

## **Neighbourhood Management and Community Development**

This paper gives a brief background to Neighbourhood Management in Eastbourne and outlines some key issues that need to be addressed to maximise the benefits of this way of working.

### **Introduction**

Neighbourhood Management is an approach to service development and delivery which focuses on the needs of particular neighbourhoods and brings service providers together with local communities to find ways of doing things better. In some cases this will be through improved contacts and communication between local people and agencies. In other cases the aim is to radically change the way we do things in order to address concerns that we have not tackled successfully to date.

The overarching aim of Neighbourhood Management in Eastbourne is to improve the quality of life and well-being of people living in the town's deprived neighbourhoods and reduce the gap between Eastbourne's neighbourhoods which score within the top 20% most deprived in the country on housing, health, education, employment, etc and the more prosperous areas in Eastbourne.

In practice this includes:

- Engaging with local communities where they live to understand their needs and priorities
- Addressing these and celebrating successes in a way that supports community engagement
- Improving our understanding of the area and outcomes for people in that area
- Identifying ways of taking effective action to improve those outcomes
- Where necessary, changing policies, practice and the way we design and deliver services
- Making the most of any opportunities for bringing in additional resources to address needs.

### **Background**

Kingsmere project was developed in response to concerns around anti-social behaviour in the area. A Steering Group was formed to agree an action plan between key stakeholders, including police, youth service and three social landlords, and Operations Group below this to implement and report back. Both groups included local residents, primarily as representatives of the community association.

Eastbourne Strategic Partnership (ESP) subsequently agreed to run pilots in Old Town, Town Centre and Willingdon Trees to see if the Kingsmere model would work elsewhere. Neighbourhood Management is now established in these three areas and officers will report to ESP in the autumn on the lessons learnt.

A new project has now been launched in Shinewater / North Langney and the intention is to develop two additional projects over the next two years in Langney and Hampden Park.

Sussex Police set up Neighbourhood Panels in 21 neighbourhoods in the meantime – to deal with crime, anti-social behaviour and other community safety issues.

### **What we have learnt**

- 1 The **structure** itself does not always work as well as in Kingsmere
  - some neighbourhoods are very diverse – with some prosperous parts alongside pockets of deprivation
  - not all neighbourhoods have high levels of social housing and this may affect the level of local participation and make it more difficult to engage local residents
  - there are very few community based organisations in some areas and those which exist may lack capacity to engage in Neighbourhood Management through meetings and would struggle to take on any additional activities

*The initial structure has been adapted in different neighbourhoods according to what works there.*

- 2 The **number of neighbourhood based groups and panels** can lead to overlap and duplication.
  - the development of Neighbourhood Panels by the police has created a forum where issues of immediate concern to residents can be voiced but it has not always been easy to clarify the differences between these and the Neighbourhood Management meetings which are intended to take a more strategic approach.
  - some issues are being discussed in more than one meeting. This is particularly true where Eastbourne Homes have an area panel meeting in the same neighbourhood as a Neighbourhood Panel and a Neighbourhood Management project.

*Some areas are reviewing the need for separate meetings. In Old Town, the community engagement will focus on engagement through events rather than relying on the traditional meetings model. The*

*Town Centre Neighbourhood Panel has combined with the Neighbourhood Management Operations Group. There is, however, a need to ensure that the Neighbourhood Management projects Operations groups retain their strategic focus.*

- 3 There are some **barriers to engaging with local communities**
- the structure of meetings which worked in Kingsmere has not worked well in some other areas where it has been difficult to get local residents and representatives to attend neighbourhood meetings or community panels
  - some people involved in Neighbourhood Panels have felt there was no need for them to continue meeting or that the Neighbourhood Management meetings are not needed and it has been difficult to communicate the distinction between the different meetings
  - more effective ways of engaging with local residents such as Quality Streets events, Fun Days and local surveys – all of which have proved very successful - can be very resource intensive and the projects have not all had the resources / staff and volunteer time needed
  - the focus on meetings has distracted from other ways of learning about residents priorities and needs, getting their feedback and involving them in developing and/ or participating in new activities.
  - Most people do not want to go to meetings unless there is a particular issue which they want taken up.

*We are now looking at alternative ways of engaging residents – including events, surveys and social media.*

- 4 EBC and other partners do not have dedicated or any pooled **budgets for Neighbourhood Management**
- Neighbourhood management in Eastbourne has relied so far on making better use of existing resources including staff and volunteer time. However, there has been very limited capacity to raise dedicated funding for budgets. This may change with a new Neighbourhood Management Officer now in post, but this post is currently funded only until May 2013.
  - The officers (from EBC, Places for People and Eastbourne Homes) leading the Neighbourhood Management projects are all very clear that there needs to be a budget which the Operations Group can use to support agreed actions and activities. Whilst it is possible to apply to Councillors for help from their ward budgets and to Eastbourne Homes Area Panels for some project costs, there are no budgets for printing costs, venue hire or training for example.

- The lack of budgets makes it more difficult to engage local residents and stakeholders. Having resources to spend or allocate encourages involvement and a sense of ownership.

*We will include a growth bid for Neighbourhood budgets in the next Service and Financial Plan and are looking at other options in the meantime..*

- 5 Whilst there are very many voluntary groups running specific activities in the town, there are very few groups with a **generic community or neighbourhood focus** such as community associations.
  - Residents' Forums and Panels have tended to replace independent Tenants' Associations and these are often tied in with their social landlord and dependent on them for any budget.
  - Services provided in past decades through voluntary activity – e.g. pre-school play groups – have been taken over by the statutory sector, partly as a result of investment – some of which is now disappearing – and partly as a result of increasing demands on groups to manage risks (CRB, health and safety, training and qualifications).
  - A large proportion of voluntary and community sector activity in Eastbourne is church-led. Whilst this is a vital part of the scene and delivers many valuable projects, there is a need for more community activity and volunteering which is not reliant on faith groups. Whilst the Christian basis of services may not deter non-Christian residents from using those services where they are needed – e.g. after-school clubs, it can be off-putting to people who do not share that faith and some services and facilities are not inclusive – e.g. unwilling to let space to gay groups or for activities which might be seen as promoting other faiths.
  - Community Associations running some of the Council's own **Community Centres** often lack the capacity to manage, develop and promote the buildings for community use as they would like. This is less true of Centres with good facilities in more prosperous areas – such as Community Wise in Motcombe – but a real challenge in others – e.g. Langney. Two of the Council's own Centres are currently managed directly by Council staff (Langney and Regency Park); a third (Old Town) requires significant support to recruit new members to avoid direct management reverting to the Council; Willingdon Trees Community Centre is now less reliant on Council staff having been run directly by the Council for several years, but continues to require regular input from staff; and Hampden Park Community Centre is run by a very small group of volunteers who need support on a range of practical, building

management issues and would welcome additional support to recruit new committee members.

*This needs to be considered in future planning for Community Grants and for the Community Development budget.*

- 6 **Community development resources and expertise** in the town are limited
- There is no dedicated community development organisation in Eastbourne addressing these problems. One of 3VA's core functions is community development. However, their services cover a much wider remit including information, support, representation and the development of networks for the voluntary sector as a whole in the town. The Council's grant to 3VA contributes to the delivery of this wider service but does not allow for the level of focused community development work needed in some neighbourhoods.
  - There is a need for a community development service with a strong track record of stimulating, initiating and developing neighbourhood based community groups and activities and with the resources to bring residents together into groups and work with them over a longer (3 years plus) period. The Council's own staff have had to take the lead on the management of new community centres, the management and redevelopment of Langney Community Centre and the ongoing support of associations in other areas.
  - Effective neighbourhood community development requires sustained investment of time and resources over a number of years. A growth bid for funding for community development in 2011 was unsuccessful.

*Opportunities for securing funding to allow the Council to recruit or commission a community development service are being explored. This also needs to be considered in future planning for Community Grants and for the Community Development budget.*

- 7 The **capacity of officers coordinating Neighbourhood Management** in the different areas is variable and, in some areas, very limited.
- Kingsmere and Willingdon Trees have both benefited from dedicated resources – particularly those provided by Places for People. However, the officer involved leads on similar projects around the country. We also need to be aware that partner organisations with a wider geographical remit may not be able to continue to devote as many resources to Eastbourne as they do currently.

- The project in Old Town has been coordinated by an officer of Eastbourne Homes whose main duties have been to oversee Income Recovery for the organisation as a whole and Resident Inclusion. His role has now changed and he is one of two Neighbourhood Managers responsible for tenancy management, estate management, income recovery and resident involvement across half the housing stock. These are significant demands and expectations of what can be achieved within such limited resources need to be realistic.
- The project in the Town Centre has been led by the Council's Crime Reduction Officer who works only three days a week and whose primary role is leading for the Council on community safety matters.
- The new project being developed in Shinewater will be led by the Council's new Neighbourhood Management Officer who is employed on an 18 month fixed term contract to take the project forward. However, any development he is able to achieve in this time is unlikely to be sustainable if his post is not extended beyond May 2013.

*As above*

- 8 It is a challenge to achieve a **shared understanding of what Neighbourhood Management is about** between different partners and between the officers involved and senior managers.
- Neighbourhood Management is an opportunity for the different partners and stakeholders to push forward on their key priorities. There is a need to be very clear early on in the process what the priorities are for an area and to agree and stick to an action plan rather than being diverted by new ideas and stakeholders who may come on board. Action plans need to develop continually with an annual refresh as a minimum, but it is important to protect the process from being overloaded with everyone's ambitions rather than taking a measured approach based on the resources of the main players and what is achievable.
  - Not all partners may need to do things differently and their role may be to ensure they link with the process in an appropriate and effective way depending on the local priorities and how far their service area is seen as critical. Not all agencies and stakeholders need to be actively involved in all neighbourhoods. For some it will be a question of staying in touch.
  - Senior Managers are not always aware at a practical level of the extent of their officers' involvement in the process or how it is benefiting their service delivery.

- As elected representatives, Council Members have an important role to play as stakeholders in the area and have valuable information to share but need to act as equal partners in the process and not seek to lead the agenda. This can be particularly challenging in neighbourhoods which cover more than one electoral ward where there may be councillors from different political parties involved.
- Senior officers are concerned to see and measure the impact of neighbourhood management to justify putting in resources. This is not always easy to match to modest interventions at local level and the new Strategic Steering Group will need some time to get a workable balance between local priorities, quick wins, tangible change and more ambitious strategic goals and evaluation (such as improving health outcomes).

*The new Strategic Steering Group is developing a strategic document which will set out what partners are trying to achieve. Discussions on this will help to clarify different approaches and understandings and what can be achieved.*

And finally... everyone has a different take on Neighbourhood Management. Much of what has been written about Neighbourhood Management reflects experience in projects funded under the last government's New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Renewal programmes. Eastbourne's approach is similar in many ways but working with significantly limited resources. Because this is still relatively new work our understanding of how best to do Neighbourhood Management is likely to change over time as we learn the lessons of experience.

Neighbourhood Management has already delivered huge benefits to Eastbourne.

- Reduction in anti-social behaviour in Kingsmere (60%+)
- Funding for healthy eating project in Willingdon Trees – to be rolled out to other areas
- Major improvements to green spaces and play equipment in Kingsmere, Willingdon Trees and Old Town
- Funding for Community Centre in Old Town
- Changes to the impact of night time economy in Town Centre

Neighbourhood Management has a significant impact too on the way the Council itself delivers services and potential to improve this in the future – everything from Parks and Gardens, Community Enforcement and Environmental Health to Economic Regeneration and Planning.