

# Values into Action – Lessons for successful community development and sustainable regeneration.

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# 1. Introduction

During the 1990's a series of central government regeneration initiatives were implemented in England starting with City Challenge and culminating in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (SEU, 2000).

Concurrently a UK Midlands based registered social landlord (RSL) was examining its future. After a merger between Friendship Housing Group and Charnwood Forest Housing Association in 1999, the newly formed RSL re-focused on many of the values which had been key to one of the partners origins in the 1950s. One of Friendship's original aims was to help immigrants, actively recruited to work in the Midlands based engineering and transport industries in the 1950s, feel welcomed into the community. However, over the years, the funding regimes directed RSLs away from community involvement and inner city rehabilitation work. In the return to original values the RSL again became involved in community regeneration. The paper draws primarily on the experience of the RSL and its attempts to engage proactively with a series of nationally funded, locally governed area based urban regeneration initiatives.

The merged RSL, renamed fch Housing and Care, supports vulnerable communities, families, and individuals. Equality is the organisation's core value, involving and sharing power with customers and the wider community.

Specifically fch's goals are:

- services tailored to people's needs and preferences
- support which helps people to live fuller lives
- neighbourhoods which are better places to live.

As it is in the practical application of area based policy that lessons are repeatedly learnt and all too often subsequently forgotten, when new politically driven initiatives come along every few years, replacing older ones, this paper draws from fch's engagement with area based regeneration to discuss some useful learning about local urban governance.

## 2. fch Regeneration Strategy

The Regeneration Strategy reflects the organisation's core purpose as a quality service organisation and its wider perspective in supporting neighbourhoods. The purpose of the strategy can be summarised as follows:

- to add financial and human resources to neighbourhoods where fch provides housing and/or other services to assist in the broader development of those communities
- to ensure longer-term commitment of such resources as envisaged within the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal rather than the 'short term' programme-funding approach epitomised by recent urban policy.
- to use the engagement to encourage local community involvement
- to develop partnerships with other private, voluntary and public organisations sharing fch goals
- to prioritise the needs of fch Housing and Care tenants and service users in neighbourhood development activities
- to promote the benefits of working in partnership with fch on regeneration initiatives

### **3. Neighbourhood Management – the fch approach**

The key components of successful community-led neighbourhood management have been identified in a number of Government Policy documents including the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (SEU, 2000). The components include an accessible local base, consultation and involvement, a community development approach building on the interests and priorities of residents, flexibility in providing local approaches for local circumstances and a long-term corporate commitment particularly in terms of resources.

The neighbourhood approach adopted by fch in Sparkbrook, Birmingham and Crewton, Derby contains most if not all of the identified components and therefore effectively pre-empted the recommendations of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (*ibid.*). In particular the Locality Team approach to housing management adopted by fch mirrors the recommended approach to neighbourhood management described in the policy document and suggested by Gregory (1998). Consequently at a time when the British Government is promoting this “new” approach and proposing a pathfinder programme, fch is in a position to review the progress of its pilot neighbourhood initiatives and consider the way forward in terms of managing its neighbourhoods.

## 4. Central Government Perspective

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (ibid.) states that it is essential to co-ordinate services around the needs of each neighbourhood and argues that neighbourhood renewal can only start when there is a proper understanding of the needs of the communities. It acknowledges that in order to achieve results more quickly change is imposed from above without proper understanding of what the problems of a community or neighbourhood really are. Equally the pace of delivery usually prevents communities from engaging with the regeneration process. The National Strategy recognises that the vast majority of resources expended in a regeneration area bring no direct benefits for the communities living there.

The Strategy also argues that effective neighbourhood renewal is prevented by a lack of leadership and joint working. Until one institution at local, regional or national level has clear responsibility for the regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods, the problems in those neighbourhoods will be compounded by the lack of leadership. In particular there is concern that lack of clarity about responsibility engenders frustration for residents and other external partners. This frustration at not being able to hold anyone to account and, as in fch's experience, not knowing who to contact in order to get involved in a particular area regeneration initiative, discourages active involvement and participation.

Neighbourhood management is identified by the National Strategy as one of a number of radical solutions to the problem of deprived neighbourhoods and in particular is regarded as the solution to the problems caused by lack of leadership. The Government's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) has identified the following characteristics of neighbourhood management for disadvantaged neighbourhoods:

- someone in charge at neighbourhood level;
- re-organised public services as the main instruments of renewal;
- maximum involvement from communities and voluntary and private organisations
- targeted assistance from government.

However there have been many area-based regeneration initiatives over the last thirty years, many of which have failed to learn the lessons from the past and repeated the same mistakes especially in relation to the attempts to engage the local community in the initiatives. Taylor (2000), argues that if Neighbourhood Management is to achieve sustainable change, it needs to learn from what has and hasn't worked. Public sector cultures need to be changed from top to bottom if communities are to be given real power and responsibility to take action. This means that the long-term perspective is essential. Otherwise Neighbourhood Management will depend on a few champions. It will not be embedded in new systems of governance.

It is in the context of the new policies of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal that the attempts proposed to 'improve' local governance through a neighbourhood management approach are considered. In the experience of fch it is argued that efforts to improve representation on local community decision making bodies is a frequently futile exercise which draws on an inordinate amount of time and resources for scant return in terms of more effective urban governance. fch believes that alternative approaches

to ensuring more effective local urban governance in local area based initiatives are available to local community stakeholders. The practical examples used to justify this belief draw primarily on the experience of fch as a community based registered social landlord and its attempts to engage proactively with nationally funded, locally governed area based urban regeneration initiatives.

## 5. fch Pilot Neighbourhood Initiatives

fch's approach to neighbourhood regeneration incorporates three strategies relating to anti-poverty, the sustainability of neighbourhoods and service delivery. These strategies are closely interwoven and reflect the organisation's role as a service organisation as well as a wider concern to support the neighbourhoods in which those services are provided.

Whilst the service strategy aims to improve the quality of service to fch customers, the anti-poverty strategy aims to maximise the disposable incomes of customers by reducing the cost in use of properties, achieving affordable rents for those properties and maximising incomes and skill opportunities. The neighbourhood strategy aims to integrate the housing and care services into the broader regeneration efforts to contribute to the sustainability of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. fch seeks to build the capacity of the communities, as argued in Geddes (1998), in its neighbourhoods to enable those communities to have a greater impact on the decision making processes that affect their lives.

In the short term the fch approach to neighbourhood regeneration clearly seeks to achieve a number of key business related outputs such as increased lettings but in the longer term the sustainability of the neighbourhoods is the outcome that fch must seek. A recent report commissioned by the Housing Corporation (Long, 2000) identified nine key factors contributing to sustainability. The report defines sustainability as "people continuing to want to live in the same community, both now and in the future" (ibid, p3). From the nine key factors the report identifies five primary factors that tend to have a greater impact on sustainability. The five factors are: demand for housing; reputation of an area; crime; social exclusion and poverty, and accessibility of facilities and work. fch's experience in developing its pilot neighbourhood initiatives bears out the findings of the report and emphasises the importance of tackling these factors in a strategic, multi-disciplinary manner.

### 5.1 Sparkbrook, Birmingham

The neighbourhood approach was initially adopted and implemented in the East Sparkbrook area of Birmingham, with critical elements of the other two strategies focused in that neighbourhood. The area was chosen because it exhibits some of the greatest deprivation in the areas where fch worked and because it also contains some of the most intractable problems in the delivery of our services. Work commenced in 1998 when a multi-disciplinary working group of fch officers was established to implement a three-year action plan. During the last twelve months efforts have concentrated on the development of a Local Service Partnership (DETR, 2000) and the reorganisation of the housing division into locality teams. The establishment of the Local Service Partnership project is therefore a direct result of the neighbourhood pilot. A case study showing the activities in Sparkbrook is contained in Appendix 1.

## 5.2 Crewton Gardens

A small multi-disciplinary project team of fch officers based on the Sparkbrook model was established in 1999. The team co-ordinates and manages the neighbourhood action plan which was approved in September 1999. As in East Sparkbrook, the intention of this management approach was to develop a group-wide and corporate response to the issues faced by fch in the delivery of our services in the area. The project team is an internal working party of fch whose core membership includes the Derby Locality Team, the Regeneration Division and the Care Services department. Partnerships are also successfully being forged beyond fch, for example, with other RSLs in the area, and with Derby City Council. All members of the project team are encouraged to share information about the area - their activities, networks and partnerships within it - and to identify issues or ideas that have so far been missed. After only eighteen months it is clear that the approach is proving to be successful and this is clearly evidenced by a reduction in the number of void properties on the estate during that period from 57 to 19.

A case study showing the activities in Crewton Gardens is contained in Appendix 2.

## 6. Neighbourhood Management – the way forward

As Taylor (2000) points out, there are few examples so far of the kind of comprehensive approach to neighbourhood management that the Government is proposing although elements of the framework have been developed across the country. Some existing models are service led, or top down and a growing number of local authorities are introducing area co-ordination to join up their services at local level, often bringing in other agencies such as the police, health authorities, employment and benefit agencies. Local teams are employed and required to report to neighbourhood forums or to area committees composed of local councillors and community representatives. In Birmingham the Local Involvement, Local Action (LILA) initiative reflects this type of approach. Best Value (DETR, 2001) is also being used by local authorities to encourage a cross-agency approach, using 'joined up' indicators.

Government initiatives such as Health and Education Action Zones or Sure Start are opening up new opportunities for joint working. Housing associations or other registered social landlords have developed service development initiatives based on the principles of 'housing plus' (Housing Corporation/URBED, 1998) aimed at providing a wider range of services to tackle the issues that face their tenants.

Other Neighbourhood Management approaches are community led or bottom-up. Tenant housing management organisations are one vehicle that has increasingly moved towards regeneration and community empowerment beyond the boundaries of their own stock. Similarly the number of asset owning community development trusts has grown partially as a result of the exit strategies of area regeneration programmes such as City Challenge. These programmes have contributed to this growth by endowing communities with assets and acting as incubators for the development of local organisations with the capacity to take on leadership roles. This has been somewhat ad hoc however and reflects a major criticism of area based regeneration. Area based regeneration policy makers are slowly recognising that whilst 3-5 years is a sufficient time period to effect physical and environmental change, it is insufficient time to engage communities more effectively in local governance. Later initiatives such as the New Deal for Communities (DETR, 1998) have acknowledged this fact by providing a ten year time frame (*New Start*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2001), although some commentators are beginning to argue that a fifteen to twenty year time frame is required to effect change to a new generation of residents and make regeneration sustainable.

Service led and community led approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive and fch's experience concurs with the view of Ward et al. (1998) that the most effective action is likely to come from strategies which engage effectively at all levels and are able to combine top-down and bottom up forces for change. The implementation of a neighbourhood management strategy in fch has already commenced with the adoption of the Locality Team approach to housing management. The lessons learnt and good practice identified through the pilot area approach is now being adopted more widely within the organisation. It is the Locality Teams that will provide the nucleus from which a neighbourhood management protocol can be developed to reflect the pilot area experiences. Sparkbrook in particular has been the focus of an innovative neighbourhood management initiative that is con-

sidered in more detail in Section 7 of this paper. The combined approach is reflected in fch's recent attempt to establish a locally managed and controlled service delivery vehicle for the Sparkbook area. This approach serves to demonstrate some of the lessons and obstacles facing current government policy makers if the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal and neighbourhood management is to be implemented successfully.

# 7. A Community Vehicle for Sparkbrook – the Local Service Partnership

## 7.1 The feasibility study

Towards the end of 1998, the principal social and public landlords in Sparkbrook, fch Housing and Care (then Friendship Housing Group), Focus Housing Group and Birmingham City Council, started to work together to look at different ways of providing services within the Sparkbrook area, across housing tenures to address common local concerns.

In the early part of 1999, the partners had developed the basic principles of a Local Service Partnership (LSP), a specially established body formed to deliver a range of different services to a specific locality. These services would include more than just housing, and in particular refuse, cleansing and environmental services were seen as important, having been identified by both partners and community. The LSP was thought to be one possible vehicle that could heavily involve the local community in the running of the multi-function services.

However, it was recognised that this would be a significant departure from the existing provision for both the residents and the providers. This step could only be taken with the agreement and commitment of the community to the longer term. It was also recognised that there would be a number of building blocks that would need to be put in place before this step could be envisaged. In order to identify those building blocks, Housing Corporation funding was secured to undertake a feasibility study on the proposal.

## 7.2 Background to the project

There have been so many regeneration interventions in Sparkbrook that it is difficult to mention all of them. Birmingham City Council has targeted the area many times with programmes to improve the built environment, to deal with rubbish and vandalism, to reduce overcrowding and to build the capacity of the local community. The City Council provides significant resources for voluntary and community organisations and economic development policy has sought to stimulate local business. Education policy has targeted local schools to increase educational attainment rates and local policies generally are sensitive to the needs and concerns of a multi-cultural and multi-religious area, as supported by Brownhill and Darke (1998).

Key regeneration initiatives in the area include:

- In 1975 Sparkbrook was designated the first Housing Action Area in the country
- Inner City Partnership Programme funding for the area in the 1980's
- In the 1980's the East Sparkbrook Neighbourhood Improvement Agency was formed by the City Council, fch and SHAPE Housing to facilitate repairs and improvements to the Barber Trust estate.
- Urban Action Plan for the area developed in 1995 by the City Council
- Successful Single Regeneration Budget bid in 1996 for the Sparkbrook,

## Sparkhill and Tyseley Area Regeneration Initiative (SSTARI)

- Designation as a Health Improvement Area in late 1990's.

A key problem is the enormity of the task to regenerate Sparkbrook. Parts of the area are largely settled and the local environment stable, whilst the East Sparkbrook neighbourhood is beset by transience, an unsettled population and a high rate of void properties across all tenures. Despite this, regeneration initiatives consistently target the wider Sparkbrook area rather than focus on the specific, localised issues in the East Sparkbrook neighbourhood.

Another issue is the number of social landlords operating in the area, currently exceeding twenty. Few of them communicate with each other about their work in the locality and in general they are not well integrated into the SSTARI SRB partnership. RSLs have tended to be overlooked in the City Challenge and SRB partnerships in the City. Whilst this is not difficult to understand when the RSLs do not hold a significant amount of stock in an area or lack a local presence, this has not been the case for fch who have been working in Sparkbrook since the 1950s. Even so, communication between SSTARI and fch was poor for a long time with fch making numerous unsuccessful attempts to get involved. This was unfortunate given that one of the objectives of SSTARI is to improve local housing. Their objectives closely matched some of the work that fch was already engaged in. The preoccupation of SSTARI to simply engage with the variety of City Council departments prevented it from recognising the capacity of RSLs like fch to reach its tenants as part of the SSTARI community and provide complementary social aspects of regeneration.

As a result fch devised and pursued its own regeneration objectives that included provision of affordable childcare locally. It was the success of fch at generating local community support for its childcare activities that facilitated a closer working relationship with SSTARI which culminated in the fch/SSTARI/ESF funded Facilitating Childcare Project. Interestingly, fch has had a similar experience in Crewton in Derby where attempts to engage with the local SRB partnership were initially frustrated by the local authority who were unable to decide whether the Crewton estate was in or out of the regeneration programme area. Following the successful local management approach adopted on the estate, the local SRB partnership are actively seeking the involvement of fch and its tenants. It would appear that local agencies such as RSLs are too easily sidelined until they appear to have something tangible to offer local authority led regeneration initiatives. This attitude does not bode well for the UK Government's call for joined up thinking.

The Housing Corporation funded Quality of Life project (CURS, 2000), included Sparkbrook as a case study. In their report the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) researchers concluded that the overall impression conveyed was that there were many strands of regeneration activity but few of them were connected. In their opinion it was unlikely that residents in the area had a common purpose or focus as a result. Birmingham City Council had pursued various different ways of involving the local population in neighbourhood forums and there were also various tenant involvement schemes run by both the City Council and local RSLs. However, CURS concluded that there was not a single tenant forum and attempts to mobilise and engage the local population had not been entirely successful. Indeed in undertaking their study CURS were extremely conscious of the issue of consultation fatigue. In areas such as Sparkbrook that have been the focus for repeated regeneration efforts, the burning desire to consult the community remains of paramount importance to the regeneration agencies. However, it is widely regarded by the local community as an empty exercise in which central and local government agencies seek to validate their own plans and strategies. It also leads to scepticism in those local communities that are

constantly asked for their opinions on a bewildering array of issues. The consultation is rarely undertaken in a co-ordinated way and usually leaves the community feeling that nothing has changed as a result.

CURS argued that their research clearly demonstrated the need for better co-ordination of regeneration activities and that better use could be made of information gathered by the RSLs who are engaged with and involving tenants. CURS also identified the concern that with so many social landlords in the area, who all appear to be managing relatively small numbers of stock, this raised the question about the need for rationalisation or at least joint agreements on some housing management functions.

Thus it was in this local context that three social landlords with combined stock of over 2,000 properties in the area decided to develop the Local Service Partnership project in 1999.

### **7.3 Introducing the new concept in partnership working**

The Local Service Partnership (LSP) was seen potentially as a neighbourhood organisation that could influence and co-ordinate the delivery of a wide range of services at local level. It was anticipated that such a body would be community led but not driven by tenure. In most cases, such a body would have responsibility for the local management of housing services, which was seen as the catalyst for the LSP.

The LSP idea operates on the presumption that services need to be attuned to local neighbourhood needs and those neighbourhoods need to be empowered to take responsibility to shape their services. An example of this within Sparkbrook would be the need for a different type of refuse collection service, to deal with the problems encountered by high levels of fly tipping and vermin infestation. This could be dealt with by increased frequency, additional collections etc., but would be shaped to meet the needs of the neighbourhood.

Moreover, the LSP would seek to identify whether connections exist between services, such as the type of accommodation and level of turnover within schools, and its influence on educational attainment. For example, it would seek to establish whether the creation of large family homes that attract and retain families with children in the area, would decrease pupil turnover, and subsequently, educational attainment.

The original project had three important inter-related objectives.

- To obtain accurate information and views from the community about the neighbourhood
- To develop a suitable mechanism that meets the local need, and addressed the issues of decline. In the long term, the LSP would be able to predict the potential outcome of investment using the neighbourhood data.
- To establish a model of neighbourhood community involvement

### **7.4 Structure of the Local Service Partnership**

The preferred governance model was for the partnership to have its own Board of twelve people. As key providers of local services, RSLs and Birmingham City Council would be the principal shareholders, but they would only have a minor presence on the Board.

The Board was expected to comprise:

- 4 representatives from the local community (including schools and businesses)
- 5 local residents
- 3 landlord representatives

The LSP was not seen as a direct replacement for existing groups but as a co-ordinator pulling together the separate services for the benefit of the community as a whole.

The LSP was expected to begin its work by providing co-ordinated management and maintenance services for Focus and fch residents and developing a unified approach to deal with environmental problems such as refuse collection and treating vermin. In addition it would invest in properties within management in a strategic way, achieving economies of scale and initiating training programmes where the contracts are big enough. It is important to emphasise that this was expected to be the starting point for the LSP that would over time extend its activities in the area in conjunction with other agencies and community groups.

## 7.5 Community Involvement

Initial consultation work was undertaken during the feasibility and business-planning phase involving tenants and service users of fch and Focus. During September 1999 a series of focus group meetings were held at which the LSP model was discussed. Support, albeit anecdotal, was identified for the need to enhance the capacity of tenants and other members of the local community to actively engage with existing landlord structures and the development of the LSP. The need for capacity building was clearly identified as being critical to this process (Taylor, 1995; Murray and Taylor, 1995; Purdue et al, 2000). It was envisaged that the role of capacity building would be developed over time, to involve the review of budgets and the determination of priorities for services and investment. As a result, the partnership would become the focus of attention for activity within the neighbourhood. The emphasis will be upon the active involvement of tenants living in the neighbourhood, rather than another piece of machinery for councillors to sit on.

## 7.6 The Community Facilitator Project

In January 2000 funding was secured from the Birmingham Voluntary Services City Council led SRB 4 Programme - 'Acting for Social Inclusion - Birmingham CAN' to appoint a Community Facilitator, to work with the local community to build its capacity, to engage with and to participate in existing landlord structures and with the LSP in an inclusive and effective manner.

A Steering Group made up of representatives from the partner organisations is now managing the development of the LSP. The LSP will have representatives from local groups such as Sparkbrook Neighbourhood Forum on its steering group. Similarly local councillors involved in the Ward Advisory Group/LILA process have been briefed on the project and will be invited onto the Steering Group where appropriate.

Birmingham CAN funding has ensured that the local community has the capacity to be involved in the LSP initiative on an equal footing with the three social housing providers. The Community Facilitator is responsible to the LSP Steering Group for building the capacity of the local community in Sparkbrook to enable effective and inclusive involvement of the community in the establishment and management of the Sparkbrook Local Service part-

nership. The Community Facilitator is establishing and supporting a local network of tenants and community groups and developing effective links with other tenant based community groups and organisations in the Birmingham area.

The Facilitator has undertaken a local community mapping exercise and has developed a database of local groups and tenant activity for the LSP area. The mapping exercise feeds into, supports and expands the mapping being developed by BVSC and the Black Regeneration Network. The mapping undertaken by the LSP project has the added dimension of highlighting RSL tenant based activity in addition to voluntary and community based groups. A key element of the mapping exercise has been the involvement of operational front line staff as a source of information.

The worker facilitates and supports capacity building activities for existing and new tenant and community groups to enable them to access training, employment and funding opportunities which will directly benefit the individual but also improve the quality of their contribution to the management of local services through the LSP. The project supports and develops training and employment activities and highlights other projects targeted at local people, particularly unemployed social housing tenants, to enable them to access opportunities with increased confidence, hopefully developed through their involvement in the LSP.

Focus, Birmingham City Council and fch have undertaken individual initiatives in order to improve the quality of life for the residents but the initiatives have been isolated and there has been no unified approach to addressing provision for Sparkbrook. The Community Facilitator is identifying opportunities for joint working by social landlords in the provision of "street services". The project is also ensuring that the investment and refurbishment activities of social landlords operating locally are linked to provide greater added value in terms of the number of properties improved and the employment and training opportunities created for tenants. Co-operation agreements and similar arrangements are being used to facilitate such joint working.

Because the project aims to build the capacity of the wider community and not exclusively social housing tenants this is beyond the role of traditional housing association tenant participation workers. Using existing RSL and local City Council tenant participation workers with other responsibilities would dilute the effect of the capacity building and not provide a sufficient concentration of effort required in the proposed area in terms of the LSP model. Funding the Community Facilitator through Birmingham CAN has provided a greater degree of independence for the project and enables the project to operate at arm's length from the RSLs and the City Council.

The project is a pilot exercise, which if it proves successful can be a model to be adopted elsewhere in the region. The achievement of a LSP supported at a grassroots level by a local network of tenant and community groups will ensure that the LSP is robust and sustainable.

Once the LSP is fully established the Community Facilitator project will be managed by the LSP board. It will not be essential for the Community Facilitator project itself to continue after the SRB funding period as the aim of the project is to build the capacity of the target community so that it continues to work as a local network to support the Sparkbrook LSP. However, the LSP would be able to continue to fund the project beyond the three year period if it identified the work as an ongoing local service priority.

The project is already working with officers and groups involved in the LILA and Best Value process. This includes the Sparkbrook Regeneration Manager and the Area Housing Manager. Indeed the Birmingham City Council Director of Housing has acknowledged that the LSP model, if developed successfully in Sparkbrook, will not only be a transferable model of community empowerment but will potentially be a model of best value in the delivery of local services.

## 8. Lessons learnt to date

### 8.1 Links to other City Council priorities

It is important to set the LSP project within the context of Birmingham and the implications of the City Council's other activities. The project is one of a myriad of initiatives being pursued within the City. Since the initiation of the project Birmingham City Council have decided to progress the council housing stock transfer which has altered the context within which the development of common housing services was being discussed. There are concerns that the stock transfer debate could be clouded by any special arrangements for Sparkbrook at this point in time. The fact that the LSP model could provide an innovative vehicle for stock transfer is of little interest to the local authority in the politically charged debate over transfer. However the local authority remains a key partner within the LSP given their obvious role within Sparkbrook area. A commitment remains between the three partners to improve the provision of street services and to explore other areas of mutual benefit.

The LSP project is providing useful information and this will help shape future proposals but it will not advance as quickly as initially anticipated. The issues of data collection have confirmed a national picture of poor availability of local area data and the intervention of the UK Government's Social Exclusion Unit will act as a catalyst for local agencies. However, more work will be required with each agency to demonstrate that data capture can be made on a postcode basis and crucially that the exercise would be of benefit to them.

The project has confirmed the need to have a holistic view of service provision. It is anticipated that the impact of the Government's Best Value initiative and cross cutting reviews will aid the future development of the project.

The Birmingham City Council transfer proposals have had a major impact on the project. The City has been supportive of the LSP concept for some time and had incorporated the idea into its Best Value pilot bid. It is now apparent that the proposed transfer has halted the potential to explore the development of common housing services. The City has been a cautious but interested participant throughout, but what is now apparent is that their participation will remain one of interested observers rather than direct participants in housing issues. They remain however enthusiastic and involved in the community facilitation element of the project.

### 8.2 Financial Viability

The difficulty created by the City's position is compounded by financial viability of the project. The feasibility study has highlighted that a critical mass of properties is required before the business plan becomes sufficiently robust. The additional 500 properties that the City had originally earmarked to become part of the LSP would have ensured that the total approached the 1,500 properties necessary to achieve business plan viability. Without these the LSP has a high cost per unit, which could only be reduced by widening the geographical area, potentially reducing the community identity.

### **8.3 A three stage process**

There are effectively now three stages that can be built on from the achievements made to date. Firstly, the project can continue as a community capacity building project. To date twenty local groups have benefited from support and training has been provided for over 40 local residents. A series of resident focus groups have been established in addition to a number of multi-agency working groups involving front line staff from the partner organisations. The latter has in particular been a rich source of information with locally based housing staff being able to identify and describe the impact of local issues in a way that local residents who do not have the same overview cannot.

Phase two of the project would seek to move to the next level of engagement: co-operation agreements between the two RSLs and the City Council on housing and maintenance issues within the area, as well as community regeneration and environmental improvement issues. This would build upon the work carried out to date without necessarily requiring the establishment of the LSP.

Establishing an LSP would be the third and final phase of the project and could only take place after the successful implementation of the previous phases and it requires a major commitment from all parties.

### **8.4 Multi-landlord v single landlord experiences**

However despite the delays in project implementation a number of important lessons can be learnt from fch's experience. The LSP vehicle is an extension of fch's neighbourhood management experience in a multi landlord environment. On the Crewton estate in Derby, fch are the single landlord and this results in the RSL being able to effect change far more quickly and effectively. Partnerships with other agencies at Crewton aid the work being done there but fch could still effect change without them, whereas in Sparkbrook, where local agencies constantly run the risk of having their regeneration initiatives being undermined by the activities of others. Evidence from the past initiatives in the area demonstrate that partnership with other local agencies is realistically the only way to successfully manage the neighbourhood.

### **8.5 Involving front line staff**

The Community Facilitator project has highlighted that the involvement of operational front line staff in the development of strategies to develop urban governance is critical. In the early stages of any community capacity building project front line staff are often better able to articulate the problems and issues of the neighbourhood. This facilitates more effective targeting of capacity building activities and enables local communities to build engage on critical issues far sooner and far more effectively. Failure to consult operational staff and to involve them in plan development as well as plan implementation will seriously weaken new approaches to urban governance. Front line staff from the three organisations have been encouraged through the use of workshop sessions to identify obstacles and solutions to project implementation. The project has highlighted the need to use front line staff as a valid source of information on local issues particularly in the formulation and review of strategic initiatives.

## 8.6 Evidence – anecdotal v empirical

The project has also demonstrated that it is the experience, real and perceived, that determines whether people will engage with local governance. The fixation of funders for empirical evidence to justify funding packages continues to be paramount despite being a major drain on limited resources. The experience of fch in establishing local focus groups is supported by the Quality of Life research (CURS, 2000) and highlights that anecdotal evidence is just as important to local communities. Therefore its validity must be recognised and incorporated into funding assessment and project appraisal. Failure to acknowledge this will result in the failure of innovative local governance projects.

## 8.7 A paradigm shift?

The greatest concern however must be the UK Government's expectation of a cultural shift in the attitudes of staff in statutory and local agencies required if the objectives of the national strategy are to be achieved. fch's experience of engagement with statutory and local agencies indicates that the degree of shift required is at best underestimated and at worst unachievable. Government officials have recently admitted that it could take up to ten years for some local strategic partnerships to include genuine community representation rather than just the 'usual suspects' (*New Start*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2001). The UK Government has acknowledged the view put forward by voluntary and community sector pressure groups that it could take that long for the vehicles for neighbourhood management to feel fully engaged with local people. Developing and involving communities takes significant time and resources.

The experience of fch in developing the LSP project highlights the problems caused to the implementation of projects when key partners become pre-occupied with other political issues as Birmingham City Council has with the stock transfer issue. Keeping statutory agencies committed and focused to neighbourhood management whilst the communities are trained and empowered to engage effectively will be a difficult task. Local agencies such as RSLs may be better able to manage this as they are not vulnerable to overnight changes in political leadership and direction.

## 9. Conclusions

Effective Neighbourhood Management requires strong cross-political party leadership from central government, which makes it clear that failure to develop effective vehicles for neighbourhood management is not an option.

However the approach cannot be imposed from above and therefore must be implemented incrementally. The experience of fch in attempted to adopt an innovative neighbourhood management approach supports the process for change identified by Taylor (2000) and must:

- recognise that holistic working is resource intensive and needs time to develop;
- does not set structures and outputs in concrete at the outset, but allows the most appropriate forms and goals to evolve as the full range of potential partners comes on board and learning is absorbed
- recognises the need for informal as well as formal structures to be developed – what Demos called the ‘weak tools’ of persuasion and knowledge building as well as the strong tools of regulation.

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# Appendix 1

## Case Study: East Sparkbrook Neighbourhood Strategy

### Action Areas

- Provision of job, training and volunteering opportunities for tenants and local residents
- Removing barriers to access to employment and training.
- Improvements to the physical and social environment of the neighbourhood
- Empowering communities.

### Achievements to date

- Facilitating Childcare project established with SRB and European funding. £53,200 in grants made to childcare providers. 201 childcare places created to end June 2000. 30 full/ part time jobs and 33 volunteering places created in childcare activities.
- Partnership with South Birmingham College and Birmingham City Council Economic Development Department to pilot a training and employment project in the Sparkbrook/Sparkhill/Tyseley SRB area. 60% of trainees on an associated construction scheme secured full time employment.
- Housing Association partner status secured in Sparkbrook SRB Programme. Lead partner status also achieved in voluntary sector led SRB4.
- European funding secured jointly with Focus Housing Group to establish the 'Employed, Warm and Safe' Project in Sparkbrook which provides improved security and insulation for fch and Focus tenants and training placement opportunities through New Deal.
- Since 1997 sponsorship totalling £10,000 provided to voluntary and community groups and events in the East Sparkbrook area.
- Support for local primary schools through the National Children's Safety Books campaign.
- Family Support project developed, for which Housing Corporation has been secured.
- Debt counselling project developed in East Sparkbrook with Housing Corporation funding which is now available to RSL tenants city wide.
- Development of Local service delivery vehicle for Sparkbrook in partnership with Birmingham City Council and Focus Housing Group.

### Evaluation

Affordable childcare was non-existent in the area prior to the work of the Facilitating Childcare project. The project has not only provided affordable culturally sensitive childcare but has also created jobs for local people. fch involvement in a wide range of local partnerships clearly demonstrates that it is identified as a key regeneration partner in the area. Since 1998 over £750,000 of additional resources have been levered by fch projects into the area.

# Appendix 2

## Case Study: Neighbourhood Management at Crewton Gardens, Derby

### Action Areas

- Proactive management of neighbourhood issues.
- Community development through tenant involvement.
- Specialist support services for vulnerable customers
- Improvements to the physical environment on the estate.

### Achievements to date

Emphasis on an multi agency approach, which has achieved:

- All known drug dealers on the estate have been evicted. A local lettings policy produced in conjunction with the fast track Crewton allocations procedure ensured that applicants who have a known history of ASB are not re-housed onto the scheme. The crime rate has dropped and feedback

- from the local police has confirmed that criminal activity related to drug use has decreased.
- Conversion of flat above the site office into a working office, staffed by members of the locality team. Former site office converted, without cost, into a community room. This has housed community activities such as a summer play scheme and competitions.
  - Increased tenant involvement through Crewton Stalwarts residents group. Increased number of 'active' committee members. Volunteers from the locality ran a summer scheme that has enabled further training for the residents.
  - Residents and staff audit of neighbourhood security, focussing on the additional lighting.
  - Home Office funding for Neighbourhood Warden scheme secured. The project is a partnership with local residents, the Police, the City Council and other RSLs.
  - Furnished lettings project linked to City Council plan to house asylum seekers in the Derby area.
  - Private gardens initiative providing gardens for 16 ground floor flats. All these flats have been let and none have become vacant since letting. It has also produced a list of tenants wishing to transfer into these properties instead of wishing to transfer off the estate.
  - fch Housing and Care and Housing 21 in partnership to create communal garden for older residents.
  - Through a fast track allocations scheme, fch are re-housing many applicants in crisis (i.e. relationship breakdowns) - these lettings have helped to decrease the voids and increase the lengths of tenancies.
  - A comprehensive promotional campaign through the Derby Evening Telegraph and local radio interviews to highlight the changes at Crewton. Involvement of residents in the 'Crewton Pride' publication. This has enhanced awareness of local activities and enabled residents to input issues that they feel strongly about.
  - Government Sure Start initiative and a local Youth project using Crewton as their local project base.

#### **Evaluation**

- The voids on the scheme have dropped from 57 in September 1999 to 19 in February 2001. The number of abandoned properties has also decreased to less than two per quarter.
- The residents group is functioning with greater commitment and added enthusiasm and has undertaken fundraising events that will be used for additional activities for tenants. Local SRB partnership seeking Crewton Residents Committee member to join the partnership steering group.