SOLUTIONS

WORKING IN NEIGHBOURHOODS, ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND LOCALISM

LESSONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

What's the issue?

Neighbourhoods are a key focus for the Coalition's Localism policies to decentralise control and create a 'Big Society'. Delivering good partnership working, generating more active citizenship and civic responsibility, maximising the opportunities in devolution, and getting local councillors to play strong community leadership roles are not simple. However, neighbourhood working can help to make this happen.

The JRF Bradford *Working in Neighbourhoods* project offers useful lessons for local authorities, neighbourhood practitioners, and communities, drawing on direct experience from practitioners in Bradford, and many other places.

Ways forward

- Neighbourhood workers are key to co-ordinate partners and services, broker agreements and solve problems creatively.
- Structures for neighbourhood working need to be proactive, consistent yet flexible. They rely on skilled individuals, with 'local knowledge' and strong personal relationships.
- Organisational culture change can help to nurture creative problem-solving and empower front-line neighbourhood staff.
- Active citizenship could be strengthened by tapping into the pool of 'willing localists'.
- Transferring more control to communities requires new mechanisms to share risk and reward between public sector bodies and communities.
- Citizen behaviour change can be facilitated through redesigning systems, and specific tools such as 'nudge'.
- Inclusion in and between neighbourhoods, in devolution, needs careful brokering, facilitation, and greater transparency.
- Councillors can play a community leadership role, and be honest with constituents, tackle difficult issues head-on, and mobilise the wider community.
- There is a shared desire by local councillors and communities to develop more open, honest, trusting and communicative relationships with each other.
- Central government could offer support, guidance and leadership for action at the local level on the shared challenges facing local public sector organisations and local government.

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BACKGROUND

In 2004, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) made a ten-year commitment to working with the city and people of Bradford as part of its long-standing commitment to addressing poverty and disadvantage across the UK. From 2008, JRF set up the *Working in Neighbourhoods (WIN)* project – a relatively unusual opportunity to study neighbourhood working in depth across a whole local authority area, exploring issues with people living, volunteering and working in neighbourhoods.

The value of working in neighbourhoods

Neighbourhoods are a key focus for the Government's Localism policies to decentralise control to the lowest possible levels and to create a 'Big Society'. Neighbourhoods are places where newly-active citizens will take action, manage services, be charitable, hold decision-makers to account and so on.

One approach being used in Localism is to introduce new rights for communities: the 'Community Right to Buy' public assets, a 'Right to Challenge' who delivers public services, options for local referendums and rights to approve or reject local council tax increases. The Localism Act abolishes regional planning guidance, giving neighbourhoods decision-making over planning, and a community 'Right to Build'.

'Big Society' goes hand-in-hand with Localism, but this is a looser policy with fewer legislative measures and a handful of policy initiatives, mainly targeted at the community and voluntary sectors. Much will depend on local interpretation, and levels of commitment by local councillors and officers in local government to support active citizenship and community rights, and devolve power.

Devolved decision-making and neighbourhood working has been evolving in Bradford for over 20 years, and in other local authorities around the country. Working in neighbourhoods has evolved over a long period, with roots in community development, regeneration, and area-based working. Its value is in providing a very localised response to dealing creatively and flexibly with complex non-routine neighbourhood problems. The fact that these often involve complicated patchworks of players and competing interests in neighbourhoods makes collective problem-solving a tough challenge. Neighbourhood working offers a way to pull action together across stakeholders. It can play a critical role in delivering improvements for neighbourhoods and citizens, getting partners together to tackle neighbourhood issues, generating and maintaining active and responsible citizenship, promoting inclusive approaches to devolution, and backing up local councillors' community leadership roles in neighbourhoods.

Working in neighbourhoods is often a mix of activities largely outside institutional control. But institutions, such as local authorities, still play a crucial role in mobilising and responding to citizens and harnessing their contributions. However, neighbourhoods are often marginal priorities to central and local government overall, where bigger priorities, departments and budgets hold much greater sway. Some local authorities simply do not have a 'neighbourhoods agenda', and for those who do, it may not be a priority.

Neighbourhood working is especially vulnerable. There has been major restructuring of neighbourhood working in local authorities, with the loss of many front-line jobs. In times of recession, discretionary services are more vulnerable to cuts than statutory services. Many neighbourhood workers nationally find it hard to neatly sum up what they do, and therefore what their value is.

Delivering effective neighbourhood working also means facing a set of key challenges, which the *WIN* project explored and debated, about how to:

- Strengthen partnership working, and enhance creative problem-solving in neighbourhoods.
- Facilitate more active citizenship, and manage the perceived risks of handing over control, assets, decision or services to communities.
- Steer citizens towards more civic responsibility and pro-social behaviour, and make models of service provision more empowering.
- Recognise devolution's opportunities for local tailoring that recognises neighbourhoods' different needs, priorities and identities.
- Mitigate any risks within devolution of unhealthy competition between neighbourhoods.
- Promote community leadership roles for local elected members.

Action learning and research

The JRF Bradford *WIN* project (2009–2011) brought together an Action Learning Network (ALN) of residents, volunteers, local elected members, council officers and other public sector professionals. It aimed to learn and debate, explore how to adapt practice in neighbourhood working across the Bradford District, and share learning more widely. The ALN met for ten sessions where the group showcased practice from within Bradford, heard from neighbourhood practitioners from different areas of the country, brought in national commentators to discuss new policies and policy proposals, and went out on two study visits to Newcastle and Birmingham.

The *WIN* project used an action research approach, with discussions and feedback from the ALN sessions forming part of the evidence base for the project. Researchers visited all five of Bradford Metropolitan District Council's (MDC) constituency areas and talked to council officers, other agencies, community and voluntary organisations and elected members. The project also interviewed other key people in Bradford and nationally. In total, this study is based on contributions from around 250 neighbourhood practitioners in Bradford and other areas of the UK.

Learning from Bradford

Bradford MDC uses structures and processes that deliver neighbourhood and locality planning, opportunities for community decision-making and self-help. It has a long history of working in neighbourhoods, including:

a) a history of community development work in the district and a thriving community and voluntary sector, supported by various grant regimes, particularly from the 1970s;
b) time-limited, area-based regeneration initiatives in some deprived neighbourhoods;
c) devolved decision-making across the whole district, starting with Area Panels introduced in 1991; and
d) the current comprehensive arrangements for neighbourhood working across the whole council.

BMDC's current neighbourhood working structures were adapted to their current format in 2008, and operate at three levels: area, ward and neighbourhood. There are five Constituency areas each having six wards, and a population of around 100,000 (15-20,000 per ward), with Area Committees for elected members, and Area Offices (run by staff from BMDC's Neighbourhood Services) which co-ordinate Area Action Plans. In all wards, Ward Action Plans are developed, and there are multi-agency Ward Officer Teams (WOTs). Neighbourhoods with a population of around 5,000 host Neighbourhood Forums and neighbourhood planning.

Different local authorities have set up their neighbourhood working arrangements in many different ways. Councils across England refer to 'natural neighbourhoods' of anywhere between 50 to 10,000 people, 'Neighbourhood Co-ordination Areas' and 'Priority Neighbourhoods' of 20,000 to 30,000, and 'Constituency Areas', 'Area Committees', 'Neighbourhood Management Areas' and 'District Committees' of 40,000 to 100,000.

Despite these differences, there are common issues across the country. Although the focus was on the Bradford district, none of the issues raised in the project was unique. The learning from this project was designed to be of interest, and use, to other local authorities and neighbourhoods facing similar issues. It draws together broader conclusions from the *WIN* research that apply beyond Bradford.

Meeting the challenges of working in neighbourhoods

Figure 1 – The key lessons from this study
Effective neighbourhood working and citizen participation
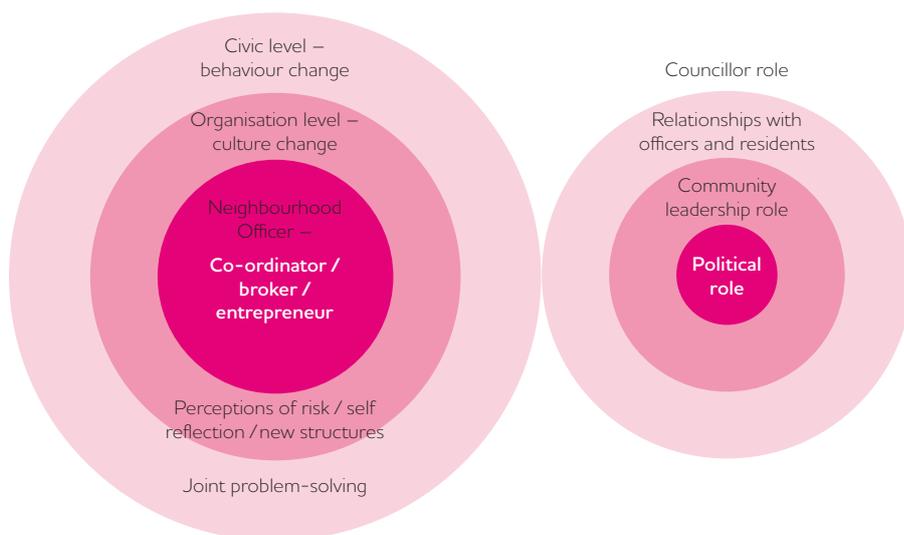
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Strengthening partnership working

One key role for neighbourhood working is to pull all the relevant services and partners together to tackle neighbourhood problems that no single agency could address alone. In Bradford, staff from the Neighbourhood Services Area offices brought stakeholders together to deal with problems such as anti-social behaviour, fly tipping, and derelict and neglected communal land. Neighbourhood officers played a co-ordination role, bringing partners together, a brokerage role – for example negotiating between departments – and an entrepreneurial role, to solve problems creatively. Partnership working and multi-agency work in neighbourhoods has been around for years, and in many places there are established structures. But partnership working is still a skill.

The *WIN* project found that successful partnership work in neighbourhoods is based on:

- **Consistent yet flexible structures.** Consistent structures mean agencies know they exist, are delegated to attend, and can build relationships. But consistency needs to be delicately balanced by some flexibility, for example when to have meetings, and who attends. Flexibility means meetings have a clear purpose, are held when needed, and have the right people there. In Newcastle, dedicated 'task and finish' groups (called SNAPs – Safer Neighbourhoods Action Partnerships) were created with a carefully chosen membership, for a set period of time, to tackle specific problems.
- **Proactive structures.** Being proactive means looking more strategically at tackling problems such as anti-social behaviour. In Bradford and Birmingham there were good examples where services had pooled data to map crime and nuisance hotspots, then compared these against gaps in service provision.
- **Skilled individuals, with 'local knowledge'.** Organisations often focus on the structures, but it is also the people within them that make a difference. One lesson from the *WIN* project was that people's skills were based on their 'local knowledge'. Local knowledge was gained through experience, and/or talking to local people and front-line workers, as well as being 'out and about' in neighbourhoods.
- **Strong personal relationships,** particularly through face-to-face contact. Workers in Bradford talked about feeling 'embarrassed' in front of other partners if they had not delivered what they promised. This is a very strong form of personal accountability to make sure things get done. Meeting as a group also helped to generate collective solutions to neighbourhood issues – people were more willing to do 'that bit extra' to help each other out.
- **Creative problem-solving.** Several members of the Bradford ALN saw themselves as civic entrepreneurs, describing their role as trouble-shooters, enablers, innovators. To be a good civic entrepreneur takes critical self-reflection and confidence to take initiative. It is sometimes harder than it sounds to challenge one's own practice and that of others. In the ALN, the JRF team tried to create a safe place for frank exchange of views and critical challenge within the group. Advice from the ALN was to see that 'negatives are positives – it holds a mirror up to yourself and makes you think. It stimulates ideas, you learn from negatives'. (Group discussion, *Working in Neighbourhoods* project)

- **Nurturing civic entrepreneurs.** The degree of flexibility for staff is an old dilemma for organisations. Previous neighbourhood working schemes, for example in England and Wales from the 1970s onwards, have come unstuck when organisations have felt that neighbourhood workers were leaning too far towards the community, or were too challenging to their own employers. Public sector organisations generally worry that allowing people creativity might backfire if they take too many risks, or simply do not perform well. Organisations could nurture civic entrepreneurs at the frontline, and create spaces for more creative problem-solving by:
    - not punishing 'failure' and allowing flexibility, risk-taking and experimentation;
    - using enhanced job descriptions and responsibilities for front-line staff;
    - checking that performance targets are aligned with organisational goals and desired outcomes;
    - supporting challenges to internal practice and other parts of organisations;
    - allowing safe reflection, sharing and constructive challenge; and
    - considering bringing in new organisations and capacity from different sectors.

Encouraging active citizenship and 'Big Society'

One of the core aims of neighbourhood working in Bradford was to encourage active citizenship. Many other local authorities want to figure out how to work more closely with communities and generate more citizen contributions in neighbourhoods. As Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) has put it: '[We] need a new starting point based on engagement, social capital, mental wellbeing, putting individuals and communities back in control' (Coppard, 2011).

Bradford MDC's useful Active Citizenship Framework sets out seven possible roles for citizens:

- Supporting local democracy, e.g. councillors, hospital board members, school governors, magistrates;
- Volunteering, e.g. helping out a youth group, mentoring a new business;
- Engagement with public services by communities and service users, e.g. going to Neighbourhood Forums;
- Citizens working together in groups, e.g., residents' and community groups;
- Campaigning and lobbying to make people aware of concerns;
- Public fundraising, e.g. taking part in sponsored events; and
- Good neighbours, e.g. bringing someone's bins in.

Increasing the pool of active citizens

Active citizenship requires citizens willing to be active. Bradford has a rich tradition of vibrant and active communities. However, even here there were worries that it would be hard to motivate people to volunteer. Research in other local authority areas shows similar perceptions, for example one survey found that 66 per cent of councils felt the community would be unmotivated to take on more responsibilities, assets or services (Carr-West *et al.*, 2011). It is unclear how much this is based on 'second guessing' what citizens may or may not want to do, as under 20 per cent had formally assessed communities' appetite for more involvement. In another survey, some London councils felt there was little evidence of a 'groundswell of enthusiasm [by citizens] to "join up and take part"' (Travers, 2011).

Data on levels of different forms of civic action in the UK suggests that there is a healthy base of citizen activity generally, but with potential for more. One realistic estimate of what proportion will be active in neighbourhoods came from Newcastle, where roughly 1 per cent of the population are consistently active, another 14 per cent dip in and out, and the other 85 per cent either want information or to attend meetings if there are big issues. These estimates are in line with national surveys which have shown that 5 per cent (Ipsos MORI, 2010) or even as much as 14 per cent (Hansard Society 2011) of the population are willing to do more, on top of the people who are already active. More people say they would get involved than actually do, but there is still a potential pool of people who could be motivated to be active citizens. They have been called 'willing localists'.

Community engagement needs to be based on more sophisticated intelligence about: levels of participation across different groups; drivers for participation; and then specific interventions, particularly those targeted at areas with lower activity and capacity, or those with different needs, cultural mix and histories of intervention and engagement. For example, lower-income neighbourhoods have lower levels of participation. So why is it that some places buck the trend? What inputs made a difference? On the study visit to Birmingham, the ALN group heard about transfer of assets to community control in deprived neighbourhoods, and resident-managed social housing through tenant management

organisations and community-based housing associations. There had been a long period of community development for these initiatives to take off in these areas with lower community capacity, and other research suggests intensive support is needed where there is a long history of disadvantage (Taylor *et al.*, 2007).

Formal structures for community engagement
Neighbourhood working can support citizens to be more active. One route is through formal structures for neighbourhood working, such as neighbourhood meetings, panels, committees and forums. Innovations in Bradford, Newcastle and many other councils suggest that formal or official neighbourhood working structures could be better at generating additional community contributions by:

- Using innovative consultation techniques, including: informal participatory approaches such as 'café style', 'carousel' or 'marketplace' formats; holding meetings in different venues; doing outreach including walkabouts; using fun, social and family events; and generally 'putting the fun back into it'.
- Moving from traditional consultation approaches ('you tell us what's wrong and we'll sort it out') to a joint problem-solving approach ('what can we all do together that would sort it out').

Deliberative techniques are one way to achieve a common ground for joint action. Deliberation is a structured process of dialogue, sometimes referred to as 'think' approaches. Supporters of the technique argue that exchanging views in public, with mutual respect, makes it more likely that people will consider others' opinions, be more accepting and tolerant, less self-interested, and more likely to compromise for the common good. By drawing on each other's knowledge, experience and capabilities, different and better solutions to problems are generated, leading to joint action (John *et al.*, 2011). The method has been used around the world, for example in the US, Canada and Australia.

Going beyond formal structures
Formal structures do not suit everyone. Neighbourhood working can recognise the value of activities outside the formal structures, and facilitate anything that gets people involved. In Bradford this included: community centres; local clubs, associations, community projects and groups; fun days and social events; environmental project such as clean-up days, and school children as 'eco warriors'; social groups for older people; community farms, allotments, orchards and nature parks; faith-based organisations; parent-and-toddler or baby groups; sewing and knitting clubs; coffee mornings and luncheon clubs; computer and cookery classes; 'Friends of Parks' groups; ballroom dancing; car clubs and lift-sharing; greens bowling tournaments; 'cohesion cricket'; befriending schemes; holiday play schemes and youth clubs. Bradford council is supporting informal community through community self-help projects. These include 'Neighbourly Help', a scheme in eight neighbourhoods to encourage residents to help each other out, for example, by bringing back bins after collections, or picking up prescriptions for older people. 'Bradford's Active Citizens 2011' was a year-long campaign of over 100 events, to celebrate people's voluntary efforts in the District. The council has also created an 'active giving' group to support civic activity, as well as a new fund for community projects.

Many other councils are trying new ways to engage people. The London Borough of Lewisham organised a public fundraising campaign for a fireworks night in one neighbourhood after funding was withdrawn. The campaign raised £25,000, of which £1,000 was raised through eBay auctions, and £2,500 was donated by individuals through PayPal. Attendance on the night also increased (Governance International, 2011).

Promoting responsible citizenship and pro-social behaviour
In the *WIN* research, as across local authorities and other public bodies in the UK and internationally, participants were keen to see citizens behaving in socially responsible ways such as recycling, eating more healthily, or sweeping their own driveways. Participants wanted to know how behaviour could be changed. There was frustration that increased public investment, without a corresponding emphasis on people taking more control of their own lives, had failed to address serious neighbourhood problems. Some aspects of Bradford's neighbourhood working arrangements and structures were felt to have helped to create unhelpful expectations in communities, councillors, services and agencies. A key conclusion by Bradford practitioners was that some models of service provision were disempowering, whilst other methods could facilitate community self-help. Behaviour change could enhance empowerment.

But, as the experience of public sector providers in many other local authority areas also shows, the challenge with community engagement, active citizenship and behaviour change was not in writing the policy, but in putting it into operation. Bradford MDC had already made a start on this, for example by creating a 'behaviour change team' of uniformed services including park wardens, traffic enforcement officers and neighbourhood wardens.

Responsible citizenship could be strengthened through a broad range of complementary approaches to citizen behaviour change, including 'nudge'. 'Nudge' tools need to be used within wider changes, and other ideas for reconfiguring relationships between citizens and the public sector.

The core idea is that people use mental shortcuts to make behavioural decisions, such as what other people like them are doing, how it makes them feel, who is asking. These shortcuts need to be understood fully in order to influence behaviours. One useful framework for putting nudge into operation is MINDSPACE (Dolan *et al.*, 2010), which stands for:

- Messenger: people are influenced by who communicates information;
- Incentives: responses are shaped by mental shortcuts, e.g. avoiding losses;
- Norms: we are strongly influenced by what others do;
- Defaults: we 'go with the flow' of pre-set options;
- Salience: our attention is drawn to what is novel and seems relevant to us;
- Priming: our acts are often influenced by subconscious cues;
- Affect: our emotional associations can powerfully shape our actions;
- Commitments: people want to be consistent with their public promises, and reciprocate acts; and
- Ego: we act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves.

One example of how nudge could be applied is from practitioners in Bradford, tackling parents parking dangerously at school drop-off times. They wanted to get parents to put stickers in their car windows to support safe parking. This is using parents and pupils as Messengers as well as showing people the accepted Norm. Default system changes were to make alternative drop-off points.

'Nudge' and MINDSPACE models are not a single solution, and are set by their proponents in the context of wider system change. A useful model is that developed by Governance International of co-production (Governance International, 2011). They have developed a model of how to achieve co-production in public sector organisations: map it; focus it; people it; market it; and grow it. 'Nudge' would come as part of the 'market it' stage. There is an online self-assessment tool available called Co-production Explorer. Other tools like 'value modes segmentation' developed by iMPOWER Consulting, involve targeting and tailoring interventions by categorizing people into groups based on market research on aspirations and lifestyles (iMPOWER Consulting, 2012). Bradford MDC used this tool to develop personalisation in adult social care. It has also been used with Coventry City Council to find creative ways to persuade the parents of children with Special Educational Needs to move over to personalised budgets for school transport.

One example of whole system redesign is from Somerset County Council, which wants 'total engagement', with citizens moving from passive recipients of services to active citizens. This work is in the early stages, but may include training for front-line staff at service points and in contact centres to recruit citizens to be more active e.g. by volunteering or to join a Somerset citizen 'membership' of the council. Proposals include: a 'menu' for service devolution to parish councils, and criteria for risk delegation to parishes; extending Inovem 'Inclusionware' software to support the new approach; Community Action Teams, made up of services, residents, voluntary sector organisations, and councillors working together in neighbourhoods to sort out problems. A commissioning and procurement review could identify potential new service deliverers from voluntary sector groups, creating a more level playing field for these groups to compete for contracts (Big Society Network *et al.*, 2011).

Many other authorities and organisations are trialling behaviour change pilots (John *et al.*, 2012). Joint work commissioned by Bolton NHS, working with Bolton Community Network based at Bolton Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), used innovative methods based on intelligence about 'nudge'-style interventions to change health behaviours. For example, 'Upsy Downsy' is a workshop to promote positive mental health, using a board game based on Snakes and Ladders. It uses statements cards about good or 'upsy' habits, and bad or 'downsy' habits to help people make choices and 'think happy habits'. Participants make pledges to take on a new good habit and are contacted a few weeks later with a gentle

reminder and support information about local classes and organisations they may find useful. As a result, there has been greater equity in uptake of health promotion prevention, screening and treatment services, including an increase over the period in minority ethnic women attending cervical screening appointments. The Upsy Downsy game has been delivered to over 1,150 people who have all pledged to take on a new habit to improve mental health and wellbeing (NWTWC, 2011). Other councils, such as the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, have implemented incentive schemes, including Recyclebank, which awards points for recycling, to be spent on discounts for food, clothing and leisure activities.

Developing inclusion and managing risk in devolution and Localism

'Command and control' models of governance are no longer capable of, or suitable for, managing complex human and policy challenges. One size does not fit all. Devolved decision-making means that decisions are made at the level of, and in the interests of, the neighbourhood. The Localism Act had not been passed when the *WIN* research took place. At the time of the research the Labour administration in Bradford MDC aspired to subsidiarity, and had an ambition to devolve to the lowest possible appropriate level.

Critics of devolution nationally and critics in the Bradford *WIN* research argued that it presents various risks: that neighbourhood interests would be prioritised at the expense of wider area needs; unhealthy competition between places and groups would be exacerbated; community tensions would be worsened; and strategic interests undermined. Opportunities in devolution are that decision-making, powers, assets, and budgets to bodies or structures below the local authority level could enhance neighbourhood working by providing local tailoring that recognises the different needs, priorities, identities and heritage of neighbourhoods.

Across the UK, others have argued that how far devolution leads to greater inclusion or exclusion depends on how such debates are brokered. There were positive examples of how inclusion had been promoted in devolution from Bradford and elsewhere. There are opportunities to debate and deliberate with citizens on understandings of fairness in resource allocation. The risks of devolution leading to unhealthy competition could be mitigated by a more transparent debate over who gets what, and what citizens accept as being fair between places with different needs. As respondents pointed out:

If people knew first-hand what the conditions are for neighbourhoods next door they would want it to be fairer than they are. Transparency is … important. (Local councillor, Bradford MDC)

It's not about being equal across the board, but if you are transparent people are more likely to accept it … it's being open about who is getting what. (Group discussion, *Working in Neighbourhoods* project)

Practical examples
- Across the UK, including in Bradford and Eastfield in Scarborough, there were examples of how participatory budgeting (where communities decide on how to allocate pots of funding) can shift attitudes and resources towards the most vulnerable groups and overcome community divisions.
- In the Bradford *Working in Neighbourhoods* project, JRF organised an Action Learning Network over 18 months for practitioners across sectors to meet together, share, reflect and learn. It gave participants a better overview of what was happening across the Bradford District as a whole, and in other neighbourhoods. Their discussions with people in other neighbourhoods helped them understand: 'we all face the same problems', 'we are all committed to neighbourhoods' (Group discussion, *Working in Neighbourhoods* project). This type of network across neighbourhoods can create a platform for a debate about how to best meet different needs.
- The Bradford 'Great Debate' 2011 was an inter-generational meeting of 50 young and 50 older people who discussed what 'active citizenship' means for different ages and how relationships between generations can be improved.
- In one local authority in North West England, elected members were persuaded to allocate part of their ward's resources to more deprived wards after visiting different neighbourhoods to see firsthand what the different levels of need were (NWEO, 2010).
- Experiments in the UK, and internationally, suggest that it is possible to deliberate (see above) on sensitive cohesion issues – inter-generational and ethnic – with large groups of people in a spirit of respectful debate, and in some cases increase tolerance (John *et al.*, 2011).

- Neighbourhood Agreements, sometimes called Community Contracts or Charters, set transparent local standards for services and residents' behaviours, negotiating between residents and services about what each will offer or receive, and can be tailored in each neighbourhood. Monitoring and accountability of service performance and outcomes are devolved under a voluntary agreement. Guidance is available from the National Association for Neighbourhood Management (IPEG, 2010).

Devolving more control to communities and managing risk
Devolution includes passing down powers to communities in neighbourhoods. Transferring more control to communities means that public sector bodies need to trust residents to do things for themselves, and sometimes start small when giving residents more power. It is understandable that local councils like Bradford MDC are cautious about transferring power to communities and neighbourhoods where they feel this would present a high level of risk. The local authority has overall responsibility, acts as a catalyst, and is answerable to citizens. Across local councils, current ways of assessing risk levels are too often biased towards the worst-case scenario, and often do not take a more rounded account of the true costs, benefits and risks for neighbourhoods.

Some communities felt the solution was to just get on and do things. They did not want to wait for permission to improve their own lives. In some cases, doing things first without permission, and showing positive results, meant that the public sector came on board afterwards. Many councils are also starting to create scope for more community action by creatively managing risk. Some examples and useful tools include:

- A **'Community PQQ'** (Pre-Qualification Questionnaire). This is potentially useful in cases where there is no legal contract between a community group and a public sector organisation, and the group does not have lots of official documentation e.g. audited accounts. In Bradford, neighbourhood workers used this process to win permission for an informal environmental group to refurbish a neglected allotment site, with excellent results. The Community PQQ would check the capacity of the group before being given permission to do positive things for community benefit with publicly-owned assets. For example, visiting the groups in neighbourhoods and seeing their work first-hand; doing skills audits of the individual volunteers; supporting groups to write business plans.
- One useful tool is **'Fit for Purpose'** (Development Trust Association, 2008). 'Fit for Purpose' is a diagnostic tool to help a new or developing community enterprise in assessing not only its strengths but also possible areas for improvement against key criteria such as:
  – **governance** - accountability to the wider community, the strength of community ownership and influence over the direction of the organisation;
  – **enterprise and business planning** - risk analysis, income and expenditure projections;
  – **financial management**;
  – **partnership working**; and
  – **policies and procedures**, such as reviews of performance and guidance for Committees and Boards.
- Streets Alive, an organisation promoting **street parties**, has created a **disclaimer** signed by the applicant, such as a community group, to agree that they are fully responsible for any problems such as people hurting themselves during the event. It transfers the risk to the community group, and makes it more likely they will be extra careful, and communicate this to attendees.

Active risk management for transfer of control to communities is in the very early stages in many places. Two interesting proposals for sharing risk and reward between communities and public sector bodies are:

- The Young Foundation has proposed the idea of a **Community Dividend** which would allow communities and public sector organisations to share risks and rewards. Community Dividends are 'rewards, intended to bolster existing volunteerism and incentivise new local action, by financially rewarding communities that take action themselves to tackle chronic issues in their local area. For example, if an estate cuts the prescription drugs bill by half, or reduces graffiti tags on street furniture by 75 per cent, then [...] they should be rewarded with half of the saving to the state' (Young Foundation, 2010).
- Professor Tony Travers of the London School of Economics has promoted the idea of **Community Improvement Districts** (CIDs). CIDs are an idea based on the success of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). CIDs would be created by groups of people and/or businesses, and agreed through a referendum, with the option of an add-on to local council tax, and set up for a fixed time period. The CID could then operate as the vehicle for running services, neighbourhood planning and other community-led activity (Travers, 2011).

Roles for local councillors in neighbourhood working

Community leadership
New 'community leadership' roles have been developing for local councillors in England over the previous decade. Community leadership puts local elected members into a neighbourhood-facing rather than a 'Town Hall'-facing position, or, as some have argued, into a two-way facing position, brokering between neighbourhoods and the Town Hall. In essence, it is about local councillors taking a lead role in neighbourhood working and being really active in their own wards. In Bradford, the support and active involvement of local councillors played a crucial factor in the success of neighbourhood working, with many areas of good practice, but councillors' skills were variable. Neighbourhood officers provide back-up for councillors and Bradford as an authority exhibited close and positive relationships between members and officers. Neighbourhood services were a key point of contact for members.

Support, learning and development for councillors could help elected members play a vital and strong community leadership role. For example, by arbitrating between conflicting interests, and providing leadership on difficult issues of resource allocation between places and groups. One example of member learning and development on diversity and community cohesion came from Blackburn with Darwen BC (NWTWC, 2010). Here, councillors and community representatives had undergone joint training on a Good Relations Programme. Originally developed in Northern Ireland to overcome community divisions, the Good Relations Programme teaches people how to have open debate about difficult issues, such as extremist views. It is based on mediation techniques. In Blackburn with Darwen, it had led to innovations such as 'a Day in the Life' swaps, where elected members and families from a different ethnic background spent a weekend in each others' homes. Other outcomes included work to prepare for a merger between two schools which had different ethnic majorities. There had been concerns that this would lead to friction between pupils. As a result of the training, local councillors and community reps felt confident to set up relationship building between the pupils before the merger took place. The Programme taught them to: 'find the space for minority voices to be heard, however unpalatable. You need to use politics to voice dissent, not violence'. (Council officer, Blackburn with Darwen BC.)

Local councillors in Bradford and other councils have played a community leadership role, helping to challenge, mediate, and broker sensitive and often controversial neighbourhood issues. The lessons are:

- Difficult or controversial issues need to be challenged head-on, using tried and tested techniques, e.g. mediation;
- Residents appreciate local councillors being honest about what is possible, or acceptable. People said: 'Relationships blossom if you are honest.' (Local councillor, Bradford MDC);
- Councillors sometimes need to resist demands from minority interest groups for special treatment, regardless of the electoral consequences; and
- Councillors can help to mobilise the community to respond to critical situations, with support from community networks such as faith organisations, voluntary groups, women's groups, and community elders.

Relationships between local elected members and residents and community groups
Good quality relationships between councillors, citizens and community groups are critical. Discussion in the Bradford ALN found that councillors were expected to:

- make decisions and be accountable to the full range of interests in a neighbourhood including 'the silent majority, not just the big mouths';
- be transparent, communicate and 'have answers';
- be visible and known in their wards;
- have more control over a wider range of budgets than currently exists;
- get things done, be well connected and have influence; and
- help represent the council to the people, including explaining how the system works.

Citizens were expected to:

- have reasonable expectations of what elected members could do and understand the limits of the system and their powers;
- play their part in democracy, e.g. voting; give their views, which includes being clear about what they wanted;
- form or be members of residents' groups and work jointly with councillors: 'come forward and take part'; and
- have relationships and contact with councillors.

Both parties need more open, honest, trusting and communicative relationships than currently exists in order to move forward.

One practical issue was the need for more effective back-up systems and information flows from officers to elected members. Neighbourhood workers already provided a way to get information to members. Some councils have also given councillors access to real-time electronic systems that track the progress of queries or jobs through the council system, for example in Newcastle. This means councillors can be more effective at getting things done, chasing outstanding issues, and updating residents about progress.

Councillors also have a key part to play in devolving control to communities, whilst retaining accountability. In Bradford and other local authority areas, local councillors are creating new mechanisms that allow them to be 'in charge when they are not in charge'. There are good examples from other areas, such as Rossendale BC, of how scrutiny has been used to keep external partners accountable to elected members (North West Employers, 2011). The Local Government Information Unit has called local councils 'stewards of community risk' (Carr-West *et al.*, 2011), and recommend that councils:

- establish a Scrutiny Panel dedicated to corporate risk management for the voluntary and community sector;
- produce a risk appetite assessment for services across the council, determining the authority's appetite for risk, and which areas are most appropriate for community involvement;
- audit the local community's appetite and capacity for risk;
- review the accessibility of procurement and commissioning policies; and
- invest in capacity and resilience building for the voluntary and community sectors.

Lessons for policy-makers

Many of the lessons from the JRF Bradford *WIN* project are of most relevance for local authorities, other public sector bodies, councillors, and voluntary and community organisations working in neighbourhoods. Indeed, one finding was that local practitioners need to set their own policy on community action and devolution, and regain control after a protracted period of central direction and funding. However, central government could offer support, guidance and leadership for action at the local level on the tough shared challenges facing local public sector organisations and local government. This should be delivered through the most appropriate bodies. In particular, there could be more help on:

- Sharing practice on how best to encourage creative problem-solving on the front-line;
- Access to data and analysis to better understand differences in levels of participation between groups, and the drivers of participation for those groups;
- Intelligence on effective interventions to stimulate citizen participation;
- Ideas and examples of successful mechanisms for risk-sharing between community-based organisations and local government;
- Support for organisations attempting to redesign their systems;
- Clarification of different forms of accountability;
- Trials of approaches to broker and mediate debates within devolution; and
- Deliberation of ideas of fairness with citizens.

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