*f*indings

The effectiveness of local service partnerships on disadvantaged estates

Residents on the poorest estates suffer disproportionately high levels of disadvantage. Their needs and problems are complex and often fall outside the scope and responsibility of any one service. Local service partnerships aim to connect all the local agencies of service delivery and bring the agencies and the communities together. Demonstration projects supported by PEP in Coventry and Burnley showed that:

- The partnerships empowered local residents and staff involved directly in service delivery. Voluntary organisations and community groups were an essential part of the demonstration projects; substantial consultation with residents led to a redefinition of the problems faced locally, although this work was difficult and time-consuming.

- The move towards co-ordination and co-operation led to direct improvements in service delivery and customer care.

- An ethos of consultative and collaborative service planning and implementation was essential. The process itself altered the viewpoint of participants and brought cultural change throughout service organisations.

- Partnerships required active co-ordination and community development support; negotiation, action plans and review were central to the process.

- They marked a shift from troubleshooting to planning, development and prevention barriers; in Burnley, for example, an innovative project targets known offenders and offers support to stop offending behaviour.

- They did not depend on extra funding from the service organisations but did influence the use of existing resources. Partners had to be committed to devoting resources of all kinds to the agreed actions.

- PEP concludes that local service partnerships don't solve all problems but are an effective way of addressing some of the most pressing concerns of residents on disadvantaged estates. Particular advantages over other forms of service delivery are that partnerships are:
  - long-term and potentially permanent.
  - evolutionary and dynamic; the process of setting up a service partnership is systematic and incremental from negotiation of the partnership to joint action planning, implementation and review.
  - 'bottom up'; they address problems as perceived and experienced by local residents.

JR

Defining the problems

"The problem as articulated by parents is that they feel unsupported. Many parents are themselves young and do not have immediate family in the area. Social workers and health visitors are often seen as powerful professionals to whom a good impression must be made, rather than people to confide in and provide advice. The lack of affordable play, crèche and nursery facilities means 'having a break' is difficult as is taking advantage of educational social and leisure opportunities. So poverty is causing isolation which further adds to the stress caused by managing the difficult job of parenting on a low income."
Working together; Area Action Plan 1995-7
(Wood End Area, Coventry)

Social housing estates are among the poorest in the country, with only four in ten households having an income from work. Residents have incomes of less than half the national average. Typically, there are high numbers of children in relation to adults. The problems that concern residents are complex, no single agency's specific responsibility and only capable of solution by co-operative initiative.

Such problems include isolation, bleak environment, poor health, stressed parents, unsociable behaviour and fear of crime. Residents often see these as their most pressing concerns while low incomes and unemployment are viewed as irreversible conditions of life.

Organisations providing services concentrate on the most acute problems and may only be 'firefighting'. Working in isolation they cannot take on prevention and development. Local workers also feel helpless and overwhelmed but have no remit to work beyond their own service boundaries. Resources are therefore wasted; overlap and duplication occur while gaps in service provision cannot be plugged.

Services provided by contracts are the responsibility of both purchaser and provider and so are further fragmented. Local wide-ranging concerns cannot be taken on where services are rigidly defined and boundaries tightly drawn. Community groups make a vital contribution but cannot alone achieve the overview necessary to meet all local needs and do not have the remit or power to do so.

Local service partnerships

Building on its work on priority estates over many years, PEP has supported initiatives by Coventry City Council and Burnley Borough Council to find out whether and how existing services can work with residents in strategic co-ordination of service delivery. These initiatives started from a baseline of an existing Area Management Initiative in Coventry and the development of an Estate Management Board in Burnley.

The work with PEP during 1995-7 aimed to help develop a comprehensive approach bringing together service co-ordination, new forms of planning and delivery and a strong community voice. Partnerships would connect all the local agencies of service delivery and bring the agencies and the communities together.

Characteristics of these local service partnerships were:

- objectives to improve local services by agencies working together with residents to target resources to problems and need defined locally. This entailed long-term strategic planning in a defined geographical area.

- a core team, including an area co-ordinator and community development worker. In the Wood End area of Coventry the Area Co-ordination Team also consisted of representatives from housing, leisure, social services, education, environmental services, city development, the police, health services (purchaser and provider) and two representatives of the local Voluntary Sector Forum. In Burnley the same agencies became involved but a comparable formal structure was not established.

- a partnership agreement negotiated incrementally. Local authorities and other large organisations made a corporate commitment to the partnership. Within the local authority this meant political agreement by the council giving corporate support.

- area action planning on a two- to three-year cycle including:
  - problem definition by wide interactive consultation;
  - action planning resulting in published plans;
  - implementation by the partners and others, backed by allocated resources;
  - an end of plan review as a base for the next planning cycle.

- the process was guided by cross-cutting action groups which sprang from the initial consultation. These were co-ordinated by team members and included residents and a wide spectrum of agencies. In the Burnley project there were eight Action Planning Groups and ten in the Coventry project. Examples are 'housing', 'health promotion', 'family support and under 8's', 'community safety', 'employment and training' etc.

- resource allocation was based on the action plans; this was made easier where there was area-based accounting and locally controlled budgets. In Coventry now, area plans feed directly into the City Council's annual service planning and resource allocation cycle.

Factors causing differences in the two projects were:

- the difference in the size of the areas affected the aims, organisation and development of the projects. In Coventry, the Wood End Area Co-ordination Team covered an area of 11,000 households. PEP's focus there was on the three main council estates in the larger area (3,761 households within Wood End and surrounding estates); still a large area in terms of intensive community development. The project in Burnley covered 1,788 households. Local workers were rarely locally based and worked over wider

areas. They contributed to the service partnership through action groups.

- the size and type of local authority caused differences in the way services relate to local teams and the way the projects were managed corporately. Coventry is a much larger authority and has unitary status. In Burnley local government services are split between the county and the borough: both were involved in the service partnership.

Stages of development

The following sequence of events was common to both initiatives:

Negotiation: this was the most crucial stage, both requiring service organisations to commit themselves to partnership and starting to define the part residents would play. All partners needed to be clear about aims, targets and evaluation and to reach agreement about resourcing the partnership.

Establishing the partnership included the appointments of co-ordinators and community development workers, the organisation of a team or advisory group, a training programme, information exchange and initial publicity.

Production of action plans was based on collection of baseline data and area-wide consultation including door-to-door surveys, small group discussions and estate conferences. The action plans were developed by issue-based action groups and programmed for two years with details of actions and methods of monitoring and review.

Implementation was co-ordinated by the co-ordinator through the action groups. There was single and joint agency action based on existing and new resources.

Review: At the end a review was undertaken to assess results and feed into the next planning cycle. The partnerships also reviewed their own operations and made changes.

The achievements of the demonstration projects

"It has brought agencies together, they are learning each others' language and working with agencies who do work with the community, learning to work at different levels."

The demonstration projects made substantial achievements which had much in common. Both areas have high unemployment, low incomes and high numbers of children relative to adults and needs associated with these. Both local authorities have recognised this way of working as an appropriate response to the needs of disadvantaged people and have extended it to other areas. Part of the achievement is learning and development through people and agencies working together but there are also many new multi-agency actions and initiatives:

Health - in Coventry both purchaser and provider are represented on the Area Management Team and there is a co-ordinated strategic approach to health in the area. Numerous projects include a community fitness programme through Leisure Services, an anti-smoking project, co-ordinated physical education in primary schools and a 'safe as houses' project to reduce accidents and emergency hospital admissions. In Burnley the Action Group, which includes the health authority and Burnley Healthcare Trust, Lancashire Social Services and local community projects, have planned for a two-stage development of facilities to deliver health services.

Family support- in Burnley, funding has been secured for a Children and Families Family Support Centre. The partnership includes social services, health, education, Burnley College, voluntary organisations and community groups. In Coventry a number of inter-agency projects have been established, including after-school care, a community crèche and parenting skills courses set up by the existing Family Centre.

Community safety- in both areas numerous projects have contributed to safety and feeling safe. In Coventry these include a mediation service to tackle bullying, motorcycle barriers to deter joy-riding and support for victims of anti-social behaviour. In Burnley an innovative project targets known offenders and offers support to stop offending behaviour. Within the Burnley project has coincided with a 30 per cent reduction in crime.

The environment in Coventry a contracts action group has worked with the client and direct service organisations to improve grounds maintenance, litter and refuse collection and street lighting while in Burnley service agreements defining standards have been developed.

Lessons from the demonstration projects

Both projects influenced targeting of resources and services in the same way. They used attention to local concerns to improve service provision.

Community development was essential, though the task was difficult and the timescales required longer than two years. The community development workers aimed to reduce isolation and exclusion by ensuring that fewer residents 'fell through the net' and households were not stigmatised. Much community development time was also spent supporting and involving existing and new community groups. Action planning required intensive consultation which was also the basis of on-going involvement.

The long-term strategies in both areas were mainly dependent on existing revenue. However, strategic planning also provided a basis for capital spending as mainstream and external funds became available. The specific funding of the projects themselves (i.e. the cost of the co-ordinator, community development worker and support staff) was very small by comparison with the total revenue and capital funding available to these areas.

Both projects provided a potential basis for social and economic regeneration tackling exclusion and

poverty. This provided a strategic framework as these projects were concerned with long-term planning, unlike many regeneration initiatives which are short-term interventions often finance-led and externally controlled.

The co-ordinators from the chief executive's department of the local authority provided an overview of the projects and maintained corporate links to the service departments. Both projects were also dependent on action groups, which helped to bring in other agencies and residents, focus thinking and develop plans. These groups remained flexible and were changed as the need arose. However, in their early stages they were dependent on the input of the co-ordinators.

All partner organisations were required to give the local partnership corporate backing . Information and training were needed by staff at all levels of involvement. Where services were managed by contract, such as in housing management and health, both client and contractor were important.

Voluntary organisations and community groups were an essential part of these local partnerships. They were involved in creative initiatives to meet local need unmet by public service provision.

Local people in service partnerships

It was difficult but essential to involve the community in defining needs, agreeing priorities, problem-solving and action planning and in monitoring the results.

These service partnerships also recognised that paid or unpaid local residents deliver essential services. In Coventry, the smoking prevention programme supported the training and work of 10 peer educators and in 1996-7 reached 500 women.

Service partnerships also increased residents' influence as users. The first stage of action planning necessitated an interactive consultation with residents. In Burnley an information van toured the area; staff knocked on all doors and an estate conference analysed problems of crime and security. The consultation led to a redefinition of the priorities of the area. The problems defined became the remit of Action Groups which included community organisations.

Service partnerships strengthened local democracy. Resident representatives provided a sounding board for the changes in service delivery. In Burnley the project built on the experience of the Estate Management Board and plans to develop service agreements with a monitoring group including the EMB and other residents groups, councillors and key officers.

Both projects were led by the local authority and agreements were negotiated early on with other services such as health and the police. The inclusion of residents has taken longer to achieve. In Coventry

there is the Voluntary Sector Forum with two representatives in the Area Management Team. Representation of all residents might be achieved through development of residents' associations attached to this Forum. In Burnley the Monitoring Group will bring existing community groups and other residents together.

About the study

This research is part of a long-term programme 1993-7 supported throughout by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and in its final stage also by the Department of the Environment and the Tudor Trust. From 1995-7 PEP consultants, Richard Crossley in Burnley and Tricia Zipfel in Coventry and two PEP Community Development Workers, supported the development of each of the service partnerships and produced project reports. Sarah Gregory co-ordinated the research and wrote the final report. The research had an independent evaluator, Lucy Gaster from INLOGOV, University of Birmingham. Her evaluation has informed these Findings.