

what this guide is about and how it can be used

This is a guide where councillors talk to councillors about what works, and what doesn't work, in delivering neighbourhood renewal and tackling social exclusion. It aims to provide a common understanding for all councillors of what neighbourhood renewal is, and why it is important in helping to achieve the aim of creating sustainable communities.

The guide has been produced through a partnership of the IDeA, LGA and LGIU, with sponsorship and editorial support from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). It complements dedicated training modules for councillors on neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion, under IDeA's Leadership Academy and Local Leadership programmes, but the advice and approaches will be relevant to all councillors, not just those in neighbourhood renewal areas. As set out in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Five Year Plan, *People, Places and Prosperity*, the aim is to offer opportunities for effective neighbourhood action everywhere and to develop a distinctive role for local councillors – as neighbourhood champions, leaders and advocates for their wards and communities.

The introductory chapters which follow set out the reasoning behind neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion policy and the key priorities. They cover what resources are available, the importance of driving delivery, and of building service improvements achieved with neighbourhood renewal funding into mainstream practice. They cover the role of floor targets in setting minimum standards and driving improvements. They also illustrate what councillors can do in all areas to scrutinise plans and policies, and to help achieve real lasting improvements to their

neighbourhoods.

The guide then moves on to case studies drawn from six very different local authorities in England. It has focused interviews with a range of councillors from these areas, which include a major city, a large urban authority with an elected mayor, a London borough, and a rural county council. The guide draws on their wealth of experience to identify pointers that can be used in any authority where deprivation needs to be tackled.

In each chapter there is a short commentary, a few things to think about and action points under each heading. The guide ends with a list of further sources of advice and support.

We would like to thank all those councillors who have contributed for sharing their experiences for the benefit of their peers. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Ian Bottrill and Deborah Benady in developing the text of the guide and the ODPM for their sponsorship and support.

The guide is endorsed by the Local Government Association and the Local Government Information Unit.

why get involved?

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Strong, self-confident local government, leading communities and enabling quality public services, is an aspiration shared by central and local government alike. Neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion provide ideal opportunities for councils and councillors to tackle disadvantage, and develop and enhance their community leadership role.

Local and national governments have worked for many years to regenerate communities, but many of those initiatives failed to deliver lasting change. If renewal is to be sustainable, it has to be based on the effective involvement of the people that live and work in the neighbourhoods. Top down regeneration – done to communities, rather than with them – is no longer an option.

Strategies for neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion offer local leaders a different way to approach the problems of disadvantaged places and people. They can be successful because:

- they tackle the core problems of deprived places and people, like weak economies and poor schools, not just housing and the structure of neighbourhoods;
- they harness the power of all sectors to work in partnership
- they focus existing services and mainstream resources explicitly on deprived areas and the people most in need

- they build on what works and base action in evidence
- they act to prevent disadvantage and don't just tackle the symptoms
- they help to reintegrate those that have 'fallen through the net'
- they give local communities more power to help turn their neighbourhoods round, and groups of disadvantaged people a say in the policies that affect them
- they create partnerships between the public, private and voluntary community sectors through the creation of Local Strategic Partnerships and neighbourhood management.

neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion: what are they?

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Neighbourhood renewal concentrates on meeting the needs of the poorest 10 per cent of neighbourhoods in England. These areas include large core cities, metropolitan boroughs, rural areas and coastal towns. People living in these areas – 40 per cent of the population, and 70 per cent of all people from ethnic minorities – suffer higher crime rates, poorer housing and physical environment, higher unemployment, lower educational attainment and poorer health.

Neighbourhood renewal is about making a real, sustainable difference to the quality of life in our poorest neighbourhoods. And a clear lesson from neighbourhood renewal so far is that by working on one theme, you can have a major impact on another. Cleaner streets feel safer. Improved education leads to better employment prospects, which can help to reduce crime. Good housing management can help to reduce antisocial behaviour.

the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU)

The NRU, based in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, is responsible for overseeing the government's neighbourhood renewal strategy. It aims to harness expenditure by key government departments rather than relying on one-off regeneration spending, and has established a range of programmes to determine local needs, and to pilot

new ways of tackling deprivation. The unit works with neighbourhood renewal teams in regional government offices to oversee and support local strategic partnerships.

what is social exclusion?

The government defines social exclusion as what can happen when people or places suffer from a series of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, discrimination, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown.

It can begin at birth, but problems can also mount throughout life into old age and can create a vicious cycle. People who live in deprived areas tend to be more at risk – but it can happen anywhere. Tackling social exclusion is an issue for all councillors – whatever area they represent.

Making public services more effective for disadvantaged people is key. Local leaders have a critical role in checking that services meet the needs of local people. Key questions councillors need to ask include:

- do local people have the information they need to benefit from public services?
- are front-line staff able to provide the support

The Social Exclusion Unit was set up in 1997 to provide joined-up solutions to the problems of multiple deprivation. The unit has published reports on a range of issues that will be familiar to many councillors – such as mental health, jobs and enterprise and debt. As well as outlining a programme of local and national government action, the reports can provide local leaders with the evidence and understanding they need when addressing such issues.

disadvantaged people need?

- are local people empowered to make best use of services?
- are all services working together?
- are the right links being made to the voluntary and community sector?
- are funding and targets supporting or frustrating successful local projects?

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)

Local Strategic Partnerships, comprising the local authority (councillors and officers), police, health services and other public sector service providers, working alongside the voluntary and community sector and local businesses, set priorities for their areas and develop Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies (LRNSs) to meet local needs. The government sees LSPs as the catalyst for developing joined-up solutions to complex neighbourhood renewal problems.

Partnership working means each partner being accountable to each other and to the communities they serve; it is not about being in competition.

National floor target data and local data can be used to:

- identify priority neighbourhoods
- understand their problems and any differential impact on residents
- map the resources going into these neighbourhoods
- agree on what more needs to be done
- implement, monitor and self-evaluate agreed actions.

Councillors who sit at a senior level in LSPs, whether on the board or perhaps as members or chairs of themed sub groups, are in a strong position to ensure not only that plans and strategies are robust and deliverable, but also that they translate into delivery of sustainable improvements on the ground.

Under the Local Government Act 2000 each local authority in England has a duty to prepare a community strategy. Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies often sit within the community strategy which sets the vision for local authority area.

Local Strategic Partnerships, having worked to set up effective structures and partnership arrangements, are now being asked by the government to focus on delivery of real improvements. To support this, every partnership that receives Neighbourhood Renewal Fund monies has developed a performance management framework to help them make the shift from development of strategies to delivering targets and objectives set out in their LNRS. These frameworks are now in place and annual improvement plans have been developed to speed up local progress.

key building blocks for successful delivery through partnership

The government's view, based on the experience of partnerships to date, is that there are four key building blocks to successful partnerships:

leadership – clarity of vision, commitment of all partners to agreed priorities and targets, and embedding of these within partners' own business plans

delivery manager – a senior manager and small team to enable and drive implementation of strategy. This involves planning, co-ordinating action with priority places and groups, project management, overcoming obstacles and tracking progress

delivery system – with sufficient analytical capacity to collate and analyse data, appraise options and provide evidence-based management information to drive and monitor performance

communication – across the partnership, with all sectors and the public so there is awareness of goals, actions and achievements.

Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF)

The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund provides LSPs in eligible areas with additional resources to tackle deprivation-related issues in their poorest neighbourhoods. The purpose of NRF is, therefore, to encourage local service providers as members of the LSP, to use their own mainstream resources in a more innovative and joined-up way to address key national floor targets and locally identified priorities set out in the LNRS.

How resources are used is agreed locally by each local authority and its partners on the LSP. **The government is clear that neighbourhood renewal funding can be spent in any way that helps to tackle deprivation in the most deprived neighbourhoods**, for example on teachers and schools where educational attainment is poor, or on local health services to tackle health inequalities. The aim is to encourage service providers to deploy mainstream budgets jointly, and more effectively, at the local level.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund provided a total of £1.875bn for the most deprived districts over the period 2001–2006. A further £525m of resources for each of the years 2006–7 and 2007–8 has now been allocated by central government to eligible districts.

Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF)

The SSCF is a new way of administering a number of ODPM and Home Office funding streams that have a common theme: tackling crime, antisocial behaviour, the harm caused by illegal drugs, improving the condition of public spaces, improving the quality of life for people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods where the issues are more prevalent.

One of the fund's four national outcomes is 'increased capacity of local communities to participate in local decision making and influence service delivery'.

The government sees Community Empowerment Networks in areas receiving Neighbourhood Renewal Fund as playing a key role in helping to shape and deliver the SSCF.

The fund is administered under the same principles as Local Area Agreements (see 'wider context' below).

Community Empowerment Networks

Community Empowerment Networks were originally set up in neighbourhood renewal areas to enable local communities to be better represented in decision making, especially through Local Strategic partnerships. The government sees the role of the Community Empowerment Network at the neighbourhood level as one of bringing together local residents and voluntary and community sector organisations, to enable them to take part in strategic decisions about designing and delivering neighbourhood renewal in their area.

Councillors should be at the heart of neighbourhood arrangements stimulating the local voice, listening to it, and representing it at council level. Councillors also need to be proactive, instigating initiatives to improve participation levels, drawing in hard to reach groups and those who have previously been excluded.¹

The National Audit Office has recommended that Community Empowerment Networks should maximise their influence by working alongside existing local democratic structures and existing structures to provide interfaces with communities.²

The government's view is that all partners on the Local Strategic Partnership should be clear about the roles of councillors and CEN representatives on the LSP to ensure they are clear, complementary and mutually supportive. Councillors may represent the views of the council as a service provider, the views of

¹ ODPM 2005 'Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter'

² NAO 2004 'Getting Citizens Involved: Community Participation in Neighbourhood Renewal'

Councillors who sit on the boards of neighbourhood partnerships, such as neighbourhood management, can play a crucial role in ensuring the success of the partnership. They can champion the partnership within the council, and within other partnerships. Portfolio holders in particular can bring to the table crucial policy experience of neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion, and as cabinet members they provide a strategic link to the council and its public, private and voluntary sector partners. Ward councillors can also play a key role in delivering neighbourhood management successfully, bringing detailed local knowledge and championing local issues.

the council electorate to inform discussions or bring knowledge of the issues in their ward.

government departments like the Department of Health, the Home Office and the Department for Education and Skills. Government departments are 'bending' their resources in favour of the most deprived areas to raise standards.

At the local level, the government wants to see councils and other key service providers actively seeking to direct their services to meet the needs of the most deprived neighbourhoods. Councillors at all levels – from ward councillors who are working day to day with local people, to portfolio holders responsible for ensuring policies are designed and delivered effectively – have a key role in making sure this happens.

how to make it happen on the ground

floor targets

To help achieve the commitment to neighbourhood renewal and the creation of sustainable communities, government departments have been given 'floor targets' defining **minimum standards** to be achieved in deprived areas. The set of floor targets was refined and strengthened in the Spending Review 2004 (SR04) and came into effect in April 2005. ODPM has agreed a new Public Service Agreement (PSA) 1 target for neighbourhood renewal, which reemphasises reducing the gap in outcomes between those areas with the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. The focus will be on achieving this in the six key outcome areas of health, education, housing, worklessness, crime and liveability.

Floor targets help to track the gap between deprived areas and the rest of the country. They can be used at a local level, to:

6 CEN representatives in turn may bring the perspective of the voluntary and community sector as a service provider, reflect the views of particular groups of interest or geographical groups, bring knowledge of deprivation and of the issues in specific neighbourhoods.

Investment in Community Empowerment Networks will be built on through the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund.

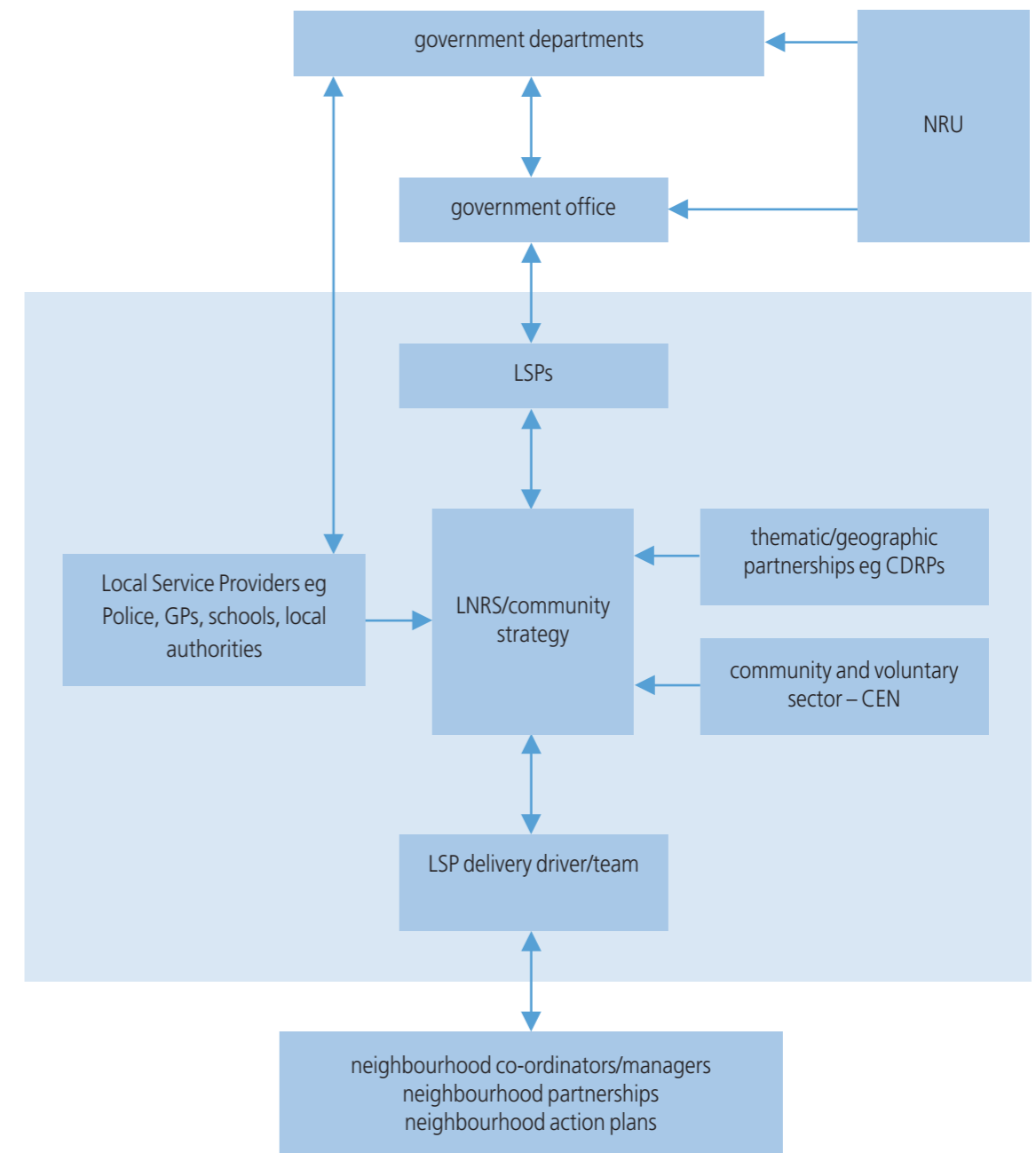
neighbourhood renewal pathfinder programmes

There are 39 New Deal for Communities (NDC) with £2bn funding over 10 years, 35 Neighbourhood Management (NM) pathfinders also funded directly by ODPM, and approximately 140 further NM partnerships funded by local authorities, housing associations and other means. All of these partnerships are working with residents, service providers and local authorities to improve local services and address liveability issues at the neighbourhood level. Such partnerships are helping to kick start the renewal process and provide a test bed for new approaches to tackling the problems in the most disadvantaged areas.

In the government's view, it is crucial that lessons learned from new approaches to renewing neighbourhoods are incorporated into the mainstream funding of local authorities and other agencies.

mainstream funding through government departments

Neighbourhood renewal harnesses the mainstream spending power, totalling billions of pounds, of main



The diagram above illustrates the key relationships at national, regional, local and neighbourhood level in neighbourhood renewal

Elected councillors can play a key role in helping to harness best practice from other areas, contributing to the design of services to meet local needs based on what works elsewhere, and by observing on the ground how policies work (or don't work) in practice. And they can spread news of what works through their local media.

- raise awareness of poor performance and help set local priorities, particularly in the development of Local Area Agreements
- help monitor progress made in tackling pockets of underachievement
- help the work of the police, health services, housing and education sectors so that their resources and service delivery are focused appropriately on deprived communities.

understanding the 'delivery chain'

Tackling disadvantage is about all sectors working in partnership. Success depends on everyone involved knowing how their contribution fits into the big picture and contributes to the achievement of national and local targets. See diagram on page 7.

learning from what works and embedding it into service provision

One of the key principles of neighbourhood renewal that sets it apart from previous regeneration initiatives is the commitment to learn from what works to improve housing, physical environment, health, educational attainment and employment prospects, and to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour. Evidence from neighbourhood renewal programmes like NDC and neighbourhood management, and from other areas, on what is working, why and in what circumstances is available for local authorities and others to access on www.renewal.net.

Dedicated Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers (NRAs) are available through government offices in the regions, to provide support and advice to neighbourhood renewal partnerships. NRAs, usually experienced practitioners from a variety of backgrounds including local government, can use their specific skills and the latest best practice to advise on issues including how to build a strong partnership, and how strategies can be translated into delivery of real improvements on the ground.

the wider context and new developments

Local Area Agreements (LAAs)

LAAs set out priorities for a local area agreed between central government and the local area (local authority and other key partners on the LSP). The government considers that they can play a crucial role in helping to tackle deprivation by enabling local authorities and partner agencies to deliver improved public services.

The first LAAs took effect in 20 top-tier areas on 1 April 2005, enabling around £800m of funding from central government to be pooled or aligned locally. Following a government announcement of a national roll out of LAAs in June, 66 local areas are currently developing an LAA, with the remaining 63 areas eligible to join in 2006.

The first tranche of pilot areas include Greenwich, Devon and Doncaster, featured in this guide. Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn have joined in the second round. In the pilot phase they have been structured around three blocks: children and young people, safer and stronger communities, and healthier communities and older people. A fourth block, on economic development and enterprise, has been added for the second round.

Areas receiving Neighbourhood Renewal Fund can pool this as part of their Local Area Agreement, although NRF continues to be focused on tackling deprivation. They must, however, demonstrate how the agreement will help to narrow the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the district. In two-tier areas, Neighbourhood Renewal Funding must be directed from the county council to the eligible district.

neighbourhoods and local leadership

Two discussion documents were published by ODPM in January 2005 as part of *local: vision, Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why*

Neighbourhoods Matter, and *Vibrant Local Leadership*. These documents set out a number of ideas, including:

- how to harness people's interest in local issues that affect their daily lives in order to secure sustainable improvements in public services and re-engage citizens with the institutions of government
- what governance arrangements and capacity-building may be required to ensure councillors represent, and are advocates for, all sections of the community, and play a more active part in their neighbourhoods.

This guide will, therefore, be useful to all councillors working to achieve the aims of local people and communities driving improvements in their neighbourhoods in partnership with local government.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

looks at how well councils deliver their services, for example education, social care and housing. It also considers how well the council is run, as this will impact on how their services are delivered in the future. It combines a council's own judgement of how it's performing with an external assessment of how well it is run. The idea is to tell councils how they are doing, and let them and their residents compare their performance with that of others; for example councils will be questioned to see how they communicate and consult with service users, partners and stakeholders about regeneration and neighbourhood renewal.

conclusion

Councillors, working alongside local government's partners in the voluntary and community sector, business, and mainstream public service providers are already working to help the most deprived neighbourhoods become sustainable communities where people want to live.

The focus now needs to be on encouraging more involvement of local communities, influencing mainstream service providers to take on and sustain service improvements achieved with short-term

funding, and strengthening some of the structures which have been created to start delivering real change in the most deprived areas. These are all areas where councillors can play a vital part, whilst at the same time developing and enhancing their role as local community champions. All partners involved in producing this guide hope that it will encourage and support councillors to see what more they can do to improve the most deprived neighbourhoods.

community leadership

Effective local leadership is key to achieving sustainable changes in an area and is at the heart of the government's vision for sustainable communities. Neighbourhood renewal offers councillors a clear opportunity to develop and enhance their community leadership role.

a few things to think about

- Lead by example. If you actively listen to the public and show that you do this, then your officers are likely to do likewise.
- Leadership should encourage others to gain confidence and develop skills. Being open and receptive to views from local people, and supportive of those who wish to get involved, will enhance your community leadership role.
- Are you ensuring that your council's services are focused on the needs of the most deprived neighbourhoods and the most disadvantaged groups?
- Is your council working in partnership with other key service providers to ensure delivery of their services are focused on deprived areas?
- Are there particular groups in your community that face stigma and discrimination? What can you do to challenge this, and make sure their voices are heard?

what the contributors say

you don't have to take the chair

Doncaster Strategic Partnership, the local LSP, is a crucial element of bringing local people along with us – it's about building consensus. I was determined that I should not chair it because I don't believe in the old style of politicians controlling everything.

Martin Winter, Doncaster

you need a clear vision

I was determined from the outset that neighbourhood renewal was going to be a genuine opportunity to engage with people who live in the neighbourhoods about what they can do for themselves and what can be done differently.

Chris Roberts, Greenwich

We take our community leadership role very seriously here in Hyndburn. Ward councillors are seen as 'experts within the locality' – they are the people who see things and make connections ... It's less about being paternalistic, more about deciding together with the community what is needed. We need to learn to achieve things by influence – discussing, negotiating, listening – rather than by imposing our view on them.

Tony Dobson, Hyndburn

you can act as a 'signpost'

I act as a stepping stone between what residents' expectations are and what the council can provide.

Tony Dobson, Hyndburn

I see my role as an enabling one, working with local people on what they want to see regeneration bring about.

Edwin Simpson, Doncaster

a few action points for you to consider

leader	Does the way your council operates encourage people other than those in traditional leadership roles (chairs and chief executives etc) to show leadership in a variety of ways? What could you do to set the 'tone' so that others can learn from your example?
portfolio holder	In the services you are responsible for, are the service users proactively engaged in shaping policy? Have you created opportunities where it is possible for those outside the council to contribute to policy reviews so that you begin to move towards 'community led initiatives'?
scrutiny chair	Has your scrutiny committee found effective ways of ensuring that service users (and sometimes more importantly 'non-users') can give evidence to your scrutiny sessions in a way which is user friendly for them (not necessarily for you)?
frontline councillor	Are you effectively finding opportunities for people in your area to show initiative and take leadership in their neighbourhood? Have you, for example, encouraged people who find it difficult to get their views heard to put themselves forward for positions in local associations, school governors, etc.? Just as importantly – do you support them when they do take on these roles?

CASE STUDY GREENWICH

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Greenwich is a London borough with a unique mix of problems. On the one hand it is a world heritage sight and big tourist attraction, with the west of the borough being very wealthy. On the other, east side of the borough, there are areas of severe deprivation. Greenwich is ranked as the 41st most deprived authority on the Rank of Average Score measure of the Index of Deprivation 2004. It has 17 per cent of its 143 Super Output Areas ranked within the 10 per cent most deprived in England. It has a population of 215,000 set to rise to 235,000 over the next ten years, by when the ethnic minority population will constitute nearly a quarter of the total. Greenwich is home to a number of ethnic minority communities including Vietnamese, Somalis and eastern Europeans.

Chris Roberts leader

I was determined from the outset that neighbourhood renewal was going to be a genuine opportunity to engage with people who live in the neighbourhoods about what they can do for themselves and what can be done differently.

The majority of the neighbourhood renewal money is spent on borough-wide themes such as health inequality, educational attainment and crime. We are trying to get all our partners to think about how we can move our joint resources more towards prevention – we're using the neighbourhood renewal money to put the prevention in place, which will save us money in the future.

The rest of the funding is being spent geographically, in the four most deprived areas of Greenwich. Each of the areas has its own neighbourhood renewal panel on which sit councillors and members of the community. Residents make up a majority of the members. Together they explore how public services might be improved, and direct the Neighbourhood

Renewal Fund towards programmes that will make a lasting impact on people's quality of life, within the framework of the floor targets that we've been set.

We went to great lengths to find new and different people in the community to come on to the panels, which took quite a long time, but has been worth the effort. We wanted to get people with all sorts of different experiences – homeowners, people with children at local schools, disabled people, council tenants. We put on fun days, sent out leaflets and generally did masses of publicity to encourage people to come forward. Our political commitment to this community-up approach runs through everything we do.

In each panel we had a few old hands who helped bring on the confidence of newer people, but we wanted fresh voices, and by and large we have been successful. We've seen a number of people come on to our panels who were desperately unconfident at first. If you'd had any election process at the beginning, they wouldn't have put themselves forward in a million years. But they were nurtured to come forward. We invested quite heavily in training and building their confidence – we had a residential

training weekend early on in the process, for instance. A number are moving into employment, becoming school governors. They have effectively started to replenish the pool of more experienced people within their communities and create new community leaders.

We deliberately kept service providers off the panels, and established a separate structure for them. We've learned from other regeneration programmes that service providers often see new funds simply as an opportunity to expand their existing budgets. Then there is no real drive or incentive to do what neighbourhood renewal is meant to do – ie bend the resources of the authority and other service providers to deliver real change in the area. We are trying to move people away from notions of projects and more into the concept of mainstreaming, but it's a culture change that is very hard for them to get their heads round.

I want to commission research into how the council, police, health and other public sector providers have, over the course of this programme, moved more resources into the deprived areas – for that is the challenge, giving inarticulate communities more access to the borough's resources. Each panel monitors their own schemes closely and we've had a number of reports by the scrutiny panel, but I am challenging scrutiny to bring in all of the public service providers and get them to demonstrate the way they have shifted more of their budgets into those areas.

There's a growing belief in the community that things can change. It's difficult to measure as a success, but I feel people are more on our side as a local authority. Having engaged residents in the panels, we are now developing more area-based approaches to our consultation on decent homes and the tenants already involved in neighbourhood renewal are coming to it with a greater depth of understanding, and a growing confidence.

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Peter Kotz
cabinet member, neighbourhood renewal and tenancy services, member for Thamesmead Moorings

Peter Brooks
deputy leader regeneration, member for Thamesmead Moorings

We saw a real opportunity with the arrival of neighbourhood renewal to set up the four neighbourhood panels, and define the roles and duties of the panel and public agency providers. The important questions were how are we going to spend and distribute neighbourhood renewal money within the community, what impact will it have on the community as a whole and, most importantly, how will the provision we've brought in from partners sustain the changes? That's the real winner – one day neighbourhood renewal will come to an end, but the benefits must continue and be sustainable.

We made a decision early on that there would be no officers on the boards, and that it would be the community representatives, not the councillors who decide where the neighbourhood renewal money should go – what they want is not necessarily what we as councillors would want.

The neighbourhood panels are almost like an outside contractor – their job is for the community to ask questions like, why isn't the council doing this? We as councillors have to face up to that and say, yes, why isn't the council doing that, how do we form a partnership to do that?

All along we've worked to keep local people informed. Each area publishes a newsletter, written by the panel themselves, which goes out to everybody in the community, telling them where the funding is going, and what neighbourhood renewal is all about. We also use the local press, and neighbourhood renewal has its own web page.

It's important to us that the news gets to everyone – we wouldn't think there are many people in the panel areas that don't have an idea what neighbourhood renewal is about, even if they don't know exactly what it is. We ask for and get a lot of feedback – all sorts of people write in with their views about neighbourhood renewal. That level of

communication is a big difference from projects in the past.

We've had lots of successes, from the smallest one like getting a ramp up to a disabled person's front door, to building a skatepark, and bigger ones like improving the environment, and improving standards in local schools. We've learned it doesn't have to be multimillion-pound projects that can change people's lives. But the greatest success is the way we've organised neighbourhood renewal, so that it does what the community wants – and that has led to an amazing diversity.

involving and empowering

Involving local people from the outset is essential if neighbourhood renewal is to succeed and be sustainable. Communities know best what the priorities and needs of their neighbourhoods are, and should be encouraged and supported to contribute at a level that suits them. Councillors are ideally placed to facilitate stronger community involvement, bringing together people, groups and agencies to take action.

a few things to think about

- Consider shadowing a neighbourhood or street warden for a day if your council has a scheme, to improve your local knowledge and get in touch with local people's ideas and concerns.
- Use a variety of venues and different styles of working to increase and widen representation, and encourage more people to come forward with ideas and suggestions.
- Established local community groups and organisations, for example tenant representative bodies, can help you widen representation and provide valuable experience. Nurture and involve them very early on, and encourage them to work with you to achieve improvements.
- Always ensure that you give feedback; people need and want to know if you have acted on their ideas. And if not, why it wasn't possible.
- Make sure you are in touch with all sections of your community, including in particular minority ethnic groups and young people.

what the contributors say

it needs to be central to what you are doing
I was determined from the outset that neighbourhood renewal was going to be a genuine opportunity to engage with people who live in the neighbourhoods about what they can do for themselves and what can be done differently. We were keen that whatever we set up was driven by the communities.
Chris Roberts, Greenwich

if you get it right it makes a big difference
We've been particularly good at getting people involved. That's got to mean something – people only get involved if they think they can make a difference, so the community must feel that their voice is getting heard.
Bernard Dawson, Hyndburn

the public might be involved in scrutiny in determining priorities
We made a decision early on ... that it would be the community representatives ... who decide where the neighbourhood renewal money should go – what they want is not necessarily what we as councillors would want.
Peter Kotz/Peter Brooks, Greenwich

... or involved in shaping policy

The authority wanted to demolish the houses ... but taking my lead from the community I pressed for improvements instead. ... By consulting we found people wanted to stay in the area and by insisting on improvements rather than just demolition we got a much quicker effect. It has resulted in a much stronger, more active community.

Edwin Simpson, Doncaster

once engaged the views of local people need to be 'heard'

We have a history of trying to engage with local people and those alliances are now coming into fruition. We make connections wherever we can.... I can bring the public's views from the ground, right up to the top decision-making level.

Mike Knight, Devon

a few action points for you to consider

leader	If your council is to lead or take a strong position on community empowerment, are its structures 'fit for purpose' – do they help or hinder?
portfolio holder	Are you making the best of local knowledge to ensure that services in your portfolio area are designed and delivered to meet the needs of deprived areas? Are you seeking the views of those using the service in deprived neighbourhoods to see if it meets their needs? And are you feeding in those views to service providers?
scrutiny chair	Neighbourhood renewal and community empowerment will demand a lot from the council. Have you considered what support structures are in place to enable this to happen? Further – how will you know if it is happening, and how effective it is?
frontline councillor	Do you – whether you are newly elected or an experienced councillor – know all there is to know about your ward? Local people who live and work there are your best resource. Do you know people who would like to be involved in regeneration but who lack skills or confidence? Make sure you can point to learning opportunities that may be available locally.

CASE STUDY DONCASTER

Geographically, Doncaster is the largest metropolitan borough in the country and consists of the city of Doncaster and number of outlying communities. Many of these communities were dependent on the mining and steel industries, and have suffered intense deprivation since the decline of heavy industry and closure of the pits. In many areas there are three generations of people who've never had a working life, and while unemployment is at 4 per cent, worklessness is nearer 12 per cent. Doncaster is rated as the 40th most deprived authority on the Rank of Average Score measure of the Index of Deprivation. 26 per cent of its 193 Super Output Areas are in the 10 per cent most deprived in England.

Martin Winter mayor of Doncaster

Our neighbourhood strategy is one of a number of strategies driving improvement in Doncaster, including the social inclusion strategy, local public service agreements, our borough strategy and my mayoral manifesto. All these strategies interlink and dovetail: they all work towards the same ends, the seven transformational goals which we want to achieve by 2010. If we manage to achieve them, we'll have transformed Doncaster.

There is no hierarchy to the goals but I see the most important one to be taking all our communities out of the bottom 10 per cent by 2010. We may not succeed but in trying we will have significantly improved the quality of life of people who live in those communities. And we won't achieve any of our other goals, such as democratic participation and economic regeneration, if we still have deprived communities.

For me, neighbourhood renewal is not just about money – since the 1980s a great deal of work and resources have gone into rebuilding Doncaster's

deprived communities, but not strategically. We'd become good at coping with decline – but I wanted to change that way of thinking to one where we celebrate our successes. I've set about reinventing Doncaster, giving the city a much more vibrant approach to the opportunities that are here – and that has dovetailed well with the neighbourhood renewal approach of empowering people and giving them a say over the way services are delivered.

Neighbourhood renewal has become the top priority of the council. We have evaluated what we've been doing as a council and how it relates to the whole renewal agenda. We've done a fundamental expenditure review, looking at everything we do as a council and ranking it in terms of how it delivers the mayor's manifesto, the neighbourhood renewal strategy, the borough strategy, the LPSAs, the education action plans etc. We have our priorities for where the funding goes.

Doncaster Strategic Partnership, the local LSP, is a crucial element of bringing local people along with us – it's about building consensus. I was determined that I should not chair it (I'm vice-chair), because I don't believe in the old style of politicians controlling everything. If the DSP is going to be an effective

advocate for the community then it needs its own identity and to be capable of challenging the mayor and confronting the council.

We've got to learn to pool resources, and put together programmes that have a distinct plan to mainstream them – so that we don't get to the end of the funding and wonder where the next lot of funding is coming from. The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) is not about a pot of money to bid for – it's a pot of money that allows you to reprogramme the services you deliver and bend them in a different way, so that you can continue the service from your own resources.

Drawing lines on maps is an inexact way of tackling deprivation – pockets of deprivation exist in other communities. By being creative and radical we have been able to use NRF money to fund things outside our three neighbourhood renewal zones – such as creating job opportunities – which have borough-wide benefits, and help achieve the floor targets around health, crime, education etc.

We have been using techniques in the NRF zones to find out what people want to see happening in their areas and to get the changes moving. These techniques have been so successful that we are rolling them out across the whole borough. My white paper, *Making a difference in your neighbourhood*, outlines our proposals for introducing a new approach to managing neighbourhoods, many of which have been or will be piloted in the NRF zones: setting up neighbourhood management areas, neighbourhood partnerships, one-stop shops, Community First service delivery teams.

The ability of the community to articulate its needs is often interrelated with the style and technique of the elected member. Members who are really into community leadership get into those communities and say we're going to get this, we're going to look at that. They vocalise the concerns, they get money from here and there, and they say come and help us, be involved, and their communities are really up for that.

The main barrier is the cynicism and lack of aspiration among some communities – after years and years of underinvestment, of the council avoiding accountability, many people can't believe we're

changing. I believe the solution is simple – by putting the community first, being more responsive to the community and reflecting more what the community needs people will begin to understand that we are on their side.

Chris Mills

previously portfolio holder for homes and housing (now schools and children), ward member for Conisbrough

Conisbrough was hit terribly by the closure of the two coal pits, with endemic unemployment and low expectations. But people have started to aspire to something more. We used the planning for real system to find out what people wanted. Local schools built 3D maps of the area, which we took around to community groups, local shopping centres etc. People put in flags for things they liked or didn't like. That coalesced into priorities and then we held further meetings to ask people how to deal with the things they didn't like: could they deal with them themselves, could they deal with them if they had some support or training, or should someone else deal with them, and if so, who?

These priorities were brought together to form the action plan, which was then sent out to statutory bodies and stakeholders, so that they could say how they related to the issues of concern and what they were doing about them.

That's how the neighbourhood renewal strategy began in my area. Prioritising, getting the people aware of what can happen. But while neighbourhood renewal focuses on the deprived communities of Doncaster, that doesn't mean that other communities don't get benefit from the things that are taking place. If something good is happening somewhere, we make sure that other areas are fully aware of it, can latch on to it and adapt it for their own use.

The planning for real process really helps communicate the neighbourhood renewal strategy, but many of the effects of neighbourhood renewal are medium and long term. Quick wins show people that things are changing, that someone does care about the conditions in their community. It could be as simple as a major clean up day. That's a ward

member role, but neighbourhood renewal can be the tool that members use to support the community's needs.

But communication is more than that. It's about going to where people are, writing to them regularly, and making actions speak louder than words. It's about helping people to articulate their vision for their area, what they want the quality of life in their area to be.

We set up jobs and training centres in the residential areas, where people are, so that it is not a great effort for those who need it to find support. We've also got Community First in the neighbourhood renewal areas, which delivers many of the council's local services at a very local level and is a one-stop access point to those services. We make sure that all the different improvement schemes sing from the same hymn sheet by housing the neighbourhood renewal team, the education action zone team, community safety wards, JET team in one building in the community. Neighbourhood renewal is tied into everything else, and officers can make the connections that make the system work better for people.

We have learned lessons from past funding mistakes, where communities have seen schemes disappear as the funding runs out. We make sure we use funding either to do a one-off job such as to get a crossing – or to put a new body in place that will save money from existing spending.

One example is our general purpose team. When council properties are vacated they need to go through a number of processes – cleansing, sanitising, clearing – before they can be repaired and made available again. It used to take a long time and employed skilled workmen to clear the property before using their trade.

Neighbourhood Renewal funding was used to set up a new team of people who go into properties before the skilled tradespeople come and get them ready for reoccupation. Void turnaround time has fallen from 63 days to less than 25 and the savings have allowed the scheme to be mainstreamed – as well as improving the built environment, part of the housing floor target.

We evaluate our performance by how communities are responding and what's happening in that community. That can be fed back through statistical data but there are so many other aspects you can't put a number to: pride in the community, pride in place and aspiration for the future.

There is one thing I would recognise as showing our neighbourhood renewal strategy has been successful. That is that at the end of the period, young people and their families have higher aspirations for their personal future. People's aspirations are starting to grow – and to me, that's what neighbourhood renewal is all about.

Edwin Simpson

ward member for Mexborough, an NRF area

I am actively involved with the community groups of Mexborough. We keep in touch with all the recognised groups of people within our ward by taking a role in all the different community organisations in the ward.

We get in touch with other people through our communications with the electorate and the feedback we get from casework. We hold surgeries virtually every week and make ourselves available at all times. I find the best way of communicating with people is very directly – going round to their homes and talking to them.

I see my role as an enabling one, working with local people on what they want to see regeneration bring about – not as schemes that are foisted on them from above by government or the local authority.

We had a good example of that: a local area of council housing was getting more and more dilapidated. The houses were too small for families and so were being let to single people which changed the social mix of the area. The authority wanted to demolish the houses, but taking my lead from the community I pressed for improvements instead. I managed to get the council to make it a priority estate and to revamp the houses into larger units. Now a very different clientele lives there and we've seen the whole nature of the estate change. By consulting we found people wanted to stay in the

area and by insisting on improvements rather than just demolition we got a much quicker effect. It has resulted in a much stronger, more active community.

The next step in this ward is the new neighbourhood partnership. Along with officers I will be drawing together all the local agencies such as police, education, Dearne Valley College, health, community groups and the authority itself. The aim will be to put the community plan into action. Those with the funding will be tackled as to how they can direct it towards achieving the targets that have been set under neighbourhood renewal. This is going to be about doing – we've talked enough, we've consulted, we've found out what people want around here, and now we're going to make sure that those needs and desires are implemented.

communications and feedback

Neighbourhood renewal and tackling social exclusion is about making real, lasting change to the quality of people's lives. Positive, proactive communication and feedback on what is changing for the better will support success, foster stronger community involvement, and help to counter cynicism. Secrecy and hidden agendas can undermine neighbourhood renewal quicker than virtually anything else.

Communication with the community needs to be two way – you need to ensure the community know what you are trying to do and how it all works. They need to know in return that you welcome, listen to and act upon their views, and they need to know when and why their ideas cannot be taken on board.

a few things to think about

- Local people should have the opportunity to influence local service delivery. Hear what people have to say to you about their perception of the services you provide.
- Feed back to the community regularly or no one will know what you have done and will assume nothing has changed.
- Make communications easy and accessible, use plain English, and remember too those for whom English is not their first language, and those who prefer face to face contact.
- Be honest! Communities are far more sceptical of untrammelled optimism. They understand constraints and will respect you for telling it 'like it is'.
- Make sure your council's communications team understands neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion, and that they take every opportunity to

promote positive news about success.

- Effective partnership working needs communication across all sectors, and with the community, so that everyone is aware of goals, targets and achievements.

what the contributors say

sometimes the most obvious approach is the best

We get in touch with other people through our communications with the electorate and the feedback we get from casework. I find the best way of communicating with people is very directly – going round to their homes and talking to them.

Edwin Simpson, Doncaster

... and we can always learn from others

If something good is happening somewhere, we make sure that other areas are fully aware of it, can latch on to it and adapt it for their own use.

Chris Mills, Doncaster

We publish our own newspaper, *The Shuttle*, ten times a year, which is where we put all the neighbourhood renewal information. More local newsletters are also distributed in the neighbourhood renewal areas to tell residents what is going on, sometimes using budgets set aside by partners, police or health, to communicate with residents.
Andy Kay, Blackburn with Darwen

communication is a two-way street

It's about helping people to articulate their vision for their area, how they want the quality of life in their area to be.
Chris Mills, Doncaster

it isn't just (or maybe shouldn't be) newsletters and leaflets

We put on fun days, sent out leaflets and generally did masses of publicity to encourage people to come forward.
Chris Roberts, Greenwich

things are changing

We ask for and get a lot of feedback – all sorts of people write in with their views about neighbourhood renewal. That ... is a big difference from projects in the past.
Peter Kotz/Peter Brooks, Greenwich

a few action points for you to consider	
leader	Are there procedures in place which both enable and encourage those involved in neighbourhood renewal to report back to their fellow councillors on progress? Does the communications team of the council understand neighbourhood renewal, and is this reflected in your media output?
portfolio holder	Whatever your portfolio you have a role to play in regeneration. You will have a number of opportunities to talk with a wide range of audiences about your role and your vision (as well as the services you are responsible for) – do you (or could you) make a point of illustrating how your services and vision contribute to neighbourhood renewal so that your audiences recognise the important linkages and the potential for mainstreaming?
scrutiny chair	Have you thought of scrutinising how effectively the council's communications get down into communities (particularly minority ethnic communities, the business community, young people and older people for example)? A generalised message is unlikely to be successful in hitting varied audiences, and careful thought needs to go into getting the approach right.
frontline councillor	There is no substitute for face to face communication in your neighbourhoods, not only telling, but being open to local people's ideas for change. This is your opportunity to develop and enhance your role as a local community champion.

CASE STUDY DEVON

Devon is characterised by diverse, scattered communities, built around market and coastal towns, and a capital city, Exeter. It is a relatively wealthy county but still has a number of problems to deal with: it suffers from pockets of deprivation; there are few opportunities for young people in leisure and work; housing is either of poor quality or unaffordable and there is social isolation. Access to services is a big concern and low pay and poor skills levels in the north and west of the county are two-thirds those of the national norm.

Although not eligible for neighbourhood renewal funding, the council's rural communities in the north have seen an injection of funding through the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's neighbourhood management programme, Pathfinder 2, which helps to improve the delivery of services in local neighbourhoods.

Brian Greenslade
leader of the council

Following the recent elections, a new administration has been formed. The work on social inclusion, developed during the last administration, will be continued and accelerated during the next four years. Things are changing very quickly. In recent months we have reviewed and refreshed our Strategic Plan and are preparing a role and action plan in relation to social inclusion. This will set out the priorities of the council in relation to social inclusion and clearly define the contribution we can make to wider partnership endeavour.

In addition, we have agreed a social inclusion strategy through our Devon Strategic Partnership (DSP) that has six key action areas:

- tackling prejudice and promoting equal opportunity
- focusing extra support on those communities that

fall into the most disadvantaged quartile nationally and that suffer rural exclusion

- developing our organisations, partnerships and processes
- raising levels of participation and involvement of excluded groups
- improving access to services
- increasing financial inclusion.

This work is being co-ordinated through a partnership called Common Ground, which is chaired by Cllr Des Shadrick, chairman of Devon County Council. We have also established an Equality Strategy and Scrutiny Group to guide the work of the DSP.

Devon has also become a Local Area Agreement (LAA) Pilot area and is currently negotiating a detailed delivery plan. This has a firm relationship to the inclusion agenda and one of the cross-cutting themes

reinforces the need to regenerate our most disadvantaged communities. In April 2006, economic development becomes a fourth block in the LAA and we are preparing that aspect of work, paying particular attention to neighbourhood and rural disadvantage.

The LAA incorporates the second generation Local Public Service Agreement, which we have also developed with social inclusion at its heart.

Local government has a major contribution to make to this agenda and Devon County Council is keen to ensure both that it plays its part locally and also that it influences national developments. The LAA, the Neighbourhood Management pathfinder, our work with regional government and our involvement in national networks gives us an opportunity to bring the needs of communities such as Devon into sharper relief.

Christine Channon
shadow leader (leader at the time of interview)

Communicating our social inclusion strategy to the public is vital in order that people find out about new services and are able to take them up. As an example, we have promoted benefit take-up through local media and through a successful pilot programme called Care Direct, a one-stop gateway to information about care, health, housing and social security benefits, aimed at older people and their carers.

We use the local media whenever possible and the local planning teams of the DSP do very well out of local radio stations – you have to have a relationship with the press and the media.

We use a range of media to alert people about what access they can have and offer services such as mobile libraries with IT facilities, as well as a quarterly magazine publicising telephone numbers people can ring for information. We actively encourage people to find out about the resources they can tap into.

We evaluate where we can: a best value review has positively assessed our economic regeneration work and we were highly commended for our subsidised

local transport programme without which communities could see themselves cut off.

We are developing a number of Surestart children's centres, aimed at developing services for families and children, levels of attendance at schools and the number of exclusions are measured. Some statistics can also be obtained on neighbourhood renewal work with community safety and Youth Offending Teams.

Successful projects and schemes included programmes to rebuild businesses and confidence in Devon following the foot-and-mouth crisis, establishing substance misuse services and developing an online information service for carers.

We've achieved a number of other objectives as a result of our programmes. These include a reduction in the level of recorded youth crime since 1999 and an increase in the reporting of domestic violence incidents.

I'm a strong believer in exchanging experiences with other councils. I have been to Hampshire, Surrey and Lancashire to look at projects undertaken there. In Norfolk we looked at ideas for a children's trust and we went to Cambridge to find out more about their website.

We need the trust of government to be allowed to join things together. We must be given the freedom to develop funding streams. For example, Sure Start is very much a stand-alone funding mechanism and is not tied in with other organisations. It would be far more cost-effective if Sure Start were working closer with health and the police. If you can put all the money together you can be much more effective.

Getting everyone else to embrace the social inclusion and equalities agenda can also be a problem. The challenge is how we put the equalities and social inclusion action plans into a language understood by the whole county council, and those whose lives it is trying to improve.

Mike Knight

Formerly portfolio holder for community planning and member for Combe Martin Rural, now retired from the council

Our policy of social inclusion looks at areas in the bottom quartile in the deprivation index. We have established a 10-year plan to get them out of that position.

We don't have Neighbourhood Renewal Fund money but we have the neighbourhood management pilot programme, which is helping us identify strategies to assist in overcoming rural deprivation. If it can be done for those areas we hope to mainstream it out to other areas.

Neighbourhood management gives us the opportunity to see how we can join up all services so that the public at large can access everything at a one-stop approach. All problems could be sorted out at one call centre, ironing out duplication in the system. This will affect how the county council, the district council, the parish council and other services, such as the police, work. There will have to be a sea change in those areas.

Our system of LSPs is fundamental to the effectiveness of the social inclusion programme. There are eight LSPs, organised on a district basis. They have different mechanisms of engaging people in those areas. We have a history of trying to engage with local people and those alliances are now coming into fruition.

There are some aspects that need to be tackled at local level; others need to be treated centrally. Partnerships need to be effective so they don't duplicate efforts at all the different levels.

In 2002, we identified social inclusion as a main plank of work and we've created an action plan on social inclusion.

I don't think people have yet found a really effective way of engaging those who don't want to be engaged but we are trying hard: we focus on five equality reference areas: gender, race, age, disability and sexual orientation. People from organisations representing these groups meet as the equalities

reference group. They feed into the council and tell us what they think we should be doing.

We have travellers' representatives on a health forum and we've been trying to identify transit sites for travellers. We have also worked with young people, where we gave them a camera and asked them to photograph what they liked about their area and what they didn't like about it. It was a good way of involving them.

Our social services officer is communicating with a mosque in Exeter, the centre of the Muslim community in Devon. There are all kinds of issues around social exclusion, with ethnic minority communities living in a predominantly white area.

I'm well supported by officers. But I also value the peer review work we've done through the Local Authorities and Social Exclusion (LASE) network with Warwick University and the LGIU.

We've looked at joint training on equality and social inclusion for individuals, members and officers as well as training for the member organisations of the LSPs and DSPs. We are also building relationships with other councils – we've got a good relationship with Staffordshire for instance – which we both find very valuable and we both help each other.

Different people bring different skills. I've been a community appraisal worker for five years; a councillor for 16 years, where I've been used to canvassing on the doorstep and getting information from focus groups and meetings.

Training for new councillors is fundamental – it has not been taken seriously before. We could benefit from other organisations within our sphere of operation being able to spread good practice.

Jill Owen
equalities champion and (at time of interview) chair of the policy and resources overview and scrutiny committee

There are three scrutiny committees: policy and resources, community services and environment and economy. Scrutiny also has policy groups, each of

which is attached to a portfolio holder on the executive.

We have periodic meetings with leaders and the management board. This is meant to be a process of mutual benefit. The executive has a huge agenda and can't go into many issues in depth. The scrutiny committee can go into the depth and there can be tensions. We are there to help the executive but also to say 'hold on, something has gone wrong'.

Recommendations of the scrutiny committee go to the following executive meeting and then the executive decides what to implement. In theory policy development work should be done by the policy groups. But it is a grey area and it is difficult to draw a firm line to define what a policy group does and what a scrutiny committee does.

focusing on outcomes

Neighbourhood renewal is about changing things in a sustainable way for the most disadvantaged communities. It is about ensuring that people living in those communities see better housing and physical environment, reduced crime, improved health and job prospects and better schooling.

a few things to think about

- Be as clear as possible about what outcomes you hope to see and in what timeframe.
- It is important to check on results. Find out what works and mainstream it.
- Outcomes may be hard to measure but it is worth persevering. A reduction in transfer requests from an estate for example, may mean that crime and the fear of crime have been reduced, making it a safer place to live.
- Never lose sight of what neighbourhood renewal is about – narrowing the gap between disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the rest.
- People want to live in safe and pleasant neighbourhoods – councils, working with their partners and with local people, are at the forefront of making this happen.

what the contributors say

sometimes you can actually count the difference

When council properties are vacated they need to go through a number of processes – cleansing, sanitising, clearing – before they can be repaired and made available again. It used to take a long time. NRF funding was used to set up a new team of people who go into properties before the skilled tradespeople come and get them ready for reoccupation. Void turnaround time has fallen from 63 days to less than 25 and the savings have allowed the scheme to be mainstreamed.

Chris Mills, Doncaster

There are also soft ways of measuring success – listening to people, seeing what's happening in communities. People are being more optimistic, more confident, children are in better environments, their mums and dads have more hope for the future. That comes from the practical things that are happening.

Andy Kay, Blackburn with Darwen

be clear what you are trying to achieve

Neighbourhood management is all about customer focus and better delivery.

Mike Storey, Liverpool

For me, being a councillor has always been about making Hyndburn a better place for people to live. It's the same for all of us.
Bernard Dawson, Hyndburn

A few action points for you to consider	
Leader	Is there a strategic focus on delivery of the neighbourhood renewal strategy, and clear understanding of the desired outcomes? Are you as leader ensuring that council services are focused on delivery of change to deprived areas?
Portfolio holder	You will most probably be responsible for 'floor targets', Public Service Agreement targets or NRS targets for your service area. Are you clear about the outcomes that will constitute success, and are you fully aware of all the factors that may impact on delivery?
Scrutiny chair	If you are actively involved in scrutiny of the neighbourhood renewal strategy or of a related area (eg health), are the outcomes clear, deliverable, realistic and based on evidence? Are you scrutinising not only the strategy, but also how it translates to delivery on the ground?
Frontline councillor	This matters for you and for those living in your ward. Are you clear about the aims of the neighbourhood renewal strategy in relation to your ward? Are you communicating that to local people and seeking their views and perceptions regularly on what has changed? Are you feeding this back to colleagues who may hold the relevant portfolio or who are responsible for scrutiny?

keys to successful regeneration

How successful you and your council are in facilitating and driving change in deprived neighbourhoods has much to do with identifying barriers and the means to overcome them. Our case studies highlight how some of these barriers can be overcome, and some of the keys to success.

a few things to think about

- Success is supported by:
 - leadership and drive and a clear sense of common purpose about what constitutes success
 - strong public involvement and interest
 - clear outcomes and timeframes
 - imaginative use of resources – people and money
 - improved skills specific to delivery of neighbourhood renewal
 - timely, accurate information on what works, where and why
 - clear, robust policies, developed with key partners, on tackling the issues that matter to local people (for example anti-social behaviour).
- Open and honest reflection on success – and failure – is key. So is willingness to learn from what works, and to share.
- A can-do, 'rolled up sleeves' approach achieves more and can be infectious!

what the contributors say

overcoming cynicism

The main barrier is the cynicism and lack of aspiration among some communities – after years and years of underinvestment ... many people can't believe we're changing ... the solution is simple – by putting the community first (and) being more responsive ... people will begin to understand that we are on their side.

Martin Winter, Doncaster

knowing what success means

There is one thing I would recognise as showing our neighbourhood renewal strategy has been successful. That is, that at the end of the period, young people and their families have higher aspirations for their personal future. People's aspirations are starting to grow, and to me that is what neighbourhood renewal is all about.

Chris Mills, Doncaster

We've learned that it doesn't have to be multimillion-pound projects that can change people's lives. But the greatest success is the way we've organised neighbourhood renewal, so that it does what the community wants – and that has led to an amazing diversity.

Peter Kotz/Peter Brooks, Greenwich

focus on the ‘big picture’

It has been important for neighbourhood renewal programmes to tie into existing programmes. For example, the money being invested through Elevate East Lancashire for Victorian housing clearance needs to go hand in hand with neighbourhood renewal, which is providing other service enhancements, such as cleansing, looking at teenage pregnancy and heart disease in the area. It is important that all the different initiatives work together to add value to each other. Peter Britcliffe, Hyndburn

use consultation wisely

... focus groups were not needed to state the obvious. Local people wanted action, not reports. Richard Kemp, Liverpool

you are often dealing with a ‘floating’ population

We’ve leafleted the area, done all sorts, to get local people on board, but as soon as they do they tend to move. It makes getting the input of the community very difficult. Dave Smith, Blackburn with Darwen

getting people interested and involved

We’re good at being proactive with all community partners ... This all inclusive strategy means that if we feel we’re missing out on a particular community we go out and actively get them to join in. Tony Dobson, Hyndburn

a few action points for you to consider	
leader	Removing barriers to empowerment and renewal is key to the success of regeneration. How can you help your officers and fellow councillors identify and overcome some of the things that might be blocking progress for your council and partner agencies? Identifying what is really happening on the ground is absolutely vital in this process. Things that might look OK on paper may not be in reality. Where can you best use your influence and ‘clout’ to unblock a blockage?
portfolio holder	Have you undertaken a review (of any sort) of the support your council offers to partners and others engaged in neighbourhood renewal? If you have are you happy that those involved have the skills to deliver, and access to best practice?
scrutiny chair	You will see what is suggested for Leaders and Portfolio holders above. Why not help them by commissioning the community and voluntary sector, or other service providers, to identify what they think are the blockages and support needs?
frontline councillor	Without doubt one of the biggest barriers to effective engagement with those who are not used to being involved in things is cynicism. You will have heard phrases like – ‘ We’ve heard it all before. You promise the world and deliver nothing. You’re all the same’ . Without doubt the best cure for cynicism is action – so do something – and do it quickly. Maybe a voluntary neighbourhood clean up or a refurbishment of a play area. Quick wins make a difference. It is your job to make sure the council supports you in delivering what is reasonable for the people you represent.

CASE STUDY LIVERPOOL

Liverpool is ranked as the most deprived authority on the Rank of Average Score measure on the Index of Deprivation. In the other five measures, Liverpool is ranked in the top 5 most deprived, making it one of the most deprived authorities in England. 59 per cent of Liverpool’s 291 Super Output areas fall within the 10 per cent most deprived in England.

Liverpool’s case study concentrates on the process of piloting and implementing a Neighbourhood Management approach, to facilitate delivery of better services at the neighbourhood level.

Mike Storey
leader

The creation of the government’s National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal coincided with our own ideas on decentralisation and resident involvement. Neighbourhood management is all about customer focus and better delivery. We’ve been so pleased with our five pilots, and learned so much from them, that we have made neighbourhood management a core aspect of frontline delivery.

Steve Munby
opposition member

As a member of an opposition party it is always difficult to influence major strategies of the council. However, working as a Board member of an empowered local organisation I was empowered to work within those strategies to affect local delivery of the services that affect my constituents. I was given both a resource and an opportunity to put my knowledge of my local community to good use.

Richard Kemp
cabinet member for housing
neighbourhoods and community safety

In 1998 it was recognised that council services in Liverpool were poor (the third worst in the country). Council tax was high.

Officers warned that simply devolving bad services to neighbourhoods would mean chaos. The right thing to do was to get the services right, and then find ways of appropriate local devolution. They pointed out that, at the time, Liverpool did not know what was needed in each area, what was currently being spent in each area, and in many cases could not even say who worked where.

The incoming administration took a pragmatic view of what neighbourhood management might mean. The administration wanted to ensure a consistency of quality, but knew that local communities would have different priorities. Crucially, we also decided to link neighbourhood delivery with customer focus.

Council officers, led by the chief executive, worked with the Executive Board to ensure that, over time, neighbourhood proposals would be linked to a full restructuring of the council. This ensured that

neighbourhood delivery became fundamental and fully sustainable.

Five pilot neighbourhood delivery areas were established, areas chosen to be very different from each other. But they had one thing in common. They had no long-term budget attached to them. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal asks not only 'why do we have to regenerate the same areas every decade' but also 'why do we form partnerships to look at 3 per cent of funding to an area and not the 97 per cent the public sector spends day in and day out'. In other words, if the 97 per cent mainstream funding is used more effectively, the 3 per cent may not be needed.

The council's approach also involved ensuring that the concept of neighbourhood activity became an objective of all the partners round the LSP table. The idea of neighbourhood activity became important for both the delivery of services, and the planning of long-term regeneration activity.

INclude Neighbourhood Regeneration Ltd was established in 2001 as a partnership between CDS Housing (now PLUS Housing Group) and the City Council. It pulls together the work of other regeneration bodies such as Sure Start and the Education Action Zone, and it runs or advises on a wide range of service delivery aspects from the council and other service providers. It has become the delivery agent for the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder, and has developed a long-term neighbourhood plan for the area.

INclude now has 80 staff working for it, of which it pays for only 5. The remainder work for mainstream services who would be working on the patch anyway, but instead of reporting upwards through their parent organisations, report locally to the managing director. Service integration has happened because people were working together on similar issues, and were empowered by all their organisations to do things the INclude way.

INclude has a number of factors which guaranteed success:

- trust – between INclude and the council on both direction and money

- trust – between INclude and CDS Housing. Both partners knew the other was acting in the best interests of both and would deliver
- a lack of party politics – two councillors from different parties who got on with the job together
- a 'rolled-up sleeves' approach by both the board and staff – a 'just Do It' mentality
- employing the right staff – a managing director who is a civic entrepreneur who pulls people together to get things done
- intelligent consultation – not consulting on the blindingly obvious. Accepting the reality that part of Liverpool was dirty, dangerous and uncared for, and that focus groups were not needed to state the obvious. Local people wanted action, not reports
- a hands off approach by the board – staff empowered to deliver activity

And it works. We know that because:

- local residents have a high satisfaction level
- property prices have gone up faster than the city average
- empty properties in all sectors have gone down
- service delivery costs have decreased
- other people want to do it.

Liverpool has now adopted a neighbourhood management system right across the city. More than 250 staff from seven different services now work together, on a holistic basis, from seven neighbourhood management districts.

Councils cannot deliver services by themselves. When we sit in town halls we obviously have to develop strategies that apply to all our areas, and a set of standards that we aspire to. The best way to achieve those standards is by local organisations taking responsibility for delivery of strategies and working with them to find local solutions to meet council-wide standards.

mainstreaming and partnership

Mainstreaming represents a fundamental change of approach in tackling disadvantage. It means changing corporate priorities and reallocating resources to meet the needs of deprived neighbourhoods. It means learning from what works and incorporating that into service delivery. Working in partnership, with all partners working to the same ends, is the key to making this happen.

a few things to think about

- Things that work well should be incorporated into normal service provision. This is often about the way something is done – perhaps through local partnership working and may not necessarily mean significant additional resources.
- Most services plan their work on the basis of what they already do. Often those managing services will say that they commission work when they are simply procuring it. Commissioning involves carrying out a good needs analysis which includes looking at how services can best be delivered to meet the needs.
- Is the council, as a major local service provider, leading by example in allocating resources to deprived areas and making the best use of what works?
- Sometimes the voluntary and community sector are better placed to reach certain disadvantaged groups. Are the right people delivering the service?
- Are services truly 'joined-up' or are there barriers that need to be challenged? Barriers could be between age groups, eg young and old, or could be geographical.

what the contributors say

mainstreaming is important for long-term sustainability

We've got to learn to pool resources, and put together programmes that have a distinct plan to mainstream them – so that we don't get to the end of the funding and wonder where the next lot of funding is coming from. The NRF is not about a pot of money to bid for – it's a pot of money that allows you to reprogramme the services you deliver and bend them in a different way, so that you can continue the service from your own resources.
Martin Winter, Doncaster

... and it requires new ways of working

We've learned from other regeneration programmes that service providers often see new funds simply as an opportunity to expand their existing budgets. Then there is no real drive or incentive to do what neighbourhood renewal is meant to do. We are trying to move people away from notions of projects and more into the concept of mainstreaming, but it's a culture change that is very hard for them to get their heads round.
Chris Roberts, Greenwich

try things out in one place, and then mainstream them elsewhere

We don't have neighbourhood renewal money but we have the neighbourhood management pilot programme, which is helping us identify strategies to assist in overcoming rural deprivation. If it can be done for those areas we hope to mainstream it out to other areas.

Mike Knight, Devon

use what works

We're so pleased with our five pilots, and learned so much from them, that we have made neighbourhood management a core aspect of frontline delivery.

Mike Storey, Liverpool

partnerships can be an effective way to secure engagement

The idea of partnership underpins everything we do – it's one of the reasons we are an excellent council – and our work on neighbourhood renewal revolves around the idea of partnership as much as everything else we do.

Kate Hollern, Blackburn with Darwen

a few action points for you to consider

leader	This is one of the trickiest bits of neighbourhood renewal to achieve. Have you started talking with partners about how you might move towards mainstreaming activity in your council area? Is your council leading by example in ensuring its services are directed to deprived areas and by incorporating what works into service delivery?
portfolio holder	Developing a community strategy is a vital part of delivering a shared agenda for improvement. The services covered by your portfolio will inevitably affect or be affected by the community strategy. Have you been working closely with relevant partners to ensure it is not only agreed but actually delivered?
scrutiny chair	Is the council as a major provider designing and delivering services to take account of what works, and are they sufficiently geared to meet the needs of deprived neighbourhoods?
frontline councillor	Partnership positions do not have to be filled by 'senior post holders' within the council. If there is a partnership or sub-group of a partnership that has a direct impact on your ward or neighbourhood you might like to consider becoming a member either as a community representative or as a council representative.

CASE STUDY HYNDBURN

Hyndburn is a district council in East Lancashire. It is a constellation of a series of towns, with Accrington the largest and the administrative centre, and has a population of 79,000.

Hyndburn has 17 per cent of its 53 Super Output Areas in the most deprived 10 per cent in England. The council is committed to tackling a range of social and economic concerns, which include severe housing problems and the need for a clear community cohesion strategy.

Peter Britcliffe
leader

Our neighbourhood renewal strategy explicitly recognises that policies and programmes must encourage those from all backgrounds and circumstances to have similar life opportunities and to live and work confidently alongside each other. They must not exclude people, nor make access to services difficult for any community, and must effectively promote strong and positive relationships between people in schools, in workplaces, in leisure and cultural activities and within neighbourhoods generally.

To meet these objectives, we have done a number of things, such as establishing community empowerment networks, which reach out to hard to reach groups and nurturing initiatives for elderly people and Asian women. These kinds of schemes, though Hyndburn-wide, are the most pronounced in the most deprived wards.

As a district council we are traditionally responsible for only a small part of the cost of service delivery in our neighbourhoods. Our LSP, Hyndburn First, was established in 2000 to join up regeneration players, such as primary care, the county and borough councils and colleges – it has four Hyndburn

councillors and three county councillors as members. It is a company limited by guarantee, which means that it is independent of the council – I am not even a member – and is able to hold partners to account, of which the local authority is, of course, one.

If I had any concerns about the LSP it would be that I feel there isn't enough information coming back to me. There is a danger that these programmes can be totally council orientated, but you can go the other way too, where the council doesn't know what's going on.

Housing renewal is a key area of our strategy. We have a terrible problem with housing – too many 100-year-old terraces that are not fit for people to live in. We have been buying homes built by the private sector and created attractive areas in which people want to invest and spaces where young people can meet and play. We have been successful in our bid for the Housing Market Renewal funds, which we have made via the Elevate East Lancashire partnership – it will bring in £23.5m and allow us to really change some of our most deprived neighbourhoods.

We are also improving access to services, providing culturally appropriate services and tapping into home-grown talent to ensure money does not leak away from our economy. For example, we had no cinema for 10 years. Now we have one – we

responded to a petition of thousands of names handed in by a 13-year-old girl. The cinema has made a real difference to people who can't travel to the multiplexes in Preston or wherever.

We are also exploring neighbourhood management and looking at whether we should set up a neighbourhood trust, to enable local people to be involved in the decision-making process, a key plank of our neighbourhood renewal strategy.

It has been important for neighbourhood renewal programmes to tie into existing programmes. For example, the money being invested through Elevate East Lancashire for Victorian housing clearance needs to go hand in hand with neighbourhood renewal, which is providing other service enhancements, such as cleansing, looking at teenage pregnancy and heart disease in the area. It is important that all the different initiatives work together to add value to each other.

Sustainability is a key theme for the LSP. New programmes and ways of working are fine while there are extra resources, but the challenge is how do local partners still collaborate when there aren't any more extra funds? Can we demonstrate new ways of working that will live on and give sustainability to the service improvements we've achieved?

We try to provide all our services, including neighbourhood renewal projects, within Best Value. For example, we have a Best Value improvement plan on racial equality as part of our overall commitment to improve community cohesion.

Communicating the neighbourhood renewal strategy to residents can be quite a difficult thing to do: the language of floor targets and service enhancements often puts local people off getting involved. But that's the message we try and get over most of all – that we welcome people's input.

Our biggest success has been on the restructuring of cleaning and refuse collection. Neighbourhood renewal wards are cleaner and residents' boards are pleased.

Tony Dobson deputy leader, regeneration services

As deputy leader and councillor for Barnfield ward, a neighbourhood renewal area, I act as a stepping stone between what residents' expectations are and what the council can provide. Housing is a major issue in Hyndburn. There are a number of empty properties because their value has dropped and more that are in a state of disrepair. My role is to try and provide the best services for the money in the kitty. We look to other councils but here in Hyndburn we have a reputation for new ideas and an open-minded and proactive approach.

We've established eight area councils as the means by which residents communicate their views to the council. Area councils have helped us bridge the gap between councillors and residents. They are astonishingly successful because they are such a good way of people getting their opinions across – area councils themselves are able to get things done, and are a conduit for those views to be taken back to the council. People are very good at attending area council meetings. We also produce a newsletter for residents twice a year and in my weekly drive around the ward I get to meet and talk to people about the things that worry them. This helps me formulate views of what people are looking for. So when I go to cabinet, I can represent their views.

We're good at being proactive with all community partners. This has come out of the area councils – not only do you have councillors on the area council, but you also have co-optees from each segment of society within the area council area. There are 26 people sitting on the Accrington area councils – only eight of them may be councillors. The others are from minority groups, the community and voluntary sector or disability organisations.

This all-inclusive strategy means that if we feel we're missing out on a particular community, we go out and actively get them to join in. For example, we held a youth council at the local youth centre. The young people created their own agenda and highlighted their own issues. Similarly, we have gone out to local mosques and organised meetings where the agenda was set by the local Muslim community.

We have a good relationship with the LSP. It likes to be independent and its board is made up of organisations in the community. We are working well together on the Elevate bid and the Pathfinder restructuring programme from the government.

We are all fighting in the same direction. The Audit Commission was impressed by how we team-build with people outside the council to solve problems.

We take our community leadership role very seriously here in Hyndburn. Ward councillors are seen as 'experts within the locality' – they are the people who see things and make connections. This requires a different set of skills than the ones we've been used to using: it's less about being paternalistic, more about deciding together with the community what is needed. We need to learn to achieve things by influence – discussing, negotiating, listening – rather than by imposing our view on them.

You need to have the ability to accept information from residents without tinting it with your own point of view. You've got to be able to fight for residents but keep a corporate view that you will sometimes win arguments and sometimes lose them. A vivid imagination also helps you to look at things differently rather than just accept the status quo.

You learn every day. Nobody would say they are fully tooled. The council takes development very seriously and responds to councillors' requests for training on specific subjects.

Marlene Haworth chair of the sustainable communities scrutiny committee

The scrutiny committee's involvement in the neighbourhood renewal strategy is integral to the strategy's success. Once the LSP had produced the strategy and the cabinet had agreed it, it was passed to us to explore: to look at the detail, the nature of the schemes and to keep track of the impact of the schemes as they develop.

We get reports on Hyndburn First's improvement plan and we scrutinise the council budget, which includes Neighbourhood Renewal Funding. I want to be able

to find out what neighbourhood renewal projects are doing for people, whether we are helping people lead better lives and is the money getting through to where it's needed most. Is it being taken up? Are we throwing good money after bad? Are projects sustainable? I want to be told exactly what they're doing – though I sometimes feel we don't get enough depth of information.

We put our recommendations to the executive but they may not always be put into practice. We are not in a position to impose our demands – but I'm not sure we should be.

The scrutiny role is supported by the executive. We get training to give us an overview of the scrutiny committee's role, but we have only one officer supporting the scrutiny function which means our ambitions are necessarily limited.

Members haven't quite appreciated that in the new political arrangements, the way they find out what the cabinet is doing is through scrutiny, and if you don't have a strong scrutiny function, the cabinet system will collapse. They don't realise that scrutiny is the place to hold the cabinet to account. When they have understood that actually scrutiny gives them more power than they had under the old system, then the whole scrutiny process will be more effective.

Bernard Dawson member for Peel ward

For me, being a councillor has always been about making Hyndburn a better place for people to live. It's the same for all of us. The community strategy and the neighbourhood renewal strategy have been adopted by all parties. Unless you work together you won't be successful in getting funding. There have been differences but in the end we all pull together.

Councillors have an important role to play. It's up to us to get out to groups, not just those in the four neighbourhood renewal wards but in all wards.

Our community cohesion strategy is about involving the diverse groups that live in Hyndburn. A large number of Asian people live in our neighbourhood

renewal areas and we have been more successful than we used to be in getting them involved. For example, the take-up of health services by the Asian communities has improved.

The area councils are one way of getting more grassroots groups involved, for example, women from the Asian community are involved in area councils. We're also encouraging ethnic minority businesses.

You have to be prepared to put up with a lot of stick. And you have to be honest with people. If someone asks you for help, sometimes you can help, sometimes you can't. That's where expectations come in. You have to be a good listener and be able to respond. It's also about trying to encourage people to get involved, helping to set up community groups. It's more than just about attending meetings.

We do well on member development – in fact we've won an award for our member development programme from North West Employers. They particularly commended the community leadership dimension of it: the focus is very much on how to respond to the community, rather than just areas like finance. The role of a councillor is difficult because it is changing, and this is recognised through Hyndburn's provision.

We've been particularly good at getting people involved. That's got to mean something – people only get involved if they think they can make a difference, so the community must feel that their voice is getting heard.

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skills, knowledge and ways of working

Neighbourhood renewal requires new skills, better knowledge of what works and a willingness to reflect on, and learn from, success and failure. The purpose of this section is to identify what skills and techniques councillors from our six case studies have used in their work in neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion.

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a few things to think about

- Most people involved in renewal need to learn new skills and improved knowledge – officers, elected members, voluntary and community sector representatives, frontline workers.
- Skills include:
 - organisational: budgeting, evaluation
 - interpersonal skills: influencing, leadership, conflict resolution.
- Knowledge includes:
 - what works to improve housing and the physical environment, reduce crime and worklessness, improve health and educational attainment
 - how that knowledge can be used to improve local service delivery.
- Ways of working can impact on success:
 - spotting opportunities
 - adopting a 'can do' approach
 - being open to innovation.
- Be innovative – consider joint learning with residents, or ask to shadow a neighbourhood warden for a day.
- Find out what is happening at ward level and

below in your area. Neighbourhood statistics, including census information and data on regeneration topics, are available online (see sources page).

what the contributors say

learn in one area, and transpose it as appropriate

We have been using techniques in the NRF zones to find out what people want to see happening in their areas and to get the changes moving. These techniques have been so successful that we are rolling them out across the whole borough.
Martin Winter, Doncaster

We have done a number of things, such as establishing community empowerment networks, which reach out to hard to reach groups and nurturing initiatives for elderly people and Asian women. These kinds of schemes, though Hyndburn-wide, are the most pronounced in the most deprived wards.
Peter Britcliffe, Hyndburn

use well established ‘tools’ to help you make progress

We used the planning for real system to find out what people wanted. Local schools built 3D maps of the area, which we took around to community groups, local shopping centres etc. People put in flags for things they liked or didn’t like. That coalesced into priorities and then we held further meetings to ask people how to deal with the things they didn’t like: could they deal with them themselves, could they deal with them if they had some support or training, or should someone else deal with them, and if so, who? These priorities were brought together to form the action plan, which was sent out to statutory bodies and stakeholders, so that they could say how they related to the issues of concern and what they were doing about them.

Chris Mills, Doncaster

think about taking an ‘area based’ approach to the task

We’ve established eight area councils as the means by which residents communicate their views to the council. Area councils have helped us bridge the gap between councillors and residents.

Tony Dobson, Hyndburn

be honest

You have to be honest with people. If someone asks you for help, sometimes you can help, sometimes you can’t. That’s where expectations come in. You have to be a good listener and be able to respond.

Bernard Dawson, Hyndburn

a few action points for you to consider	
leader	Do you ensure that your officers and members know what works and how it can be applied? Does your council ensure that everyone involved in neighbourhood renewal is able to develop skills and access very best practice? Is the council a learning organisation?
portfolio holder	Are you confident that you as portfolio holder, and those delivering the service for which you are responsible, have the key skills needed, and access to best practice? Are they supported and encouraged to be innovative?
scrutiny chair	A review of member support functions (and of any Compacts with the voluntary and community sector) could be very helpful in keeping the machine well oiled and up to speed. Does the council have a skills strategy that reflects key skills for delivering neighbourhood renewal? Does it encourage joint learning opportunities with other organisations?
frontline councillor	Is the knowledge you need about Neighbourhood Renewal readily available? Is it skills and techniques you need help with? Are you confident that your approach to communities is welcoming and open? What support do you need in order to enable you to engage effectively with your communities? Consider joint learning with local residents. They could be your best teachers.

CASE STUDY BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN

Blackburn with Darwen is a unitary council, a former mill town, typified by close-back terraces and a densely packed centre – but it also has country parks, high-value housing, good schools and access to the motorway.

Since 1998, there has been massive investment, especially along the motorway corridor. There is no history of white-collar working in town, but that is changing.

There are still high levels of deprivation – it is ranked as the 34th most deprived authority in England on the Rank of Average Score measure, and has 23 per cent of its 91 Super Output Areas ranked among the 10 per cent most deprived in England.

Kate Hollern

leader of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

We like to think of Blackburn as the town where partnership began. The Blackburn partnership, the forerunner of today’s LSP, was formed in 1991, and there’s a major feel for partnership embedded in the town. The idea of partnership underpins everything we do – it’s one of the reasons we are an excellent council – and our work on neighbourhood renewal revolves around the idea of partnership as much as everything else we do.

The persuasive powers of Blackburn with Darwen mean most of the partner organisations have come on board pretty easily. We’re here to co-ordinate and lead as necessary. It’s very rare that we have to drive something through. The LSP members are well aware of the problems and we’ve all got the same aims.

Our neighbourhood renewal strategy is based both around the five neighbourhood areas and various interests: under fives, older people, getting people

into work, which operate across the borough. The zone approach is helpful, but sometimes artificial. Fulfilling a resident’s need for a job might not be in the place he or she lives, so a borough-wide approach is necessary to really challenge deprivation.

We use the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund to pilot approaches that could make a difference – either by using it to make minor interventions in mainstream delivery so that we bend services in a way that makes a big difference, or by using it to fund things that can’t be funded by the main council budget. The key thing is that whatever we use the money for we want it to bring people from different interests and departments and agencies together.

We have restructured the organisation around neighbourhood co-ordination, which has brought all the services together at neighbourhood level. There are five areas endorsed by the LSP, the police and the Primary Care Trust, and each has its own co-ordinator, funded from the neighbourhood Renewal Fund, whose role is to look at neighbourhood issues in the round, and then work with the ward members, the police, housing or whoever, to try and find a solution.

Finding out exactly what the community really wants can be quite tricky. We have public meetings, which we try and make as active and enjoyable as possible, Mori surveys and citizens panels.

We learned a lot from the experience of home zones, residential areas of the town which we are proposing to turn into play streets by banning traffic.

We held a number of public meetings, to which mainly men turned up. They were against the proposals as they meant they couldn't drive or park near their homes. But a Mori survey of residents found all the women to be in favour.

This showed us we need more sophisticated ways of engaging people, and that is where ward members have a key role – they are the ones who have the links with the communities and can represent their views. It does mean they have to look at their role in a different way – they have to learn to network, to share authority and to influence beyond the council. It means thinking in terms of 10–15 year programmes, not the next election.

Andy Kay executive member for regeneration

One of our aims for neighbourhood renewal is to encourage communities to be together, and to try and make sure that whatever organisation individuals wish to be involved with they feel part of that community and can have their say. That is particularly important in a racially mixed area like Blackburn with Darwen.

Many of our communities are quite ethnically distinct – because, quite naturally people want to live conveniently and socially. But it can lead to the impression that all the money is being spent in one area or another. It's one reason we have done a resource mapping exercise for the authority, to show how much is being spent in each area – and it shows that money is generally spent quite equally.

The important thing is to communicate this. We publish our own newspaper, *The Shuttle*, ten times a year which is where we put all the neighbourhood renewal information. More local newsletters are also

distributed in the neighbourhood renewal areas to tell residents what is going on, sometimes using budgets that had been set aside by partners, police or health, to communicate with residents.

There's a big perception gap here in Blackburn with Darwen which we've got to tackle – we've been named as an excellent council, which reflects the standard of the organisation, but unfortunately we don't get an excellent reaction from our communities. One of the ways we do that is by only promising what we know we can deliver, so that people's expectations are not raised too high.

The success of the neighbourhood renewal strategy is evaluated through the hard measures of the inspection regime, performance indicators and whether we are meeting our floor targets. There are also soft ways of measuring success – listening to people, seeing what's happening in communities. People are being more optimistic, more confident, children are in better environments, their mums and dads have more hope for the future.

That comes from the practical things that are happening. Since we started with neighbourhood renewal and put money into traffic calming, our fatal accidents among school-age children have gone down from 36 to nine. That's a couple of dozen children and their families and the health service that don't have to go through the trauma of a terrible accident, and that's a real human benefit.

Ron O'Keeffe chair of scrutiny

Neighbourhood renewal is a huge area so we tend to look at aspects of it through one of the five scrutiny committees. We have looked at it in terms of the council's performance assessment, and at the council's strategy of communicating with and involving the public. We've also looked at proposals for home zones.

We tend to choose issues where there is a fighting chance of coming out at the end with the three political parties being able to agree. It's not that we shy away from difficult issues, but if we don't reach a consensus, then the executive is more likely to ignore

the recommendations we make. As it is the executive accepts over 80 per cent of our recommendations. We're here to make things better for people. If scrutiny didn't change anything, what would be the point?

Ideally we use a mixture of things to judge performance. We use performance criteria, take evidence from the executive and officers and try and get external views – from partner agencies or other authorities. We also get out and talk to people: on the 'Thrash the trash' initiative we talked to focus groups of local residents, and then members went out with the public and took pictures of things they saw as a problem.

We have a good training programme for members with three sessions a year. In the first years it was basic stuff – teaching members to assess performance indicators for instance, then it was how to do health scrutiny. We're moving on to training members around the issues of partnerships and how scrutiny might interact.

The culture of scrutiny is still in development. Each year it gets better as people get more experience; it has credibility among all three parties, and each year dozens of our recommendations are accepted by the executive and those things make lives better for the people of Blackburn with Darwen.

Dave Smith member for Sunnyhurst ward, Darwen

A ward like mine, which is not one of the 10 per cent most deprived but has the most deprived area of Darwen in its boundaries, has always struggled to get funding, because it never figured in the deprivation statistics. The great thing about the neighbourhood renewal initiative is that now poor pockets are getting a look in.

Since I was elected in 1986, I've seen my main role as representing people who want to get things done in their neighbourhoods, particularly in housing. I channel all the requests to make the community's lives better. My role is to seek out the funding, put them in touch with the relevant council services and try and find ways to bring about what they want.

In the affluent areas of the ward they are able to apply for grants for themselves. But in the areas which need a lot of investment, people tend not to have the skills to do that, so I often have to do it for them. The turnover of the population is such that it is hard to get anything established.

I'm on a community association that covers the most deprived areas of Darwen – we've leafleted the area, done all sorts, to get local people on board, but as soon as they do they tend to move. It makes getting the input of the community very difficult. Every few weeks we go round a few streets, knock on every door, ask them if they've got any problems. We also issue a regular newsletter, and have a monthly advice surgery. But I find the best way to get hold of the hard to reach groups is by knocking on doors.

There are open channels for taking community views back to council. The whole concept of neighbourhood co-ordinators is very good because they are appointed at a level where they can sort things out. They've made it easier to facilitate things which cuts out a lot of red tape.

sources of further information and support

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useful websites

- www.neighbourhood.gov.uk Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
- www.odpm.gov.uk Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- www.socialexclusion.gov.uk
- www.idea.gov.uk Improvement and Development Agency
- www.lga.gov.uk Local Government Association
- www.lgiu.gov.uk Local Government Information Unit
- www.renewal.net online guide to what works in Neighbourhood Renewal
- www.raceactionnet.co.uk online advice and best practice on tackling racial harassment in housing and neighbourhoods (subscription based, members include local authorities, police and housing associations)
- www.cleanersafergreener.gov.uk advice, support and ideas for creating cleaner, safer and greener communities
- www.ascskills.org.uk, Academy for Sustainable Communities
- *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: A National Strategy Action Plan* (Social Exclusion Unit 2001). Available online at www.neighbourhood.gov.uk or by telephone on 08450 82 83 83
- *Making it happen in Neighbourhoods: The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal four years on*, January 2005. Available online or by phone, as above, product code 04NRU02643
- *The Learning Curve: A Learning and Development Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*. Summary and full report available online at www.neighbourhood.gov.uk or by telephone, as above
- *Smarter Delivery, Better Neighbourhoods*, ODPM 2005. Available online or by telephone, as above
- *Local Area Agreement Guidance*, ODPM 2005. Available online at www.odpm.gov.uk
- *Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities* by Sir John Egan, 2004. www.odpm.gov.uk/eganreview
- *How Local Authorities Can Make a Difference: Benchmarking Best Practice*. Ines Newman and Mike Geddes. Published by the Local Government Information Unit for the Local Authority Social Exclusion (LASE) Network
- *The Role of Councillors in Community Planning*. Jo Dungey LGIU 2002
- *Scrutiny Solutions* LGIU 2003. LGIU publications available from: Central Books Ltd., 99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN. Telephone 0845 458 9910
- *A Councillor's Guide 2005/6*, IDeA. Available online at www.idea.gov.uk/councillors, or by telephone 020 8867 3298
- *Breaking the Cycle: Progress and Priorities for the Future*, SEV 2004. Available online at www.socialexclusion.gov.uk

reading

- *Sustainable Communities: People, Places, Prosperity*, ODPM 2005. Available online at www.odpm.gov.uk
- *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter* and *Vibrant Local Leadership*, ODPM 2005. Available online at www.odpm.gov.uk/localvision