

NEIGHBOURHOOD EMPOWERMENT

A model of Community Consultation

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**THAMES VALLEY
PARTNERSHIP**

WORKING
FOR SAFER
COMMUNITIES



CONTENTS

	Page
The Background	3
The Thames Valley Partnership Model	5
The Study	7
Results so far	7
Benefits	10
What could be Improved?	13
Has the Forum Improved the Quality of Life?	14
Conclusions	15
References	18
Neighbourhood Empowerment – The Thames Valley Partnership Way by Cathryn O'Donovan & Russ Wootton	19

THE BACKGROUND

Tackling the biggest challenges, such as social exclusion and the renewal of the most deprived neighbourhoods, demands concerted and co-ordinated effort across all sectors. Relatively few local crime and disorder strategies identify specific neighbourhoods as a priority for action even though the case for doing so is strong and growing. 40% of crime takes place in 10% of neighbourhoods. (1).

In March 2001 the Government issued guidance on Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP). They defined an LSP as a single body that:

- brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together;
- is a non-statutory, non-executive organisation;
- operates at a level which enables strategic decisions to be taken and is close enough to individual neighbourhoods to allow actions to be determined at community level; and
- should be aligned with local authority boundaries.

They argued that such partnership working was important because:

“ public, private, community and voluntary sector organisations all have a part to play in improving quality of life”. The more they can work together, with local people, the more they can achieve and the more likely it is that:

- the benefits of sustainable growth are achieved across the country;
- economic, social and physical regeneration happens – and is sustained – in deprived areas;
- public services work better and are delivered in ways which meet people’s needs;
- local people can influence decision-making and take action to improve their neighbourhoods; and
- business and the community and voluntary sectors can play a full and equal part.

A number of other Government initiatives also sought to foster the establishment of such partnerships:

(i) Community strategies: place duty on local authorities in England and Wales under Local Government Act 2000 to prepare community strategies. To improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of each area and its inhabitants, and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK.

(ii) Rationalisation of the many current separate partnerships, plans and initiatives to integrate existing plans and initiatives so that it is easier to deliver improvements in health, education, crime etc.; to reduce duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy; and make it easier for partners, including those outside the statutory sector, to get involved.

(iii) Local Public Service Agreements (PSAs): pilots with 20 authorities in 2001/02. With 130 other ‘top tier’ authorities on a voluntary basis in the two years following 2001/02. Local authorities will need to show that their proposals are supported by local people and other local partners. Joint working will almost always be needed to deliver local PSA targets.

(iv) Neighbourhood renewal: National Strategy Action Plan published January 2001.

To narrow the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country, with common goals of lower unemployment and crime, and better health, education, housing and physical environment. Effective neighbourhood renewal depends on services working together to plan and deliver concerted improvements in public services. Local people, business and the voluntary sector all need to have opportunities to contribute.

Experience has shown that successful involvement is more likely when partners, including the community, develop clear strategies as early as possible and are prepared to invest time and resources in building the capacity of local organisations. Since 1992, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) have been looking at what works in the regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods, with a strong focus on the role that local residents and community organisations can play. Their research showed that the impact of community involvement on regeneration had generally been modest, and that commitment to community involvement had often been tokenistic.⁽²⁾ On the other hand, good practice in this field of work showed that:

- Communities had a fresh perspective, and could often see the problems in new ways.
- Successful community involvement helped to revitalise democracy.
- Successful involvement was more likely when partners, including the community, developed clear strategies as early as possible and were prepared to invest time and resources in building the capacity of local organisations.

Community Safety is often at the top of any list of residents' concerns and these concerns must be tackled if communities are to thrive. The aims of 'joining up' action and rooting action in communities are most easily achieved at neighbourhood level.

It is now commonly acknowledged that successful neighbourhood crime reduction means putting communities in the driving seat. Resident participation is needed at all stages, from identifying problems and agreeing priorities, to developing and delivering solutions and tracking progress. Achieving this is extremely difficult in neighbourhoods that often have little history of community development, a track record of bad relations with local public services, and where residents are cynical that matters can improve. How best to bring the professionals together with local communities to work on an equal footing is an issue that has challenged community safety strategists for many years. There seems to be no simple answer.

Involving communities in regeneration is not an easy option. Some urban and rural communities are already well organised but many are not. In these cases, which may include city-wide initiatives, the building of capacity is slow and requires various types of support. It is important for partnerships to realise that community involvement is not a 'bolt-on' or a cosmetic activity: real community involvement involves compromise, sharing power, learning to cope with diversity, adjusting organisational cultures, understanding different styles of work, handling conflict constructively, and adjusting priorities and timetables.

Deciding which neighbourhood(s) to target can be even harder! Key considerations, many of which will be assessed in an area-wide crime and disorder audit, include:-

- levels of recorded and unrecorded crime
 - levels of disorder
 - levels of public concern
 - the availability of data
 - the scope to link, or tap into, other programmes or funding streams
- It is also worth checking that ward-level data does not mask or understate the problems faced by neighbourhoods within, or straddling, relatively affluent wards.

The neighbourhood should be a recognisable community. Size (or the lack of it) matters. Those identifying areas for work need to be wary of spreading resources too thinly over too large an area. A focus on the area's heritage or strengths can help allay fears that the neighbourhood will be stigmatised by being targeted for action.

Neighbourhood crime and disorder reduction needs to be co-ordinated and 'joined up', ideally via a neighbourhood-level partnership that brings together residents and agencies. Early, strong investment in building the partnership will pay off later: so will establishing clear links with other relevant partnerships in the neighbourhood and district. Those involved from agencies need to combine operational experience with a mandate to speak for their organisation. Robust methods of community consultation are key to the development and sustainability of community partnerships.

THE THAMES VALLEY PARTNERSHIP MODEL

Having identified an ongoing need for meaningful and sustainable consultation between communities and the organisations that provide services to them, the Thames Valley Partnership developed their own model for engaging with the local community identifying that "communities need the same help and support as professionals to take part in the debate."

The Thames Valley Partnership offered to work with neighbourhoods that had been identified as a priority within local community safety strategies to help harness the energies and resources of a wide range of partners and also facilitate genuine involvement of the community in finding solutions. Three neighbourhoods were identified using a range of community safety indicators and deprivation statistics. The areas were also known to local agencies and communities as 'hotspots' in need of extra support.

Cathryn O'Donovan and Russ Wootton of the Partnership developed a five stage model based on empowerment. The Partnership facilitated a highly structured process and acted as 'honest brokers' with the aim to support the development of the consultation process but to then withdraw. An outline of the model is shown below and full details are attached at Appendix 'A'.

Stage 1

With the support of the Partnership, as many representatives of professional organisations as possible from the local area are invited to the first meeting and asked to bring as much information both factual and anecdotal to inform the debate. The aims of this meeting are:

- To begin to develop team cohesion
- To begin to identify the area issues
- To sign up to the process

Stage 2

This phase provides an opportunity to involve any professional and voluntary groups that have been missed in the first phase, to elect a chairperson (preferably a community champion) and to prepare the group for public launch

Stage 3

This session is aimed at bringing the professionals and communities together. The aims at this stage are:

- To create an arena where issues can be raised
- To listen to the issues that the community raise
- To introduce professional agendas
- To identify the positive attributes of the neighbourhood
- To acknowledge personal anecdotal agendas
- To introduce a working together agenda

Stage 4

The Thames Valley Partnership Team begin to withdraw from the meetings with a gradual handover of power. The aims at this stage are:

- To introduce the meeting format
- To begin the process of creating a functioning working group
- To begin the process of withdrawing

Stage 5

Aim: To withdraw from the group

As well as introducing the stages and assisting in setting up the forum, members of the Partnership also acted as facilitators to the sessions. After key actions were identified and discussed by service providers and residents, members of the partnership summarised this work into flowcharts. (an example is shown at Appendix 'B'). The Partnership staff were also involved in providing additional support as needed by each forum. In some cases this was writing up actions whilst in others it involved taking an active part in the development of solutions to problems. In practice withdrawal at stage 5 was not always as easy as the model would suggest.

This study has looked at the early stages of setting up the model to assess some of the benefits of this approach, some of the difficulties encountered and some lessons that have been learnt. It is hoped that this will be of use to others who may be considering ways for developing effective community consultation. This is just one model of community consultation and it has not been possible within this study to compare it with other models.

THE STUDY

Three neighbourhoods in the Thames Valley area were identified as likely to benefit from the introduction of the model and accepted the Partnership's invitation to facilitate its introduction. Community safety and deprivation indicators were key in identifying the need for intensive support in all three areas but for one area in Aylesbury Vale, nuisance caused by young people was a particular issue and came high on the list of tenant and resident concerns. Thames Valley Partnership staff facilitated the introduction of the five stage model and assisted each forum as necessary through this phase. The evaluation took place at least six months after the hand - over from the Partnership had (officially) taken place.

Questionnaires were sent to service providers and resident/community members of all three forums. Interviews also took place with Thames Valley Partnership staff, Community Safety staff and individuals closely involved in the setting up and running of each forum. As has already been stated, a variety of indicators were originally used to identify the areas as areas of need. Unfortunately police data is collected across different geographic boundaries to ward data coupled with the fact that police recording procedures changed during the course of this study. The researcher made a conscious decision after discussion with several people involved in the projects not to collect quantitative data. Although there is obvious merit in being able to measure an initiative using both quantitative and qualitative measures, it was felt that the baseline data was too unreliable or inconsistent to provide any meaningful before and after comparison. Those spoken to felt that it was still too early in the initiative to draw any meaningful conclusions from such comparisons and therefore quantitative measures are not included in this report.

RESULTS SO FAR

The title of this section is deliberately worded to illustrate the long term ongoing process that is community consultation. The results described in this section are a snapshot of the forums at a relatively early stage in their development.

Previous consultation

Initially the study looked at what consultation existed before in these geographic areas. The feedback from more than three quarters of those questioned and therefore the overwhelming perception was that nothing existed before the forum. Not surprisingly the mention of existing groups such as Crime Prevention Groups, Neighbourhood Watch, Consultative Committees etc came from service providers. Residents and community members stated that any problems they had were dealt with by personal phone calls to "faceless names" or via the local councillor. Some individual issues were dealt with by one off meetings but the consensus was of no accessible consultation process. The forums are

therefore seen as a very positive development in that they fill a perceived gap in the consultation framework. This is indicated by a number of responses from residents and service providers alike:

"It gives the chance to speak face to face with service providers".

"It gets people talking to each other who would otherwise have no contact at all".

"It encourages resident participation and offers direct access for residents to key officers and agencies – it's a partnership".

For service providers, it filled an additional gap:-

"Local services can be seen to have a human face behind them making them more accessible and approachable for the community".

"Service providers are becoming aware of and working with each other".

Involvement

One problem highlighted was the difficulty in actually getting people involved in the first place. As one individual involved in the organisation of one forum commented:-

"It's getting community involvement and sustained ownership that is the problem".

This theme is supported by others who attend the forums:-

"It would be good to involve a wider range of residents".

"Insufficient residents despite concerted efforts to get them to attend".

"I speak to lots of people who don't know it exists".

This concern extends to the type of representation at the meetings but also begs the question how wide can or should the net be cast? This is illustrated by the following comments:-

"Why no representation from churches or the schools"?

"It would be useful to get representation from the local pubs and restaurants".

"I would like to see more young faces attending".

Maybe the Asian Community should be better represented".

Many of those responding accepted the difficulty in getting more people from a broad cross section of the community and service providers to attend and some offered ideas on how this could be addressed:-

"You should encourage one spokesperson for every road to come and discuss their local issues."

"Involve rolling groups of invited residents perhaps street by street".

This extended to the service providers with the suggestion that as well as regular attendees, specific agency representatives could be invited to attend specific meetings where their knowledge and presence could directly help to develop solutions to issues being dealt with at that meeting.

Promotion

Comment on attendance extended beyond the 'who' should attend and extended to publicity and specific practical advice or pieces of work which might help to promote and extend attendance at the forum:-

"More posters, improve publicity".

"A newsletter – get residents to distribute some of them".

"Someone to pick up and drop off older residents".

"Occasionally hold daytime meetings for those people who are unhappy at attending evening meetings".

"Special meetings for the younger age group to hear their concerns and involve them in working towards solutions".

"Rotate the venue around the parish".

Getting people to attend the meetings was the first stage in a complex process dependent on many variables. All the areas studied had identifiable community problems and issues and therefore as has previously been mentioned they justified the individual attention and the allocation of resources from the many local service providers. It also meant that people felt strongly enough to attend the meetings and see if things could be improved. Which people attended, and how often was linked to many individual variables such as the personal importance of issues to them, their own self confidence and their willingness to become involved in the issues affecting their community. *"The problem is sustaining interest and numbers"* as one resident put it. Getting their voices heard and highlighting the issues important to them was the next big issue and once again produced varied and passionate feedback.

The chance to contribute

The majority of people (both residents and service providers) felt that they got an opportunity to speak and to be heard. For one service provider it was the essence of the whole process – *"communication, communication, communication."* For others there were issues about who was heard:-

"Some people allowed to be too dominant".

"A few loud voices may not be representative".

And to one individual it was *"a disorganised bear pit with irrelevant issues introduced"*.

For some, the difficulties in expressing views was linked to the confidence of the individuals – *"some feeling of being intimidated by others"* and could also be linked to the style of the chair – *"the chairman sometimes stops them before they can finish what they wish to comment on and then they do not attend again"* .

Overall people felt they were able to express their concerns. The structure of the meetings and the model used was praised and was said by many to offer the opportunity for everyone to have their say whether it be in the question and answer sessions, discussion groups or more informally and confidentially on a one to one basis with individuals at coffee break.

As one individual commented:-

"All sessions were well planned in advance and were well run. They also produced the outcomes and consensus to move forward".

Although this initially was down to the facilitation skills of Thames Valley Partnership staff, the skills of the chair were also mentioned and it was suggested that this individual was pivotal in maintaining support, allowing everyone to express their views and progressing pieces of work. Several people also highlighted their concerns in relation to political bias entering the forum. As one commented, *"there is some political needle creeping in"*. Another stated *"I would like to see less back biting by Councillors trying to score points."* This problem could well be addressed by the election of the Chair and there was some support for the election of a chair from the community. As one respondent commented, *"I wonder if it would be less 'top down' if a resident could chair?"* This has occurred in some cases but not in others. Respondents acknowledged the difficult job of chairing the forum and felt that this individual needed reliable support from the statutory sector to ensure that they were properly resourced and supported. As another individual commented *"volunteers committed to this forum should not be out of pocket"*.

BENEFITS

As well as being asked to comment on the benefits offered by the existence of the forum as a consultation body, respondents were also asked to comment on what they felt was good about the forum and what could be improved.

The benefits broadly fell into the following categories:-

Regularity

Residents and service providers liked the idea that the forum was an opportunity to discuss issues specific to their neighbourhood and that it took place on a regular basis. As the following quotes illustrate:-

"It's regular and anyone can attend".

"The regular engagement with the community".

"Regularity and attendance of a broad range of service providers".

Answers to questions

Many spoke of the opportunity to take any matter however small it might seem to the forum. Because of the direct access to people with the relevant information, they were able to find out what to do or who to go to and were far more likely to resolve their problem. This opportunity to meet and consult directly on issues was also seen as beneficial by the service providers and helped them to prioritise the issues important to the community. This opportunity to get the right information is illustrated by the following selection of quotes:-

"Nothing is too small to have attention given to it".

"People come back to you with answers".

"Being seen to consult".

"Being able to hear what other people are doing and that with problems you are not alone".

"Proposals, replies, co-operation, discussion, expert advice".

Development of rapport

The opportunity to meet regularly face to face had an important additional benefit of allowing community members and service providers to develop rapport. Even though the forums are still developing this benefit was seen as important to the sustainability and ongoing success of this type of consultation framework. It was also seen as an excellent opportunity for residents and local voluntary organisations to get to know each other and begin to build their own self help networks.

"There is much better rapport between the community and the police".

"Gives the chance to speak face to face with service providers".

"Frank open exchange".

Concern and interest

This benefit comes mainly from the resident community responses. There was widespread support and gratitude for the interest shown by agencies in working together for the community. This in addition mobilised those who may not have worked on their own, to work together to solve problems and take pride in their community. This was illustrated by the following responses:-

"Concerns are taken seriously".

"This partnership has boosted the residents' confidence".

"It makes a stand against all who are not law abiding or respectful and makes it clear that we (who are) are watching and concerned".

"Satisfying to know that 'officialdom' and other people generally are concerned".

"It is helping people realise that small improvements can be made by working together".

Holistic picture

Although existing consultation bodies were seen to deal with individual issues in the neighbourhood, people saw one of the main benefits of this style of consultation as providing an holistic picture of the neighbourhood. This worked both ways in that staff within all the key agencies were able to share their data on the one geographic area leading to a more efficient assessment of the problems. Residents were able to see what effort was being put in to prioritise and solve problems in the area and become involved in the solutions and take responsibility for dealing with the problems.

"Having various service providers gives an opportunity to gain an overall picture of the situation".

"The coming together of the various agencies in resolving local problems".

"By taking a geographic approach, it has helped to lever in additional help".

"Appreciation of other's problems".

'Actions speak louder than words'

There were very different ideas about what had been achieved by the forums and this is discussed later in this report but for a significant number, the key benefit of the forum was that things had happened. These may have been perceived by some as quite small achievements but for many they were the catalyst to greater things.

"Action is based on the residents main concerns".

*"Things **have** happened".*

"There is an attempt to change things".

"Concentrating action in this area".

"(The forum) has created interest in local matters and as a result, many problems have been solved and others kept well in sight for future progress".

This is discussed further in the section on improvements that have resulted from the introduction of the forums.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

There were no responses received that suggested the areas would be better off without the forums but respondents were asked about what they felt could be improved. Many suggestions were made about how to attract more people across a broader cross section of the community and these have been discussed earlier in this section. The mechanics of the meetings were the subject of a fair amount of discussion and warrant separate comment.

Several respondents commented on the need for clarity of purpose. These comments were extended to provide suggestions on the way in which the meetings could be structured:

"A clearer focus on what the meeting is about".

"Tighter constitution".

"Meetings can be chaotic".

"Meetings are long".

"Deadlines and plans to keep to would focus us all".

"The agenda planning needs to build on issues raised at previous meetings".

"Time bound sessions to stop people going over the same items consistently".

Many residents commented on the lack of consistency of the agency staff that attended and although the latter commented on how *"time consuming"* the meetings could be, there was recognition that the community should be clear about who to contact in relation to specific problems. It was felt that this could be done via regularly updated contact lists although as one resident commented;

"one expects to see the same service provider as before to pursue a concern".

One agency representative commented on the problem of getting the community to take ownership of the forum. This view was expressed by several respondents from both the resident population and the service providers and has been mentioned previously in relation to the difficulties of sustainability. There is certainly no simple answer to this question but several suggestions about how best to maintain the fragile balance were put forward.

"We need better indicators of community involvement and improved quality of life".

"Things can be changed for the better but the community involvement is essential for its future".

"Improve publicity, promote successes".

"We have problems getting the community to take ownership of the forum and part of the reason for this is because it was agency led at the outset".

HAS THE FORUM IMPROVED THE QUALITY OF LIFE?

Finally the study asked those involved whether the forum had helped to address issues important to them and whether it had improved the quality of life in their area. For a significant number it was still too early to tell and there was recognition that it would take time to see the big changes which many acknowledged could be achieved if everyone continued to work together.

Once again perceptions varied greatly about what the forum had achieved ranging from:
"These should exist across each and every community not just a select few".

to

"No improvement noticed".

The majority feeling was that the forum had improved things. The general view is captured by the following comment from a service provider:

"Overall I would say the forum has been a great success although agency intensive. Just by having a geographic rather than a thematic focus means agencies and local people can interact on the real issues affecting them rather than just having groups that deal with national priorities".

From the resident population the responses understandably related to their specific needs having been met but added support to the service provider's comment that the forum works because it addressing specific community needs and not 'second guessing' what those needs might be:-

"Traffic speeds and traffic nuisance addressed".

"Provision of extra skips, improvements in youth behaviour".

"Rubbish cleared from grass areas, starting to tidy the place up in small ways".

There was however wider recognition of what the forum was doing for the local people in terms of providing a structure and network of support:-

"It's becoming a focal point for the building of community. It also helps to make the point that crime and community safety are not matters for the police alone".

"It provides a venue for concerns to be raised".

"All the issues dealt with are involved with community safety and as such are very important and to a great extent are being ignored by national and local government".

*“My main issue is that there are various authorities that believe they know what is good for you without asking. The forum encourages people to tell them what they are **really** concerned about”.*

The general impression was that the forum helped to contribute to a reduction in the fear of crime but only for those who attended and who had a fear of crime in the first place. There was still concern that those who had a real fear of crime would not feel confident enough to come to the meetings or to seek assistance in getting their views heard. Once again this is a much more complex issue than this study can do justice to and currently there are no indicators being consistently used in these areas that will measure the fear of crime. Thus for one resident, they had never felt safe in the 40 years that they had lived in the area whereas for another living in the same area, safety had never been a problem. Answers to this question would require a sustained and in depth study of a consistent set of indicators over a much greater time-scale and this is possibly an area for future work. However early indications suggest that the regular exchange of information and the development of a partnership to address issues goes a long way to producing small but important improvements in levels of confidence and feelings of inclusion. As one resident commented when asked whether the area felt safer as a result of the work of the forum:

“Yes, because the sense of community is stronger now”.

Therefore, strengthening communities may well lead to reductions in the fear of crime”.

CONCLUSION

Numerous research projects over the last decade have recognised the need to engage communities in the regeneration of neighbourhoods and bringing about improvements in the quality of life for residents. The most effective programmes are shown to be those that engage at a very local level and involve residents in the decision making processes. How best to achieve this continues to be the subject of much debate.

This study has looked at the development of just one model of community consultation developed by the Thames Valley Partnership. The model is highly structured and as such many may feel it is contrary to the pure community development ethos. The model seeks to engage and empower the local community to work in consultation with their local service providers but is also resource intensive for agency staff in terms of attendance and support. The study looked at three geographic areas where the model had been introduced and sought feedback from all those involved in the development and maintenance of the process to see what has been achieved to date.

The model provides the framework to determine who should attend and how the process of consultation can be built in a constructive and productive way. This is not to say that there is no flexibility but the structure gives clear guidelines for progress. Each of the sessions within the model develops the previous work done and aims to build in sustainability and a focus that allows the communities to develop their own problem solving capability. Some may argue that the level of initial support may make it difficult to sustain when service providers and the community are left to continue. It is certainly recognised to be resource intensive for the organisations involved. Interestingly however all three forums continue to exist and to meet on average every 4-6 weeks. They have

continued to attract a regular attendance of between 30 to 40 people. One forum attracted over 100 people to its first meeting and this coincided with an England World Cup football match! The most recently developed forum has just elected to form a Community Association. There certainly seems to be a desire by both community and service providers to make things happen.

The results so far suggest that although it may be difficult to get the community involved, this method of consultation is beneficial to both residents and service providers alike. None of the areas studied had any other consultation framework that was comparable or came anywhere close in terms of dealing with such a broad cross section of local concerns. The bringing together of information from across the agencies helped both to identify the areas of greatest need but also to join the pieces of the jigsaw and prevent duplication of effort.

The benefits resulting from this style of consultation were broadly seen to fall into the following categories:-

- Well planned and well run initial sessions that help to engage the community from the start.
- Provides a *regular* focus for residents and service providers to meet face to face and address local concerns together.
- No issue too small and questions answered.
- An opportunity for communities and service providers to develop a rapport and for agencies to be seen to consult.
- Provides an overall picture of what is happening in the area.
- Actions based on the residents' main concerns.
- Acts to boost morale and confidence within the community.
- Concentrates action where it is needed.

The key areas of concern or aspects of the process which respondents felt could be improved fell into the following categories:-

- Effort must be made to encourage as many people as possible to attend. This can be achieved by advertising, varying venue and times of meetings and assisting with transport.
- Meetings need to be skilfully chaired to allow all to have their say without any one individual dominating. Ideally the chair should come from the community.
- Resources should be made available to provide administrative support and to reimburse volunteers if necessary.

- Sessions can drag on. They should have an agenda and be time-bound.
- There should be contact lists of agency staff provided which are kept up to date.
- Community involvement is essential but it is difficult to gain community ownership of the forum.
- Actions speak louder than words, however small those actions might seem.
- The forum needs to publicise its existence and its successes to maintain support.
- Change takes time but gradual improvements boost confidence and encourage commitment.
- To be designated a deprived area and to receive too much attention could be counter productive.
- Need to be careful not to raise expectations.

There are still testing times ahead. It remains to be seen whether or not the forums can maintain long term momentum, involvement and interest but they are all still in existence, indeed one forum is over two years old now and continues to engage the community on a regular basis. There is also an ongoing concern that data collected by different agencies is not currently comparable across the geographic areas that have been identified for this consultation framework. Future initiatives should think about the measures that need to be in place to evaluate improvements in the quality of life as well as community safety. This may well entail changes in reporting procedures and the development of more effective ways of sharing information across organisational boundaries. Such changes would allow for a quantitative measure of improvements as well as qualitative one.

The forums have however already proved to be good networking platforms, encouraging resident participation and producing results that relate directly to the needs of the local people. Their challenge is to continue to build resilience and local based problem solving capacity within the community whilst maintaining effective and constructive consultation channels with service providers. If this can be achieved then public services will work better to meet local people's needs and economic, social and physical regeneration can happen and be sustained.

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NEIGHBOURHOOD EMPOWERMENT - THE THAMES VALLEY PARTNERSHIP WAY

**By Cathryn O'Donovan
and Russ Wootton**

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Contents

	Page
1. Rationale	23
2. The Five-Stage Model	23
3. Stage One	24
Tasks	24
Aims	24
Programme	24
4. Stage Two	25
Tasks	25
Aims	25
Programme	26
5. Support Meeting	26
6. Stage Three	26
Tasks	26
Aims	27
Programme	27
7. Support Meeting	28
8. Stages Four and Five Tasks	28
Session Four	28
Aims	28
Programme	28
9. Support Meeting	29
10. Stage Five	29
Tasks	29
Aims	29
Programme	30
11. Six Hats Exercise	31
12. Mind Map	32

Neighbourhood Empowerment – The Thames Valley Partnership Way

Rationale

During the Community Safety Strategy developments there has been pressure from Government to engage with the local community. It has rightly been suggested that local problems demand local solutions, but as professionals how do we work with the local community to help them meet professionals on an equal level?

At the Thames Valley Partnership we believe that communities need the same help and support as professionals to take part in the debate and to this end we have developed our neighbourhood strategy.

Taking the model of empowerment, our five-stage model involves engaging with communities alongside professionals on an equal footing. We believe that communities are full of thinking, intelligent people who, given the correct information and the whole picture, are able to take control and be involved in solutions to community issues just as effectively as those who are paid to do the work.

The Thames Valley Partnership offered to work with neighbourhoods that had been identified as a priority within local community safety strategies both to help focus community safety and harness the energies and resources of a wide range of partners but also to facilitate genuine involvement of the community in finding solutions. The process that is described is the model that was developed by Cathryn O'Donovan and Russ Wootton of the Thames Valley Partnership in three neighbourhoods within Buckinghamshire. In each case the work was subsequently handed over to a local independent committee with the community safety partnership continuing to give support.

The Thames Valley Partnership is willing to work with other community safety partnerships to use this model as a starting point for developing and maintaining an inclusive community safety strategy in the area.

The Five Stage Model

During the first Community Safety Audits it became clear that workers within districts could identify 'hotspots'. In the Aylesbury Vale hotspots were identified through the Violent Crime Action Group. There may not be much statistical evidence available to pinpoint hotspots, but areas that cause concern are easily identified both by the public and the local service providers.

What became clear during the audits was that although hotspots were known there was little, if any, joined up thinking, provision or work provided for these areas. Deprived areas were not always getting their fair share of resources and a dispirited population rarely gets its full quota of help and support. Resources, which are not joined up, fail depressed areas, as there is not the infrastructure to offer extra support.

The aim of the five stage model is to join up the professionals and the community to begin to tackle the issues of Community Safety within any one clearly identified community.

The Thames Valley Partnership's role is to act as honest brokers on behalf of the local Community Safety Partners.

Stage One

Tasks

With the support of the Partnership staff, as many representatives of professional organisations as possible from the local area are invited to an initial meeting. We would encourage the net to be cast as wide as possible, but included in this first trawl should be Councillors from Parish, Town, District and County Councils as well as any voluntary organisations including the churches and other religious centres. All statutory agencies that are signed up to the Community Safety Partnership should be included. We would recommend that there are members from the Police Area Beat Team, Area Youth Workers, somebody representing Health Services, District Council (leisure and planning) and County Council to form the nucleus of the group.

We would suggest that as far as possible meetings are rooted in the community the group is wishing to serve, therefore good usage of community provision would be encouraged. Checks need to be made that there are facilities for making drinks, toilets and fire exits and access.

The professionals are then invited to a workshop where they will be asked to bring as much information, factual and anecdotal, to inform the debate.

Aims

- To begin to develop team cohesion.
- To begin to identify the area issues.
- To sign up to the process.

Programme

Session Length 2.15 hours.

00.00 Welcome and Introductions

- a) Working Together Contract
- b) Pairs – Getting to know you exercise

Who you are?
Your organisation.
One fact about your professional role.

00.15 Roles and Responsibilities

- a) Why geographical initiatives.

- b) Virtual Child Continuum

00.30 Is There a Problem?

- a) What is the statistical evidence?
- b) What is the Anecdotal evidence?
- c) Put on flip chart.

01.00 Priorities

- a) In small groups.
- b) Identify six priorities.
- c) Identify any 'quick wins' (ie something that an organisation could easily manage to create a positive input in the area).
- d) Feed back to large group.

01.30 Coffee – Mix and Mingle

01.45 SWOT Analysis

Is your chosen area the place to work in?

02.00 What Happens Next

Partnership Expectations

02.15 End

Stage Two

Tasks

This is the opportunity to open up the sessions to those professional and voluntary groups that may have been missed.

Workers will need to agree to the process as Meeting Three will involve the community and it is not going to be helpful if there is a blame culture or lack of co-operation.

The election/volunteering of a Chairperson. (The Chairperson will be supported for the first three meetings by the members of the Thames Valley Partnership). The Partnership would recommend that the Chairperson be seen as a community champion from the voluntary or councillor sector with professional departments offering supportive back up.

Aims

- To create a cohesive team.
- To prepare the group for a public launch.

Programme

Session Length 2.15 hours.

00.00 Welcome and Icebreaker

Song Titles

00.15 Recapping the Process

00.30 Reviewing the Priorities

00.45 The Thames Valley Partnership's Six Hats Exercise – Options For Action (see page 31)

01.30 Coffee – Mix and Mingle

01.45 Structure of the Forum

Temporary Chairperson and Support

02.00 Going Public

a) Next Stage

b) Marketing Strategy

02.15 End

Support Meeting

This meeting is offered to support the new Chairperson, if the Chairperson is someone from outside the professional arena. These meetings are particularly important as they are created to empower the Chairperson to deal with a public meeting and introduce the Session Three Agenda.

Finding a local venue and publicity will need to be discussed here. It is useful to alert reports from the local paper and invite representatives from the local media to the meeting.

Stage Three

Tasks

This session is aimed at bringing the professionals and communities together; it is about creating opportunities so that the community can highlight the issues they have. Our experience shows us that community concerns are rarely professional's concerns and are often quality of life issues.

Aims

- To create an arena where issues can be raised.
- To listen to the issues that the community raise.
- To introduce professional agendas.
- To identify the positive attributes of a neighbourhood.
- To acknowledge personal anecdotal agendas.
- To introduce a working together agenda.

Programme

Session Length 2.30 hours.

00.00 Hello, Good Evening and Welcome

Health and Safety Issues of the Venue

00.05 Introductions

Introductions of the facilitators, what the programme is offering and the Working Together Rules.

00.15 Background Issues

- a) Why are we here – Invitation by Strategy Group.
- b) What is Community Safety – Explanation of the Five Stage Model.

00.45 The Problems

Word Storm (Brainstorm) the problems of the area. Small groups or large group depending on the size of your audience.

01.15 Coffee – Mix and Mingle

Encourage people to start talking about their issues and problems to the relevant professional.

01.30 Comparisons

Present the issues that the professionals discussed and add to the community issues.

01.45 Definition of Problem

Working as small groups combine the issues under 5/6 main topic headings, feedback to large group-facilitators scribe.

02.15 Weaknesses

Word Storm (Brainstorm) the weaknesses in the Community.

02.20 Strengths

Word Storm (Brainstorm) the strengths in the Community.

02.25 Final Words – Summary – Date and Time of Next Meeting

02.30 End

Support Meeting

A meeting that offers support, coaching, feedback and preparation to the Chairperson and their administrative support. The length and depth of these meetings will depend on the experience of the person in the Chair.

Stage Four and Five

Tasks

The Thames Valley Partnership Consultancy Team will now begin to withdraw from the meetings. Clearly they still have a role to play but there is a gradual hand over of power to the Community Chairperson.

The introduction of the meeting format.

The identification of quick wins.

Stage Four Aims

- To introduce the meeting format.
- To begin the process of creating a functioning working group for the Community Safety Strategy.
- To begin the process of withdrawing from the group.

Programme

Session Length 2.15 hours.

00.00 Hello, Good Evening and Welcome
Health and Safety Issues of the Venue

00.05 Restate Working Together Rules

00.10 Review of Previous Meetings Issues

00.15 Open Session

Opportunities for members of the public to introduce new issues and concerns.

00.30 Quick Wins

An opportunity to share the changes from the previous meeting.

00.35 Close of Session

Members of the public are thanked for their contribution, opening of Community Forum.

00.45 Priorities

Small groups using the work from Session Three begin to create a priority action list.

01.15 Coffee – Mix and Mingle

01.30 Solutions

In small groups begin to look at solutions to the priority list – share the results with the large group.

02.00 Feedback

Identify who will begin to take the issues back to agencies or the strategy group.

02.10 Thank you, date and time of next meeting.

02.15 End

Support Meeting

A meeting that offers support, coaching, feedback and preparation to the Chairperson and their administrative support. The length and depth of these meetings will depend on the experience of the person in the Chair.

Stage Five

Tasks

To withdraw from the group.

Aims

- To withdraw from the group.
- To say goodbye.

Programme

Session Length 2.15 hours.

00.00 Hello, Good Evening and Welcome
Health and Safety Issues of the Venue

00.05 Working Together - Respect

00.10 Open Session
New issues.

00.25 Progress Report
Update by all.

00.55 Close of Open Session
Public thanked for their contribution, Community Action work.

01.00 Coffee – Mix and Mingle

01.15 Working Meeting
Development of Community work, writing and updating of Action Plans.

02.10 Date and Time of Next Meeting

02.15 End

The Thames Valley Partnership's Six Hats Exercise.

This work was adapted from the work of Edward De Bono.

The Six Hats Exercise is a thinking tool which divides thinking into six categories:

- Managing The Thinking
- Information
- Feelings
- Caution
- Benefits
- Creativity

Each hat represents one method of thinking to be used temporarily to the exclusion of the rest. The facilitator introduces the problem to be solved and then guides the group using the hats. The purpose of this approach is to focus the thinking of the group and encourage participation. (The Thames Valley Partnership Team adapted De Bono's original descriptions of the hats – but here they are described in their original form to avoid confusion for those who may be familiar with the original version). The aim is to manage the thinking and planning process in a constructive way.

Blue Hat	Managing The Thinking. What strategies are the group going to use to solve their problem?
White Hat	Information. What information do the group need as they begin to solve their problem?
Red Hat	Feelings. What are the individual's feelings about the problem?
Black Hat	Caution. What will get in the way of a solution being found.
Yellow Hat	Benefits. What are the benefits or advantages?
Green Hat	Creativity. How extreme can solutions be to solve the problem? Allow the imagination to run wild.

This exercise should be fun, light hearted and quickly administered. Facilitators are looking for groups to begin to expand their thinking.

The problems here will be those identified in the original priorities.