

Suffolk Community Empowerment Roadshow

**Monday 16th March 2009, 9.30am – 4.00pm,
Suffolk Constabulary HQ, Martlesham Heath, Ipswich IP5 3QS**

Inspire East, representing the Regional Empowerment Partnership, hosted an event dedicated to the topic of community empowerment across the county of Suffolk. The event provided an opportunity to explore the engagement and empowerment challenge for Local Authorities and their Partners.

OVERVIEW OF THE EVENT

A total of 59 delegates were welcomed to the event by Cllr. Doreen Savage, Chair of the Community Cohesion and Inclusion Delivery Partnership. The event was chaired by Rachel Sloane, an award winning radio presenter who has over 30 years experience of teaching adults and a career in commercial and BBC local radio.

Delegates represented a wide range of public sector organisations including County, District and Borough Councils, LSP's, Suffolk Constabulary and GO-East. The voluntary sector was also very well represented by local infrastructure organisations. Other delegates included representatives from the Federation of Small Businesses, Choose Suffolk, Orwell Housing Association and University Campus Suffolk.

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

Overview of the Regional Empowerment Partnership

Jen Wingate, Community Manager, Inspire East explained that the REP is one of nine across the country, working with the National Empowerment Partnership, Government, the National Association of Local Councils and others. Its role is to raise the profile and the practice of empowerment across the Region. In the coming year, the REP would be focusing on the question 'what does empowerment mean in Suffolk', collecting case studies and undertaking evaluation such as the Rural Action East / Rural Community Councils current review of the role of Community Led Planning.



For more information please visit www.inspire-east.org.uk/communityempowerment or contact Jen on jenwingate@eeda.org.uk

The Policy Context – An Introduction to the Empowerment White Paper

Antony Carpen, Community Empowerment Delivery, Department for Communities and Local Government outlined the policy background, including the 2008 White Paper 'Communities in Control' and expectations placed on Local Authorities, including the Duty to Involve. National Indicator 4 which measures the increase in the number of people who feel they are able to influence decision making, was in the top ten of Indicators selected by Local Authorities. Antony gave examples of emerging good practice, in Oldham where 'community contracts' were being introduced, and the Young Advisors Charity (www.youngadvisors.org.uk) where young people were being sponsored to sit on LSP's and other local bodies.

For more information please visit: www.communities.gov.uk or contact Antony on Antony.Carpen@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Making Connections Exercise



During the morning delegates took part in an interactive session using a set of cards called 'Making Connections'. The exercise provided eight community empowerment scenarios which were used as the basis for discussion. Delegates broke into pairs and offered solutions in response to the scenarios. The discussions were enjoyed amongst delegates as they encouraged people to start thinking of empowerment issues across different areas of their work and how empowerment can contribute towards sustainable communities.

Overview of the Community Cohesion and Inclusion Delivery Partnership

Allison Coleman, Social Inclusion Co-ordinator, Suffolk County Council outlined the role of the Community Cohesion and inclusion Delivery Partnership, one of nine delivery bodies of the Suffolk Strategic Partnership. The CC&IDP leads on nine of the National Indicators including NI4, NI1 'the percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area' and NI6 'participation in regular volunteering'. The Partnership has agreed ten desirable outcomes, two of which are directly related to the empowerment agenda. Delivery aims also reflect Public Service Agreements 15 & 21 'more cohesive, empowered and active communities' and 'addressing the disadvantage individuals experience due to gender, race etc'.

For more information please visit www.suffolk.gov.uk or contact Allison on Allison.coleman@csu.suffolkcc.gov.uk

The Ipswich Perspective

Cllr. Nadia Cenci, Portfolio Holder for Communities, Ipswich Borough Council delivered an Ipswich empowerment perspective, where five Community Forums had been created across the Borough. Ipswich was one of only 18 National Empowering Authorities. The five Forums had received a delegated budget to make a difference in their areas and in one case this had led to

the refurbishment of run down tennis courts, and new Committee being formed and additional funding being levered. There was a clear distinction between consultation and participation, with residents tending to get involved when an issue was identified and there was an appetite to do more.

For more information please visit: www.ipswich.gov.uk or contact Nadia on nadiacenci@hotmail.com

Case Study - Suffolk Coastal

Alison Matthews, Suffolk Coastal District Council outlined the Suffolk Coastal approach which has been to identify as many opportunities as possible for people to get involved. Both skills and resources are needed to engage, with training and advice and guidance considered essential to the process. Suffolk Coastal is described as 'generally effective at engaging service users, the business community and vulnerable groups to inform service delivery'. Key messages are that the role of elected Members is especially important, diverse communities may require diverse solutions, and partnership working is often essential.

For more information please visit: www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk or contact Alison on Alison.matthews@suffolkcoastal.gov.uk

The Challenges for Members

Cllr. Doreen Savage, Suffolk Coastal District Council gave a personal perspective on her current position as a District and Town Councillor, how this might change through the implementation of the empowerment agenda, and what challenges this might present in the future. To what



extent is 'empowerment' already in place through consultation and partnership working? How will the empowerment agenda take into account the small number of dissenting voices which seem inevitably to arise with significant issues such as housebuilding targets? Is there a danger that this could further delay important strategies and developments in the future? Perhaps it is possible that the introduction of Councillor Call for Action may dispel some of these questions. One definition

of empowerment, and possibly the most appealing, is 'to enable' and this philosophy should not be lost when any changes to procedures and working practices are being considered.

For more information please contact Doreen on Doreen.savage@suffolkcoastal.gov.uk

Facilitated Group Discussions

At the end of the morning session, delegates were given the opportunity, in seven groups, to discuss Community Empowerment against three key questions, detailed below. The key points arising were:



What does empowerment mean?

- Being listened to
- Able to do things or make things happen
- Have a choice for the community
- Opportunities to make the right connections
- Confidence and capacity
- Different things to different people
- Ability to influence
- Understanding structures and processes
- Accessibility and flexibility
- Ownership
- Knowledge
- Full involvement in decision making
- Responsibility
- Negotiation devolved to appropriate levels
- Finding the 'do-ers'
- Opportunities to participate
- Seeing outcomes
- Understanding other views
- Community power
- Equity of voice
- Information
- Thanks and recognition
- Not simply consultation



What changes do we need to think about initiating?

- Appropriateness of communications
- Range and methods of engagement, and language
- Responses and feedback
- Honesty in decision making
- National policy influences
- Open consultation, at an earlier stage
- Greater understanding of community issues
- Better understanding of structures
- Devolved funding
- Responsibility and accountability
- Continuity
- Training and support for Members
- Rotation amongst decision makers
- Sharing of information
- Focus on local issues
- Facilitation
- Skilled leadership
- Appropriate timescales



Who has the power?

- Everyone should
- Power sharing, not transferring
- Those with the budget
- Those with influence, knowledge or skills
- Media
- Voters
- Central Government
- Those who are going to be impacted
- Decision makers

Overview of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership

Celia Tredget, Director, Improvement East outlined the role of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership which is made up of 60 Local Authorities and Fire Authorities across the Eastern Region. Its main priorities are to improve performance, deliver Local Area Agreements, increase efficiency and develop skills and capacity. The RIEP is funded until 2011 by the Department for Communities and Local Government, and works in close collaboration with the Regional Empowerment Partnership.

Further information can be obtained at www.improvementeast.gov.uk or contact Cecelia on Cecilia.tredget@eera.gov.uk

SUMMARY OF WORKSHOPS

Participatory Budgeting

Jez Hall, Participatory Budgeting Unit



Participatory budgeting is defined as ‘involving local people in making decisions on the spending and priorities for a defined public budget’. The concept initially developed in Brazil in the 1980’s, is now in over 300 cities worldwide and is recognised by amongst others the World Bank and UNESCO. The Department for Communities and Local Government would like to see all Local Authority areas involved in some form of participatory budgeting by 2012. There is a range of potential models, from small grant allocation, through some mainstream allocation, to Authority wide budget engagement and Local Area Agreements. The main benefits of Participatory Budgeting include involving more people and new people, better targeted services, engagement becomes part of the process, and local ownership of projects and decisions.

An example was outlined, ‘Your Norfolk, Your Decision’ where organisations were encouraged to bid for funding totalling £200,000, to be spent on projects supporting Local Area Agreement themes. A Steering Group was formed to shortlist projects which were then presented to community participants who voted on the final choices. Grants ranged from a few thousand pounds to £60,000. More information on the background to Participatory Budgeting, and resources can be found at www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk or email Jez at jez.hall@participatorybudgeting.org.uk.

Neighbourhood Management and Community Led Planning

Jackie Brown, Neighbourhood Manager, Interlock, Basildon

The Interlock project is part of a seven year Pathfinder programme to improve urban parts of Essex, in this case the Northlands Park area of Basildon, a neighbourhood of some 3,500 homes and 10,000 people. Residents sit on appraisal panels for project funding, and interventions to date have included development of a Youth Council, healthy eating for children and families, home safety checks for elderly and vulnerable people and a rubbish amnesty removing unwanted household items. Residents feel more involved in decision making and this has led to a greater involvement with statutory organisations generally. There has been a significant reduction in crime levels, even though there are now many more opportunities for crime to be recorded. For more information please email Jackie at Jackie.brown@nminterlock.org.uk.

Clare Nagle, Regional Project Officer, Rural Action East

Rural Action East is the umbrella organisation for the six Rural Community Councils in the Eastern Region, its overall aim being to build strong communities where local action can transform the outlook for rural quality of life. Community Led Planning – Parish Plans, Village Design Statements and other community based planning activities – is a step by step process of creating a vision for a community or neighbourhood, usually leading to an Action Plan of projects to improve the community or area. In the East, nearly 700 Parish Plans have been completed, with over 9,000 actions identified. Rural Action East has recently undertaken some case study work with twelve Parishes, assessing the effectiveness of Parish Plans in influencing

local strategies and delivery of services, and the results of this work will be published soon. Community Led Planning is extremely effective in engaging local communities, however further support is required in terms of enabling communities to deliver their aspirations. For more information please visit www.RuralActionEast.org.uk or contact Clare at Clare.nagle@RuralActionEast.org.uk.

Asset Transfer

Annemarie Naylor, Asset Programmes Manager, Development Trust Association

The Development Trust Association was formed in 1993, and now has over 450 community development organisations as members. The Asset Transfer Unit within the DTA is however much more recent (January 2009) and follows research undertaken in 2007 which concluded that in principle there were no barriers to the transfer of public assets into community ownership. There are obvious benefits to such transfers taking place in terms of community cohesion and responsibility, opportunity to engage on potential uses and so on, however a number of risks too around the transfer value, ongoing viability of organisations responsible for the asset, possible multi-ownerships etc. The recession has not helped of course with funding being harder to access. The DTA's Asset Transfer Unit can provide free advice and has case studies, tools and model documents to share with communities. Further information is available at www.dta.org.uk or contact Annemarie on A.Naylor@dta.org.uk.



Role of the Third Sector

Dr. Wil Gibson, Chief Executive, Suffolk ACRE

Dr. Wil Gibson gave a presentation focusing on increasing awareness of the type of activities that can contribute to NI4, and the third sector organisations and others engaged with the community empowerment agenda who could help communities to gather evidence and determine activities and priorities. Capturing and sharing experiences, successes and good practices would be an important aspect of future development in this field. Existing community led planning such as Parish plans historically had an extremely high participation rate and it was important that these views were not only captured but used to inform local, regional and even national strategies and action plans. Points arising from a discussion amongst the group

Included reviewing funding arrangements to reflect lead in times for projects, more understanding of local issues needed by local and national Government, roles of elected Members, more cooperation and collaboration between third sector support organisations, and better feedback on issues and actions. For more information please visit www.suffolkacre.org.uk or contact Wil at Wil.gibson@suffolkacre.org.uk.

PLENARY SESSION

The Chair, Rachel Sloane, thanked all speakers & workshop facilitators for their contributions to the event. Thanks were also given to members of the event planning team which included Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Constabulary, Ipswich Borough Council, Suffolk Acre, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Inspire East.

FEEDBACK FROM ATTENDEES

Delegates were asked to complete a feedback and evaluation form relating to the organisation, content and learning from the event. A total of nineteen responses were received, and can be summarised as follows.

Objectives for the day

The majority of delegates who responded to this question were looking to gain a greater understanding of the empowerment agenda, and in one case to determine where the particular organisation represented fitted into the process. 20% of responders reported their objectives 'met', and a further 70% 'partly met'. Comments in this respect included:

- 'lots to take in'
- 'too much to take in – needs time to sink in'
- 'a lot of general information, little specific'

10% of responders described the event overall as 'very useful', and a further 65% as 'useful'.

55% of responders reported that the event provide useful new learning, with a further 40% saying that this was partly the case. Comments included:

- 'participatory budgeting was a useful concept'
- 'identified organisations to consider'
- 'didn't know much about asset transfer before'

Speakers and Workshops

70% of responders described the speakers sessions as 'useful', although two comments recorded the content and presentations as 'variable'. 45% of responders described the workshop sessions as 'very useful', with a further 40% 'useful'.

Event organisation

80% of responders to this specific question regarded the pre-event details and organisation as either 'very useful' or 'useful'. General comments relating to the format of the day included:

- 'still too many acronyms and too much jargon'
- 'more case studies needed'
- 'more discussion needed in smaller groups'
- 'too many powerpoint presentations'.

Summary

Delegates who recorded general comments on the event were largely positive, as this selection of remarks confirms:

- 'informative, but somewhat general'
- 'worthwhile, but I feel swamped!'
- 'very good'
- 'informative'
- 'highlighted how much there is still to do and how far off empowerment some people feel'

- 'it was useful'
- 'good, but perhaps needed some workshops during morning'
- 'wide forum of diverse and intertwining agencies'
- 'a good opportunity to understand the issues faced by the sectors represented'

Thanks to all those who took part, from Speakers to Workshop Facilitators, and of course delegates. Also to the teams from Inspire East and Suffolk ACRE and Suffolk Constabulary for the practical organisation and administration.

If you would like to access any of the presentations and documentation from the event you can download all of the information from the Inspire East website:

www.inspire-east.org.uk/suffolkcdroadshow.aspx

The Regional Empowerment Partnership is supported by Communities and Local Government.