

Paper presented to the EURA Conference **The Vital City**, *University of Glasgow*, 12 -14 April 2007, *Community Activism and Civic Innovation* Stream

Title: **Community Activism or Policy Implementation? Resident to Resident Learning in Neighbourhood Governance**

Authors: **Derrick Purdue, Angus McCabe, Mandy Wilson, Laura Braybrook, Liz Chilton and Rose Ardon**

### **Introduction**

Community activists accumulate a lot of knowledge of regeneration programmes and governance structures. While some have found a career path as paid workers in community or voluntary organizations, consultancy offers an innovative way of converting their cultural capital into wages by providing services rather than importing professional skills from outside of the neighbourhood. This paper is based on the evaluation of the Home Office / CLG Guide Neighbourhood Programme, through which neighbourhood organizations in cities as diverse as London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leicester, Hull and Plymouth, that have been successful in engaging with regeneration were encouraged to become consultants on the basis of their experiential knowledge of how regeneration works in deprived neighbourhoods and to mentor residents in other less established neighbourhoods. This process was called 'resident to resident learning'. The policy intent of the programme was to make local impacts in the less established neighbourhoods against a range of Government policies. In the paper ideas drawn from policy implementation studies are used in the evaluation of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme and the role and sustainability of the resident to resident learning model.

### **Concepts of Policy Implementation**

Implementation plays a more or less significant role in different approaches to policy analysis. Where policies are treated as developing in cycles, these cycles are divided into stages agenda setting where problems are defined, followed by more detailed policy development including bargaining between

policy actors, and then implementation of the policy and finally evaluation prior to another cycle (Parsons, 1995). This fairly rationalist approach tends to separate policy formulation and adoption from the action that follows in implementation, or else fails to appear, resulting in an 'implementation gap'. A top-down version of policy making is based on the idea of a legitimate command chain with the key decision makers passing the task of implementing their decision down a hierarchical chain for implementation by the troops on the ground, (e.g. a large public sector body such as local authorities or university). The top-down school of policy making when concerned with implementation, is interested in finding ways in which decisions are carried out perfectly, i.e. increased control of implementers.

Others reject the rationalist underpinning of policy cycles, preferring an incremental approach which sees policy developing through a gradual accumulation of small adjustments, based on attempts to correct previous failures in implementation (Hill, 1997).

A more challenging approach suggests that for a new policy to emerge requires policy window to appear through the coincidence of three independent streams: policy solutions, problem definitions and political motivation / legitimacy (Kingdon, 1984). However, unlike the cyclical model, solutions are not necessarily a rational response to the definition of prior problems. Solutions can precede problems to which they are subsequently attached. For example, in the 1990s local food networks in the UK were conceived within the context of organic food production and reducing the environmental impact of food and agriculture on biodiversity and climate change. However, these networks have subsequently been proposed as ways of implementing policy agendas in domains such as community cohesion, health and local economic development (Mackridge, 2006).

Even where policy decisions are clearly made at the top of organizations, front line workers frequently have to make professional judgements choices and applications especially where there are conflicting demands from superiors (i.e. almost always). This led to the bottom-up approach to studying

implementation, exemplified by Lipsky's (1980) study of 'street level bureaucrats'. Lipsky's innovation was to see the whole policy process from the point of view of the frontline workers. In contrast to a rational top-down approach, implementation studies adopt a more bottom-up model in which implementation is the key phase of policy making where decisions made on the ground in frontline services are important in shaping how policy is actually implemented in practice, resulting in a policy-action continuum (Barrett and Fudge, 1981; Barrett, 2004) rather than policy being a completed entity which is then implemented in subsequent action.

Practice can be the source of policy change, particularly where competing funding sources and decision making structures exist (central, local, international and multi-sector), especially in more diffuse policy domains, such as diversity and community cohesion and empowerment (Hill, 1997).

While Lipsky (1980) was studying the policy process within organizations, national policy on regeneration and neighbourhoods, involves an inter-organizational field, where central and regional government engages with local authorities, and increasingly, with a myriad of community and voluntary sector organizations, often arranged in partnerships. Clear chains of command or even lines of accountability are blurred, or more often duplicated, with collaborative arrangements resulting in conflicting loyalties and priorities. However, it remains worthwhile to take up Lipsky's challenge of viewing policy from the point of view of the implementers in this more complex policy world. In the case of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme, discussed in this paper, the implementation agents were community activists and their organizations, relating to a range of policy domains, including community empowerment, community cohesion and quality of life including neighbourhood management, local environment, community safety and social enterprise.

### **Resident to Resident Learning: The Guide Neighbourhood Programme**

The Guide Neighbourhoods Programme (2005-7) was developed in a policy context in which various government departments have recognized the importance and efficacy of action taken by local residents in regenerating their own neighbourhoods. In particular, the guide neighbourhood programme built on the ODPM's Residents' Consultancy Pilots Initiative, which explored the extent to which residents' knowledge of their locality can be valuable and marketable to regeneration organizations, and their knowledge of regeneration valuable to residents in other neighbourhoods (Taylor, et al, 2002). The Treasury's Cross Cutting Review (HM Treasury 2002) argued for an increased role for the Voluntary and Community Sector in delivering services, using their specialist knowledge of local clients to deliver holistic services, with a shift from grant funding towards service contracts. The Home Office also aimed to make sure that in each deprived neighbourhood there was a 'community anchor organization' to support and facilitate a wide range of (unfunded) community groups, which promote community cohesion and renewal of civil society (Home Office 2004).

The recent Local Government White Paper (CLG 2006) 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 (CRU 2005), an initiative started by the Civil Renewal Unit, to enable people to engage with public bodies and influence the decisions that affect 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 (CRU 2005a) and Communities and Local Government has retained responsibility for three key elements of 'Together We can' namely: active citizenship, strengthened communities and partnership working.

The Guide Neighbourhood Programme was set up as an action research project with funding dedicated to a network of neighbourhood anchor organizations and to study how effective the package of resources provided, would be in facilitating these organizations in implementing neighbourhood policy at the grass roots level. The guide neighbourhood recruited to the network were to disseminate their own good practice outwards to build the capacity of other fledgling organizations outside of their neighbourhood. This in turn was to have an impact on policy implementation in these client neighbourhoods. The resources provided included national networking meetings, funding to employ development workers and to finance visits to and from client neighbourhoods and a budget for small grants to be distributed. As well as hosting visits and distributing small grants, most guide neighbourhoods also provided ongoing advice and support to their clients. The programme was time limited - two years in duration, with nine neighbourhoods involved from the start, and a further five joining during the programme. The origins of the programme lay in approaches made to the Home Office by activists from some of the original neighbourhoods.

### **Research Approach**

The evaluation was undertaken by a consortium of two universities, Birmingham University and the University of the West of England, and a consultancy, COGS. The evaluation followed an action research model (Huxham 2003), in which the evaluation team played a developmental role as well as a research role. This type of co-production of knowledge and skills requires a delicate balance of capacity building and analysis. A flexible research design (Robson 2002) was adopted, including running workshops at national and regional networking meetings. An early focus on three case study neighbourhoods was shifted to emphasize assessing the impact of the guide neighbourhoods on their clients, through a survey of clients, with 40 responses and follow up interviews with held with clients.

## **Policy outcomes of the programme**

In assessing the outcomes of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme, and the extent to which the learning involved translated into action in neighbourhoods, it is important to reinforce the three key policy areas the initiative relates to directly:

- **Active citizens:** people with the motivation, skills and confidence to speak up for their communities and say what improvements are needed
- **Strengthened communities:** community groups with the capability and resources to bring people together to work out shared solutions
- **Partnership with public bodies:** public bodies willing and able to work as partners with local people (CLG 2006).

The evaluation framework, developed with guide neighbourhoods, set out the parameters for assessing the Programme's impact. These included community empowerment, resident engagement, organisational capacity, community cohesion, increasing influence in partnerships and sustainability. Each corresponds to the core elements of the civil renewal agenda. In addition, the framework aimed to address quality of life indicators in the client neighbourhoods, such as the impact on the local environment, housing improvement, neighbourhood management, community safety and social enterprise. Again, these relate directly to Governmental policy themes.

In theory, the Programme impacts on neighbourhoods as a whole. In reality much of the influence is on organisations in neighbourhoods and more specifically on those who play a catalytic leadership role in the neighbourhood or within communities of interest. Yet the clients the guide neighbourhoods have worked with over the past two years are often quite fragile organisations (or more properly community groups) consisting of a handful of individuals, and sometimes lone 'active citizens' seeking to establish more of a profile. Therefore distinguishing between change for individuals and for client neighbourhoods is not always possible.

A major achievement of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme has been to spread knowledge and skills into 'forgotten estates' where there has been little history of community activism or regeneration investment. Key themes which emerged from client community interviews were:

*"We thought we were alone, forgotten"*

*"We were doing things and getting no-where. It was like we were lost in some big system. What [the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme] has done for us is give us a position we never had. We felt like the lost estate, but now we can go to the council and say we are part of something national [and that] they [the Programme] are helping us and that seems to mean something to the officials. They listen to us now".*

This has, however, also been a difficulty for the Programme. Working with community groups who have no history, or no track record with statutory bodies, takes time. It was therefore only towards the very end of the Programme that positive outcomes began to emerge for those small, fragile, groups, with which guide neighbourhoods were working.

#### *Promoting Active Citizens: Resident Engagement and Self-Esteem*

Much of the impact on client neighbourhoods has, therefore, been in encouraging and inspiring community groups to become active or their leaders to have the confidence to persist with their ideas, by seeing examples of achievement. The personal touch of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme's approach "*someone believing in you and seeing you face-to-face not just as a form*" has proved to be motivating in sustaining community action.

*"The training spurred me on more, confirmed our views and gut reactions, and made us see there was a light at the end of the tunnel in dealing with the City Council".* This has led to the idea of "*working **with** the City Council not against them*". (Client neighbourhood)

Journeying out of the neighbourhood together as a group can develop a strong sense of solidarity among community activists or citizens active in their neighbourhoods. *“Trips bond the group together like a family, we care about each other, [this] wouldn’t have happened without guide neighbourhoods”*  
(Client neighbourhood)

Further, it has enabled community groups to place, often small scale actions, within a broader policy context. The values of seeing exemplars of regeneration, meeting others with the same concerns and attending network meetings cannot be underestimated in terms of building personal and group confidence to tackle difficult issues and *“recognising what we are doing here (environmental improvements) is part of a much bigger picture. Didn’t think about this till we all met, but it does all add up.”*

*“We’re all tribal, but now we are starting to build a wider sense of community. We are not alone, we all have the same problems and are not the only ones who suffer, it is just the emphasis which is different ... It made me less impatient, made me less territorial or tribal. I am looking outside my own box”.*  
(Client neighbourhood)

*“I think I may have floundered by now without Neighbours4U’s help. It has broadened my vision”.* (Client neighbourhood)

Guide neighbourhoods have been instrumental in supporting the initial development of neighbourhood organisations. Yet more than this, they have played a key role in re-invigorating those groups which felt they *“were on the verge of giving up ... had lost direction and members.”*

The work of community groups trying to improve their area can feel like a long grind. Celebrations are an effective way of re-energising community groups used by guide neighbourhoods. One guide neighbourhood held a ‘Celebrating the Success of our Friends’ event in April 2007, which not only shared the experiences and successes of those who had been allocated seedcorn funding but also provided a forum in which client neighbourhoods could



reinforce each others successes and learning. The focus was on client neighbourhoods, but they in turn commented on and valued guide neighbourhoods in terms of personal, named contacts and their accessibility:

*“I think the relationships we’ve built up with residents and [guide neighbourhood] are invaluable because we know they’re there and they’re there for us and they’ve been through this process and they don’t mind you ringing them asking for advice whenever.”*

The theme of a more personal and accessible relationship with guide neighbourhoods as advisors, supporter and funders ran through the comments of many of the clients. For example, a client reported that the personalised nature of support provided by another guide neighbourhood had been instrumental in establishing a momentum to their work.

*“He’s ... fantastic with us he really is, he’s always there for us. He’s always encouraging us and he’s always advising us. He never tries to take over don’t get me wrong but he’s always there to advise us and help us, because they’ve been through it all, [the guide neighbourhood] have been through it all.”*

For struggling groups, access to flexible advice and support was “*what made a difference in us keeping on*”.

#### *Strengthening Communities: Developing Organisational Capacity in Client Neighbourhoods*

Just as many small businesses fail in the start-up phase, so do many community groups. *“If you look back ... like when we were first set up 20 years ago as a group, you know purely voluntary group ... at that time within [the city] and within this area there were dozens and dozens and dozens. And we’re really the only one that’s [survived].”*

The nature of the clients supported by guide neighbourhoods is that they are small and fragile groups that generally have quite a low organisational

capacity. This was also a starting point for a number of guide neighbourhoods – a factor which helped build trust and empathy.

*“An awful lot of people who are involved in residents’ groups, interest groups, they tend to come and go and people fall out with one another. A lot of them tend to be predominantly made up of older people, and that inevitably brings like health problems ... people move, get jobs. Yeah. Or they fall out. It seems to be a common thing that happens, people either realise that they can do things they didn’t think they could do, and then they go off and get jobs ... [or] they’re elderly and the strain of doing something that goes beyond just talking, they realise it’s too much for them, and they pull out for that reason. We (guide neighbourhoods) have all been there.”* (Guide neighbourhood)

This means that the work of guide neighbourhoods in supporting clients was a slow and delicate process and one where success is by no means guaranteed.

*“There is a value in working individually with client neighbourhoods and we’ve had some really good results, but I think as well possibly the resident to resident approach actually kind of gets things working. Certainly the grants have helped that, ‘cause obviously it’s a concrete thing that people have been able to purchase or get”.* (Guide neighbourhood)

Guide neighbourhoods have therefore worked beyond developing the skills and confidence of key individuals in neighbourhoods to building wider organisational capacity. Where the Programme has had a particular impact has been in supporting emerging organisations to have a physical presence and profile on their own estates. Two client neighbourhoods have, or are working towards, establishing a ‘shop front’ presence and a third has been assisted by a guide neighbourhood towards developing a one-stop facility.

Guide neighbourhoods have also played a role in shifting organisational cultures and practices and increasing the professionalism of client organisations. For example:

*“the whole attitude, the way we hold our meetings, I mean the ideas on how to look after the estate, lots and lots and lots of ... We had a fun day here. We had one last June which was again an idea from guide neighbourhoods”*  
(client neighbourhood).

Another guide neighbourhood has helped a client community development trust with quality procedures, building on their committee, and supporting them in moving to new premises. This, as with other guide neighbourhoods, has involved developing the competencies of often small organisations in building alliances and partnerships both with other voluntary and community groups as well as key statutory players.

#### *Partnership and Influence*

A number of guide neighbourhoods have therefore acted as positive role models for encouraging client neighbourhoods to engage in partnerships.

*“I also think the real meaning of partnership working is clearer now as well, because I think the Guide Neighbourhoods [Programme], it is an example of a partnership, and it helps you to understand what a partnership should be like”.*  
(Client neighbourhood)

In a number of instances this has involved negotiating introductions between community groups and key statutory agencies – or brokering new, more positive, relationships where these have been historically difficult. The picture is, however, uneven. Such brokerage takes time. It is less easy to provide clear evidence of clients building sustainable partnership working – particularly amongst smaller ‘hidden communities’. Further, positive partnership working is closely related to local organisational cultures and histories and there was a continuing concern (expressed by resident guides) that articulate residents’ groups still *“get labelled as trouble”* by local authorities and this makes reaching solutions to neighbourhood management problems harder.

Nevertheless, there are clear indications that for some of the client groups guide neighbourhoods support has enabled them to feel, and be seen as, more professional. They are being taken more seriously and are better able to build relationships with the statutory sector - rather than remaining in the mode of 'oppositional politics':

*"We used to shout about the Council ... the Council this, the Council that ... What we have learned is it's much more complex than that. It's not just the Council. You want to get street lights fixed, you have to go and find who has the contract ... and then who that contract has been subbed [sub-contracted] to ... and then how you get things done in a big long chain like that. It's frustrating and it's frustrating for tenants ... who you have to explain to again and again ... it's not just the Council ... it's not that easy to get things done sometimes."* (client neighbourhood)

At a more formal level, a guide neighbourhood worked from the bottom up in a client neighbourhood to engage the community and help the neighbourhood partnership to become constituted. Guide neighbourhoods extended partnership working beyond purely local/neighbourhood based approaches. One guide neighbourhood was instrumental in raising the awareness of key statutory players of the potential of community ownership of assets to transform communities. Equally others played an important role in the development of an authority wide social enterprise strategy, or invested in supporting community groups and statutory partners to establish consortia to bid for investment which would not have been open to any single agency.

### ***Policy and Quality of Life Impacts***

Building individual and organisational capacity has been a key achievement, of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme. Further, those groups worked with have begun to engage in more strategic partnership arrangements beyond their immediate neighbourhoods which has, in the case of black communities in one city, facilitated inward investment. Yet, in a sense, these are 'soft'

outcomes – rather than the ‘hard impacts’ of neighbourhood change and the language of Neighbourhood Renewal Floor Targets.

Given the limited time available to the Programme, it would be unreasonable to expect ‘headline news’ in terms of impact – and this is indeed one of the important messages from the Programme – that *“quick wins can end up as long term losses if they are not part of a process.”* (Guide neighbourhood)

Yet it is possible to identify key policy areas where the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme has made a difference both in terms of the speed of policy implementation and the enhanced quality of life in a number of client neighbourhoods.

#### *Neighbourhood Management and Housing*

Neighbourhood management is a key theme in governmental policy initiatives, including Neighbourhood Renewal Pathfinder Programmes, the promotion of Tenant Management Organisations, stock transfer, and the introduction of Neighbourhood Wardens and Neighbourhood Policing.

These are all areas in which guide neighbourhoods, particularly those responsible for housing and community asset management have a long track record and there is evidence that this experience has enabled client neighbourhoods to ‘fast track’ local developments. The outcomes achieved by guide neighbourhoods in the field of neighbourhood management are mainly in facilitating the more effective transfer of housing stock and better terms for the tenants involved. Support from experienced Tenant Management Organisations and community managed housing initiatives has focused on preparing tenants for applying, speeding up the process of transferring stock to community control and developing good governance systems as well as providing support through the decanting and refurbishment process.

One fledgling group, which has been putting together an application for community managed housing options, felt that *“we have been able to do the job of developing a TMO professionally not like amateurs”*.

Client neighbourhoods working on housing management issues re-emphasised the role of guide neighbourhoods in enabling them to 'fast track' action, revealing that their experience of support from guide neighbourhoods had speeded up the Tenant Management Organisation application process. In client neighbourhood the results were even more dramatic. They moved from exploring TMO status to winning the vote on feasibility and possible option appraisal within six months and felt they could not have done this without support from two guide neighbourhoods. In London, a client neighbourhood also acknowledge the support of one of the guide neighbourhood in that:

*"The fact that it took them six years has helped as we have done it in 2 (achieved TMO options vote) because of learning from what they did wrong as well as their successes. They warned us of pitfalls. Without that [support] it would probably have taken us at least six years as well, maybe more."*

Another guide neighbourhood took a broader focus, looking at wider neighbourhood governance and strategy, working in four Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder areas. Due to their success in the area, they were asked to work on neighbourhood management. *"The Councillors ... actually called a meeting with us just to sit down and look at what we could do within that area"*.

Guides have continued to make a unique contribution to good governance once community managed housing and neighbourhood management structures have been established. Their resident background and experience, for example, allowed them to criticise poor management of lettings policies by their client TMOs:

*"Professionals had told us [residents] what we were doing wrong ... but no-one believed them. It needed another [resident] group to tell us ... this is how it is, this is what you can do. This is what you can't"* (client neighbourhood).

Indeed, it is to their credit that a number of guide neighbourhoods did not avoid addressing particularly difficult issues in housing refurbishment and regeneration. Two guide neighbourhoods worked with a variety of clients to prepare them for the process of decanting when their housing was scheduled for demolition and rebuilding or major refurbishment. Whilst it is difficult to quantify the outcomes of this intensive work in policy terms, feedback from interviewees indicates that the decant process became more manageable, humane *“and involved less conflict than we thought.”*

### *Diversity and Community Cohesion*

Developing a positive approach to diversity and building community cohesion remains an important plank of Government neighbourhood policy both within the Local Government White Paper (CLG 2006), particular funding streams (e.g. Connecting Communities) and in the emerging new regeneration governance structures such as Local Area Agreements. Two areas of diversity are of particular significance for community cohesion in many regeneration areas – race/ethnicity and age/life course, with the problems of social exclusion often focusing on young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Cantle 2005).

Guide neighbourhoods have worked on a range of community cohesion issues. They have attempted to address the exclusion of young people, older generations and disability groups as well as cultural diversity. Further, they have tried to do so in a coherent manner. A common criticism of community cohesion strategies has been that (particularly with young people) they create a series of artificial situations to ‘bring communities together’ – bussing pupils between schools being one example. The learning from guide neighbourhoods highlights the need for diverse communities to challenge and learn from each other, have time to build trusting relationships and then address issues of common community concern.

Guide neighbourhoods have variable experience and capacity to lead in this area, as was evident from a capacity building workshop at one of the Guide

Neighbourhood Programme network events where ideas of diversity and multi-culturalism were debated vigorously.

Indeed, one of the ironies of successful guide neighbourhoods is that many have established stable communities, in which minority communities may be under-represented. Nevertheless building cohesion has been a focus for several of the guide neighbourhoods' work.

One guide neighbourhood supported a Filipino Community Association, which provided a forum for the Filipino community, assisted people to act on their issues and concerns and coordinated with other agencies to improve access to services and to promote and develop the Filipino culture and identity. The group aims to promote unity, cooperation and cohesion among members of the community so that they can be active members of society. The group was awarded a grant to cover costs for some annual events as well as rental of premises. The guide neighbourhood played an active role in developing the group and integrating its activities into communities in the city region, as they are getting little support from elsewhere. Equally, another guide neighbourhood were active in tackling racism both within the locality and in the communities they work with – and yet another guide neighbourhood consciously used seedcorn grants to sustain fragile, but emerging, black and minority ethnic organisations in their city.

Many of the groups funded with seedcorn money by one guide neighbourhood were involved in building links between different cultural communities – supporting an inter-faith women's group; an Asian poetry recording group; an African Caribbean achievement project; a Pak-Kashmir forum; and a Community Environment programme working with a Bangladeshi women's project; as well as a group for African refugees to access health services.

In an ethnically diverse client neighbourhood, the guide neighbourhood found social interaction across ethnic groups to be as important as, and more effective than, concentrating on particular issues, borne out in their support for a cross-cultural women's group:



*"I think the women we have got involved are really good women ... they're English and they're Asian. Because in [the neighbourhood] the Asian community has started to move in and there is some little bits of resentment and there are people, like the ladies involved, who see it as 'well actually our neighbourhood is changing but what are we doing to accommodate change?' So you've got a nice sort of cohesion ... before now at the [school] gates they'd say 'hello' and go, if that was at all what they did, whereas now actually they're meeting"* (guide neighbourhood).

Community diversity is often a feature of neighbourhoods facing social and economic difficulties with high population turnover. The London guide neighbourhoods expressed the feeling that, given the transitory and changing nature of migrant communities, policy asked them to *"build sustainable communities in a transit camp"* and that bringing extremely diverse communities together required additional resources and reflection on the methods adopted to achieve cohesion in neighbourhoods in a state of flux – as well as re-considering the overall goals of community cohesion policy,

Yet, despite these difficulties, real achievements are evident. In an area of rapid demographical changes, a guide neighbourhood made a small grant to a Kurdish group to hold a multicultural event in a neighbourhood where the school is becoming distinctly more mixed. 270 People attended: *"I don't know if we built trust, but people were talking together and at least we helped in understandings. It's not everything but it's a start."* (Resident guide)

In policy terms the concept of community cohesion has tended to focus on issues of race and cultural identity. As a result, wider issues of social cohesion, including divisions between generations, or disability tend to be over-looked, despite these being key policy themes 'in their own right' (Russell Commission 2005; DEfS 2006).

Engaging young people became a key activity of guide neighbourhoods themselves and also informed their work with clients. Thus one of the client

neighbourhoods raised the point that young people are “*not the enemy*”. Working with young people was one of the positive effects of clients’ involvement with Guide Neighbourhoods Programme.

*“The whole outlook of us as a forum ... we’ve been able to take on what we’ve learnt and put it on the estate. The whole thing has changed. Come on this estate a couple of years ago, if you parked your car, there’d be no wheels on it. I mean it ... you can check. Look, we’re closer to the kids, we’re closer to the elderly. We’ve got more things going on in the estate. We’ve got toddlers groups, we’re now fighting hopefully to have a bit of ground given to us so we can have a park for children to play, all great. Seriously we have come a long way thanks to [the] Guide Neighbourhoods [Programme] and ... and a lot of forums in the future will tell you that”* (client neighbourhood).

Another client visiting a guide neighbourhood took away lessons on inter-generational community cohesion:

*“After seeing what has been achieved with young people, the older generation [in our group] has improved its attitude towards young people. [The guide neighbourhood] have been very supportive and suggested positive steps, which has led to getting new people involved and feeling positive, [3-4 new committee members who are 16-21] plus single mums are now stopping us in the street to find out what we are doing.”*

A delegate to the national Guide Neighbourhoods Programme Conference in Birmingham (2007) came:

*“... to get the young people more involved in the community work because when adults take over we decide for the young people. Let them decide; if it’s possible for their decisions to come through then we back them up.”*

The Greenhouse Project in Liverpool brought four organisations together to draw up. Young people have been very engaged by one guide neighbourhood, in the development of a Community Business Plan, including

the plan for a new building, with 200 young people taking pictures of what they liked in the area to inform a creative workshop to develop plans for the redevelopment. Young people were also encouraged to volunteer to be part of a group to take ideas forward.

Another guide neighbourhood supported the development of an inter-generational community choir in a client neighbourhood. Again, this may seem like a small step, but as one older and previously isolated resident commented:

*“It’s amazed me really, because I thought about what the word ‘**community**’ is ... really ‘**people**’ [...] and it’s amazed me that all these people who’ve never met before. Some people know a few, but I didn’t know any of them ... and within six months, we’ve got this wonderful sound.”*

Forms of disability can also often lead to high levels of hidden social exclusion. Another guide neighbourhood provided mentoring and a small grant to what was originally a ‘one man band’ who used it to provide expressive arts activity sessions for severely disabled people, bringing them and their carers out, to benefit from social contact as well as self-expression. Results have often been dramatic, with professionals reassessing medication needs and the skills of the disabled people involved. To expand this impact on the quality of life of these service users, the funded client began setting up a social enterprise employing others to help him, with business advice and support from the guide neighbourhood.

### *Environmental Improvements*

A number of the guide neighbourhoods have used the advice and support given, as well as their seedcorn small grants, to help their clients to change their local physical environment in ways that raise the community’s self esteem. Visible environmental change has often been seen as a ‘quick fix’ in regeneration initiatives. However, guide neighbourhoods have used this approach not as a ‘one off’ but as part of a process of linking environmental

improvements to other policy areas, such as estate management, and community safety.

The guide neighbourhoods have been particularly effective where relatively little money is needed but the local authority is unable or unwilling to become involved. In one case a grant of £350 combined with organisational support and action planning enabled one local group to establish sustainable environmental improvements:

*“One of the client neighbourhoods has waited seven years for the space in front of their housing, the communal space, to be weeded and for the council to come and resurface that area. ... You know seven years is a long time if you’re looking out on rubbish every single day... So that particular group came down and looked at the alleyways and some of the community gardens. They asked the council whether there was funding to do that and there wasn’t ... We supported them doing a community plant-up, ... we have a pop up gazebo and everybody was invited to come down, and it was a really like rough day, it was raining, but I mean there was a lot of people that got some good photographs. And people like planted up hanging baskets, and then we had probation services, we arranged for them to come down and put the brackets up. And basically it was a nice planting up session and it just enabled us to sort of talk to some of the other neighbours. Because we’d had three ... I think three residents that were really active about you know wanting to sort of change that space, but we’d not had up till then an opportunity to talk to the other you know dozen or so people”.*

### *Community Safety*

It is difficult to demonstrate that guide neighbourhoods have enabled client groups to reduce headline crime figures within their communities. Again, however, there is evidence which indicates that progress has been made against community safety objectives.

A client used a guide neighbourhood as a model for their Community Watch, including producing leaflets using the same format, and the guide

neighbourhood found funding for mobile phones and 'junior warden' jackets. Other client neighbourhoods have expressed an interest in developing this approach as a means of engaging young people. Thus another client involved local young people in both bulb planting and community clean up schemes as a way of *"building bridges ... and saying young people are not all bad ... I'm not sure if crime has gone down, but more people are coming out [of their houses] and talking to each other. So it's a start"*. The police are now using the estate as an exemplar of what can be achieved through neighbourhood policing and community involvement.

Another client found noticeable changes in the levels of residents' feelings of community safety as a result of starting up football teams on their estate.

*"You've got to get them off the corners instead of standing there ... if you had come up here maybe a month ago the place would be saturated with beer cans, you know get the kids off the street. I'm not suggesting for a moment we can make it perfect ... but we can give them something to believe in and let them be proud of their neighbourhood, your neighbourhood. Your football team represents it."*

They have also learnt put a community watch approach into practice, working alongside community safety officers. A group of three local residents patrol the estate at night.

*"We just go around, walk around check, particularly the elderly people ... just knock at the door and check they're ok. They don't answer the door we knock at it, just knock back and we know they're ok. We do that. It's enjoyable."*

By working closely with the police, a guide neighbourhood has developed new ways of joint working which have a wider relevance to community safety and addressing serious crime:

*"We have recently had drug trading over there [names estate] whereby the information was coming in and obviously people wanted to remain*

*anonymous for possible fear of reprisals I assume, which is understandable. At the end of the day we got the job done [arrests were made]. It took a little bit longer because we had to incorporate other tactics as opposed to taking direct evidence from residents for those fears, but we worked together with the management team, we did our own surveillance and other forms of police tactics and touch wood we've certainly got very good changes out of it. It's a different way of doing things but, depending on what happens in court, we got a result. Without the experience [of working with the TMO] we would have gone about things in the usual way – and maybe not got evidence. It's slower, yes – but we got things done ... and I think they can help us think about neighbourhood policing and do it well ... because it's new and quite frightening for some officers.”*

Indeed, a common theme from across client neighbourhoods, is that focusing purely on crime may actually increase community fears and that building relationships and improving the local environment are vital starting points for enhanced community safety.

*“So there were lots of groups. But they were small and not really active and certainly not listened to. So we are now running a Neighbourhood Watch and work on Local Agenda 21 (environmental partnership). It's one group – not been easy – but there are more people active. It's no longer just negative crime things. We are looking at our local environment. How this can be better and safer. It's one group, but more active members and they (Police/Elected Members) have to sit up and take notice.”*

However, success also brings criticism and reinforces the importance of neighbourhood groups and their partners maintaining good communications across communities:

*“People round here used to complain they never saw a police officer. Now we have them on the beat and you see them regularly... so now people say they are living in a police state!” (Guide neighbourhood)*

### **Dilemmas of the transition from activism to policy implementation**

It is appropriate to return to the strand of policy analysis embodied in implementation studies, which attempts to take a bottom-up approach to implementation, focusing on the problems and pressures of frontline implementation. Like Lipsky's (1980) 'street level bureaucrat' neighbourhood based community organizations face a number of concerns and pressures which shape their response to policies. Community activists and their organizations in deprived neighbourhoods face intractable social problems for which there have been no quick solutions. Making significant impacts in the neighbourhood on issues such as poverty, unemployment, crime, ethnic tensions or drug addiction is not easy. These problems are a continuous source of socio-economic and consequently psychological stress (Kagan, 2006).

The neighbourhood organizations also experience 'policy churn', as one short term regeneration programme follows another, usually requiring developing new capacity, re-branding current work and bearing an increasing load of monitoring to keep funding. Thus these organizations, which are often reliant on only a few individuals, resolve the following dilemmas in the implementation process:

- manage resources from diverse funding sources in order to keep their organizations going,
- work within the capacities, interests and aims of the limited number of activists that can be mobilised in the local civil society,
- translate the policies and funding programmes that rain down on the neighbourhood to align them with their own aims for the neighbourhood, while exploring new ground.

***Managing multiple funding streams*** is a challenge, as the end of an initiative leads to staff redundancies, unless similar work can be funded from elsewhere. The short length of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme did, for some, mean redundancies at the end of the programme. Community activists

tended to see the short timescale as a taster for an extended follow on, in spite of getting no encouragement for this view from Government. Piecing together a number of funding sources is essential to sustaining community organizations. Furthermore, it is increasingly difficult for community organizations to attract funding without being able prove they will be able to use the money to achieve policy impact in priority policy domains.

Thus the instrumental view sometimes employed by various levels of govt of community organizations as service delivery agents finds its reciprocal form in a similarly instrumental view by the activists of Govt programmes as funding sources to maintain their own objectives where possible.

Programmes can be seen as a way of funding core business and community vision, rather than specific delivery targets to be met. An example of this from the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme is that clients were not always able clearly to distinguish between what the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme provided and what the guide neighbourhood organization did anyway prior to the programme, or even what they learnt from a leading individual activist, without any real sense of either the organization or the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme contribution. A second example was the tendency of some guide neighbourhoods themselves to muddle the distinction between impacts in the own neighbourhood and those outside in separate 'client neighbourhoods'.

Local residents in deprived areas have a different perception of both the geography and the history of their neighbourhoods than do professionals and policy makers (Diamond 2007), carrying with them a longer historical experience and a more differentiated geography. The difficulty can be in getting policy makers to appreciate the sense of past oppression and government failures, and to get activists to appreciate new opportunities in changing policy. Connected to this is the contrast between informal personal activist networks and more formal policy structures.



***The individual and organizational aims and capacities of activists do not necessarily mesh with programme aims.*** The experience and skills of the community activists are not necessarily attuned to those needed in a programme. In the Guide Neighbourhood Programme some key activists openly admitted that the more formal training and consultancy were beyond the skills and experience of local residents who were available to act as resident guides. Their strength was in presenting their own experience and inspiring others with their stories of barriers overcome. Residents' accounts were also valued for their candid discussion of failures or difficulties.

To policy makers a programme has consistent aims which require resources to fulfil them. To implementing community groups these programmes need to deliver resources within a specific context - there are budgets to be balanced, and existing aims, commitments and skills, into which the programme needs to fit. ***Fitting into Programmes or translating programmes into own organization.*** One of the original ideas for the programme was to produce home grown consultants from the neighbourhood to use their experience and take on work that was leaking funds to external professional consultants. A social enterprise model was envisaged where viable community consultancies would be grown during the programme to continue without funding afterwards. However, it proved much more difficult to achieve partly due to capacity of many resident guides (for personal health or age reasons), partly legal limits on activists as board members of key organizations, and partly to do with the low income of most potential clients (and lack of trust from bigger organizations). Even where successful during the programme, this pure social enterprise model faced a challenging time when the funding ran out. Yet Guide neighbourhoods adapted the model to find a series of pragmatic compromises in the forms of employment of resident guides.

However, The Guide Neighbourhood Programme had major strengths as Programme by providing a learning network structure for activists in guide neighbourhoods to develop personally and to build the capacity of their organizations through meeting regularly with others from outside their own neighbourhood allowing them to 'see the bigger picture' rather than only what

was happening on the doorstep. (This was widely considered to be a major benefit). Second the fact that it was a national programme with a profile, links and access to events in other programmes (e.g. Together We Can) caused some activists to begin to see the relevance of Govt policy to their own neighbourhood. That the connection between policy and practice (i.e. implementation) could be two way and have mutual benefits came as a new insight to one activist

*“I think we’ve tried harder to link in with national strategies so along with some of the resident guides we did go down to the Respect launch. You know we found out a bit more about the Respect agenda which possibly if we’d not been involved in the programme we may or may not have done really, we may have not prioritised it. We got involved with Together We Can... But I don’t think that that would have happened had we not been a guide neighbourhood”.*

## **Conclusion**

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 – the building of long-term personal relationships – rather than the delivery of more remote, one-off, problem focused consultancy services. The outcomes achieved by guide neighbourhoods have resulted from the combination of resources they have been able to offer their clients – demonstration visits, training, ongoing day-to-day advice, sometimes in-depth consultancy and participation in network events. A particularly important tool in effecting change has been the seedcorn grants, which guide neighbourhoods have been able to offer in a unique way, supported by advice and the other resources available through the Programme. The Programme also contained valuable insights into the

dilemmas faced by community activists in making the transition to policy implementation agents, as well as their creativity in developing new forms of implementation practice.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thanks are due to the Home Office and Communities and Local Government for funding the research on which this paper is based, and to Charles Woodd and Duncan Prime for their support.

### **References**

- Barrett, S (2004) Implementation Studies: time for a revival? Personal reflections on 20 years of implementation studies, *Public Administration*, 82 (2): 249-62.
- Barrett, S and Fudge, C (1981) (eds.) *Policy and Action: Essays on the implementation of public policy*, London: Methuen.
- Cantle, T (2005) *Community Cohesion: a new framework for race and diversity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Civil Renewal Unit (2005) *Together We Can: People and government, working together to make life better*, London: Home Office.
- Civil Renewal Unit (2005) *Civic Pioneers: local people, local government working together to make life better*. Home Office, London.
- Communities and Local Government (2006) *Strong and Prosperous Communities: the Local Government White Paper*, (White Paper CM 6939), London: The Stationery Office.
- Department for Education and Skills (2003) *Every Child Matters*. London: DfES.
- Diamond, J (2007) Civic organizations and local governance: learning from the experience of community networks, in Purdue, D (ed.) *Civil Societies and Social Movements: Potentials and problems*, London: Routledge / ECPR.
- Hill, M (1997) *The Policy Process in the Modern State* (third edition), Harlow: Pearson.

HM Treasury (2002) *The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery: a Cross Cutting Review*, London: HM Treasury.

Home Office (2004) *Firm Foundations: the Government's Framework for Community Capacity Building*, London: Home Office.

Huxham, C (2003) Action research as a methodology for theory development, *Policy and Politics*, 31 (2): 239-48.

Kagan, C (2006) *Making a Difference: participation and wellbeing*, Manchester: RENEW Intelligence Report.

Kingdon, J (1995) *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), New York: Harper Collins.

Lipsky, M (1980) *Street Level Bureaucracy*, New York: Russell Sage.

Mackridge, R (2006) *The Politics of Local Food: agenda setting, organizational strategies and the emergence of a dominant discourse on short food chains*, PhD Thesis, UWE.

Parsons, W (1995) *Public Policy*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Robson, C (2002) *Real World Research* (second edition), Oxford: Blackwell.

Russell, I (2005) *The Russell Commission Report: the national framework for youth action and engagement*, Norwich: Cabinet Office/HMSO.

Taylor, M, Zahno, K, Thake, S, Nock, M and Jarman, K (2002) *Exploring the Field of Residents' Consultancy* (Research Report 382), London: DfES.

**Contact Address:**

Dr Derrick Purdue  
Cities Research Centre  
Faculty of the Built Environment  
University of the West of England  
Coldharbour Lane  
Bristol BS16 1QY  
Tel: +44-117-328-3045  
Email: Derrick.Purdue@uwe.ac.uk