking a lead and coming up with creative solutions to problems, and away from the 'usual suspect' context (in the case of young people, the member of the youth parliament or the school council member). In this connection, the young participants reported to the evaluation team:

  > I feel I have a lot to say and I will get a chance in future meetings. Also I feel I'm now starting to understand that I can make a difference.

  > I now understand a whole range of views from different people.

- Influential people were brought into direct contact with communities' stories and experiences and issues.

We would argue that programmes like Local Links is in itself, and also gives rise to, precisely the kind of positive local activities that the Commission on Cohesion and Integration (2007) cites as key to building cohesive communities:

We strongly believe in tailored and bespoke local activity to build integration and cohesion.[8]

5 Knowledge and information

This aspect of Local Links programmes relates strongly to support of the role of all of the sectors – public, private and not for profit – cited in the Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*,[1] namely that:

> Voluntary groups, faith groups, local businesses and other public agencies have an important part to play in the life of our towns and neighbourhoods but they need to know who and how they can relate to in order to make their contribution.[2]

The knowledge in the group

The starting point for increasing participants' knowledge and learning is the expertise and knowledge within the group itself and harnessing 'the genius in the room'.[3]

Accordingly, early in the programmes, we tasked groups to map their patch – what they knew about the local area, what various communities were doing, connections within it, its strengths and weaknesses, its major issues and what influences were in play both within the area and beyond it. The expertise and knowledge this revealed was complex and extensive, coming from a range of people and the perspectives of many organisations and communities of interest, skill and service area.

Participants also learned from each other both within and across the pilot programmes – young people and older people learned together and from each other through intergenerational learning and experience such as working together on positive and negative images of the area. Young people and grass-roots community activists worked and shared perspectives on an equal footing with faith leaders, head teachers and professionals. Work shadowing (an optional 'homework' part of Local Links) undertaken by quite a number of the participants also deepened this type of experiential, informal learning.[4]

Providing information

Local Links also provided direct input of information and knowledge – for example, the following.

- Contributions as 'keynote' presentations, and as panellists and small group advisers from representatives of public bodies such as the West Yorkshire Police, local strategic partnerships (LSPs), councils (including both officers and elected members), Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber, Yorkshire Forward, as well as the media, voluntary sector agencies, pressure groups, housing groups and private sector organisations, particularly those active in corporate social responsibility or those with a direct service role in respect of the areas and communities concerned.

- Visits – particularly within the Bradford programme, which took place during the daytime, including to the City Hall, community and youth projects, and key areas of regeneration. In Shipley, a tour with the Town Centre Manager was cited as providing a particularly good insight into the place. These were key ways of enriching knowledge.

While some participants were very knowledgeable about structures of local governance, others (both worker and resident participants alike) had limited or little knowledge about the roles of elected members or of where influence could be exerted by local people, for example through area committees and forums, community empowerment networks and other democratic structures.

A visit to the City Hall in Bradford by the BD5 Local Links group was particularly revealing in this respect – a significant number of the participants visiting the Council Chamber did not know what went on there or how they as citizens might connect with the democratic structures. This was especially, though not exclusively, true of young people participating in the programme who felt that they had plenty of 'campaigns' that they would want to bring to the attention of elected members.

All programmes included sessions that engaged with local elected members and, in the case of Shipley, the local MP was also involved. To cite just one programme (Todmorden), the session on power and influence included town and district councillors, officers from Calderdale Council and from Calderdale Forward, the LSP and the media.

The programmes revealed that learning and knowledge flowed in more than one direction and that learning can impact participants and contributors alike.

- A Common Purpose graduate contributor, who is responsible for community policing in the area, benefited from participants' local expertise and altered the local service to reflect their concerns and their suggested improvements.

- Similarly, the editor of a local newspaper discovered issues within the community that he stated he would not otherwise have known about.

- A local MP was able to learn from the group's collective concern about lack of affordable/supported housing in the area, while equally they gained knowledge from him about how the parliamentary system worked and might connect with their concerns.

Equally, the participants could hear directly authoritative insights into strategies, constraints and resources that impact on the delivery of the local service, and also have the opportunity to ask difficult questions or challenge the status quo. The operation of the Chatham House Rule was key to ensuring that honest answers were given to such questions.

We would argue that this mutuality and commonality of learning strengthens community voice in two ways – it gives the community the information and knowledge it needs in order to influence effectively; and contributors learn directly from the community about local issues.

We tried in Local Links to avoid the assumption that, when one has outside speakers, they should be regarded as the only experts in the room and that participants are amateurs. Therefore the use of facilitated conversations (with non-hierarchical seating) was adopted most frequently, though we did have some traditional 'question and answer' panel sessions as well.

There were some occasions where learning and insights seemed only to enlighten the participant group. A striking example was the elected member who, when asked what local people involved in Local Links could add to making the place in question more economically vibrant, replied 'Nothing, it is up to the Council and the Chamber of Trade'. As one participant subsequently commented in after-session assessment feedback, 'it helped me to understand some baseline positions of local politicians'.

Building up knowledge of what was going on in the area was also achieved in other ways. For example, in the Bradford BD5 programme, walking through the area in mixed groups revealed 'hidden' places – as one participant said 'the boys took me to places I didn't know existed'.

The programmes also revealed at times that one person's positive can be another's negative – for example, a regeneration project, such as diverting buses from the market place in Shipley town centre, can be positive if you want the town to change and provide a more 'upmarket' retail environment, but negative if you are a current

stallholder offering cheaper commodities who wants to retain the regular customers who come to the town by bus. A canal can be a tourist opportunity for some, a place of danger for others.

We held programme sessions in different venues – another way both of opening up learning about the physical environment and place, and of seeing the locality through another lens. Sessions in Shipley, for example, which were held at the new Windhill Community Centre and at Frizinghall Community Centre placed participants in a different place with different community perspectives.

Some other examples of this include the following.

- The Woodroyd Centre in Bradford BD5 is a new facility and an exemplar of community involvement. It gave Local Links the setting for exploring the topic of community consultation in the provision of new facilities and debate.

- In Heckmondwike, the fact that few participants knew where the Khandaani Dhek Bhal Centre was or that it existed at all was a learning point in itself.

- In Todmorden, a session held in a local primary school provided the context for exploring issues affecting education provision in the town.

Capturing the community *Zeitgeist*

Local Links provided a rapid way of identifying what is important to communities at any one time, forming snapshots of concerns.

By enabling rapid learning and 'research' through group participation and the use of participatory tools such as photographic images, mapping, ranking and so on, much can highlight, identify and analyse the key concerns of a community at any one time. For example, among their pressing concerns, our Local Links groups identified the following:

- affordable housing;

- lack of information about available funding for organisations, projects and services;

- crime and community safety;

- economic downturn;

- young people's needs (including decent housing) and their voice being heard;

- community cohesion and conflict resolution;

- employment and economic prosperity;

- built environment and particularly dereliction;

- democratic deficit and political power;

- media influence.

We found, in all of the programme areas, participants' existing knowledge of structures of governance or particular issues was most extensive and informed when they were closer or more involved in them. Thus, at the starting point of Local Links, knowledge of the politics and routes of influence in the town or immediate area is greater than that of more distant or less familiar contexts.

For example, the Town Council in Todmorden was generally felt by the group to be more influential than Calderdale Metropolitan Council based in Halifax, while such structures as the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber, the Regional Assembly and Yorkshire Forward (the regional economic development agency for Yorkshire and the Humber), and indeed the media, were not well known to the group or considered particularly influential in terms of what actually happened in and for the town. It was surprising also that, despite an extensive masterplanning consultation for Calderdale led by Yorkshire Forward, local participants during the session on power and influence did not consider Yorkshire Forward influential at all.

Similarly, it was clear in one area that some local front-line worker participants employed by local authorities knew little about the function of the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber.

A newly arrived faith worker in one of the areas reported in his feedback assessment that he had learned more about the place from three sessions at Local Links than in the previous nine months, while a participant in Shipley told us that Local Links had completely changed her view of the place and that she had now decided to locate her new business there.

The evaluation report on Local Links[5] points to understanding and knowledge as a major benefit of participating in the programme:

> [There was] a great deal of consensus around improved understanding and knowledge of the local area and how it works. Seeing the 'big picture' was mentioned a number of times …
>
> Respondents cited the benefit of being 'better informed' … on who was making decisions and what were the key issues in their local area.

And:

> We've been able to make links to issues not necessarily on our own radar [Shipley].
>
> I've got a much better understanding of the town, the history, the people and their views. This has really helped me feel at home in Todmorden.

6 Sustainable community skills

In addition to gaining knowledge, information and routes to access and influence (networking), there are other skills within the 'sustainable community' context that are necessary for local people to have a voice and participate effectively. Accordingly, for Local Links building, the following skills were a central objective in achieving the overall aims of the project:

- confidence;

- motivation;

- giving and receiving support;

- storytelling;

- leading beyond authority – making a difference.

This chapter looks at each of these skills areas and how the project addressed them in terms of *why, how* and *so what?* We set out the relevance of those skills, and how we delivered the programme with them in mind, evidencing this with examples drawn from our observations and feedback from the programme sessions, as well as from the independent evaluation report.[1]

Confidence

By confidence in this context we mean the local people's confidence to participate and have a voice.

Why?

Confidence is necessary in order for local people:

- to be able to put over a point of view – strengthening communication skills;

- to lead;

- to work effectively in a team;

- through being more secure in their own values and beliefs to be better able to deal with diversity and challenge.

How?

- Active operation of the Common Purpose conventions.

- Each participant starts by introducing him/herself to the group and therefore establishes him/herself as an equal member of the group from the outset.

- Gathering knowledge and information from contributors, visits, colleagues in the group (see also the previous chapter on knowledge and information).

- Expressing views in and to the group.

- Leading group discussion.

- Presenting the results of working groups in plenary and answering questions (presenting the collective view(s)/wisdom of others).

- Questioning and challenging contributors, speakers (especially those who might be considered experts or particularly influential or powerful – for example, elected members, representatives of the press, governmental bodies).

- Being supported by colleagues – for example, receiving help to overcome problems and difficulties in a community role, being supported in expressing a particular point or points of view, working together on mutual concerns.

- Participating – the conventions help promote and deliver the expectation that everyone will participate actively in Local Links with encouragement from the group and Common Purpose staff to do so.

- Mutual respect – also encouraged by use of the Common Purpose conventions.

- Working and interacting with new people and contacts.

- Observation.

- Small group work – analysis, practical tasks such as cracking 'tough nuts'.

- Chairing and pastoral care from programme director, sensitivity to individual needs and levels of confidence.

- Through the learning aspects of the programme and taking personal responsibility for that learning.

So what?

- Local Links is 'really opening things up for me, increasing my confidence and understanding, and I am now looking to getting more involved in other stuff in the area' (Shipley participant).

- A Todmorden participant had been very reluctant to speak out in the group and told the programme director about her fear of doing this, but around halfway through the programme she made some quite forceful points in one of the discussions, and her feedback tracked this, 'Really felt much more confident about contributing', while another participant recorded 'Initially it was daunting but did make me think deeply about wanting to be involved'.

- Young participants were sometimes shy to speak at first, sticking close to mentors and friends, and generally being more comfortable in small group situations than in plenary. We noted that their confidence grew as the programme progressed. In Bradford, they declared that they had a lot of issues that they would like to bring up and, in Shipley, after the session with the local MP, one of the young people took the lead and scribed for her working group, which included some participants who were far more experienced than herself.

- Inspiration came at times from fellow participants and at others from contributors. Some seasoned campaigners and activists (some of them Common Purpose graduates) contributed – one to the Heckmondwike third session with tips on how to establish and sustain contact with local mosques and Asian communities. Participants at that session commented on how much they felt inspired by the approach and more confident to do it for themselves.

- Some (female) participants from one area told us that a session with several outside 'campaigners' raised their confidence and inspiration levels to contribute more and to actively challenge the status quo in another organisation.

- A front-line worker commented 'I've got more confidence in facilitating groups … I've learned so many techniques just watching [the way Common Purpose does it]'.

- The evaluation report[2] evidences this:

  > … consistent feedback from a range of individuals across all the programme areas that participating in the programme has increased their confidence in speaking in groups … *[They also feel]* more able to ask questions of people in the group and to contact people who they would not have contacted normally outside the group sessions. This feedback came predominantly from people who had less experience in group working/networking situations.

- Inspiration came from the groups themselves too – the young people's contribution was noted by many people, particularly in Shipley, while some participants' willingness to expose their own sensitivities and, for example, their experience of racism and stereotyping was much valued.

Motivation

By this we mean people's enthusiasm about a place, a community or other passions and drivers that get them more involved.

Why?

- The reason for participating in the first place.

- To maintain momentum and sustain the network and working together.

Expectations set out at the beginning of the programmes by the participants provide some of the motivations that prompted people to get involved in Local Links. The evaluation report[3] summarises these as follows:

> A large proportion of the respondents … fed back that they joined the programme in order to meet others working in the area and find out about different groups/organisations.

> Others' expectations were:

- to learn more about how decisions are made – 'who pulls the strings';

- personal skill development;

- to develop joint initiatives – 'positive practical outcomes';

- to influence the development of the area/influence decision-makers.

An example set of expectations from Shipley is included as Appendix 7.

How?

- Sharing experience and knowledge with others.

- Focusing on the place – a place that they really care about.

- Facilitation techniques that build the team/participant group.

- Inspiration from others – ideas and creativity (see above). For example, one comment was 'Brilliant, loads of new idea, lots of extra work in 2006'.

- Attitudes and behaviour – being valued as an expert who has solutions.

So what?

- Evaluation report evidence from participants speaks of 'making links to issues not necessarily on our own radar'.

- The focus on the particular place and its wider context was a clear reason for people to participate but also a context for motivating – and so working together to unpick the place – for example, through positive and negative images (photography) sessions, mapping, and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) exercises.

- Design and delivery of the programme is based firmly in building energy, motivation and cumulative learning.

Giving and receiving support

By this we mean people supporting each other in having a voice and playing a full part in the community, thus building social capital.

Why?

- Support from within the community and not outside it makes 'social capital' and strengthens the community bonds.

- Means that people are not isolated and working on their own.

- Spreads the load, working to counter 'burnout'.

- Builds the 'win-win' habit.

How?

- Familiarisation and getting to know each other.

- Doing business together.

- Mentoring roles within the group.

- Identifying ways of working together and solutions that include the many not the few – thus the final session is entitled 'Our vision our voice' (not '*My* vision my voice').

Evidence[4]

'… the programme gave me the insight and realisation that I could make a career out of community work. People on the programme supported me and having Local Links on my CV helped me get … a job with a community development project in Halifax.'

[In Bradford, a participant from a local community radio station] stated that it had changed the way she approached her reporting … It has

helped her give a voice on the radio to other people involved in local decision-making and activism, not just the usual suspects.

' … it helped me promote the women's group to more people. For example … the CAB *[Citizens Advice Bureau]* now refers people to the women's group. We've got more members now so it has had a big effect.'

- Other organisations and individuals on the Shipley programme helped the young people's project get furniture for their homes, and in return the young people offered to help with babysitting and gardening.

Further examples are cited elsewhere in this report.

It was very clear that, for some participants, the presence of others to provide motivation and support to participate was crucial – for example, the youth leaders who brought young people along and ensured their continuing participation. Some of these leaders were graduates of other Common Purpose programmes for senior decision-makers.

Participants with more experience in being active and making a difference in the community were sometimes also highly motivational in terms of providing support, and in practical ways – for example, the community worker helping the Salvation Army access funding and the community enterprise offering training and ideas to young people's projects.

Storytelling

By this we mean the conversations made up of memories, experiences and sharing of perspectives within the community, by illustration and personal stories.

Why?

- Builds bonds within the group by talking together.

- Brings the place to life – it reveals the richness in communities and places.

- Reveals diversity in all its forms as well as commonalities, and within the context of place.

- Is light-touch and non-oppressive.

- Is creative and thought-provoking.

How?

- Introductions.

- Mapping and location – positive and negative images.

- Experience sharing.

- The storytelling that accompanies group work and making presentations.

- In white space – i.e. the refreshment breaks and other informal sessions.

So what?

- Shipley housing – people in the group with experience of single families, supported housing, poor housing.

- On the Bradford programme, young people's positive and negative images with older people – 'we went to places we didn't know existed'.

- Work shadowing opportunities such as took place on the Todmorden programme.

- Suggestions for action and solutions based on what had happened successfully before explained by means of a story – for example, one participant explained the efficacy of having conflict resolution training held outside familiar territory (i.e. on the canal boat).

- The stories of the past – for example, in Heckmondwike, where the stories of the past not only highlighted the town's former glory but also drew the observation that 'Heckmondwike is haunted by the ghost of its own past'.

- Sharing motivation in a story – for example, a participant shared his experience in Northern Ireland.

Leading beyond authority[5]

By this we mean making a difference by looking outwards, beyond the individual's discrete role (as a worker, office bearer, volunteer within an organisation), and building the skills needed to have influence and deliver change. Sometimes this involves not having a professional or official mandate to do so.

Why?

- Empowers people to take action.

- Creates a 'can do' culture.

- Provides mechanisms and people to achieve positive change.

- Is based in community and people, and supports community and people ownership of solutions.

- Does not cost much, and certainly not anything 'extra'.

- Encourages participatory democracy.

How?

- Local Links sessions incorporated processes to identify and ways of delivering community solutions.

- Builds on and promotes the application of knowledge and information, and seeing the bigger picture.

- Embeds in participants and therefore communities *the legitimacy of being there* and counters feelings of cynicism and being 'consulted to death'.

- Provides opportunities for graduates of Common Purpose programmes to 'lead beyond their authority' by contributing to Local Links (parallel process).

- Problem-solving sessions – 'Tough Nuts'.

- The final sessions of the programme – the challenges, and our vision our voice.

- Emphasises the legitimacy of the Local Links place (i.e. in civil society).

- Provides 'civic acupuncture' in the form of the role model, the idea, example of good practice or inspiration from others that spurs action in others – for example, in Shipley, input from and engagement with the local MP was important in 'showing a way' (i.e. how to submit a petition to the House of Commons), while leaders in the shape of Common Purpose graduates locally and a local housing association director in particular inspired the group with means and methods of increasing voice and influence, and the Common Threads group shared their tips for a successful cross-cultural project with Bradford's Bankfoot Partnership.

These skills, along with enhanced knowledge, networking opportunities and experience of 'encounter the other', provide local people with the tools for successful place making. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007), in the Foreword to its Final Report, cites the importance and contribution to strong and better communities of the 'small fires' of local activity:

> From a spectrum of individual actions to those organised by the voluntary sector, faith organisations and Local Authorities the range of activity is impressive. The local focus of work moves forward in the context of a national government commitment to integration and cohesion. This is a welcome mosaic of activity and one that needs to be built upon, supported and enabled to make an even greater impact.[6]

Local Links, we would argue, is an example that draws these activities together in a potent and informal synergy.

Charles Landry has called this 'urban knitting'[7] – that is, the art of interweaving the apparently contradictory attributes that people say they want their places/ communities to have – vital, dynamic, joyful, edgy, challenging, beautiful, tranquil, strong, resilient. The more this happens, the more successful the place and the communities within them are. Local Links is one way of building these 'urban knitting' skills and empowering people to make a difference both individually and collectively – beyond their authority.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

What did Local Links achieve?

The learning from the project is useful in respect of not only the narrower Common Purpose approach and experience but also the usefulness of the methods employed to others working in community development and capacity building, whether in professional or voluntary roles. Key learning points are the following.

Development and recruitment

- Development and recruitment take time and require support and persistence locally.

- Common Purpose is not widely known at community level.

- Benefits spread beyond the immediate group.

- Participation and 'buy-in' will depend very much on characteristics of the area/ neighbourhood and will vary from place to place, community to community.

- Flexibility in content as well as timing is necessary to meet the needs of the particular place and community.

- Where there is a great deal of worker-led community activity and many 'ways in' that might be pursued, recruitment can be more complex than where there is one key contact or agency.

- Recruitment targets should be wide but, in the end, so long as the participant group is diverse, balanced in the sense of power and as representative as possible of the local community, then the people who attend are the 'right' people.

Benefits of Common Purpose approaches used in the programmes

- Common Purpose conventions (particularly the Chatham House Rule) helped to enable honest, challenging and safe discussion.

- Access by the participants to Common Purpose graduates and the organisation's network of decision-makers.

- Opportunities were created for Common Purpose graduates to be more involved in their local areas by contributing to Local Links.

- Through open rather than closed facilitation techniques, created positive possibilities and opportunities of working with diversity.

- Brought into play the Common Purpose chairing (especially advanced chairing and anti-oppressive behaviour techniques) in order to 'capture the genius in the room'.

- Provided different perspectives/outside-the-box learning.

- Offers development opportunities for Local Links participants to take part in other Common Purpose programmes.

- Provided a forum and scope for high-quality discussion and debate.

- Offered participants a different kind of training course – and ways of running meetings.

Networking and connectivity

- Brought together a diverse group of participants in each area. Provided a supportive environment and forum in which people could seek and share information.

- Encouraged participants and their organisations to 'do business together' and demonstrated that this happens in abundance when given the right circumstances for it to do so.

- Encouraged neighbourliness.

- Encouraged people to network informally and often – the 'excuse to have coffee', which builds mutual support, social capital and ways of tackling problems.[1]

- Impacted outside and beyond the immediate participant group.

- Demonstrated that informal networks, if carefully harnessed and nurtured, can be forces for positive, creative change (cf. when they are used for more negative ends).

- Demonstrated that a social and enjoyable element to the programme makes it positive, pleasant and a good place to be and work in.

Cohesion and difference

- Encouraged participants to value diversity (in all its manifestations) within their community, to *see the world through other people's eyes* and to break down barriers between 'them' and 'us'.

- Brought participants face to face in a safe environment to address 'difficult' issues (power, 'turf wars', community cohesion).

- Brought together participants (often from deprived or minority communities and interests) with key decision-makers and influential agencies – a potent effect.

- Demonstrated that Local Links programmes are dealing with real lives, real issues and real problems experienced by the participants and therefore fragility and sensitivities can emerge that are (arguably) not found to the same extent in 'senior' networks and meetings.

Practical learning and skills

- Groups of participants working and sharing learning provided a fast-track and topical snapshot of local community issues and priorities.

- Widened the horizons of those participating, particularly the participant group but also speakers and contributors to the programme.

- Provided insights and learning on how the local area (and its wider context) works (or, importantly and perhaps frustratingly, the degree to which it does not work).

- Provided specific learning and understanding about decision-making in local governance.

Developing active networks in local communities ───────────────

- Provided participants and others with a snapshot of community issues and current *Zeitgeist*.

Voice and participation in local governance

- Provided opportunities for working together and 'joining up' on issues and projects in and for the local area.

- Increased the confidence of participants, especially those who were not used to presenting their views and ideas.

- Provided a forum where local people on the front line of local services (users and deliverers) could analyse where power and influence lie, and could identify where 'civic acupuncture' might be applied for the well-being of the local community and organisations.

- Encouraged participants to be empowered to make a difference, to occupy 'civil society' space.

- Gave participants opportunities to understand and use the media to get their messages across.

- Encouraged problem solving, solution finding and communities doing for themselves together (neighbourliness).

- Revealed much about the degree to which communities feel disempowered and excluded from having a voice in governance.

Participant views

Participants valued the time spent on the programmes and in the evaluation report they recommend Local Links thus:

- an opportunity to network effectively;

- it's not what you know but who you know;

- sell it as partnership development;

- helps you to break in and make contact with the movers and shakers;

- find out what's happening on your patch;

- come and get connected in your community;

- get knowledge of your own community and learn how different sectors work.[2]

Recommendations for future delivery of Local Links programmes in the context of community participation and increasing voice in local governance

Based on the experience of this action research project and the independent evaluation that accompanied it, the following recommendations are made for future programmes based on the Local Links model.

Development and recruitment

- Adequate pre-programme outreach, development and recruitment time should be considered, especially in those areas where there are cultural and other divides, and a lack of existing networks that cross them in the community.

- Have available for prospective participants clear marketing and information material that emphasises networking and mutual support.

- If programmes are being delivered by Common Purpose, then presence of Common Purpose office is crucial; for other agencies and organisations delivering this model, appropriate access/networking routes are essential.

- Engage with key agencies and organisations for support and access (which may call for more strategic, policy-linked information material than that aimed at participants).

- Have local community workers and other contacts who are known and trusted in the area to recruit participants.

- Value the 'bush telegraph' and find ways of accessing it – especially to find the 'unusual suspects'.

Selecting and prioritising locations for Local Links

- While Local Links could take place 'anywhere', consideration should be made regarding prioritising where it might be needed most or where its impact would be greatest. This might be, for example, in places where participation by the community is evidentially not happening to a significant extent (this might be where there is a heavy 'top-down' approach by local authorities and other service deliverers), or in areas of high deprivation, or where there is little experience of different/diverse communities and organisations working together. The programmes would be less useful where there is a lot of support and a tradition of working together effectively.

Participation

- Incorporate ways in which barriers (e.g. language, gender, culture, class, age) can be overcome to encourage participation from excluded sections of the community. For example:
  - encourage buddying and/or mentoring;
  - be flexible regarding timing and reflect local conditions (recognising that there is no timing that will suit everyone);
  - consider shorter sessions held more frequently over longer periods of time;
  - consider ways in which migrant and new communities can be involved as well as the established one and always bear in mind creating opportunities for 'encountering the other';
  - be mindful of the power balance within the participant group, though not to the extent that this diminishes the diversity of the group;
  - be flexible about participation and welcome people when and where they can come – recognise that people have other difficulties and real barriers in many aspects of their lives, especially in poorer and more disadvantaged areas.

- Offer (subtle) support and nurturing to the less confident in the group.

- Offer accreditation (for example, through Open College Network or university access credit) as an option to those who would value it.

- Make people welcome.

Design and delivery

- Group sizes can vary depending on the vibrancy and extent of community activities, groups and services, but should be not less than 12 in number and not more than 35.

- Vary the venue and the structure of the sessions (in line with the diversity and 'seeing the world through other people's eyes' theme) and in response to participants' different learning styles.

- Provide lots of opportunities for small group work with different participants – thus creating new connections, getting beyond 'cliques' and breaking down barriers and creative ideas.

- Be flexible and sensitive to local issues/needs, and design and adapt the curriculum accordingly.

- Make the experience sociable and 'fun'.

- Value participants' individual expertise and viewpoints, and enable everyone to express them.

- Encourage debate and expression of differing views and challenge – this may at times make for 'edgy' sessions, which need careful facilitation.

- Invite contributions from Common Purpose graduates.

- Adopt a non-oppressive approach and invite and encourage participation, especially where the local context is oppressive and hostile to positive networking.[3]

- Provide plenty of occasions for meeting and engaging with representatives from key agencies and structures.

Sustainability of the networks and the benefits

- The pilot programmes were 'one-off' – future programmes should be run in the form of consecutive programmes over (ideally) a minimum of three years in order to establish the Local Links 'brand' and build momentum and connecting up cohorts in the expanding network/Local Links community.

- Local Links would offer most value where it connects with other community capacity-building initiatives. Thus it could come as part of a process (the beginning, the middle – for example, participatory appraisal training, 'get to know your city', 'together we can' and other models could be other parts of the continuum).

- Encourage continuing support from and engagement with existing structures – community workers active in the area, community engagement networks, area management and so on.

Resources needed

Costs for programmes would include staff time for recruitment, co-ordination, facilitation, venue hire, participants' travel and caring costs, materials, publicity and marketing, administrative costs such as telephone, postage and stationery. Delivery of such programmes could be shared between some organisations (for example, local authorities or housing associations) undertaking recruitment of participant groups and other organisations (perhaps training providers) providing the co-ordination and facilitation of the programmes.

Notes

Chapter 1

1.   See Chapter 4.
2.   www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/about/whatwedo/communities.
3.   For example, Skidmore *et al.* (2006); Young Foundation (2006); ESRC (2007).
4.   DCLG (2006), Foreword, p. 4.
5.   DCLG (2006), Executive Summary, p. 8.
6.   DCLG (2006), p. 12.
7.   Compact Code of Good Practice on Community Groups, Home Office/
       Compact Working Group 2001, cited in HM Treasury (2006), 2.4, p. 9.
8.   www.lyonsinquiry.org.uk/.
9.   Young Foundation (2006), p. 26.
10.   DCLG (2006), 2.6, p. 26.
11.   Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007), Executive Summary.
12.   'Do policies to promote community participation in governance build social
       capital', JRF *Findings* (November 2006, Ref. 1963), www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/
       findings/government/1963.asp.
13.   Icarus Collective (2008).

Chapter 2

1.   Icarus Collective carried out this evaluation work, which is the subject of a
       separate report (Icarus Collective, 2008).
2.   See Appendix 9 for list of Project Advisory Group members.
3.   This was particularly crucial for Common Purpose and JRF; for other
       organisations undertaking a similar project, this knowledge and access would
       be available through appropriate agencies and other networks.
4.   www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/soa.asp.
5.   www.jrf.org.uk/research-and-policy/neighbourhood-renewal/.
6.   www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/soa.asp.
7.   Common Purpose's Matrix and Focus programmes are leadership
       programmes for senior decision-makers. Programme teams in Leeds, Bradford
       and Kirklees run these programmes in the West Yorkshire sub-region.
8.   Middleton (2007).
9.   The full text of the conventions can be found in Appendix 1.

10. Common Purpose programme directors are trained to recognise the range of individual and collective learning styles, diversity and difference within the participant group, and to respond to the energies, needs and challenges that lie within the group. This involves, among other methods, using and directing the conventions appropriately in order to open up and widen learning possibilities and participant interaction.

Chapter 3

1. In the final chapter of this report, we make recommendations that address the barriers to making the networks sustainable.

Chapter 4

1. From a presentation by the Rt Hon The Bishop of London on the role of St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, London, April 2007.
2. Wood *et al.* (2006).
3. Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007), Foreword.
4. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) Final Report states in the Foreword: 'We live in contradictory times! We have never been more global in outlook and our day to day experiences are influenced, often in subtle ways by the world economy, politics and cultural imports'.
5. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that: 'The great majority of low achievers – more than three-quarters – are white and British, and far more are boys than girls. The analysis found nearly half of all low achievers are white British males. White British students on average – boys and girls – are more likely than other ethnic groups to persist in low achievement' ('Tackling low educational achievement', JRF *Findings* [June 2007, Ref. 2095]).
6. Employers, for example in the construction industry, are employing Polish workers because of their motivation, good skills and a strong work ethic, which they are not finding in the established communities.
7. Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007), Executive Summary.
8. Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007), Foreword.

Chapter 5

1.   DCLG (2006), 2.40, p. 39.
2.   DCLG (2006), 3.15, p. 54.
3.   de Souza Briggs (2003), p. 8.
4.   Chapter 4 examines in more depth the learning that comes from diversity.
5.   Icarus Collective (2008).

Chapter 6

1.   Icarus Collective (2008).
2.   Icarus Collective (2008).
3.   Icarus Collective (2008).
4.   Icarus Collective (2008).
5.   Middleton (2007).
6.   Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007), Foreword.
7.   Charles Landry presentation at Integreat Yorkshire Conference, York, June 2006.

Chapter 7

1.   'Do policies to promote community participation in governance build social capital?', *JRF Findings* (November 2006, Ref. 1963), www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/government/1963.asp.
2.   Icarus Collective (2008).
3.   At the time of writing we were unable to identify specific courses for facilitators and animateurs. However, the Occupation Standards in Community Work identifies many of the attitudes and behaviours and skills that are appropriate to this kind of work (www.fcdl.org.uk/publications/documents/nos/Standards%20040703.pdf). The Community Development Foundation, Open College Network, Northern College, Federation for Community Development Learning and Community Development Exchange (CDX) among others signpost and have links to training and courses available both nationally and locally as well as practical examples of good practice. Participatory appraisal (PA) training provides learning in the attitudes and behaviours used in facilitating Local Links. This training is available from various agencies in different areas of the country.

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Skidmore, P., Bound, K. and Lownsbrough, H. (2006) *Community Participation: Who Benefits*? York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Wood, P., Landry, C. and Bloomfield, J. (2006) *Cultural Diversity in Britain: A Toolkit for Cross-cultural Co-operation*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Young Foundation (2006) *Local Democracy and Neighbourhood Governance*. London: Young Foundation

Appendix 1: Common Purpose conventions

To help you to get the most from your experience with Common Purpose, we ask you to respect the following conventions during the programme. These 'rules of engagement' have evolved over many years and have proved their worth in helping us to deliver high-quality; challenging programmes that provide value for the time you spend with us. They apply to everyone involved in a Common Purpose event.

Be open to learning

Be prepared to hear views that you may not normally wish to hear – and be willing to learn something from them. You will certainly hear views expressed with which you deeply disagree; we take the view that leaders need to know what other people are thinking, in order to be better able to work with, against or around them.

Adhere strictly to the Chatham House Rule of confidentiality

This international rule states that: 'participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed; nor may it be mentioned that the information was received at the meeting'.

Both contributors and participants must feel that they can talk openly and it is a privilege to get these insights. If the rule is broken, contributors would be unlikely to continue to speak freely, and future participants would miss out.

Avoid both giving and taking offence

It is important that everyone feels able to say what they really think. When views are articulated bluntly or clumsily, we ask you to suspend instant judgement and enter into constructive discussion on them. We also ask you to communicate in a respectful way and to listen to any feedback as to why your ideas or language might cause offence.

Be a leader

Make sure that your contributions are to the point and be prepared to ask the difficult questions. Speak as yourself. Support fellow participants when they have the courage to go out on a limb. Do not delegate issues to the Programme Director if the group is better placed to deal with them. (For instance, if it appears that a convention is being broken, participants should take the initiative to raise concerns, rather than leaving it to the Programme Director.)

Show commitment

Make arrangements so you can attend each day in full, keep to the timings given, prepare yourself well and ensure that you are not interrupted.

Appendix 2: Participant flyer

Local Links

A new Common Purpose project in your neighbourhood

What is Local Links?

Local Links is a new project that will bring together key workers, activists and community leaders who are working to make a difference in their community, for a series of activities tailored to the needs of the locality. It's being offered first in Heckmondwike, the Bradford Trident (BD5) area, Shipley and Todmorden, and may expand to other locations across the UK. The aim of Local Links is to create more effective neighbourhood and community networks by connecting local leaders and helping to build awareness of what others are doing, as well as confidence and mutual support.

Who's behind it?

Common Purpose is piloting the Local Links project, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in four areas of West Yorkshire over the next 18 months.

Since 1989 Common Purpose has developed a range of programmes designed to help people to be better leaders at work and in civil society. These programmes are run in 45 locations across the UK and in an increasing number of cities in Europe and South Africa. The Local Links project will draw on this expertise and transfer the tools and techniques to neighbourhood-level governance.

The project will be developed in consultation with local-level partners including local authorities, the health service, the police service, housing bodies, local businesses, as well as voluntary and community sector organisations.

How do I qualify for a place on this project?

If you are involved in local governance in any way, such as by being a school governor or teacher with responsibility for citizenship, being a housing manager

or the chair of a tenants' association, or a community police officer or member of the community safety partnership, or you are a community development worker or community leader, to name just a few examples, then you can apply to join the project. There is no charge, as it is totally funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

How would I and my organisation benefit from participating in this project?

You will find out about linking and working with other organisations and people who can help you and your organisation. You can find out how to raise your organisation's profile and influence other organisations more effectively, and you can learn more about some of the issues affecting your locality. You can also pick up new ideas and contacts and find out about resources to support you in your role.

We are committed to:

• Building a group that is as diverse, inclusive and reflective of the local community as possible.

• Providing sessions that are informative, creative and enjoyable.

• Providing pleasant surroundings and good food.

• Helping with caring and transport costs where they are needed.

• Listening and learning about your needs and issues, and tailoring the programme accordingly.

• Awarding certificates to all those who complete the programme.

Please get in touch with Common Purpose now to find out more.

Appendix 3: Flyer aimed at infrastructure organisations and key agencies

Local Links

A new Common Purpose project in West Yorkshire

Common Purpose is introducing the Local Links project in four neighbourhoods in West Yorkshire, namely Bradford BD5, Shipley, Todmorden and the Upper Calder Valley and Heckmondwike.

Local Links, which is funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, will bring together local workers and community leaders and activists who increasingly are expected to 'join up' more effectively to make a difference in their neighbourhoods and communities. Local Links seeks to provide a 'fast track' to achieving this goal through a programme of customised activities, run over several months, for a diverse group of participants from each neighbourhood.

Developing active networks in local communities

Why	How	Results
Senior decision-makers are increasingly well networked in towns, cities and local authority areas, but such benefits are generally unavailable to community-based decision-makers and active citizens. School governors, for example, often have no links with tenants' groups, who have no knowledge of the voluntary group providing support to single parents and the Sunday footballers using the park. There are demonstrable advantages in increasing mutual understanding, developing common aims, creating a shared language and establishing mutual trust. Local Links seeks to make this happen by bringing together new networks of neighbourhood leaders. The Local Links project is based on the premise that improved networking can assist active citizens in local neighbourhoods, workers and community leaders alike, to be more informed, more effective, better supported and strengthened in their roles.	Establish and support locality-based networks of key workers, decision-makers and active citizens in each area; providing a tailored programme of activities designed to improve participants' knowledge of their locality, understanding of each other's organisations and their capacity to join up and work well together. The intention is to link with, though not duplicate, existing local structures. The project will work alongside local authorities, the health service, the police service, housing bodies, local businesses, voluntary and community sector organisations and others. Common Purpose's 16 years' experience of developing better leaders, stronger communities and new networks – through proven techniques and tools – will contribute to the success of the project.	• Mutual support for local decision-makers, community-face professionals and active citizens. • Joint working and improved co-ordination of services. • Improved confidence and decision-making supported by an increase in knowledge of local context. • Skills sharing. • Community benefit from a more holistic approach to neighbourhood governance. • Increased community power and influence. • Higher visibility and impact for and by local decision-makers. • Self-sustaining, energised networking structures for neighbourhood-based decision-makers.

Appendix 4: Project timetable

April – November 2005: development, recruitment and design.
November 2005 – April 2006: Todmorden programme.
January – June 2006: Heckmondwike programme.
Each comprised six four-hour sessions held in the evenings.

June – October 2006: Shipley programme.
This comprised one long session and four four-hour sessions at two-weekly intervals, with a break in the summer holidays during which two optional 'homework' sessions were held.

November 2006 – February 2007: Bradford BD5 programme.
This comprised six five-hour sessions held from 9.30am to 2.30pm.

We held follow-up sessions in Todmorden, Heckmondwike and Shipley to re-examine issues for the towns, and to enable the Local Links evaluation team to meet with participants.

Appendix 5: Local Links programme

Each session c. 3.5–4 hours

	How	Outcomes
Session one: 'Getting to know each other'	Introductions, information, analysis, expectations, establishing baselines and starting points, setting ground rules	Members of the group get to know each other better. They understand the programme and project better. They begin to build relationships and the network. They identify and address issues together.
Inter-session activity	Working in pairs on set task – positive and negative images	Builds relationships, learning for next session.
Session two: 'Our place'	Group work, information, analysis Mapping/SWOT, etc. with accompanying storytelling	Participants share, gain knowledge and understand different perspectives on the area/community. They gain confidence and learning. They build individual and collective voice.
Session three: 'Gaining access and influence'	Participatory group work Matrix of influence Panel	Increased understanding of power and influence and constraints of key agencies and organisations. Participants begin to understand their potential in terms of their own power and influence. Increasing understanding of how society works.
Inter-session activity	Work/organisational shadowing and visits	Develops understanding of diverse perspectives and contexts (knowledge and learning), relationships further developed, core network activated and energised.

	How	**Outcomes**
Session four: 'Wider networks'	Problem-solving workshops Panel from organisations 'further away', information	Participants experience and understand other perspectives, contexts and organisations. Relationships further developed, core network further activated and energised through working together. Deepening understanding of diverse and multi-agency groups.
Session five: 'The challenges'	Group work – mini consultancies on one another's challenges – analysing, finding and delivering solutions	Learning problem solving and working together to find ways forward. Learning through doing. Strengthens group and relationships.
Inter-session activity	Preparation of presentations in groups	Participants work together on projects, the value of network and relationships underpinned, support and mutual understanding.
Session six: 'Our vision our voice'	Presentation, reflection, consolidation of learning	Participants recognise their power and potential to have greater voice, self-reliance and mutual support – ground established for sustainability and ongoing activity in the future.

Appendix 6: Sample agenda

Shipley Local Links

Agenda

Gaining access and influence

Monday 10 July 2006

Wycliffe Primary School
Saltaire Road,
Shipley, BD18 3HZ

5.30pm   **Refreshments and networking**

6.00pm   **Welcome and introduction to the session**
Susie Hay, Associate Programme Director, Common Purpose

6.10pm   **The matrix of influence**

6.50pm   **Supper with guests**

7.20pm   **Perspectives on power**

- Councillor John Briggs (Baildon, Liberal Democrats)
- Councillor Hawarun Hussain (Shipley, Green Party)
- Councillor Tony Miller (Windhill and Wrose, Labour Party)

Groupwork and discussion panel

8.50pm   **Assessment and briefing for the next session**
Susie Hay

9.00pm   **Close**

Appendix 7: Expectations from the programme – Shipley participants

Expectations

Employment	Better training. More training for people of all ages.
Accommodation	Have a voice and influence. Improve knowledge. Quality of housing has to go up. To either improve flats or knock them down and build new houses for younger people and single parents. A safe, secure place for single people to live instead of living in flats in rather rough areas. People should get proper housing where they enjoy living.
Communication	To improve my knowledge of Shipley because I don't know what's happening any more. Get a young voice to work alongside the people who make decisions to make things work. Encourage more young people to participate. Inform and be informed. Encourage each other to make Shipley better. Find out what is going on in Shipley – the main issues. Information. Better understanding of what it means to live and work in Shipley. To better connect. Share my experiences. Good practice. Learn about new developments. To show people that God is interested in Shipley. Listen to others. Learn how to recruit volunteers. To find out more about needs and possibilities for Shipley. Develop a directory of group members, their interests, their needs and how we can help each other. Link up common aims. Develop networks and partnerships. To connect up with agencies, individuals and organisations in the area. Build links.

Expectations

	Gain more knowledge of the area (regeneration improvements) – services, local needs and issues.
Social life/work life	Meet a group of new friends to help and support each other.
	Meet other people from different sectors.
	I would like to meet a range of new and friendly people who can help me and assist me in getting problems solved and I could hopefully do the same for them.
	Find people who I could work with.
	To make a lot of links – network.
	Make connections – find new people and find a 'common purpose'.
	To be more focused in addressing issues.
	To hear people's stories.
	To be enlightened and challenged.
	To hear perspectives other than my own on what Shipley is about.
	To offer to be a mentor/buddy to anyone in the group.
	Share sources of funding.
	Raise profile of each other's projects.
	To do intergenerational activities.
	Spread the word about volunteering.
Environment	Brighten up Shipley because it's too depressing and no one looks happy.
	Fixing the clock tower will cost £40,000 and it has been said that it isn't worth repairing. If so many people want to save the clock tower maybe it should be up to them to raise the money.
	Volunteer around the area.
	Make Shipley a better place to live.
	Link up with groups to make Shipley a better and safer place to live.

Appendix 8: Further information on the four locations of Local Links

Todmorden

Demographics

- Todmorden has a population of about 10,500 and has a small but significant BME (mostly Asian) population (5 per cent); nearly 20 per cent of the population is over 60.

- Significant numbers of 'newcomers' settling in the town – e.g. commuters, retired professionals, new members of the gay and lesbian communities, migrant workers from Eastern Europe.

Levels of deprivation

- Todmorden ward is one of the 25 per cent of most deprived in England (ranked 1,543 out of 8,414 wards).[1]

- Fifteen per cent of the housing stock is social housing with areas of sub-standard housing.

- Accompanying social exclusion (measured nationally in terms of income; employment; health deprivation and disability; education, skills and training; housing; and geographical access to services).[2]

Political representation

Local political representation is on Todmorden Town Council (predominantly Liberal Democrat); three Liberal Democrat elected members from the area serve on Calderdale Council. The MP for Calderdale is Christine McCafferty (Labour).

Regeneration

Todmorden is part of the Upper Calder Valley Renaissance initiative run by Yorkshire Forward[3] and associated built environment improvements, though the view locally is that insufficient funds are available to tackle all the regeneration needs – economic, social and physical.

Heckmondwike

Demographics

Heckmondwike urban district has a population of some 18,000, of which 14 per cent are BME (11.8 per cent South Asian – mostly Pakistani). Nearly 19 per cent of the population is aged 60 and over.

Political representation

Heckmondwike is part of the Kirkees Council local authority area, with three local elected members for the ward at the time of Local Links development: one Liberal Democrat, one Labour and one British National Party (BNP).[4] The local MP is Shahid Malik (Labour).

Levels of regeneration

- The town has qualified for relatively minor regeneration initiatives and does not fall within the geographical areas that qualify for European Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) or other major funding streams or regeneration projects.

- The built environment of the public spaces is generally of poor quality, and the town centre is less economically active than neighbouring towns such as Cleckheaton and Dewsbury.

Levels of deprivation

- As well as some relatively prosperous residential areas, Heckmondwike has areas of deprivation and associated need including a large 'white' social housing

estate. There are also areas of privately owned poorer-quality housing occupied by both the Asian (predominantly Pakistani) and white residents.

• At the time of the project these were not, in terms of numbers, large enough to trigger the types of funding and interventions, for example 'super output'[5] status. While Dewsbury and Huddersfield were benefiting from a range of new initiatives like Sure Start and Neighbourhood Pathfinder at the time of selection, Heckmondwike was not.

Shipley

Demographics

• There is a population of around 10,000 people, of which the BME (mostly Pakistani) population is 6 per cent. Twenty-five per cent of the housing stock is social housing, and there are pockets of serious deprivation both in the town centre itself and in surrounding areas.

• We were told by a number of people that there are significant numbers of care leavers housed near the town centre.

• Increasing numbers of migrant workers from Eastern Europe are coming to live and work in the area.

Political representation

Within BMDC three Green Party councillors represent Shipley ward. Other parties (Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative) have elected members serving the surrounding wards of Baildon, Windhill and Wrose. The parliamentary constituency MP is Philip Davies (Conservative).

Levels of deprivation

• Shipley town centre is close to, and affected in a range of ways by, areas of severe deprivation, notably Windhill, as well as areas like Frizinghall, which has a predominantly Pakistani population (73 per cent) and mainly white areas like upper Baildon and Wrose.

- There are also significant areas of affluence in Shipley and the town centre is impacted on by bijou places like Saltaire,[6] a mile to the west, which draws tourists and other visitors to its more upmarket 'offer' in terms of attractions, shopping and built environment.

Levels of regeneration

- Town centre has seen little regeneration compared to other areas in BMDC, though the Airedale Masterplan[7] identifies it as an area for considerable physical development.

- Town centre is in decline economically – and considered in need of improvement, especially in terms of its retail offer.

- Canal/riverside developments indicate some growing regeneration of the built/waterside environments

Bradford BD5

Demographics

Statistics are not available for the BD5 area as a whole, but as a guide.

- The Trident area, which makes up most, but not all, of the BD5 area, has a population of about 11,500, of which there is a BME population of 60 per cent (50 per cent of whom are mainly Pakistani Asians).[8] The white population tends to be of the older generation.

- Increasingly, migrant workers and asylum seekers are coming into the area; they and a small established Afro-Caribbean community make up the rest of the BME population.

- In contrast with other Local Links pilot areas, 30 per cent of the residents are under 16 years of age.

Political representation

At the time of the Local Links programme, there were three elected members (all Labour) representing Little Horton Ward, which makes up most, but not all, of the BD5 area, on BMDC, which was a hung council with the Conservatives leading the council having made an agreement with the Liberal Democrats. Marsha Singh (Labour) is the constituency MP for Bradford West, which includes BD5.

Levels of regeneration

- New Deal for Communities (NDC) Trident has been operating since 2000. Set up to address serious deprivation in terms of crime, standards of health, education and housing, Trident has delivered capital and revenue projects that by 2010 will total around £50 million in parts of three neighbourhoods – West Bowling, Marshfields and Park Lane.

- Trident works in partnership with other public sector service providers, businesses, organisations and other initiatives operating in the area.

- BD5 also includes areas that are not within the Trident target communities and that have benefited from some, but significantly less, inward investment and regeneration.

Notes

1. http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk.

2. www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=9421&Pos=1&ColRank=2&Rank=272.

3. See www.ucvr.org.uk for a description of this initiative.

4. A BNP councillor was elected to represent Heckmondwike for the first time in 2005 and, during the programme, in May 2006, a further BNP councillor was elected.

5. www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/soa.asp.

6. Saltaire has UNESCO World Heritage status as the site of Titus Salt's model woollen mill town.

7. www.airedalepartnership.org/masterplan.asp.

8. According to the 2001 Census, Bradford's combined Asian population breaks into: 68,000 Pakistani, 12,500 Indian and 5,000 Bangladeshi.

Appendix 9: Project Advisory Group members

- Alison Gilchrist, Director, Practice Development, Community Development Foundation

- Bana Gora, Bradford Manager, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

- Steve Hartley, Chief Executive, Bradford Trident

- Reverend Michael Hills, Hessle Road Network/Humberside Industrial Mission

- Karen Houghton, Head of the Regional Centre of Excellence, Yorkshire Forward

- John Low, Area Regeneration Co-ordinator, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

- Bary Malik, Director, ADAAB

- Mike Smith, Head of Human Resources, Yorkshire Water

- Joyce Thacker, Chief Executive, Connexions South Yorkshire

- Janet Tonge, Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber

- Pete Wilde, Director, COGS

- Louise Woodruff, Principal Policy Development Manager, Joseph Rowntree Foundation