Locality planning
Embedding the lessons from New Deal for Communities

Prepared by RegenWM, in partnership with:
The Guide Neighbourhoods Partnership
The Neighbourhood Resource Centre for Central England
The Nehemiah Foundation

April 2010
The National Empowerment Programme: Context and overview

The National Empowerment Programme (NEP) is a programme committed to supporting and improving empowerment activities across England. It gathers evidence of effective community empowerment activities and promotes the powerful benefits of involving communities in decisions that affect them. The focus is to provide a structure for empowerment activities and to steer and lead the empowerment agenda. In particular, it supports local authorities and community organisations to increase the number of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality. The NEP is managed by the Community Development Foundation and funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Empowerment Partnerships

The practical work of the NEP is carried out by organisations working together in empowerment partnerships. There are nine empowerment partnerships across England and each one brings together a range of statutory agencies, voluntary and community organisations, networks and people who are running community empowerment activities. The partnerships use their collective expertise to support local authorities, statutory agencies and community organisations to work together. This helps to give more power to communities and local people to make decisions about what happens in the areas where they live.

RAWM was granted the contract to deliver one of the nine empowerment programmes in 2008. The West Midlands Empowerment Partnership is called Every Voice Counts (EVC) and its work is directed by the EVC Partnership Board. This Board has members from GOWM, IEWM, BIG Lottery, as well as two local authority N14 representatives, and a range of voluntary sector organisations.

RAWM: Already engaged in a Big Society agenda

RAWM is a body that exists to support the voluntary and community sector in using their voice and their influence to engage with both government and the local agenda. All of RAWM’s projects originate from the need to provide an effective voluntary and community sector response to a changing environment. This quite often requires RAWM to not only manage the change environment, but to also provide strong leadership and, where appropriate and necessary, challenge behaviour and practice in a constructive manner.

RAWM’s role in the empowerment agenda in the West Midlands has been to promote empowerment, encourage partnership working, provide opportunities for communities and citizens to engage with both government and the local agenda and take part in activities to develop their voice and influencing. RAWM also highlights the huge variety of resources and opportunities that exist to enhance community engagement and participation and bring these resources together to be accessed to support the growth of the Big Society.

RAWM delivers the NEP alongside a number of other programmes, including the Target Support for Empowerment and Participation Improvement Fund (TSEPI) which is a two year programme complementing the work of the EVC, delivered through Local Authorities commissioning Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to feed into and improve priority needs in their local areas. RAWM also delivers projects around Sustaining Influence and Change (BIG Lottery), 2012 Sports Volunteering Project (Sport England and AWM), Regional Voices (DoH), Third Sector Economic Engagement Programme (AWM) and various infrastructure programmes funded by Capacity Builders.
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1. Introduction

This report relates to an Every Voice Counts (EVC)-funded research initiative, led by RegenWM, to capture the good practice in neighbourhood regeneration developed by the six New Deal for Communities (NDC) pathfinders in the West Midlands.

The timing of the research was determined by the fact that all the pathfinders are due to complete their work in the next twelve months. It was therefore essential to conduct the research before too many of the key members of staff left to find alternative employment.

During the course of the research it became apparent that two other factors would be equally important if the good practice identified was going to make a meaningful and positive difference to future neighbourhood regeneration work in the region:

i. The need to tailor the research not to the context of NDC pathfinders, but to the likely context of future neighbourhood regeneration. After all, not many future programmes are likely to have £50m budgets.

ii. The need to identify the best ways to disseminate these research findings, as the legacy of NDC will make little difference if no one pays attention to it or understands how to apply the resultant good practice developed.

As a consequence, RegenWM invited three West Midlands-based organisations to participate in the research. These organisations were chosen because they have an established track record in (a) understanding the current context of neighbourhood regeneration and (b) training future regeneration practitioners.

The organisations are:

- The Guide Neighbourhoods Partnership
- The Neighbourhood Resource Centre for Central England (NRCCE)
- The Nehemiah Foundation.

Each of these organisations has submitted an appendix that addresses the two factors described above and has been summarised into the body of this report.

2. Current context of neighbourhood regeneration

Appendix 3 from The Guide Neighbourhoods Partnership provides a very useful summary of the current context of Neighbourhood Regeneration.

Its basic findings are that:

- Neighbourhood regeneration has a long history of different initiatives
- The sector is now changing from initiatives to delivery through devolved mainstream structures linked to Local Area Agreements
- This new approach is being further enhanced by approaches linked to pooled budgets and inter-agency planning
- It has been recognised that this new approach needs to be underpinned by a joint commitment to long term change and capacity building
- Neighbourhood working remains on the agenda of all the main political parties.

However, Appendix 4 from the Neighbourhood Resource Centre for Central England (NRCCE) includes the identification of a number of obstacles to effective neighbourhood working that are highly relevant to understanding the current context. These come from the stock-take review (‘One Size Doesn’t Fit All’) conducted by the NRCCE into the support needed by Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of neighbourhood working.

The barriers identified include:

- That partnerships still tend to work within their own silos, with little sharing of good practice
- That there is a lack of understanding of, and therefore commitment to, neighbourhood working as an effective tool for addressing social issues beyond ‘crime and grime’
- That good practice is not generally being captured, let alone disseminated
- That building the capacity of communities needs to be delivered hand-in-hand with building the capacity of decision-makers and delivery staff as well.
To balance this, Appendix 5, submitted by the Nehemiah Foundation, makes a persuasive case that there are nevertheless understood approaches that can address these barriers.

For example, the recognised importance of:

• Committing to and adopting a strategic, long term approach which helps to set expectations and create time for good practice
• Not assuming that effective partnership working will just happen, but instead realising that it needs to be actively cultivated
• Equipping and empowering frontline workers to work with communities in a way that acknowledges that every neighbourhood and community is unique
• Realising that there is no single model for successful regeneration; rather that there is a range of tool kits available, but these need to be matched to the different characteristics of different neighbourhoods
• Understanding all the perspectives from within a community and not just relying on one set of accounts
• Creating clear management structures and job descriptions that allow frontline workers to adapt confidently to a range of settings and issues.

From these three reports it can be seen that:

i. There is still a commitment to neighbourhood regeneration, but that the context of regeneration has changed from being initiative or funding driven to being mainstream service driven

ii. There are significant barriers to delivering this new style of regeneration, which need to be overcome; in particular the need for the building of understanding of this new context and the capacity to deliver it through all tiers of the intended delivery structures

iii. There is, however, a growing body of knowledge in terms of how this capacity can be developed.

The next question is whether the findings from the NDC research project can add to this body of knowledge?

3. Summary of findings from New Deal for Communities pathfinders with recommendations regarding the key findings for dissemination

Learning from the New Deal for Communities (NDC) is not necessarily new learning – evaluations of previous initiatives such as City Challenge have raised similar issues, and yet subsequent initiatives have remained handicapped by the same problems and, at times, repeated similar mistakes. This suggests that previous evaluations may, therefore, have attempted to learn the wrong things. It is our belief that previous evaluations may have over-emphasised what a programme achieved and not necessarily learned enough about how they achieved it. After all, the end product of a particular regeneration initiative may be unique to local circumstances, but the trick is to find the universal elements of its approach which led to its success.

Similarly, these evaluations tended to focus on what had worked and overlooked lessons about what had not – which increases the risk of mistakes being repeated.

As a consequence RegenWM’s NDC research project was designed to try to capture the knowledge about how NDCs worked rather than just focus on what they did. This meant talking to the people who were doing the work on the ground – staff from the six NDC pathfinders in the West Midlands.

For three reasons, RegenWM is now confident that these workshops did in fact draw out good practice:

i. Even though different workshops were run with different participants on different themes, the findings were remarkably similar

ii. Participants did not just ‘show off’ about their successes; they were equally willing to discuss their failures

iii. Participants were unanimous that they could still have achieved good things with far less money.
The findings, including the implications of less funding being available, are summarised by means of tables below; a fuller account can be found in Appendix 1.

These tables group the findings into three key areas:

- Getting it right from the start
- Less money doesn’t have to mean less impact
- How do you achieve success with less money?

### Lessons learned from New Deal for Communities: the secret of success is to get it right from the start!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set up</th>
<th>Programme design</th>
<th>Delivery</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow enough time for set up</td>
<td>Work from evidence</td>
<td>Continuity of staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get the right staff</td>
<td>Get past presenting issues to root causes</td>
<td>Learn from what works</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understand the neighbourhood</td>
<td>Tailor solutions to local need</td>
<td>Allow for evolution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invest in communications</td>
<td>Connect projects/client journey</td>
<td>Build a menu of engagement then allow for progression</td>
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<td>Build robust partnerships</td>
<td>Link to mainstream</td>
<td>Communication/reputation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embed core systems</td>
<td>Capture evidence</td>
<td>Project management</td>
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<td>Project support</td>
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Lessons learned from New Deal for Communities: less money needn’t mean less impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less money means</th>
<th>Less money means</th>
<th>Less money means</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer systems</td>
<td>Focus on change not spend</td>
<td>Greater responsiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less risk aversion</td>
<td>Need rather than spend driven</td>
<td>Greater need for community knowledge</td>
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<td>Less interference</td>
<td>More transferable solutions</td>
<td>Better community engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less governance</td>
<td>Commitment not based on ‘£s’</td>
<td>Community more equal partner</td>
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<td><strong>Means...</strong></td>
<td><strong>Means...</strong></td>
<td><strong>Means...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>more responsive and faster moving</td>
<td>more genuine partnership working</td>
<td>more chance of community empowerment</td>
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<td><strong>...but also...</strong></td>
<td><strong>...but also...</strong></td>
<td><strong>...but also...</strong></td>
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<td>requires genuine delegation of decision making</td>
<td>requires genuine commitment to shared targets</td>
<td>residents need more convincing that change is possible</td>
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</table>

Lessons learned from New Deal for Communities: less money means working smarter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you achieve success with less money?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The right people deployed in the right way</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t recruit on qualifications but values and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find staff who are willing to do things differently</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximise high value staff by using them to mentor new staff</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>True partnership working</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Get sign-up to a shared understanding</td>
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<td>Let everyone see their targets are getting met</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop shared strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Continuous improvement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insist all new initiatives learn from good practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasise training and a learning culture</td>
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<td>Don’t straightjacket initiatives with targets – allow learning and evolution</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Utilise local resources</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Value volunteers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage quality secondments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilise local assets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plug into local networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create community enterprise</td>
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4. Summary of findings regarding effective means for dissemination

As mentioned before, it has become apparent while conducting this research that just recognising good practice is not sufficient. The knowledge has to be matched with an understanding of how best to disseminate it.

Much of RegenWM’s experience in disseminating good practice (see Appendix 2) has been at a strategic/senior/policy level. The NDC findings outlined above however, plus the findings in Section 2 (current context), clearly identify that successful neighbourhood regeneration requires all the different levels of delivery, not just the strategic, to be in harmony. That is why the three partner organisations were chosen – each has significant experience at these other key levels.

The necessary levels and corresponding organisations are:

- Residents and communities: The Guide Neighbourhoods Partnership
- Frontline workers: Nehemiah Foundation
- Agencies and partnerships: Neighbourhood Resource Centre
- Strategic/policy: RegenWM.

Good practice dissemination for residents and communities

Appendix 3 from The Guide Neighbourhoods Partnership emphasises the nationally-recognised importance of learning from ‘what works’.

The Guide Neighbourhoods are also specialists in working at a community level and their experience, supported by further national findings, has identified:

- The importance of experiential learning for community representatives, and that this learning must be based on real/immediate needs
- That training for residents needs to go beyond formal/accredited courses and, in the process, look to build confidence and inspire as well as simply pass on knowledge
- That small scale local funding programmes are a good way to link residents to advice and support, but also encourage the development of skills such as action planning and project management
- That residents benefit from networking across neighbourhoods as it encourages peer learning and support, which can have far greater impact than learning/support from outside experts.

Finally, the Guide Neighbourhoods have been able to demonstrate that this approach to community learning has the knock-on effect of developing transparency in community governance, accountability in community groups and greater confidence in delivering local action.

Good practice dissemination for frontline workers

Appendix 5 from the Nehemiah Foundation is based on a tried and tested programme for training and developing community-based regeneration workers. The Nehemiah Foundation’s work emphasises the fact that every neighbourhood and community is unique and, as a consequence, the good practice training and support that the regeneration workers receive needs to reflect this.

For example it should include:

- Access to a variety of good practice models and toolkits from across the board rather than restricting practitioners to one particular model
- The opportunity for reflection both in terms of ensuring the lessons learned are appropriate to the community concerned and for reviewing what is working and what is not
- Good practice around personal effectiveness (reflection, time management, etc) and not just regeneration practice
- Ongoing learning that reflects the ongoing way that regeneration challenges change.

As a result the Nehemiah Foundation has developed, tested and now advocates for the training of frontline workers in good practice as an ongoing, not a ‘one-off’ process. This ongoing process not only reflects the reality of the regeneration challenge, but also allows for the
introduction of learning techniques ideally suited to the effective dissemination of good practice. These include:

- Linking back to the wider context and ‘bigger picture’
- Action learning
- Reflective practice
- Experiential learning
- Shared or peer learning.

**Good practice dissemination for agencies and partnerships**

The NRCCE (as found in Appendix 4) have established the following in terms of laying the foundations for good practice with agencies and partnerships:

- That the training works best when based on personal experience
- That the training sessions are more effective with an audience that brings different perspectives
- That lessons in good practice also need to include what has not worked
- That it cannot be assumed that learning will transfer to the workplace, and that this can be enabled by linking the learning to ongoing self-study assignments for the participants
- That there has to be a clear strategic commitment to the training with regard to it being both relevant and supported into practice
- That this strategic commitment also has to include a commitment to freeing up staff to participate
- That effective tools for this training include:
  - ‘Seeing is believing’ study visits
  - Exchange visits
  - Conferences
  - Informal learning networks.

Finally, the NRCCE report emphasises the fact that any dissemination of good practice has to come with a strategic commitment to culture change, to the embracing of openness in decision making, and to risk-taking.

**Good practice dissemination for strategic/policy level practitioners**

The seven years of work that RegenWM has applied to regeneration good practice has revealed the following with regard to influencing and changing the behaviours of strategic/policy level practitioners. These are:

- That it is little use just one person learning an important lesson or trying to implement a new approach. It requires a ‘critical mass’ within a team, organisation or partnership for change to take hold.
- That time has to be made available for practitioners to engage with good practice.
- That written materials and toolkits rarely work by themselves. For these to work, practitioners also need one-to-one or group interaction to question, to explore and to share insight and ideas.
- That engaging with good practice needs to be a vibrant ongoing process that both inspires and allows time for testing of and experimentation with, for example, new approaches or new skills or new ways of working.
- That ongoing reflection is as important as initial learning.
- That good practice is as much a process as a product and that this implies that embedding good practice is therefore a journey and not just a quick fix.
- Regeneration is a multi-faceted sector and therefore learning opportunities that bring together a wide set of perspectives tend to have greater impact (ie. challenge silo thinking).

The challenge within these findings is that the successful techniques, therefore, have to come with significant senior level support due to the time commitment for staff and the costs involved.

**Conclusion**

Reviewing the above summaries reveals that the same messages get repeated through each section even though the different reports were produced with different audiences in mind.

These messages are that, if we are to be serious about disseminating good practice
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in a way that really changes day-to-day working, then we have to commit to dissemination techniques that embody:

• Ongoing learning
• Group or team learning
• Ongoing support and networking
• Experiential and/or reflective practice.

In other words, one-off training events and stand-alone toolkits are not going to be sufficient, regardless of the audience in question. This has significant implications because it is going to require organisations signing up to training techniques that will be both more time consuming for the staff involved and more costly to purchase, unless the dissemination process is supported by centralised funding.

5. Conclusions and recommendations for further action

This EVC funded project started out as a relatively straightforward exercise into discovering the good practice in neighbourhood regeneration developed by the region’s six NDC pathfinders before they all close during 2010/11.

However, during the course of the project it became apparent that regardless of the good practice findings identified it would all be irrelevant if:

i. It was meaningless in the current context (ie. post recession, less initiative funding, greater emphasise on mainstream delivery)

ii. It was disseminated using the wrong techniques for actually embedding this good practice into current working.

We believe that this report demonstrates that:

• There is good practice to be disseminated from the region’s NDC pathfinders
• That it is relevant to the current context
• And that different agencies have, over time, found the best ways to disseminate this kind of information, in meaningful ways, to the necessary audiences.

Unfortunately, these latter findings mean that this research should not stop here. If the good practice identified in Section 3 is actually going to be of worth then it should be linked to a dissemination strategy based on the techniques identified in Section 4. Otherwise this report risks being yet another set of good practice findings that just sits on a shelf and gathers dust.
Appendix 1:
New Deal for Communities
good practice research

Background
For the past ten years the West Midlands has been host to six NDC pathfinders. These pathfinders are now coming to an end. Given that this represents an investment of £300 million, and given that neighbourhood regeneration is still a critical issue, RegenWM believes that an evaluation of these pathfinders is critical, so that (a) the impact of such an investment can be maximised and (b) future neighbourhood regeneration activity can benefit from the good practice developed through the NDC programme.

This research was based on four starting assumptions:

1. Most post-programme evaluation concentrates on results and ‘what works’ but not on ‘why’ or ‘how’ – and yet these are the essential messages that need to be passed on.
2. Post-programme evaluation rarely mentions what did not work – and yet this is vital information if we want to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.
3. Transferable good practice should not be about the end product, which may be unique to local circumstances, but rather about the key elements of the approach adopted which led to its success.
4. The future of regeneration is changing. It will no longer be big-budget driven, but instead will have to find new ways to deliver in a world of scarce resources. As such, any evaluation of the NDC programme has to be done in a way that reflects this new context.

For the above reasons, we designed this research project to try and capture the knowledge about how NDCs worked rather than simply find out about what they did. This meant going to people who were doing the work on the ground.

We then tried to repackage this knowledge as a practical, accessible guide to regeneration, which is appropriate for a post credit crunch regeneration economy.

Methodology
The findings presented in this report come from a series of workshops organised for staff currently participating in the six NDC pathfinders in the West Midlands.

These workshops were split into two types:

1. Workshops for whole NDC teams looking at how a particular NDC operated
2. Workshops on specific themes bringing together theme leads and resident representatives from across the different NDC teams.

The whole team workshops asked three questions:

• What were the main barriers to success?
• What could still be achieved for less money?
• What would you do differently next time?

The theme workshops looked at four questions:

• What were the main barriers to achieving the theme targets?
• What were the essential principles for success?
• What could still be achieved for less money?
• What are the secrets of good community engagement?

NDC Team Research: what were the main barriers to success?

1. Communication
Communication is one of the main barriers to success. It is vital that ideas are understood by both residents and partners. The value of communication needs to be ‘sold’ internally so that resources can be made available at the start for a resource-intensive discipline encompassing:

• Reputation management – dispelling negative perceptions on the part of residents and partners, both of the NDC itself and of the area.
• Expectation management – extremely important for any programme whose rationale is to be close to residents. Most residents are not in a position to appreciate how complex some of the projects are. Lead-in times must be minimised in order to avoid a cycle of raised hopes followed by dashed
expectations; in addition, language must be tailored to the differing needs of different audiences, with honest and straightforward information provided to residents.

- Fostering culture change in the area – moving away from a ‘victim complex’ and empowering people to think and act differently, thus reducing their dependency. Challenging the mindset of the population in the space of less than a generation is necessary but difficult.

2. Partnership

Struggling to establish workable partnerships can be a barrier to success. The characteristics of a good partner include:

- Providing timely information
- Minimising the disruption of staff turnover to partner relationships
- Avoiding a personality-driven perspective
- Not being motivated simply by the money on offer
- Willingness to respond to local needs rather than just organisational needs
- Demonstrating a commitment to change
- Willingness to look bad, learn and improve.

3. Internal systems

Notwithstanding the observation ‘there never seemed to be time to do things properly’, it remains true that if not thoroughly thought through, internal systems form a barrier to success:

- Top-down pressure to spend can undermine good work in other directions by appearing to ignore resident priorities, diverting resources and producing an emphasis on spend rather than quality of delivery
- Duplicating external silos internally must be resisted
- Risk aversion is a barrier to innovation, but can be the unintended end result of multiple layers of governance
- A lack of understanding or interest within an organisation about financial procedures will lead to insufficient financial control and financial management, which will cause immense reputational damage.

NDC Team Research: what could still be achieved for less money?

1. Less money can actually be an opportunity as well as a barrier

Opportunities include:

- Less distraction
- Less systems required
- Less risk aversion
- Less interference
- ie. less governance!

Barriers include:

- Harder to get the attention of strategic partners
- Making a difference will require genuine delegation of decision-making authority to neighbourhood level.

2. Less money can enable better partnership working as well as be an obstacle

Opportunities include:

- Commitment will be to good and real neighbourhood management rather than spend
- Effort will be on what needs to be done rather than on money
- Genuine rather than money-motivated buy-in from partners
- Efficiency will have to be the driver as no spend is available – this should lead to more sustainable solutions.

Barriers include:

- Silo thinking will have to be overcome, as progress comes from services realising they have shared agendas and shared targets
- Greater freedom and flexibility will be required in service delivery (for example, amendments to job descriptions etc) in order to deliver change.

3. Less money could also improve joint working between residents and services

Opportunities include:

- Services will have greater flexibility to respond to residents’ needs as they
will not be constrained by government targets attached to spend.

- Any improvements will have to be driven by efficiency saving. Community intelligence and influence may be the key to this.
- Developing a scrutiny role for the community, scrutinising quality of services and their interconnections, feeding observations back up to partners to drive change.

Barriers include:

- An organising body will still be required that can:
  - Co-ordinate community engagement
  - Build relationships
  - Advocate for change rather than be an organisation that funds change
  - Become the partnership lead or hub of a network of neighbourhood organisations – a catalyst, not hand-holding but empowering.

NDC Team Research: what would you do differently next time?

1. Have a planning year

- Agree clear objectives from the start with all stakeholders
- Get thinking, knowledge, strategy, priorities, infrastructure, staff, partners, community, relationships, buy-in in place at the very beginning
- Map out potential partners, sign them up from the start and get key agency support to make sure of full co-operation
- Develop robust internal systems
- Establish shared understanding of ethos and aims from Year 1 – fix the goal posts!
- Get theme leaders (the right personnel) in place at the start, with appropriate skills and expertise
- Earlier profile-raising with partners, more selling of message whenever personnel change and also at regular intervals
- Get a picture of the area’s needs/wants and then identify highest priority and work on that – prioritise the nitty-gritty on-the-ground work
- Make sure secondments are not just staff that services are trying to sideline!
- Make the chance of a secondment aspirational.

2. Get engagement right

- Make sure it is purposeful and ingrained in everything, offers a choice of different entry points – including genuine decision-making power – and is linked to successor body
- Understand cohesion – it should drive engagement – and discuss at the beginning how to limit ‘single group’ funding and get clearer agreement/engagement with the community so that collaboration is encouraged
- The office base should be in the community
- Projects need to tackle community aspirations not just the presenting issues
- Establish the ethos of high resident involvement by focusing involvement around themes.

3. Address Governance

- Work towards successor body, asset base and income-generation much earlier – by the second year.
- Support good practice networks.
- Whose priorities are we delivering – top down or bottom up? Make sure the needs of the residents are being met rather than just box ticking.
- Get agreement to use Social Return On Investment to provide evidence of social value and value for money.
- Clarify complications that arise from a Local Authority being both the accountable body and a delivery partner.

NDC Theme Group Research: lessons from target-based working

1. Getting the targets right

- Be wary of targets that have a broad breadth of determinants or are slow to respond to change (for example, life expectancy).
- The challenge is to find targets that match both strategic priorities (so that senior decision-
makers stay interested) and local needs (so that you stay relevant to the community).

- Make sure you have a robust baseline to start from.
- Allow for outside influences on targets by maintaining comparisons to city, regional and national averages. This also allows you to demonstrate value added.
- Targets based on small numbers can be misleading as they can be disproportionally influenced by a small number of people (for example, certain crimes or mortality types).
- You need targets that can reflect both short term reactive activity and long term preventative activity so that a balance of activity can be justified.
- Target setting can be a useful participatory tool – by making residents do the hard work of prioritising different issues.
- Targets should be chosen that can be broken down into interim indicators such that:
  - All the different barriers to a target are reflected
  - All community groupings are represented
  - Added value can be demonstrated
  - Progress toward long term goals is measured.

2. Problems with data

- Get partners to commit to supplying data in a consistent, timely manner
- Make sure the data you are collecting can be broken down by different community groupings (age, ethnicity, gender, etc)
- Find the people who are the best sources of data and develop a personal rapport with them
- The boundaries of an area should be chosen to match the data available
- Tracking progress of individuals can provide powerful evidence of progress
- Make sure projects have the necessary systems in place for monitoring right from the start
- Make sure projects understand the importance of monitoring data
- Collecting qualitative data is a specialization in its own right requiring skill and experience
- Check whether community representatives actually only represent their own views.

3. Allowing for local influence

- Be aware of local factors that can influence progress towards a particular target, eg:
  - History: have there been previous initiatives of this type?
  - Culture: does the local economy actually rely on stolen goods?
  - Turnover: who is leaving the area and who is moving in?
  - Norms of behaviour: is this a fast food community?
- Certain targets may be more difficult for certain communities, for example NVQ Level 2 for communities where English is a second language.
- Some communities are not well served by certain services. This may undermine efforts to achieve particular targets.
- Targets may be influenced by non-residents, for example, people coming into the area because of the night time economy then causing crime.

NDC Theme Group Research: what were the essential principles for success?

1. How to achieve delivery

- Start with a strong evidence base for the local area, plus a thorough and correct analysis of why things happen, to ensure project design is robust
- Obtain absolute commitment and sign-up at the start on all elements, with a shared understanding of who does what, what data is expected (for example, tracking of individuals) and what kind of evaluation will be appropriate to the scale of the project
- Set meaningful and challenging targets, but with permission to change and experiment. Do not use them as a straitjacket
- Start small, then use the evidence to stop what does not work and expand what does work
- Allow freedom to respond to need, gaps, population change, etc
• Value outputs as evidence, rather than as bureaucracy, and use them to ‘sell’ successes to partners, delivery agents and funders.

2. How to achieve community satisfaction

• Communication – marketing, celebration – is important to ensure that the community attributes the successes to the appropriate project, rather than to the council.
• Create trust within the community by using community champions and peer mentors who will be looked up to and trusted and will generate word of mouth publicity.
• Use staff that can relate to the client group, have an understanding that all customers are individuals, recognise multi-level problems and are prepared to proactively ensure ongoing support. Staff continuity is essential to achieve this.
• Go where people are, both in terms of location and confidence – respect their comfort zones – and get projects fully integrated into the area.
• Projects should be in tune with local needs, holistic, flexible in location, opening times, etc, relating strategy to the local situation rather than being solely driven by targets.

3. How to achieve impact

• Ownership of what is happening is essential – so invest in outreach, marketing, communications, feedback, engagement opportunities, etc, not only to residents but to partners and funders.
• Being client centred means being prepared to adjust to changing circumstances, being holistic in approach and project design, and employing staff who will focus on the clients.
• Being a talented youth worker does not necessarily translate into good project management. Project management, risk management, etc, are skills that can and should be trained.
• Interim indicators are essential to ensure a project is on track. If it is not you must be prepared to stop, learn the lessons then improve.
• Supporting a client through their whole journey achieves the greatest impact. So projects must be linked together and progression between them actively supported.

4. How to achieve value for money

• Impact on the social capital of individuals or the community will impact on multiple targets
• Measuring the wider impact of projects demonstrates greater value (for example, the impact of gaining employment on an individual’s health)
• Be certain of the business case for a project right from the start
• Target locally but fit in strategically because the greatest value for money can be achieved by filling the gaps locally between mainstream services
• Delivering through community organisations multiplies the impact of a project because it also creates jobs, ownership, culture change, etc.

NDC Theme Group research: how to achieve success for less money

1. The right people deployed in the right way

• Tailor job descriptions to obtain staff with the right values and skills – not necessarily qualifications. Staff need to be ‘neighbourhood-minded’; all frontline staff should be trained in a range of issues for signposting purposes and be involved in generic community work. Essential qualities are honesty, openness to ideas, and a willingness to break the cycle of wrong styles and bad behaviours.
• Make more economic use of high value staff by examining the job requirements – for example, qualified staff may only be needed for high-level strategic direction.
• Explore effective ways of working, for example offer supervision to volunteers.

2. True partnership using resources wisely

• Honesty in partnership: both sides should be able to see what is in it for them to encourage flexibility and pooling of money, targets and strategies.
• A local co-ordination body may be necessary to maximise the impact of partnership working.
• Thoroughly map the existing service provision and produce a directory so that everyone can
signpost. This will facilitate joint assessment and also lead to wiser use of external funding.

- Multi-use of buildings by services; agencies should use buildings accepted by the community rather than making new buildings.
- Use existing networks, but ensure meetings are regularly attended to feed information back in.
- Fully include the community and voluntary sector, as they bring added value in terms of their local knowledge.

3. Good practice and continuous improvement

- Refer to good practice when designing projects (and influence existing projects to ensure they reflect good practice, for example by providing training for them) – this will result in less spend in the long run.
- An annual review defending strategies against outputs and impact helps to ensure that project redesign is considered along with additional finance as a solution when targets are not being met – continuous improvement.
- Reach a shared understanding of impact at the start, for example, shared understanding of the ‘leap of faith’ from outputs to impact.

4. Local

- Interpret good practice for the local community – small details can make the difference, for example territorial boundaries. This can be seen as inefficient initially but will have greater impact in the long term.
- Give people ownership and enhance their ability to deal with agencies.
- Utilise volunteer resources and intermediaries.

NDC Theme Group Research: what are the secrets of community engagement?

1. How to start

- Community engagement is a skill – so get the right staff.
- Map existing engagement opportunities and work within this network.
- Get to know the frontline workers already working in the community and build a rapport.
- Build confidence with the community:
  - Show you are listening to consultation by responding to local needs.
  - Be honest about what you can offer – and what you cannot.
  - Always give feedback.
- Go to where people are already, rather than expecting them to come to you.
- Be clear and concise about what you want to communicate. Utilise the power of repetition.
- Avoid jumping to conclusions about established community representatives. They may just be representing their own views or those of a very small group, but they may equally be representing the views of a wider network.
- Use existing networks, groups, etc.

2. How to build

- Getting small things right can make a big difference; for example, show respect by looking smart.
- Use local people to deliver local services. It creates jobs, it creates role models and it builds community ownership.
- Train residents to deliver their own consultation.
- If it is not working – re-evaluate and be prepared to stop.
- Continuity of personnel is vital.
- Be open, frank and direct. Be prepared to publicly stand by the decisions that are made. Even unpopular decisions can be accepted if there is a proper justification.
- Co-ordinating consultation work through a central point or person avoids unnecessary duplication of activity and therefore consultation fatigue.
- Make sure you are located in an accessible building.
- Provide a support worker and training for community representatives.
- Value volunteering: offer training, support and progression.
- It can be traumatic on the frontline – your staff must know that you support them first.
3. How to sustain

- Be realistic about what is sustainable; be realistic about what is actually needed.
- Move towards making engagement everybody’s responsibility rather than looking to sustain a dedicated engagement team.
- Remember, people have more pressing needs than engagement. Any ongoing structures and processes must be realistic about the demands placed on residents.
- Developing a micro neighbourhood model means messages can get out into every part of the community without making too many demands on the neighbourhood representatives.
- Put processes in place to continually refresh the pool of community representatives and volunteers.
- Establish a neighbourhood charter.
- The case must be made to all services about the value and impact of ongoing community engagement.

Appendix 2:

**RegenWM report: Effective means of disseminating good practice**

**Background**

The aim of this report is to summarise the findings from seven years’ research into good practice and regeneration by RegenWM, the Regeneration Centre of Excellence for the West Midlands.

RegenWM’s role has been to support, influence and challenge the regeneration community. The organisation’s work has taken place in a national, regional and local context, with many opportunities to investigate new ways to address the immense challenges for regeneration and the creation of sustainable communities.

At RegenWM we believe that regeneration is about multi-agency and cross-sector intervention into ‘at risk’ places and communities, whilst the scale of regeneration interventions can be anything from small local areas up to whole cities or regions. Good practice is therefore going to be about creating success in a complex environment.

Despite this complexity, there are seemingly endless examples of good practice to be learned from. One only has to look at the number of award-winning and nationally-recognised regeneration initiatives in the West Midlands to realise that the regeneration ‘good practice cupboard’ is anything but bare. Indeed, RegenWM has been running a Prizes programme of its own for a number of years now. This then raises a question: if there is so much acknowledged good practice out there why do we not live in a perfect world? Why do we still need regeneration? Why are we not learning key lessons? Why do we seem to keep starting from a blank sheet of paper? Why do we keep repeating the same mistakes?

The conclusion that RegenWM has come to is that the obstacle to using good practice is less to do with finding relevant examples and more to do with how we learn from these examples and then embed the important lessons in our day-to-day regeneration practice. As a consequence RegenWM has allocated significant resources into testing different approaches to communicating and disseminating...
good practice such that it makes a real and lasting difference to the design, implementation and delivery of regeneration initiatives.

**Trialing different approaches**

The different approaches trialled by RegenWM include:

- Seminars
- Masterclasses
- Workshops
- Good practice visits
- Good practice networks (real)
- Good practice networks (virtual)
- Prizes
- Case studies and other on-line resources
- Action learning sets
- One-to-one connections
- Strategic events (conferences, conventions)
- Research support
- Learning laboratories
- Post graduate qualifications
- Foundation degrees
- Undergraduate modules
- Toolkits.

It should be noted that RegenWM’s core audience tends to be middle to senior level regeneration staff within mainstream regeneration agencies. As such, this report should be understood in the context of this audience only.

Table 1 provides a quick synopsis of each approach and a reflective evaluation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each. Overall success has been measured against the success of a given tool not only for communicating good practice information but also for actually delivering positive change in regeneration practice.

**Key findings**

From the evaluation of RegenWM’s various experiments in disseminating good practice it has been possible to extract the following findings:

- It is of little use for just one person to learn an important lesson or try to implement a new approach. It requires a ‘critical mass’ within a team, organisation or partnership for change to take hold.
- Time has to be made available for practitioners to engage with good practice.
- Written materials and toolkits rarely work by themselves. For these to work, practitioners also need one-to-one or group interaction to question, to explore and to share insights and ideas.
- Engaging with good practice needs to be a vibrant ongoing process that both inspires and allows time for testing of and experimentation with new approaches, skills or ways of working.
- Ongoing reflection is as important as initial learning.
- Good practice is as much a process as a product, which means that embedding good practice is a ‘journey’ not just a ‘quick fix’.
- Regeneration is a multi-faceted sector, so learning that brings together a wide set of perspectives, ie. challenging silo thinking, tends to have greater impact.

**Conclusions**

In RegenWM’s experience, it is those techniques that allow for ongoing reflection, practice and learning that appear to make the biggest difference for middle level to senior regeneration staff.

These techniques include:

- Good practice networks
- Action Learning Sets
- Mentoring
- Learning Laboratories.

These techniques require significant time commitment from the participants and tend to be costly. However, if we are to take the genuine dissemination of good practice seriously then these are the sacrifices that need to be made.
Table 1: A relative analysis of the different tools trialled by RegenWM for the dissemination of good practice information to middle to high level staff within mainstream regeneration agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dissemination technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Overall success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminars</td>
<td>Half day lecture on a given topic for an audience of 25-30.</td>
<td>Good for putting across a new idea or a basic concept.</td>
<td>A seminar can seed a new idea but does not bring about organisational change or personal development on its own.</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masterclasses</td>
<td>A whole day class, led by a leading practitioner, in which participants explore in depth new skills or ideas.</td>
<td>Good for challenging thinking, inspiring and embedding new ideas.</td>
<td>As a one-off event even a successful masterclass does not necessarily lead to organisational change.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good practice workshops</td>
<td>A half day session in which participants investigate a good practice case study.</td>
<td>Works well for a specific audience who just want to pick up some new hints and tips.</td>
<td>Tends to focus too much on the ‘what’ and not enough on the ‘how’. Also encourages showing off from presenters rather than honesty.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good practice visits</td>
<td>Visits to examples of good practice with a chance to see and question.</td>
<td>Can be very inspiring and also is a team building event for participants.</td>
<td>Lessons learned tend to be superficial and over- overarching. Rarely get to the complexity of good practice.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toolkits</td>
<td>A manual or training package based on good practice that can be used in different settings.</td>
<td>It breaks good practice down into a form that can be easily communicated and disseminated broadly.</td>
<td>Few organisations or individuals seem to actively use or look for toolkits. They tend to ‘sit on the shelf’ once completed. Also, they can be over-specific.</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good practice networks (real)</td>
<td>A network of practitioners meet on a regular basis to share information, offer peer support, hear expert input and offer critical advice.</td>
<td>Offers support and ongoing learning to practitioners who can otherwise feel isolated in the workplace. Allows key messages to get reinforced over time.</td>
<td>Requires a significant time commitment which can be difficult for senior staff.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good practice networks (virtual)</td>
<td>Similar to real networks but online and ongoing.</td>
<td>Easily accessible, requires less time commitment, available as and when required.</td>
<td>Initial enthusiasm almost always wanes. Good for information sharing, less good for actually challenging or changing practice.</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prizes</td>
<td>Annual awards that recognise good practice in regeneration.</td>
<td>Promotes good practice. Recognises what works. Rewards the deserving.</td>
<td>Tends to focus on the final product. Benefits the winners but rarely leads to rolling out of good practice.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies and other on-line resources</td>
<td>Accessible examples of good practice, written up and made available online.</td>
<td>Content of the case study can be tailored to emphasise key messages. Always available. Good for students.</td>
<td>Professionals rarely have time for research and when they do it tends to be for a decision already made.</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action learning sets</td>
<td>A series of workshops delivered over a period of time.</td>
<td>Participants have the opportunity to try out ideas between workshops. Reinforces learning and can change practice.</td>
<td>Relatively expensive and requires time commitment.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>Ongoing developmental relationship between an experienced and a new practitioner.</td>
<td>Ongoing mechanism for embedding key messages and supporting change. Captures good practice from experienced practitioners.</td>
<td>Needs to be a good personality match between mentor and mentee. Ideally should come with training before mentoring starts.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic events (conferences, conventions)</td>
<td>One-off high-profile events for a large audience.</td>
<td>Can be inspiring and act as a catalyst for change. Good for networking and spreading ideas.</td>
<td>Reliant on the audience taking away ideas and acting on their learning.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research support</td>
<td>Specialist help particularly around the generation and use of evidence.</td>
<td>Use of evidence is a weakness in the sector and a specialist skill. This service allows specialists to have maximum impact.</td>
<td>Agencies have to come forward to use the service. As a consequence tends to ‘preach to the converted’.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning laboratories</td>
<td>A selection of the above activities delivered to a particular team over a set period (typically eight days over two months).</td>
<td>Utilises the strengths of different techniques and backs up the learning with ongoing support.</td>
<td>Expensive and requires careful design. Organisation must commit to releasing significant numbers of staff.</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accredited qualifications</td>
<td>Typically post graduate qualifications in regeneration practice.</td>
<td>Allows participants to really explore a topic and learn through their own research – which can be linked to organisational change.</td>
<td>Expensive. Tends to cater to small numbers. Requires significant time commitment.</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: The Guide Neighbourhoods Partnership report: What’s worked

Background

Neighbourhood working has a long history. The past 40 years have seen a range of area-based initiatives, often supported by ring-fenced and time-limited funding, for example City Challenge, Single Regeneration Budget and New Deal for Communities.

More recently, the main political parties have placed a greater emphasis on developing devolved structures, linked to Local Area Agreements (LAAs) at a constituency or district level, as mechanisms for decentralising service delivery and decision making.

There has also been a fundamental shift from the concept of area-based regeneration initiatives to ‘mainstreaming’ responses to community needs and a more co-ordinated use of existing finances through pooled budgets and inter-agency planning through Local Strategic Partnerships and LAAs.

Neighbourhoods have therefore come to be seen as important in plans to improve service delivery, and in addressing democratic deficit, modernising government and building community cohesion in an increasingly diverse society. Working at neighbourhood level re-connects services with the communities they serve, builds public trust, and encourages active citizenship, accountability and good governance.

The commitment to turn round poor neighbourhoods and reduce dependency has formed the foundation for further developments including a number of flagship programmes. Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders, Neighbourhood Street Wardens and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund were introduced with this community focus.

The 2006 Local Government White Paper confirmed the importance of working closely with citizens and communities. It also re-committed Government to continuing support for the empowerment of local people and communities and to building on Together We Can, an initiative started by the Civil Renewal Unit, to enable people to engage with public bodies and influence the decisions that affect their lives and their communities. This noted that the neighbourhood remains a significant space for people to come together and take action around the issues that most concern them, especially in less prosperous areas, where people have fewer choices about where they live and the services they use. This continuing focus on the neighbourhood goes hand in hand with broader concerns around democratic and civil renewal.

Rapid policy shifts have been consistently underpinned by two key principles: the recognition of community development as a long term change process and the importance of the shared learning required to implement both new ways of working and sustainable regeneration. That commitment to capacity building at community level was enshrined in the Civil Renewal Unit’s 2004 policy document ‘Firm Foundations’ and re-affirmed in the 2006 Communities and Local Government papers.

Building on the 2000 ‘Report of Policy Action Team 16’, which identified key gaps in professional skills and knowledge, developing new ways of learning about ‘what works’ in neighbourhoods and regeneration was seen as essential. ‘Firm Foundations’ and the ‘Active Learning for Active Citizenship’ initiative emphasise the importance of experiential learning, which is that the process should ‘start from people’s immediate needs and life experience’ and offer a ‘menu of learning opportunities’ that goes beyond formal, accredited courses to include coaching, mentoring and consultancy support.

Implementing this vision is what the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme was all about. Government recognised that in order for local residents to play a leading role in the regeneration of their own neighbourhoods, some financial support was needed to help them do this. The Guide Neighbourhoods Programme aimed to contribute to the development of good governance structures at the neighbourhood level, the passing on of specialist knowledge (for example, on community-managed housing) and perhaps most significantly the building of community confidence through inspiring local residents.
Seed-corn funding

A particularly important tool in effecting change has been the seed-corn grants, which the Guide Neighbourhoods have been able to offer in a unique way, supported by advice and the other resources available through the Programme.

The amount of the grants ranged from a minimum of £500 to a maximum of £10,000 per organisation. The grants were promoted and administered locally by a designated grant officer from the Guide Neighbourhood. Decisions on seed-corn applications were made by a funding panel of at least three members of individual Guide Neighbourhoods’ management groups who were also charged with monitoring spending and grant outcomes. Different Guide Neighbourhoods adopted a range of approaches to grant distribution – from targeting monies to groups they were building a consultancy relationship with, through to openly advertising their availability via Councils of Voluntary Service and other local network publications.

Responses from clients across a range of Guide Neighbourhoods showed that the seed-corn allocations procedures were seen to be transparent and easy for clients to follow. Recipients particularly appreciated the additional advice and support available from Guide Neighbourhoods after funding had been allocated. An important aspect of the seed-corn process was supporting the clients to produce action plans extending beyond spending the immediate grant. It was not only the money itself, but also the planning associated with the awards that had an impact on the organisational capacity of the clients,
especially in small and fragile organisations. Successfully applying for seed-corn monies gave a discipline to clients – having to do an action plan, working to a timetable and being accountable.

The following case study examples take environmental improvements as their starting point, but demonstrate how seed-corn grants can have positive outcomes in a variety of policy domains – in terms of safety, resident engagement and community cohesion through youth inclusion.

Case studies

1. Conker Island
The Kingstanding Neighbourhood Forum (KNF) was hoping to develop the area known by local children as ‘Conker Island’ identified as the main trouble hot spot from the neighbourhood tasking meeting.

Perry Common Guide Neighbourhood allocated a £10k seed-corn grant to KNF mainly to cover environmental improvements to ‘Conker Island’. Activities included: bulb planting involving local schools; renovation of the centre of the island, taking up an old ‘Coat of Arms’ and removing loose bricks to make it safe; a plan to involve the local Youth Inclusion Project to redesign the ‘Coat of Arms’; and installation of four benches in order to attract young people away from shop fronts and encourage them to congregate in the centre of the island. The balance of the funding was to support community consultation and a feasibility study to be used to attract further funding.

A community consultation open day was held and bulb plantings took place over two days and involved all six local primary schools in the planting of 5,000 daffodils. The schools were also given questionnaires to encourage children to talk about what else they would like to see on the island, and children designed and drew pictures, some of which have been displayed in one of the schools.

180 questionnaires were completed for the community consultation. Meetings were held between representatives of key organisations in which the results of the community consultation were discussed.

The support provided by Perry Common included: giving advice by telephone, tracking down useful telephone numbers, and even getting hold of tools for the environmental improvement work. However, the seed-corn grant also acted as a catalyst for community involvement: “you can definitely say that the money we’ve had has definitely inspired us to go on and do different projects and carry on what we’ve started, we’ve got the buzz for it.”

Young people are actually using the benches on the island as opposed to being in front of the shops, church and houses around the island, which residents found intimidating.

“The impact straight away is that you can go down and look at that island ... there’s daffodils up. The centre of the island has been made safe. What is good about working together like this is it creates a sense of community and for some of our younger volunteers it is their first taste of active citizenship.”

2. The Heart of Bandywood
Oscott Residents’ Association, with the support of Castle Vale Guide Neighbourhood, also undertook an environmental project with the primary focus of enhancing a local traffic island.

The Association engaged with local residents to find out what they wanted for the traffic island and took action including: providing a mature tree as a living sculpture; relaying turf; and raising kerbs to ensure that the island does not return to being used as a car park. Children have been involved in the process, taking part in a colouring competition for which a local councillor awarded the winner a prize. Two pedestrian crossing points are also being installed and kerbs are being dropped to take into account the need for access for wheelchairs and children’s buggies.

Seed-corn money has been an extremely useful tool enabling Guide Neighbourhoods to ‘kick start’ or maintain community activity, particularly with highly marginalised groups. Crucial to this success has been the ability to link grant making to ongoing developmental support – often beyond the time involved in developing and delivering a particular seed-corn initiative. Small grants, however, are not a magic solution to a neighbourhood’s challenges – they are only part of the solution.
Learning opportunities

Training, in the formal sense, hasn’t really worked well. However, many informal ‘learning opportunities’ were provided through the Programme, mainly in the form of advice and mentoring support. Networking conferences were a ‘safe space’ in which to discuss problems as well as successes and were highly prized: one of the selling points of neighbourhood to neighbourhood learning is that ‘they tell it like it is’. ‘Client neighbourhoods’ valued learning from people who had been ‘through it’; getting tips on what to do and what not to do and what to look out for. They were supported to ‘keep going’ even when things did not go well the first time.

Birmingham networking events: strategies for sharing learning

During 2006-07, the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations, with support from West Midlands’ Guide Neighbourhoods, ran three ‘mini-conferences’. The first of these was essentially a showcase (attended by over 70 delegates from 17 community groups) to raise the profile of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme. Forty participants in later events were supported to develop and present their own case studies and ‘share ideas, problems, come up with solutions and think about how they could continue to support each other’.

Participants commented:

“These events have helped us move a long way. We realise that we are not alone. Whatever your community there are some common problems, and if we work on these together we are stronger. It’s not just shouting ‘everyone is against us’, we have come to see there might be partners we can work with and come up with those solutions. But ‘we are not alone’ is the message that will keep us going.”

“We did not know what we achieved until everyone at the event celebrated our success. We stood up proud ... maybe for the first time.”

“It’s not just about telling the authorities what they should do for us, but helping them see what we can do for them.”

“We all need more mature relationships with officers. It’s been a safe place to be open about things, but we have to move on.”

In supporting resident learning, the quality of the event venue is important. Each of the three Birmingham network conferences was held in a local hotel. This contrasted with participants’ usual experiences of “being in some grotty community centre, we felt valued and like we had something worthwhile to say.”

The idea of ‘cascading’ learning between neighbourhoods was also seen as a critical factor:

“It’s not like the Guide Neighbourhoods knew everything. They weren’t teachers; we were all learning together. So we shared and gained confidence not like we know it and you don’t. Been to too many events like that before.”

Sample feedback from visits to Guide Neighbourhoods

“From our point of view the visit was a tremendous success, alongside an invaluable exercise. A key factor of the day was the opportunity for our residents to talk with yours about their experiences and initial concerns on embarking on a lengthy regeneration programme, and the benefits to the community on successfully coming out the other side. The opportunity to share pitfalls, alongside positive benefits is something that is best experienced by hearing and seeing first hand.”

“We were... just took around one of areas where residents actually took the community and cleaned up a pathway and put flowers in it and everything in the garden. Funnily enough as we went to see that lady was just coming out with her gloves on to clear the garden and that was showing that they took the responsibility and was saying it can be done and to take the responsibility of your own area and these residents done it and they came through a lot of issues for them to get motivated to do that.”

“Like a lot of residents, we were keen to hear from the horse’s mouth what the advantages and disadvantages of a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) were and to see the results of residents being involved in the delivery of the housing service. We wanted to create a TMO that not only would deliver excellent services but would care for our community the way that yours does.”
“Everyone was very impressed by the visit and went away with food for thought. Personally I was glad to hear that new things are still being developed – the Youth Council sounds great.”

“Presentations were informative and gave the group a good understanding of a remarkable regeneration story ...The residents conveyed their pride and enthusiasm for the achievements and positive outcomes and it was especially important to see for ourselves the transformation of the living environment ...”

“There are some exciting developments for our group which I would like you to be aware of, not least because I have no doubt that we will be seeking your advice on some of these matters in the not too distant future. These include acquiring premises for our estate to use as a community centre. I appreciate that we are in the very early stages in what will be a long and protracted process and are acutely aware that we will need support along the way.”

“We were inspired by the visit because it demonstrates that residents can do it and if people want change in their area – it’s residents that know what will work.”

“We will be telling everyone of our visit and encouraging people to come on more visits because ‘seeing is believing!’ When you can see it you know you can do it!”

**Conclusions**

We all learn all the time – as policy makers, practitioners and residents develop new solutions to problems in a rapidly changing society. Guide Neighbourhoods are no exception. Several Guide Neighbourhoods promoted their relationships with client neighbourhoods as partnerships rather than as an ‘experts to learners’ model. This process affirms the progress and achievements of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme. It has brought new learning opportunities, particularly in developing transparency in community governance and building accountability in community groups and local partnerships. It has also enabled both Guide and client neighbourhoods to become more confident and outward looking and enhanced their capacity to relate local action to the wider policy agenda.

It is important to remember that the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme started out as an action research project. There were few initial expectations that those involved could support real change in ‘client neighbourhoods’ or that individual Guides would be able to demonstrate how they were contributing to the achievement of Neighbourhood Renewal Floor Targets. Yet distance has been travelled – even by fragile community organisations in the early stages of identifying and addressing local needs. Much of this has been achieved through informal support and advice and inspiration, the building of long-term personal relationships rather than the delivery of more remote, one-off, problem focused consultancy services.

The Guide Neighbourhoods Programme has, however, been about more than inspiration. At the core of the Programme has been the ambition both to ‘turn learning into action’ and ‘tell it like it is’. It is this honesty of approach (‘warts and all’), together with the enhanced capacity to offer ongoing support that has been particularly valued by client neighbourhoods. They have been able to apply learning and bring about real change and enter into decision making in more informed ways.

The outcomes achieved by Guide Neighbourhoods have resulted from the combination of resources they have been able to offer their clients – demonstration visits, learning opportunities, ongoing day-to-day advice, sometimes in-depth consultancy and participation in network events.
Appendix 4:
Neighbourhood Resource Centre for Central England report: Promoting What Works in Neighbourhood Regeneration and Community Empowerment

Background
Since 2004, the Department for Communities & Local Government (CLG) has invested up to £11.5m in the UK’s regional network of Neighbourhood Training and Resource Centres. The Neighbourhood Resource Centre for Central England (NRCCE) is the centre of excellence for the Midlands region and began life by supporting neighbourhood warden practitioners. We still continue to be the recognised regional centre of excellence for wardens, providing a successful regional warden support programme with a range of products and services to 460 wardens and 36 schemes working across the region.

However, over the past three years we have successfully broadened our remit to provide support for local authorities across the region, encompassing other frontline practitioners such as Police Community Support Officers, as well as volunteers involved in neighbourhood-based projects. This includes support for neighbourhood management and safer communities teams and, increasingly, working with communities and local authority partnerships on approaches that help to achieve LAA improvement targets in deprived neighbourhoods.

Through our involvement with major European Social Fund (ESF), Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) and Advantage West Midlands (AWM) funded projects, we have also developed an excellent reputation for partnership working with a number of local authorities, the police, probation trusts, colleges, universities, voluntary and community sector bodies and private sector training providers.

The common thread that unites all Neighbourhood Resource Centres is our ability to drill down into neighbourhoods and build capacity at a grass roots level in communities. Working with and supporting residents and frontline workers with training, network facilitation, good practice study visits, renewal project design, implementation assistance and evaluation is at the heart of what we do.

As a training centre accredited to deliver programmes through City & Guilds, NCFE and the Open College Network, the NRCCE is also able to provide a range of training and support products and services to equip frontline workers with the professional skills, knowledge and understanding of policy directives on community empowerment, cohesion and wider neighbourhood renewal interventions. Through our bank of associates, we are also able to draw on expertise and experience of a wide range of issues affecting neighbourhood working.

This report
The purpose of this report is to provide a review of ‘good practice’ in relation to the work of the NRCCE, particularly focusing on neighbourhood regeneration and community empowerment.

The report aims to identify good practice in terms of the best ways for agencies, initiatives and partnerships to learn from what has worked elsewhere and how this learning is then applied to individuals’ own working practices on a day-to-day basis, for example through a directory of good practice, a toolkit, a workshop or online networking.

Neighbourhood wardens and good practice
Training is NRCCE’s core business. We offer Community Warden Core Training, which is seen by many schemes as a pre-requisite for new wardens starting in post – and many wardens undertake it within their first couple of weeks of employment. Whilst we understand the merits of this approach, we have found the programme is much more productive when wardens have undergone their own in-house induction and they have been in post for a month or so. This then allows for some level of understanding and experience of the warden role, so participants feel informed to pose questions in sessions and share their own unique experiences with others,
leading to a much richer personal learning experience for all. This sharing of knowledge and good practice also empowers wardens to go away from the programme with their own ideas or suggestions of projects or new ways of working that they can implement in their own schemes.

We also find that schemes tend to nominate whole teams to attend a programme as managers advocate a ‘team building’ approach. Again whilst we understand the merits, we will often encourage a mixed take-up of a programme to ensure a varied group of learners attend, so that wardens can learn from others with the trainers facilitating good practice sharing and learning.

As the diversity of schemes emerge, it is becoming more common for participants to undervalue units which their role has little or no connection with. We are undertaking a review of the Community Warden Core Training at present, to ensure the structure reflects what is relevant and needed for today’s wardens. An individualised approach of selecting optional units seems to be the most appropriate; however, this approach would lessen the opportunity for individuals to learn from others who have different roles.

As a direct response to the growing concern in general that learning gained from training does not always transfer to the workplace, when designing our Level 3 Community Engagement programme we ensured an element of assessment that bridged that gap. As part of each unit of the qualification, learners must submit a self-study assignment which is designed to demonstrate how their learning can be used to tackle real situations or problems in their own role. These assignments are available to interested parties, for example line managers, so that they can also appreciate the value of the learning.

In terms of barriers to applying good practice, we talked about the challenges from a frontline practitioners’ perspective in terms of overcoming organisational culture and staff being unclear on their role and contribution. Frontline practitioners felt that there was little point when engaging with residents to identify good practice and thus raise their expectations only to be turned down by the decision-makers when they requested change.

In addition, in economically difficult times we often see those in frontline posts being given reduced opportunities to take up training or attend networking events and this obviously has a bearing on whether good practice is disseminated. Whilst there is an argument that these times of economic challenge need innovation and analysis of ways of providing services differently, i.e. more efficiently, the culture that often prevails is that of fear and non risk-taking. This inevitably means that providers are less open to new, possibly radical, ideas and therefore to applying good practice.

As a centre of excellence there has always been a strong commitment by NRCCE to promote both regional and national warden good practice, focusing on themes such as the integration of wardens with the neighbourhood management approach and the community empowerment agenda. Good practice has been identified and actively promoted through the development of good practice reports, ‘seeing is believing’ study visits and exchange visits between schemes, and events and conferences.

Whilst we have never undertaken a comprehensive study of the best and most appropriate means of transferring and embedding good practice amongst our practitioners, we have come to recognise the true value of informal learning networks and particularly the value of our practitioner meetings.

Feedback from countless customer reviews has also advised us of the value practitioners place on informal networking and how informal discussions struck up with warden colleagues can be instrumental in schemes being able to identify and draw on existing good practice and innovation. The NRCCE in its facilitation role has also been able to draw on these networks to establish learning needs and common areas of interest, which have then been used to inform the planning of suitable study visits where schemes have the opportunity to see with their ‘own eyes’ the work of other warden services.

Feedback from study visits also indicates that often wardens will use these visits to validate their own scheme’s practices or alternatively they will return to their scheme with the beginnings of a seed for a potential project or initiative.
NRCCE also regularly collates regional good practice case studies and publishes these in the form of bi-annual good practice reports. The reason for publishing these reports is two-fold: firstly as a way of sharing successful warden-led projects amongst practitioners; and secondly as a marketing document which individual warden services can use to promote their own services to their accountable body, local partners and stakeholders. In fact, we see very little evidence of wardens using this as a resource they can draw on to learn about what works and applying this learning to their own service – they tend to use it predominantly for promotional purposes.

Neighbourhood Working Stock-take Review: ‘One Size Doesn’t Fit All’
Between September and November 2009, the NRCCE led the most comprehensive review to date of neighbourhood working in Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) areas across the West Midlands. The review was supported by funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and endorsed by the Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands (IEWM) partnership.

The purpose of the review was:
1. To identify the current status of neighbourhood working models and approaches across the 14 partnerships
2. To identify the support needed to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the neighbourhood working agenda.

The review was completed at the end of November and resulted in the final report ‘One Size Doesn’t Fit All’: A review of neighbourhood delivery practices across the West Midlands region.

The report’s key findings and recommendations were then used to inform the design and development of a ‘fit for purpose’ regional neighbourhoods support programme. This programme is currently being managed and delivered by the NRCCE.

A key focus of the review was to identify good practice around neighbourhood working models and approaches. This was identified via a literature review, incorporating both regional and national good practice, followed by primary research which attempted to capture evidence from the LSP teams. This research was carried out through an e-questionnaire sent to 14 LSP managers. Follow-up interviews were also conducted, where appropriate, to discuss key issues raised in the responses.

The review focused on five specific key lines of enquiry (KLOE) which enabled the necessary ‘drilling down’ on the issues and challenges which are commonly attributed to neighbourhood working approaches. This also included identifying existing good practice models and activities which could be harnessed and potentially scaled up to support the effective empowerment of local residents to promote social action and greater civic responsibility within our neighbourhoods.

The review generally identified the fact that many partnerships tend to work within their own silos, with little or no collective sharing of good practice taking place. This could be attributable to the fact that there seems to be no neighbourhood support community of practice group or forum for practitioners to feed into. However, there was evidence of some informal networking taking place directly between localities. If a regional networking forum was established, it was recommended that it be linked to other existing national, regional and local networks ie. the National Association for Neighbourhood Management (NANM), Regional Observatory, and the Guide Neighbourhoods Network.

Some observers suggest neighbourhood-level working yields limited success in tackling the broader social issues in neighbourhoods. In the context of our research we have deemed key ‘issues’ as problems that localities are trying to tackle, and the challenges to be the barriers and risks that localities face when applying these at a neighbourhood level. As our primary research concludes, there are areas where neighbourhood working is often limited to tackling ‘crime and grime’ problems such as street lighting, cleaning open spaces and graffiti; so this remains a priority for many local authorities. However, localities are also attempting to look at both the national and regional social issues, such as: reducing the...
number of NEETs; tackling entrenched poverty in areas of deprivation; responding to the economic downturn by tackling worklessness; and carbon reduction in neighbourhoods via innovative solutions. However, the lessons learnt are often hampered by silo working with no mechanism in place to effectively share this learning at a regional and national level.

When specifically asked about the purpose of a neighbourhood support programme and what it might contain, several localities requested that a potential programme should assist with the collation and promotion of good practice initiatives and activities across the region – including the promotion of successful neighbourhood working models and approaches to help demonstrate what ‘does and does not work’. One locality also suggested that there be additional support in how these models and approaches could be applied in other areas. This could be achieved through the facilitation of peer to peer reviews and support to solve specific issues being grappled with by partners. Another locality advised that the support should be less about ‘action learning sets’ – where people are taken out of the neighbourhood and into the region – and more focused on the practical, with support given on the patch.

This review also identified the need for capturing, recording and sharing innovation and good practice around neighbourhood working models and approaches within a locality. The rationale for this was that many localities commented that they simply struggled with finding the time and capacity needed to ensure good practice was being captured within their own locality and so opportunities were being missed in identifying what is working and scaling this up across the partnership area. This necessarily limits scale-up at a regional level.

These recommendations around good practice facilitation were taken forward in the drafting and development of a locality offer which has now gone out to all of the 14 LSPs. This now forms one of the five support activities which have been identified by the partnerships as the most valuable in driving improvement and efficiency at a neighbourhood level.

The activity is described below:

‘Good Practice’

The dissemination of practically-based exemplar case studies and sharing of good practice, both across the region and within LSP areas to promote excellence in neighbourhood working and minimise the opportunities for duplicating what does not work.

Whilst the NRCCE predominantly works with frontline practitioners and residents, it is important to consider another key recommendation made by LSPs, namely for advice and good practice support to be made available at all appropriate levels across a neighbourhood. This would advocate a more holistic approach to drive neighbourhood improvement, with local agencies working in collaboration with the community and residents to address and challenge rigid organisational barriers, poor communication systems and inefficiencies as a result of disjointed working and duplication. This support would be best provided utilising a three-tiered support programme which aligns itself to supporting strategic managers and elected members (decision-makers), middle managers and frontline practitioners (delivery staff) and residents (the community), hence building the capacity of all parts of a neighbourhood.
Appendix 5:
Nehemiah Foundation report:
Review of Good Practice in Neighbourhood Regeneration

Background

Overview
This report has been produced by the Nehemiah Foundation as part of a regional project, coordinated by RegenWM, to review good practice in neighbourhood regeneration.

Drawing on our experiences, this report seeks to suggest:
- Key determinants for success in neighbourhood regeneration
- Good practice, particularly in engaging frontline services with communities
- Effective ways to communicate and embed that good practice such that it makes a difference.

Reference points
We have drawn upon the experiences which led to the Nehemiah Foundation being developed, its work over the past five years, and a comprehensive analysis of feedback and evaluation provided by workers and organisations with whom the Nehemiah Foundation has worked.

Language
By regeneration we mean new initiatives which are focused on bringing about outcomes which include:
- Improvements to the physical state of a neighbourhood
- The economic prosperity of the people in a neighbourhood and economic impact of the neighbourhood itself – ie. cost and contribution
- The social welfare of the people living in that area.

In respect of social regeneration, we include an individual’s state of wellbeing; the levels of inter-reaction between local people; levels of social capital and levels of cohesion.

We have also regarded neighbourhood management as a form of regeneration activity as its success is also affected by many of the practices referred to in this report.

In writing this report we are also mindful of how views on the merits of neighbourhood place-based regeneration change regularly – sometimes the focus is issue based, sometimes it is neighbourhood based. Our view is that there is a place for neighbourhood-based regeneration and it will inevitably involve an awareness of and connection with issue-based initiatives such as Sure Start and Every Child Matters which become part of a general mix.

By ‘frontline’ we mean the places where local people meet with those who provide services or are engaged in a regeneration process. By ‘frontline workers’ we mean the people who engage with local residents. This includes people who are already in a neighbourhood before regeneration activity begins and then get engaged in regeneration activities in addition to their existing role. It may also include people in a pure regeneration role.

Context
When considering best practice, we believe it is important to be mindful of which phase of the regeneration process is being considered. We see the regeneration process as involving three key stages:

1. Planning and set up
2. Implementation and delivery
3. Conclusion and maintenance.

The skill sets for each phase vary because of the things that have been achieved in the previous phases and the nature of the work to be done in a particular phase. For example, the initial work of building trust and securing buy-in from local residents and partner organisations is more demanding at the start of the process than it is when a programme is underway and has started to deliver results.

We also think it is important to consider what roles a regeneration worker will play in the process and who they will develop working relationships with. The key roles which we
think need to be considered are likely to involve relationships and communications:

- With residents and communities within a neighbourhood
- Within an organisation providing services to the neighbourhood at different levels – peers, managers, policy makers
- With other organisations which have an ongoing role within the neighbourhood, for example, local third sector organisations
- Organisations which will develop a connection because of the regeneration process, for example, architects or developers
- Other organisations which will take on a monitoring role within the process.

The Nehemiah Foundation

The Nehemiah Foundation is a registered charity established to train, equip and support people and organisations wanting to regenerate neighbourhoods. It was developed out of a belief that there was a skills shortage in respect of those able to play the brokering and catalytic role within the neighbourhood regeneration process. This was informed by the work and experiences of staff at Anthony Collins Solicitors and those they had worked with for over 20 years, including:

- The establishment of Community Associations – groundbreaking resident-led regeneration schemes in Birmingham including Stockfield and Witton Lodge Community Associations, both of which are now well-established and seen as examples of good practice. Both are Guide Neighbourhoods and their resident leaders have been honoured with MBEs in recognition of their work.
- A variety of initiatives and funding streams including City Challenge, Single Regeneration Budget programmes and the Estate Renewal Challenge Fund.
- 22 of the 39 New Deal for Communities programmes across the country.
- Approved Section 16 agent status, which involves working with local residents and communities to explore tenant management options for housing, and ‘tenant friend’ status, which involves working with local communities in respect of housing regeneration initiatives like stock transfers of council housing.
- The building of strong working relationships with agencies and organisations across the country, such as TPAS and the DTA. We have always been keen to explore opportunities for strategic partnership working.
- Discussions and planning around local neighbourhood management, Local Strategic Partnerships, and national reviews such as the Quirk review into community asset transfer where we supported one of the pilot schemes for Birmingham.

The Nehemiah Foundation’s community regeneration programme has been designed to pass on best practice and help neighbourhoods become ‘initiative ready’ ie. able to be a genuine partner in the regeneration process and ‘be on the front foot’ ie. either ready for when an initiative comes along or pursuing opportunities to get a momentum going.

The Nehemiah Foundation’s full programme focuses on equipping frontline workers with the motivation and passion to engage in the long-term transformation of the communities in which they are working. The programme is divided into four parts, designed to equip them to:

- Develop a detailed understanding of what the neighbourhood is like, and have a clear baseline against which to measure progress. This involves taking the time to gather statistical information, local history, a range of perspectives from local residents and organisations, and identify what the key issues or themes are.
- Build up a community profile of the area. This involves reviewing and evaluating previous consultation, undertaking focused consultation to listen to local community views, and build up an understanding of what the priorities are.
- Develop local capacity, both residents and stakeholders, into a partnership body able to work effectively together, pooling information and resources to deliver activities which meet the priorities of the local community. Linked to this is the development of effective communications structures.
- Produce a locally owned vision and comprehensive business plan, so that the
frontline workers, local residents, and partner organisations are all agreed on priorities and actions and are able to work effectively towards this, but are also equipped to take advantage of opportunities (funding streams, investment opportunities, etc) which may arise.

The way this programme has been delivered informs our views on how best practice can be shared and embedded to make a real difference.

Key determinants for success

The community regeneration programme developed by the Nehemiah Foundation seeks to encapsulate what we believe are the key determinants for success in equipping communities and frontline workers for effective and lasting regeneration. The approach has several important features which inform our delivery:

- Area based – with a focus on the local neighbourhood as a geographical location with which people identify and regard as home.

- Cross sector collaboration – when regeneration is partnership-led, with public, private and third sector (including faith groups) working effectively together with shared aims and approaches. Important in this is the role of the broker and the catalyst, to stimulate connections and ideas.

- The local community being a genuine partner in the process, rather than being ‘done to’. Local information, knowledge, and energy is invaluable. It can unlock innovation and inform improved service provision.

- For the community to be a genuine and active partner, time and energy must be invested in engagement and empowerment activity – listening to community members, equipping and encouraging them to get involved in a range of ways, so that they want to be involved, can be involved, and then are able to own the issues in question, and share in the process of addressing them and shaping the proposed solutions.

- Community, support and care – frontline workers, and the partnerships they develop, are being equipped to invest in their own support and care. Community engagement and regeneration demands a considerable amount of time and energy, often focused on a small group of dedicated individuals. A key determinant of the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of such activity is support networks to help avoid burnout or disillusionment.

- Knowledge and capacity – in observing neighbourhood regeneration programmes and addressing the questions raised by frontline workers, we believe a neighbourhood benefits most from a regeneration process when it has as many as possible of the components we have described as ‘the Essential Gene’.

Components of ‘the Essential Gene’

1. A Neighbourhood Partnership, hub or anchor
2. Excellent knowledge of the local neighbourhood
3. An excellent communication network with local residents
4. An excellent communication network with local organisations
5. Knowledge of local needs
6. Local vision which is owned and held
7. Issue-monitoring framework and mechanism
8. Ability to galvanise and stimulate change
9. Informing, communicating and engaging with (all) local people
10. Nurturing of social capital
11. Nurturing of faith capital
12. Community space.

Understanding and ability to work within frameworks of the following:

1. Neighbourhood management
2. Joint venture
3. Social enterprise
4. Project development
5. Faith and social capital
6. Campaigning and lobbying.

These 18 components may not all be present initially, but this provides workers with a focused framework within which to develop their work.
Good practice

We are of the view that good practice in neighbourhood regeneration involves:

1. Setting clear expectations for those involved at the start of the process
   - This means acknowledging that regeneration and community engagement are long-term processes, involving complex aims that are challenging but possible. Residents and frontline workers need to avoid unrealistic expectations or promises early on.
   - It takes time, energy and commitment, and cannot be rushed. Engagement with and empowerment of local communities involves tapping into a powerful energy source. If done well it can bring lasting benefits, but done poorly it can damage community relations, fail to achieve the desired results and be a huge waste of money.
   - Acknowledging that the problems of deprived areas are complex and that addressing them will involve a range of approaches, organisations and relationships, and that these will need to be developed over time.
   - Observing that while there are useful tools and approaches, it is important to be clear that each neighbourhood and community has a unique identity, needs and people, and any approach to regeneration must be tailored to that community – one size does not fit all.

2. Adopting a strategic, long-term approach
   - The temptation may be to move quickly to take action, often via short-term projects. Whilst there may be merits to some ‘quick wins’, it is important to recognise that sustainable regeneration is a long-term process that will need a strategic approach. Given the amounts of energy, time and effort needed, it is important that adequate consideration is given at an early stage to ensuring that the key issues are understood and that all activities fit within a comprehensive strategy to address them. Rushing into short term action can mean that issues are never properly understood, possible connections or opportunities for joined up working may be missed, and frontline workers may find themselves burdened with managing and fundraising for projects, rather than building an effective partnership approach with local residents and organisations to deliver a shared vision.
   - Taking the time to listen, observe, and learn at the start of a programme is invaluable. An informed, well-evidenced strategy, with wide acceptance, provides a strong base on which to build, and can help in avoiding unhelpful or disruptive distractions.
   - This can be particularly challenging if money is a significant factor at the start of the programme – the reality is often that funding streams and ‘funny money’ can make regeneration more complicated if finance, rather than clear strategy, is the focus at the start.

3. Actively cultivating partnership working
   - A key is the benefit of effective partnership working which builds on a range of experience and resource, and which crosses organisational or sector ‘silos’.
   - From the outset of regeneration work, it is helpful to be aware of what organisations and groups are active in a community, and to build an understanding of what they do, what resources they have (and what they are lacking), and what the links and gaps in vision are. Frontline workers who have taken the time to build up their local knowledge, networks and expertise are in a strong position to initiate and stimulate partnership working that places communities in an active role at the heart of the regeneration process rather than being perceived as passive recipients.
   - This mapping of resources and agendas is important whether looking at new physical regeneration (in which new resource and investment is required), or in looking at more effective and efficient provision of existing services in a way which meets local needs.
   - For frontline workers and community organisations, it is not possible to provide everything a community needs. Developing an informed, credible local partnership is a central plank of a long term plan for improvements. This not only brings service providers together with one another, but by adding community members to the discussion it can allow for sharing of good practice, identification of duplications and gaps, and the development of shared approaches to complex problems. Adopting a
‘win-win’ approach to these relationships is an important skill for frontline workers to develop, to facilitate and join up for mutual benefit.

4. Access to a toolkit of resources

- In equipping frontline regeneration workers to support and work with their communities, the Nehemiah Foundation seeks to provide a ‘toolkit’ of resources, skills and techniques to be drawn on as and when they become useful. Rather than having one set approach prescribed, workers and groups benefit from being able to access a range of resources which they can be confident in using or adapting to unique situations.
- This allows them to draw on good practice from across the board, rather than feeling restricted to one particular model. This respects the distinctive circumstances within which workers find themselves operating; it also ensures that skills are transferable from one context to another.
- An additional aspect of this approach found to be beneficial has been the ability for frontline workers and their community organisations to access a resource ‘hub’ which can hold templates, guidance notes, and other toolkit resources centrally, keeping them up to date and able to offer additional advice on their use.

5. Exposure to what has worked and what has not worked elsewhere

- There is great value in frontline workers and community groups taking the time to visit live examples where regeneration and community engagement have been successfully undertaken, to observe and experience what can be done, and to explore and discuss what has, and importantly what has not, worked.
- It is helpful to undertake these encounters with a degree of preparation (identify what you want to find out) and reflect on them afterwards so that key lessons and ‘top tips’ can be distilled, particularly when looking at how to apply them into a new context.
- One aspect that can be overlooked, but which can be very helpful, is the development of relationships between neighbourhoods, workers and organisations to ensure ongoing learning and dialogue rather than one-off visits.

6. Development of an authentic community voice

- Genuine community empowerment and involvement cannot be rushed, and takes time to build and nurture. Whilst it may be relatively straightforward to make contact with community leaders, it is important not to underestimate the rich benefits of taking time to build relationships, trust and understanding with residents across the community, from a position of seeking to listen and understand rather than convince, recruit or cajole.
- Being able to understand and acknowledge the range of perspectives within a community (across ages, genders, ethnicities, levels of influence, etc) rather than relying on one set of accounts may be challenging, but ensures that the development of partnerships and strategies is done from a position of authenticity and integrity to the community.
- Taking the time to build these relationships can also stimulate greater community involvement in activity, increasing the understanding of work within the community and helping to foster long term cohesion and ownership of the regeneration strategy developed.

7. Nurturing the development and practice of effective ongoing communication

- Clear, effective communication is vital to building good relationships between residents, frontline workers, and partner organisations.
- As noted above, residents and partners need to know what is happening, but it is also important that communication is driven by the need to listen and understand. Communication must be interactive (with clear, accessible routes and mechanisms), and needs to ensure that messages are not only conveyed, but are understood. Having a network of relationships across the community can help inform and refine this.

8. Establishing a community anchor in the neighbourhood

- Service providers, initiatives and funding streams can all bring help to local communities, but agendas and priorities are prone to change. The Nehemiah Foundation’s experience points to the central importance of developing key elements within a neighbourhood that not
only catalyse and support the regeneration of that neighbourhood, but that emerge from and remain firmly rooted within it.

- Key to avoid being ‘done to’, or being neglected when priorities change, is to develop and equip a local, informed, community-led partnership able to commission and develop a strategy for regeneration that is informed and flexible enough to take advantage of opportunities when they arise, but strong and resilient enough not to be knocked off course when things get in the way.

- This ‘community anchor’ will be shaped and owned by local people, informed by an in-depth understanding of local needs and aspirations, but also founded in partnership with other organisations and equipped with a shared, agreed strategy. A helpful element to ensure the viability and independence of this ‘anchor’ is to identify or acquire a community-owned asset (such as land, building, service or information) which is valued and needed by partner organisations.

9. Supported and empowered frontline workers

- Community regeneration is a challenging endeavour, and frontline regeneration workers need to be supported and empowered if they are to be able to deliver effective work over the long-term.

- In delivering comprehensive regeneration, frontline workers will need desire, knowledge, information, structure, space, wisdom, flexibility, peer support, partners, and laughter.

- It is important that they have clear management structures, job descriptions, resource and appropriate working conditions to do this. It is also important to recognise that frontline workers need to be able to engage in a range of settings, dealing with conflict, misunderstandings, hopes, and frustrations, and can often feel quite isolated in doing so. This is compounded when they live and work in the same neighbourhoods.

- A key element of good practice to ensure the ongoing effective contributions of frontline workers to regeneration initiatives is to equip them as individuals to understand their support needs and to put in place the structures and resources that will help them to do this. Taking time to develop self-awareness (through reflection, mentoring, etc) and self-support techniques (including time management) is an invaluable investment.

- The support needed by frontline workers is ongoing, as pressures will change with circumstances. Alongside appropriate management and self-support structures, the Nehemiah Foundation also encourages workers to engage in a wider network of peer relationships, which not only allows the sharing of information and resources, but also stimulates a supportive environment based on shared understanding and experience, and can reduce the sense of isolation. Again, this builds on principles of partnership working, generosity, and ongoing learning from good practice elsewhere.

10. Time for reflection

- One final element of good practice in regeneration work is to build in ongoing opportunities for reflection. The pressures to deliver and to be busy are great, and it is important that frontline workers and community organisations take active steps to incorporate space to reflect on their practice, review what has been achieved, and if necessary revise their activity or approach.

- On an individual level, it is good for frontline workers to be able to reflect on what they are doing and seeking to achieve, to identify what support they may need, and also to consider whether anything needs to be changed. Constant action without reflection may mean opportunities are missed, unnecessary or unhelpful activity continues unchallenged, and personal growth and health can be compromised.

- For community organisations, it is good to build in opportunities for reflection and review of strategies and delivery plans to ensure that the organisation’s progress is still in line with original objectives and current realities.

How to communicate and embed good practice such that it makes a difference

The process of training and equipping people to engage with a neighbourhood regeneration process over a period of five years has
informed our thinking on how best practice is shared most effectively. We have found that the process requires consideration of:

- What the person involved is expected to do within the regeneration process
- How much of their time is devoted to this work – is it a part of their job or their whole job
- The degree of security they have to do that work
- The degree of support they have to do that work from their own organisation
- Their level of experience.

Our general view is that for those given the responsibility of engaging with local residents and connecting with organisations contributing to the regeneration process it is helpful to have:

- A preparatory course at the very start of the process
- Check points at key stages of the regeneration process
- Periodic meetings of peers undertaking the process at the same time
- Periodic meetings with practitioners to review progress.

The specific techniques we think help embed best practice are:

1. Managing expectations at the start of the process through discussion with others who have been engaged in the process

   - This is important because regeneration and community empowerment is not a short-term or easy journey. Good practice may not necessarily be the quickest or most immediate route and the pressures to adopt ‘quick wins’ can be intense. Presenting a clear overview and inspirational examples can help encourage the will to adopt good practice.
   - Honesty about hopes, fears, expectations and pressures creates a realistic environment based on an understanding of each worker’s situation and allows for approaches to be tailored to accommodate them.
   - It is also helpful to encourage awareness that there will be mistakes, challenges and other issues arising, and that a certain amount of preparation can be made to ensure that these do not knock everything off track and that structures are in place to help during difficult times.
   - Having a clear expectation about what lies ahead also helps people to locate elements of good practice within a bigger framework – some of it may not make immediate sense or seem directly applicable at the time, but when held within that framework, it can allow workers to reflect and return to it when it does become more relevant. It also encourages people to be able to prepare and therefore be in a position to take advantage of the learning opportunity (for example to reflect on questions they might wish to ask).

2. Establishing a clear learning framework and rationale before the process starts

   - Whatever model of training, communication or dissemination of good practice is used, it helps if there is a clear, understood rationale for it, that the approach used is appropriate to the material and the audience, that the key information is clearly presented, and that jargon is either avoided or clearly explained. If frontline workers do not see the rationale and benefit, they will be less disposed to absorb and apply the good practice effectively.
   - Establish pace and avoid overwhelm – too much information in one go can be counterproductive. Frontline workers are often very busy, and dealing with a wide range of issues. Space to acknowledge and have some respite from this is a valuable element to equipping and supporting them.
   - Consider training in the value of skills such as time management.
   - Provide clear outlines at the start of training modules and sessions, with an appropriate range of teaching styles (recognising that people have different learning styles and preferences, and that topics lend themselves better to one approach than another).
   - Build in time for reflection and questions as well as space to consider how to apply good practice into a ‘live’ situation. A particularly valuable element of the Nehemiah Foundation’s programmes has been the balance between teaching and
application, with each frontline worker having a structured approach to applying what they have learned directly into their community and then having space to reflect on what they have learned through that process.

- Having a space away from the neighbourhood context to explore good practice models and practice them in a ‘safe’ environment is helpful, and has allowed workers to apply the approaches in their work with confidence.
- Encouraging frontline workers to explore best practice, and then apply it directly, helps to disseminate that practice outwards; rather than remaining solely with the workers, it is taken back to their organisations and communities, shared and applied.

3. Awareness of the ‘big picture’ at all times

- For best practice to be understood and applied, it is important that it is not viewed in isolation. Local, regional, and national policies and initiatives (both past and present) have an impact on local communities and organisations, and this needs to be recognised. There is also a great deal of useful information to be gleaned from past approaches to regeneration (including guidance materials). Workers and communities can learn from this and reduce the need to start from scratch and learn all over again.
- Being aware of the bigger picture also encourages an awareness of opportunities for creative or innovative working.

4. Action learning

- At periodic intervals, create an opportunity for direct application, practice runs or consideration of worked-through examples. Frontline workers are often people of action, and artificial or abstract approaches can seem unsatisfactory.
- Outline an approach to a particular situation, explore the ideas about how it should be addressed, allow space for questions and then encourage workers to apply the lessons learned in their communities. In this process it is important to stress the value of trying things out and not being afraid of mistakes, as learning can come from these too.

5. Reflective learning on a periodic basis

- Provide space for reflection on activity which has been undertaken following input. It does not always come easily to people, particularly those motivated by action and tasks, but we have found it to be a key part of effective learning and embedding of good practice.
- This is valuable for the individuals, but is also of wider benefit. Encouraging a sharing of reflections, observations, and lessons learned with others helps to embed good practice and hone it. The lessons learned from good and bad experiences can inform future practice and also how good practice is passed on.
- Learning logs or journals, and regular space dedicated to review and reflection, can be an invaluable resource to frontline workers, as can space to ask questions, discuss concerns or try out new ideas. To do this well, workers will need to be encouraged to find techniques and approaches that suit their personalities, but suggested frameworks can be provided to help.

6. Learning from the experiences of others

- A very helpful element of the transfer of good practice is to see it in action by direct visit and engagement and to learn from those who are already doing it. It is good to be able to ask about how it works and what has gone well and not so well and also to see how that application is similar to, and differs from, one’s own.
- As well as being an encouragement to workers that an issue is not unique to them and that the approach being explored can work, it is helpful to be able to explore different perspectives and techniques.
- Seeing inspirational stories and people can be very encouraging, but it is also important to note that it can be just as encouraging to see that even successful exemplars have weaknesses and problems. Learning from an honest appraisal of those experiences can be invaluable.
- The Nehemiah Foundation encourages workers to prepare for such encounters so that they can make the best of the opportunity. This involves research about the organisation before a visit, and identification of what learning is desired and what questions need to be asked to do this.
• One effective way of capturing the good practice learned and explored through such encounters is to encourage, through reflection and discussion, a summary of the ‘top tips’ or key lessons learned, which provide a useful future reference resource.

7. Have a breadth of expertise and perspectives involved in the sharing process
• As regeneration initiatives involve having to engage with a range of people, organisations, agendas and sectors, it is useful to prepare workers for this. The Nehemiah Foundation has found it helpful to ensure that a range of people are involved in training, so that workers are exposed to different perspectives and ‘voices’.
• This can also encourage fruitful discussion on the areas of good practice where there is significant overlap, and stimulates helpful exploration of differences and potential connections. Providing opportunities for frontline workers to engage in joint learning opportunities with people from other sectors also grappling with specific issues can be a creative way of doing this.

8. Contextualising the toolkit approach
• A guiding principle of the Nehemiah Foundation has been that each neighbourhood and community is unique, and that a ‘one size fits all’ approach does not do justice to the people involved. Rather than presenting a single, inflexible model for good practice in regeneration, a toolkit approach can be helpful.
• This recognises shared elements and core principles but involves equipping frontline workers and community groups with a range of techniques and resources (tools in the toolkit), which are explained and practised, and can be drawn upon as and when they are applicable. It is important that each resource is clearly outlined, that it is transferable from one setting to another, and that workers are given experience of using it.

9. Peer group learning and working
• Interactive group working is a very helpful approach to learning and sharing good practice, helping people to discuss ideas and dilemmas, work through issues together, but still come to their own conclusions. Building relationships with people in similar roles or contexts can be encouraging, and the sharing and exploring of ideas can be very creative.
• It can equally be helpful to encourage group working towards shared aims – again, equipping workers to operate in team and partnership contexts, seeing different approaches and perspectives and learning to ‘play to strengths’.

10. Ongoing peer network
• Linked to the benefit of group learning has been the value of establishing peer-to-peer support through a network of regeneration workers. This can be very effective in embedding and supporting the ongoing delivery of good practice as workers encourage one another and learn from one another.
• A network can bring the encouragement of engaging with people who are going, or have gone, through similar experiences and seeing different perspectives and approaches put into action. It can therefore have the benefit of not only keeping individuals in touch, but can provide opportunity for good practice in one context to be shared and applied in others.

11. Ongoing dialogue
• The Nehemiah Foundation has sought not only to pass on good practice to frontline workers, but seeks to affirm the value of their contributions to informing ongoing learning. One of the benefits of group working, networks, and visits to other examples of good practice is that it can enrich the resource of good practice further. Community groups and workers, in applying good practice, will refine and adapt approaches in potentially innovative ways and this is a vital resource which should not be missed. The capturing and dissemination of good practice should be a live, ongoing, and multi-directional process, rather than fixed and top-down.

12. Intentional feedback to local partnerships
• The Nehemiah Foundation seeks to equip not only individual frontline workers, but through them to build local, community based partnership organisations. By ensuring the focus on direct application of good practice into the
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community context and equipping workers to pass that on, good practice can be disseminated beyond the immediate tranche of workers.

- It is helpful to keep the partnership idea in mind and encourage workers to continually reflect on how to apply what they are learning into that context. When developing local teams and partnerships, it is helpful to ensure that the structures and relationships encourage that sharing of experience and roles – not only to avoid burn-out or overload, but also to allow others to learn and develop.

13. Ongoing Support to Frontline Workers

- Good practice can be shared and communicated effectively, but if frontline workers are not given appropriate ongoing support and management, then the application of that practice may be hindered.

- Ongoing opportunities (whether with direct line management, peers, or external support) to reflect on learning and practice are important, as is the space to ask questions, raise concerns, and receive encouragement. Workers benefit from an understanding of what support they need and being proactive in developing a support and accountability framework.

- It is important to be intentional about creating a motivating, inspiring and constructive environment. Valuing and encouraging what people are already doing is important, as is seeing that as a base on which to develop further good practice.

- As regeneration and community development initiatives progress, issues will arise which will require specific, targeted advice or support. Alongside regular management and network structures, it is helpful for frontline workers and groups to be aware of where they can find this help.

14. Online resources

- In seeking to support and equip frontline workers and their communities, the Nehemiah Foundation sees value in the development of a central resource bank or ‘hub’ to act as a contact point, a repository of good practice and practical resources, and to issue guidance and provide an online discussion forum to support the network of workers. The aim is to help workers and residents access information, support and resources quickly and easily.

- There is value in having such a central register of shared resources, but this must be maintained and kept up to date, and needs to be user friendly. If online resources are not easy to use, and of obvious benefit, they will not be used no matter how good the quality of material available.

- Information sharing also needs to be done strategically – for example, email updates can be a useful resource, but care needs to be taken that they are seen as helpful, rather than overwhelming or irrelevant.