

# Assessing contribution of Community Empowerment Networks to communities, the VCS and public sector partners in the North East

Commissioned by North East Empowerment Partnership

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## Executive Summary

CENs in the North East have made an extraordinary contribution to the Community Engagement agenda in the North East. They work to underpin a “healthy third sector (which) is in itself a national priority outcome”<sup>1</sup>.

However despite their considerable progress it is clear that effective community engagement takes time and resources. This report documents where the North East CENs are currently at in terms of their development and highlights areas for further development. Amid a national and local review of LAAs, the end of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and ongoing consultations<sup>2</sup> and discussions<sup>3</sup> with Department of Communities and Local Government, the future of CENs nationally is uncertain. As this report evidences most CENs in the North East are under threat as their funding is not ring-fenced and individual local authorities and LSPs have varying levels of commitment to continuing their funding.

### Regional Issues

- Not all of the regional CENs have been well resourced.
- All CENs and LSPs had to be shaped to reflect their areas unique needs.
- Each CEN started from different places with regards to the capacity of organisations and communities to engage in this work. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the history and current role of the host organisation can be both a barrier and a support to the work of the CEN. This parallels with findings of recent research by the Directory of Social Change (Set 2007)<sup>4</sup> where 38% of participants responded that ‘The Local Authority dominates the LSP and controls decision-making.’
- It is clear that LSP partner agencies did not accept the VCS as an equal partner in the LSP. Much progress has been made in many areas to address this but it is still an issue that takes away from the engagement capacity of CENs and LSPs.

### Recommendations

Many of the recommendations at the end of this report can be developed and will work to address the above issues. However the current crisis facing CENs is about RESOURCES. The single main need is for independent and long term agreed minimum resources attached to a minimum service specification for the region. Alongside this there should be developed locally agreed

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<sup>1</sup> *The Third sector: The crucial role of the new performance framework*, DCLG December 2007

<sup>2</sup> *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities Statutory Guidance: Draft for Consultation* HM Government November 2007

<sup>3</sup> *Principles of representation: A framework for effective third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships*, DCLG Discussion Document, November 2007

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dsc.org.uk/charityexchange/surveyanalysis1007.htm>

priorities with additional local funding available. These can be flexible and designed to meet the local communities and LSP's profiles and needs.

### **Public sector partners**

In the current Government policy "churn" there are several factors that should be used to support CENs work engaging communities in the North East. These are interlinked with the new local performance framework.

### **LA performance indicators;**

GONE has supported all 12 LAs to adopt the performance indicator "% of people who feel able to influence decision making in their local area".

### **Overarching Government policy has the VCS taking on 4 key roles;**

- Voice and campaigning
- Strengthen communities
- Delivery and shaping local services
- Supporting local social enterprise solutions

CENs are best placed to take all these areas of work forward ensuring that the duty to involve is carried out in an effective and coherent way.

### **Duty to involve;**

The new duty on most public bodies such as LAs, Passenger Transport and Fire services to involve, consult and inform local people about what they are doing, going to do or want to do places CENs at the heart of the VCS and local community responses in this agenda. CENs can deliver this work for local communities in a co-ordinated and effective way.

### **Community contracts;**

CENs are best placed to ensure these are mutually effective agreements for both LAs and local communities. Sunderland and Gateshead are 2 of the national pilots for this work. There is, at this time, very little indication of support for Sunderland CEN. Gateshead CEN looks to have a much more positive future.

### **Equality and diversity;**

However, if this work is going to fully take account of power issues within the voluntary and community sector and wider communities, issues of equalities and diversity will need more attention. Areas that need to be addressed include improvement in the dissemination of good practice regionally and nationally and to develop much more effective monitoring and evaluation systems.

## 1. Introduction

In November 2007 VONNE hosted the tender process for the NEEP for research to assess the cumulative regional contribution of Community Empowerment Networks to communities, the VCS and public sector partners in the North East. A consortium bid lead by Regeneration Exchange in association with bassac<sup>5</sup> and independent consultant Sue Robson were awarded the tender.

## 2. Background

Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) were initiated by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit in 2001 to ensure voluntary and community sector (VCS) involvement in decision making, particularly in Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). VCS organisations applied directly to their regional Government Offices to access these funding streams to develop Community Empowerment Networks in their local area. Since 2005 funding for the CENS has been directed through LSPs via local authorities as part of Local Area Agreements (LAAs). Research conducted by Urban Forum found that, in the transition, funding to CENs has significantly decreased (December 2006). Some CENs have ceased to exist. Amid a national and local review of LAAs, the end of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and ongoing consultations<sup>6</sup> and discussions<sup>7</sup> with Department of Communities and Local Government, the future of CENs in the North East is uncertain.

There are 23 LSPs across the North East. There are 25 Local Authorities including Durham and Northumberland County Councils. In some non-NRF areas in the North East networks were set up with similar functions to CENs. Since 2001, many CENs have experienced considerable changes in their functions a number of CENS have ceased to exist.

## 3. Methodology

The researchers used mixed methods of investigation to develop pen-pictures of the CENs and mapped and compared these in order to identify similarities and differences. Case studies have been selected from the results of the mapping and comparison to reflect key differences, identify exemplars of good practice, identify key learning points, and identify gaps (Case studies are highlighted throughout the report)..

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<sup>5</sup> bassac is the national network of multi-purpose community based organisations, dedicated to tackling the causes and effects of poverty, exclusion and discrimination [www.bassac.org.uk](http://www.bassac.org.uk)

<sup>6</sup> *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities Statutory Guidance: Draft for Consultation* HM Government November 2007

<sup>7</sup> *Principles of representation: A framework for effective third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships*, DCLG Discussion Document, November 2007

The research comprised of:

- An integral and specific investigation and analysis of equality and diversity issues in relation to the networks activities and profile of membership.
- Two focus group sessions with regional Community Empowerment Network Workers will provide an overview of the CENs (one on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2008 and another within the Regional CEN workers meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> January)
- Desk research to examine performance management data<sup>8</sup>, alongside any additional independent evaluations or council/host organisation sponsored assessments of the network.
- Telephone interviews targeting one member of staff and two representatives from each network.
- Production of pen-pictures of each network, outlining the structures, membership, areas of work, management, and partners.
- Case studies to reflect the key differences in networks.
- Gap analysis to identify further activity/investigation to inform the development of NEEP action plans.
- Identifying recommendations on future roles and requirements of the networks

### 3.1 Limitations of research

The timescales for the research, i.e. during December and January, included periods of annual leave and sickness for many of the actual and potential research participants. This has limited the data and information available to the researchers e.g. the intention was to interview three people from each network in many CENs we were not able to identify a community of identity/interest member to talk to. The pen pictures are, mostly, based upon desk top research, the views of a staff member and the chair of the CEN.

As noted later in this report CENs have not been resourced enough to engage any independent external assessment of their work. All of our findings are, to a greater or lesser extent, subjective.

We have outlined gaps in engagement coverage, in VCS representation on LSP/LAs and others as they emerge.

All CENs were helpful and responsive but inevitably funding constraints and the uncertain future has impacted on their capacity to participate.

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<sup>8</sup> Based upon *Community Empowerment Networks Performance Management Framework A Framework for Assessing Progress and Development*, ODPM/ Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2004)

## 4. Regional Overview

**Government Office North East, Department of Communities  
Spokesperson; Ian Dodds**

**Performance/quality assessment** - GONE has information on its website including copies of Local Area Agreements which include information on CENs. Historical performance management information was designed to support the development of individual CENs. It was not quality assessment and is not suitable for use in this research.

GONE accepted that with 14 Neighbourhood Renewal Area developing LSPs covering very different communities, geography, existing infrastructure and targets there would be considerable differences between LSPs and CENs.

GONE did not therefore compare CENs to each other but worked regionally to share elements of good practice e.g. induction packs, a communication strategy. These were seen as operational tools and that individual CENs could choose what suited their individual needs. GONE were clear that what worked in a sparsely populated rural area such as the Wear Valley would not work in a large urban population such as Newcastle.

**Why did some CENs cease to exist?** A number of CENs did not survive and this research has been explicitly tasked to identify why this is the case. From GONE's perspective whilst there were a number of potential reasons it is not possible to identify specific causes. Some CENs shared similar problems but found ways of resolving or managing them.

One of the primary difficulties linked to the attitudes and skills of some of the proposed CEN host agencies. These were local CVS organisations and some had difficulties adapting to work with the community sector i.e. they were used to working with paid staff from larger voluntary organisations. They found it hard to adapt to working with unpaid community representatives.

Some CVS boards didn't feel it was within their remit and did not want to take the work on. In some areas these problems did not exist, in some e.g. Newcastle they managed it by splitting up the voluntary sector representation – managed by CVS and the community – managed by the CEN. In some the CEN became absorbed into the Local Authority i.e. Sedgefield.

Another difficulty was the VCS capacity to work in partnership with the LSP and Local Authority. Many local community representatives had been actively engaged in challenging Local Authority service delivery. Moving to a role where they needed to balance challenging with a willingness to work in partnership to resolve problems proved difficult for some individuals and organisations. This has also been a challenge for LSPs to manage.

GONE also acknowledges that effective partnership working and community engagement takes time. GONE played a significant role in facilitating the development of better understanding and working relationships between the CENs and LSPs before the funding was transferred to LAs.



**CENs in the North East** - In general GONE considers CENs to have worked better in the North East than in some regions. But this is an impression from meetings where other regional CENs have indicated more barriers to engaging with their LSPs than many NE CENs.

Again as an impression CENs in areas which hadn't had previous regeneration money seemed to develop partnership working quicker.

GONE consider that any sub-regional variations in approaches such as website development are more reflective of the access to IT in their areas 5 years ago.

GONE is hopeful that many CENs in the North East will continue to be funded by the LSPs. There are some very positive indicators e.g. CENs in Middlesbrough and Gateshead have been involved in the Local Area Agreements and local commissioning. They are looking forwards to carrying out specified work for the LSPs in the future.

### **CEN regional profile**

There are 11 remaining Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) of the fourteen that were initiated by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit in 2001 to ensure voluntary and community sector (VCS) involvement in decision making:

<b>Community Empowerment Network</b>	<b>Accountable body</b>
North Tyneside Community Empowerment Network	Voluntary Organisations Development Agency
Newcastle Community Empowerment Network	Newcastle Healthy Cities
Hartlepool Community Empowerment Network	Hartlepool Voluntary Development Agency
Empower Gateshead	Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council
Sunderland Community Network	Sunderland Centre for Voluntary Services
East Durham Community Trust (ECDT)	ECDT brings together the work of the former Easington CVS and East Durham Community Network
Wear Valley Community Network	2D (Two Dales)
Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency
Wansbeck	Wansbeck Council for Voluntary Service
Redcar and Cleveland	Redcar and Cleveland Voluntary Development Agency
Stockton CEN	Stockton Residents and Communities Groups Association Ltd

The 3 areas where Community Empowerment Networks initiated by Neighbourhood Renewal Unit have ceased to exist are:

- Derwentside
- South Tyneside – recently relaunched see pen picture
- Sedgefield – functions absorbed into the Local Authority

In addition to the Neighbourhood Renewal CEN's the following agencies/networks have formed in Northumberland and Durham performing similar functions:

#### Rural Networks

The following networks were identified in Northumberland and Durham as performing some similar functions to Community Empowerment Networks:

<b>Network/ Agency</b>	<b>History and functions</b>
Northumberland Community Development Network	Established in May 2002 and followed by the formation of the Northumberland Community Development Company (NCDC) in May 2003. The work of the Network is organised around four areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information exchange</li> <li>• Learning and support</li> <li>• Inclusivity</li> <li>• Collective voice</li> </ul>
The Tynedale Community Development Network	Started in 1998 to support the Community Development Strategy and comprises of over 60 representatives from community and voluntary sector organisations throughout Tynedale. It provides a support network for community development professionals working in Tynedale,
Teesdale Community Network	Aims to bring together groups, organisations and individuals to work more effectively together, have a strong collective voice and provide a representative link to the statutory bodies and public sector.
One Voice Network	Brings together and assists the county's voluntary and community organisations, helping to build support services. One Voice Network has one seat on the County Durham Local Area Agreement (formerly Local Strategic Partnership)

### **Good Practice – Information Communication Technology and Website**

Urban CENs in the Tyne and Wear sub-region tended to have their own website i.e. Newcastle, North Tyneside, Gateshead and Sunderland. Links to LSP sites were clear. Community Representatives were clearly identified giving a sense of 'openness' to the CEN.

North Tyneside's website was particularly noted as open and welcoming - Individual pen pictures of community representatives are available and all are contactable via the website.

Urban CENs in Teesside i.e. Hartlepool, Redcar & Cleveland and Middlesbrough were less clear on websites. Middlesbrough doesn't have one; Redcar & Cleveland and Hartlepool have 'flat' sites with little information. They rely on the LSPs' websites for most information about Community Representation, meetings and feedback.

BME Network Middlesbrough had a good accessible website, [www.bmenetwork.org.uk](http://www.bmenetwork.org.uk), and clearly plays an active role in the LSP as stated on their website "and has representation on to the LSP Board. It is used as a consultative mechanism by the LSP as well as individual partner agencies. It is recognised by the LSP as an important part of it's community engagement and empowerment mechanisms". This is an independent network.

Rural CENs varied i.e. Wansbeck, Wear Valley and East Durham Trust relied on either the LSPs sites to provide most of the information or had web-pages on the site of their accountable body with limited information.

### **Good Practice – Regional Community Empowerment Network**

Two of the research team attended the Regional CEN Workers Meeting in Redcar & Cleveland on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2008 hosted by Recar and Cleveland and facilitated by VONNE. Our purpose for being at the event was to consult with CEN workers who hadn't been able to attend the focus group on 11<sup>th</sup> January. It also provided an opportunity to observe the CEN workers interacting and sharing information. The meeting was an excellent example of partnership working and the team considered it appropriate to describe this as good practice case study for the regional work of the CENs.

Ian Dodds provided an update from GONE which was very informative and timely. The meeting was also an opportunity for CENs to provide information to him directly.

An interesting mix of information and update sessions from sub-regional network and individual CENs took place. This provided good, up to date snapshots of the work of the CENs. It also allowed them to exchange information about what worked and ideas about possible future funding.

Hosting the meeting circulates around the group and it is serviced by VONNE.

## 5. Individual CEN pen pictures

The information provided depended on the interests and position of the people responding. Some were much more structural in their answers than others. Ideally this would be smoothed out when getting the CENs to 'sign off' on their individual pen pictures and this has not been completed. Also we contacted 2 of the CENs at different stages of development. South Tyneside could only provide a limited amount of information.

Ian Dodds, GONE spokesperson, was very clear that he expected the CENs to be different in order to reflect the differences in their localities, resources and LSPs. This must be taken into account when comparing the CENs.

## Empower Gateshead

### Outline

Gateshead was one of the 88 areas nationally to receive Community Empowerment Fund (CEF) in 2002 and is now funded through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund until March 2008. Empower Gateshead have 5 paid staff. The staff report to a Network Steering Group. Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council (GVOC) is the accountable body for the network. The network has considered becoming an independent entity and decided that this would not be a sustainable option. Gateshead Community Network's website is distinct from GVOC, it clear and accessible and has lots of information. Dates and minutes of Network Meetings and Gateshead Strategic Partnership Meetings (GSP) are posted on the website.<sup>9</sup>

### Membership and Structures

The Network is made up of individuals (around 200), and community and voluntary sector groups (around 600) throughout the borough. Members are invited to participate in consultations, attend bi monthly meetings and have access to training. The Steering Group is the decision making body of the Network and meets monthly; it has 2 representatives on the GSP and the relevant themed partnerships of the GSP. There are themed Network focus groups meetings, the format of these may change in 2008 as the structure of GSP is changing to fall in line with the four main Blocks of the Local Area Agreements. The Network will continue to have places on the new LAA Blocks. Gateshead Council have developed an Area Forum based structure; Gateshead Community Network have a representative on each of the 5 Area Forums. In addition to its GSP work, Empower Gateshead on behalf of the Network has taken on a transport consultation involving NEXUS, and a number of locally based consultations on behalf of Gateshead Fire Service, Northumbria Police and the PCT.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.networkgateshead.org.uk/>.

## Equality and Diversity

There are 12 members of the Steering group (named on the website), representatives of community organisations (4) a range of voluntary organisations (5) and individuals (2), and one representative of a Black and Minority Ethnic organisation. In terms of wider representation it was stated that BME representation is a 'real and genuine problem' and something that the network has 'tried really hard' to develop. There has been a recent success in attracting a representative from the Jewish community.

The network have good relationships with the Council's Youth Service and have developed work with School Council's and the Youth Council to deliver a children and young people's conference in 2007, attracting an age range from 4 – 17 years. Equality and Diversity is offered to Network members via GVOC's Capacity Building Programme.

### Good practice – Empower Gateshead

During 2007, Gateshead Community Network worked jointly with the Local Authority in developing a Community Development Framework for Gateshead. This involves network members being proactive in two working groups, one to write a Borough-wide community development strategy and the other looking at training support, good practice, tools and methods for community development. Other areas of good practice identified by staff are:

- Independent, neutral critical friend of the GSP and statutory agencies. Ensure that local people's views are presented, by local people, to the relevant decision making body/group
- Embedding the Network into the decision making processes
- Proactive in promoting involvement, engagement and capacity building across all sectors.
- Recognised as enhancing and encouraging partnership and are seen as fundamental part of the LAA

The Network also operates a small grants fund of £25 to £1,500 that is focused upon supporting small community groups.

## Performance Management

Although not a formal requirement of the GSP, the GCN Steering Group monitor the work of the Network and Empower staff, plan the work programme and the direction of the Network. Empower staff report to the Steering Group, who in turn submit written reports to GSP. *HelmePark* conducted an external evaluation of the Network and Empower Gateshead between January and March 2007.

## Principals of representation assessment

Eleven members of the steering group responded to the survey based upon the *Principles of Representation* and the results are in the following table:

Principle	Score	Assessment
Accountability	4.3	Good
Equality	4.4	Good
Leadership	4.4	Good
Purpose	4.4	Good
Sustainability	4	Good
Openness	4.2	Good
Values	4.2	Good

Overall the assessment is good, staffing levels are an advantage and work around maintaining the input of members needs to be sustained. No areas of weakness were identified in the staff's assessment of the Network.

### Other comments

- Staff support the steering group to run the network effectively
- The community is always paramount, need to ensure that there is good input from members
- Managing to maintain focus while GSP structure in transition
- Has good relationship with statutory sector and maintains a critical distance from the Local Authority

## North Tyneside Community Empowerment Network

### Outline

This CEN has a good, accessible site at [www.ntconnect.org.uk](http://www.ntconnect.org.uk) which provides lost of information and encouragement to get involved. There is feedback information on the LSP meetings available on the website and in regular newsletters. The CEN's website has been noted as a good practice model elsewhere in this report. There are 3 staff, 1 is part-time.

### Membership and Structures

Simple and easy to understand organisational diagrams are available. Pen pictures of community representatives are available and they can be contacted direct. They have a mailing list of about 120 members and have access to their host agency's, VODA, list of about 600 members. They have 13 representatives on the LSP.

There is feedback on LSP work available from the network plus links to LSP site which publishes the date of partnership meetings and copies of minutes.

LSP site has information on the role of network, funding and performance management.

## Equality and Diversity

Overall the response is a positive one and the CEN considers itself to be working well and strong in openly working to engage communities. This fits well with the overall perception of their work from the desk based research. The CEN has active Equality and Diversity policies and monitors the ethnicity of it's staff, board and Community Representatives. It is reflective of the community it serves.

### Good practice – North Tyneside CEN

It works hard on supporting diversity within it's community e.g. hosted multi-cultural Christmas Celebration with multi-cultural performers which was very positively received. This resulted in contact from a group of Bangladeshi women who wanted to be involved in the future and with whom they are planning further work.

## Performance Management

The CEN has continued to use the Performance Management Framework established by GONE. This is used by the LSP, Representatives and the CEN board. It is not in a format that would be useful for this research as contains a high proportion of anecdotal information.

They took part in a CapacityBuilders funded evaluation carried out by Sustainable Cities in 2006 and this is available.

The CEN is hosted by Voluntary Organisation Development Agency – VODA which has PQASSO level 3 and an externally accredited NAVCA Quality Assurance standard.

## Principals of representation assessment

A member of staff from the CEN responded to the survey based upon the *Principles of Representation*. The results are as follows:

Principles	Score	Assessment
Accountability	3.6	Good
Equality	4.5	Good to excellent
Leadership	4	Satisfactory
Purpose	4	Good
Sustainability	3	Satisfactory
Openness	4	Good
Values	4	Good



The CEN considers its strengths lie in;

1. Effective and comprehensive dissemination of information – feedback from members indicates this is much appreciated.
2. Engaging new and emergent groups – often began in response to a local issue and when they want to continue after the issues resolved the CEN good at getting them into local, infrastructure support services.

Much of the CEN resources are concentrated in the above 2 areas. As a result it is somewhat weaker at direct support to representatives and board member to improve their skills. They do have an induction process but follow up developmental support is not as developed as they would like.

There is ongoing concern about the sustainability of the network in terms of funding. Whilst it is likely that some core funding will be available it will not support the current level of activities.

## Sunderland Community Network

### Outline

Newly re-formed in 2007, Sunderland Community Network (SCN) provides a focused and specific role as required by the government, to make sure that local people are involved in putting forward ideas and suggestions for the development and delivery of local planning and services. The structure of the Network makes sure that local community and voluntary sectors are part of the decision making process. The Network is committed to:

- Supporting its members and delegates
- Being open and transparent in all aspects of the running of the Network
- A members meeting every two months
- A regularly updated website
- Provision of regular Network Bulletins
- A quarterly newsletter
- Providing opportunities for debate and information on relevant partnership issues

The Network has its own website

<http://www.sunderlandcommunitynetwork.org.uk> with very easy to find information, although some of the titles e.g. in the loop don't make it immediately obvious what is behind them.



## Membership and Structures

There are 36 delegates' places for the Network who are decided by the members each year and can hold their position for a maximum of 3 years. The majority of these places are filled and some are over subscribed resulting in places being competed for. The roles and responsibilities of a delegate are: to represent SCN Members at the Sunderland Partnership meetings raising the issues and concerns prioritised by the wider network members. SCN Delegates also agree to their picture, information and contact details being put on the SCN website. A steering group maintains an overview and keeps the delivery plan under review. Some delegates sit on more than one group, though these are in the minority. The groups are: Steering group, Sunderland Partnership, Sunderland Management Group, Community Development Strategy Group, Creating a Prosperous City, Improving Health and Social Care, Reducing Crime and Fear of Crime, Creating Inclusive Communities, Expanding Cultural Opportunities, Raising Standards and Improving Access and Participation in Learning, Developing an Attractive and Accessible City, and Improving the Quality and Choice and Range of Housing. There are three paid workers: administrator, Development Officer, and Network Co-ordinator. There are a wide range of groups with membership in the Network and these are listed in SCN directory of members on the website. There are positions for 3 paid members of staff but currently only 1 is in post.

## Equality and Diversity

An equalities and diversity policy has been developed and is in the process of being agreed. SCN is also developing a toolkit for equality and diversity. SCN promotes and encourages equality and diversity at every opportunity by making meetings and events accessible. They *'have equality and diversity as a way of working, not just a tick box exercise.'* The invitations to meetings are broad and reasonably reflect the make up of Sunderland. *'Staff are pro-active in trying to get different sectors involved'* but the Network acknowledges that there are areas that are still to be engaged with. Training around Equality and Diversity is offered to members of the Network.

### **Good practice – Sunderland Community Network**

SCN ensures participation and informs its members with pre-meetings to brief delegates before the meetings with the LSP. There is representation by a SCN delegate at every level of the LSP and they are supported *'enough to enable them to provide a real contribution'*. SCN has provided a framework for the VCS to feed into the LSP process and the off-shoots of the LSP.

Recognition of areas for improvement is strength of the SCN and some of the areas for improvement are noted as: a need to engage with *'smaller voluntary projects (e.g. neighbourhood level) more and give them the chance to provide input to the process'*, communication with external partners is not done as well as it could be, *'especially LSP partners'*.

A real difficulty at present is that SCN are *'unable to build on current situation due to uncertainty of funding. Don't want to promote service then not be there as that has happened before and damaged relations in Sunderland community sector'*.

## Performance management

There is a delivery plan with outcomes but no formal PMS. The delivery plan is a standing item of the steering group and there is a half-yearly meeting to review the plan. The Local Authority gets quarterly reports. SCN are currently developing a formal PMS of their own.

## Principles of representation

The response to the survey based upon the *Principles of Representation* and the results are in the following table:

Principle	Score	Assessment
Accountability	3.4	Satisfactory
Equality	4.25	Good
Leadership	3.25	Satisfactory
Purpose	3.8	Satisfactory
Sustainability	3.2	Satisfactory
Openness	3.4	Satisfactory
Values	4	Good

Overall the assessment is satisfactory. Areas of weakness are identified as:

- Being hosted by the CVS
- The new structure not being properly embedded or robust enough to withstand external political machinations.

## Newcastle Community Empowerment Network

### Outline

Newcastle Community Empowerment Network (NCEN) is a Government initiative currently funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. The Network aims to support the community sector's participation in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), in Newcastle (the Newcastle Partnership). The Network supports the Community Voices (CVs) (community representatives) to discuss local issues and solutions, provides training to the Community Network and encourages information dissemination between the communities and networks through newsletters, bulletin, events and the website.

The Networks website has a clear layout, is accessible and contains information relating to networks involved, events, the partnership board and the delivery partners, steering group meetings and minutes, contact details for the five paid workers, details of the Community Voices and an archive of their newsletter.

### Membership and structure

The Network is a number of networks in Newcastle, brought together to form the Community Network. Networks involved include, BECON, Better Days, East End Community Development Alliance, Elders Council, Newcastle

Disability Forum, Newcastle Tenants Foundations, Outer West area Forum, Regional Refugee Forum North East, Regen Forum and West End Community Development Consortium.

10 CVs sit on the 4 partnership boards (Strategic Board, Delivery Board, Scrutiny Panel, Innovation Group), 14 on the 5 delivery partnerships (Safe Newcastle, Economy, Work, Skills and Learning, Children and Young People, Health, Wellbeing and Sport, Environment & Housing) and 3 on the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Group. Some CVs do sit on more than one partnership board or delivery partnership.

### **Equality and Diversity**

All policies relating to Equality and Diversity are under the Healthy Cities Project. The Network aims to have representatives of various minority groups sit on each Board group. The Network has links with BME groups and the wider community through the Networks that are involved (as above).

The Network work to the National Occupational Standards in all areas of work (all members are signed up to these).

There are 12 steering group members; this includes representatives from the various Networks mentioned above.

### **Good Practice – Newcastle CEN**

Areas the respondents feel the Network work strongly with, include:

- Engaging with BME communities/faith groups.
- Engaging with a wide network of community groups.
- Supporting other established networks to get involved.
- Developing relationships with other officers across the sectors.
- Setting up communications systems to engage other people.

Areas the Network would like to build on include:

- Mentoring programme – working as a cohesive team
- Publicising activities of the Network to a wider audience
- Ensuring better monitoring, evaluation and reviewing.
- Stronger links with CVS

### **Performance Management**

A Quarterly Monitoring review (QMR) is undertaken four times a year. This information is sent to the Newcastle Partnership and the Neighbourhood Renewal Sub-Group.

An evaluation was carried out by a Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor two years ago.

## Principles of representation assessment

One of the Community Network Development Officers responded to the *Principles of Representation* questionnaire, the response for this is below:

Principle	Score	Assessment
Accountability	3.6	Good
Equality	4.8	Excellent
Leadership	3.9	Good
Purpose	4.1	Good
Sustainability	3.6	Good
Openness	3.7	Good
Values	5	Excellent

### Comments

- CEN Takes lead on equality
- CVS not treated as equal partners on LSP
- All members of CEN signed up to National Occupational Standards for Community Development

Overall the assessment is good; no areas of weakness were identified in the staff's assessment of the Network.

## South Tyneside Community Network

### Outline

This CEN has just recently been relaunched and is hosted by South Tyneside CVS. There is no website for the CEN but the host organisation has one and provides links to the LSP website which has lots of information.

The new worker informs us:

“There is a massive amount of community activity happening across South Tyneside.

With the advice, support and guidance of the community and voluntary sector and partners, we are working to join all that activity up into a Community Network for South Tyneside.

Many individuals and community groups have given their views on what they would want a Community Network to do and look like and we have taken all of that on board.

The Community Network is for groups and individuals and it will provide opportunities for consultation and communication. It will also give groups and individuals the opportunity to find out about each other, share ideas, publicise activities and, if they wish, work on things together.

If you want to know more about the Community Network and the work already been done, or if you want to express your views please contact Hugh Mc Shane, the acting Community Network Manager on 456 9551 Or at [hughmcshane@btconnect.com](mailto:hughmcshane@btconnect.com)”

## **Draft Middlesbrough Community Empowerment Network**

### **Outline**

Hosted by Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA) and based in the centre of Middlesbrough. The CEN and MVDA don't have a website although they are planning to develop one. It has 3 paid staff.

Some feedback explained that the CEN had experienced some barriers to development in the past but that they had dealt with these and had made significant progress in the last 12 to 18 months.

### **Membership and Structures**

LSP publishes performance information and copy of CEN constitution. There is a list of 39 community representatives, many cover more than 1 area and include paid workers. Papers for LSP meetings are available on line 10 days before each meeting. The CEN has up to 12 places on the Partnership board and 7 on the Executive.

CEN currently works with over 400 groups in the area and is planning to develop this further.

### **Equality and Diversity**

The BME sub network has a good, easy to access site at [bmenetwork.org.uk](http://bmenetwork.org.uk). This also has a statement on representation and noted Home Office model of good practice – this relates to work on hate crime. Other sub networks include [middlebroughfaiths.org.uk](http://middlebroughfaiths.org.uk) and a Lesbian and Bisexual Women site via LSP's site.

Mixed response to the telephone surveys regarding the CEN reflecting local communities especially with regard to involving young people and black and minority ethnic communities. It was considered that the CEN doesn't feedback as openly as it should and that they acted as gatekeepers for resources.

It was felt that the development of a CEN website could help improve access to information for different communities.

## Good practice – Middlesbrough Community Network

The LSP website also has copy of Protocol between Middlesbrough Partnership and Middlesbrough Community Network. This sets out the vision for community involvement and roles and responsibilities.

CEN considers it has made good progress in developing its relationship with the LSP and partner agencies. It also has had success in bringing together the voluntary and community sector in order to be a strong voice in the LSP.

### Performance Management

They have recently completed some work on partnership working with the LSP. This involved some reflection on their performance. They are also considering an evaluation exercise involving a range of partners.

Current indications from Middlesbrough LSP are that they intend to continue to support the CEN.

### Principals of representation assessment

A member of staff from the CEN responded to the survey based upon the *Principles of Representation*. The results are as follows:

Principles	Score	Assessment
Accountability	3.6	Satisfactory to good
Equality	3.9	Good
Leadership	3.75	Good
Purpose	3.4	Satisfactory to good
Sustainability	3.7	Good
Openness	4	Good
Values	4	Good

This is a draft pen picture as the CEN was not able to agree the final content.

## Draft Redcar and Cleveland Community Empowerment Network

### Outline

The CEN has a website but there is very little structural or membership information on this. [www.rccn.org.uk](http://www.rccn.org.uk) The information on the website is very flat but links to other information and newsletters. There is more information on host organisation site at [www.rcvda.org.uk](http://www.rcvda.org.uk) Redcar and Cleveland Voluntary Development Agency and the LSP.

Access to information on the current work of the partnership and CEN seems to be focused more via the host agency i.e. RCVDA than the CEN. The CEN

considers it's marketing and promotion of itself and its work to be an area of weakness.

### **Membership and Structures**

There are 3 members of staff. They host regular regional meeting for community representatives and partner agencies to attend. These provide a regular exchange of information and are publicised in advance.

### **Equality and Diversity**

There is very little available information on this. Diversity issues are referred to in the mission statement and the host organisation has the standard equal opportunities policies.

The area itself has very few black and minority ethnic communities. There has been very little asylum seeker accommodation in the area. The CEN has been involved with a number of projects for bme groups but few have lasted any length of time. They are actively engaged in developing work around gender equality duty with partner agencies.

In general the CEN accepts that they need to do more in this area but because the communities of interest are very small and they have competing demands for resources they haven't been in a position to pick this up.

The CEN does consider it reflects the local community and is planning more work to develop representation from grass roots community activists. This is part of the capacity building strategy recently agreed with the LSP.

### **Good practice – Redcar Community Network**

There is a 'Statement of Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement' setting out some background and basic principals. This is also a Community Engagement Capacity Building Plan. Work is ongoing on developing the capacity of local communities to engage both on a geographical and a community of interest basis.

The CEN considers that its strengths lie in the engagement of small and medium sized community groups. It is planning future work to develop the capacity of local people to participate in LSPs.

### **Performance Management**

LSP site has some performance information via Performance Improvement Group with named contacts from LSP and Community Network.

The CEN has recently commissioned a consultant to some work looking at the sustainability of the CEN. This report is for internal use only.



Lack of resources and some attitudinal responses from both the VCS and partner agencies have provided barriers for the development of the CEN. But they are working on addressing these via the capacity building work.

### **Principals of representation assessment**

A member of staff from the CEN responded to the survey based upon the *Principles of Representation*. The results are as follows:

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
Accountability	3	Satisfactory
Equality	2.5	Moderate to satisfactory
Leadership	2.5	Moderate to satisfactory
Purpose	3	Satisfactory
Sustainability	2.25	Moderate to satisfactory
Openness	3.33	Satisfactory to good
Values	0	

The above assessment is said to be affected by a number of factors:

Expending resources on developing issues around equality has to be balanced against the identified need and resources. Leadership CEN identified difficulties with balancing needs minority groups and tackling difficult issues. Purpose CEN felt weaker in responding to new and emerging groups. Overall the CEN acknowledged weak areas many of which will begin to be addressed in the capacity building work.

This is a draft pen picture as the CEN was not able to agree the final content.

## **Draft Hartlepool Community Network**

### **Outline**

Hartlepool was one of the 88 areas nationally to receive Community Empowerment Fund (CEF) in 2002. Hartlepool Community Network is part of Hartlepool Voluntary Development Agency (HVDA), which is a registered charity (No - 1098248) and a company limited by guarantee (04682579) so is it's own accountable body.

HVDA can also act as accountable body for other smaller groups that find difficulty in accepting grants and administers several funding streams itself, to which Community and Voluntary Groups in Hartlepool can apply. A compact between itself and Hartlepool Borough Council.

There is no website for the Community Network itself and information is not easy to find when doing a Google search. The only route in appears to be



through the HVDA website ([www.hvda.org.uk](http://www.hvda.org.uk)) clicking on 'Our Work' and then selecting the Community Network, so would be difficult to find if you did not know exactly where to look.

### **Membership and Structures**

There is a staff team of 2 Community Network Officers supported by a Community Network Support Officer, all of whom are managed by the HVDA Manager.

Interviews indicate that the Network is well represented, both in terms of Hartlepool geographically and in terms of groups represented and appears to reflect the make of the town well.

Events and meetings for the Hartlepool VCS are organised as and when required by the Community Network and other HVDA staff. These events aim to promote collaboration and awareness of the activities of VCS groups and seek to secure the involvement of voluntary organisations and community groups as equal partners in local decision-making processes.

### **Equality and Diversity**

Although there is no formal Equality and Diversity policy, HVDA practice this as standard. Members also have access to the Local Authority's Equality and Diversity Officer, who attends meetings and runs training sessions.

#### **Good practice – Hartlepool CEN**

HVDA pro-actively supports VCS representation on public sector meetings, like the LSP and associated theme partnerships.

Pre-meetings are held with resident and theme partnership representatives prior to the Hartlepool Partnership meetings.

It is also very good at providing information to the people that need it in the community, and ensuring that communication is fed back from the community.

### **Performance Management**

HVDA comply with the regional CEN Performance Management Framework through Government Office North East.

It also performs a self-assessment against Hartlepool LAA's Strengthening Communities targets.

Members are involved via monthly reports on activities at Board level.

### **Principals of representation assessment**

A member of staff from the CEN responded to the survey based upon the *Principles of Representation*. The results are as follows:

Principle	Score	Assessment
Accountability	3.6	Satisfactory
Equality	5	Excellent
Leadership	3.75	Satisfactory
Purpose	4.34	Good
Sustainability	4.2	Good
Openness	4.34	Good
Values	4	Good

The overall assessment is good.

This is a draft pen picture as the CEN was not able to agree the final content.

## Draft Stockton Community Network

### Outline

Stockton Community Network was established in 2001 and the accountable body was originally Stockton Voluntary Development Agency. At this time, Stockton Residents and Community Groups Association (SRCGA) were the accountable body for the small grants and when the funding changed to become Single Community Programme SRCGA became the accountable body for the whole programme. Initially Stockton Community Network had 11 staff, it is now down to 3 and the staff also do development of community groups such as funding advice and developing constitutions etc and have recently developed the Stockton Compact. The network is currently funded by £30K NRF and £65 from Safer and Greener Communities. SRCGA have invested reserves to keep the network going this year and its funding from April 2008 is at present not clear, although a decision is imminent from Stockton Renaissance (the LSP). SRCGA are applying for 'Reaching Communities' (Big Lottery) to sustain and develop the network. The worker for Stockton BME network is seconded to SRCGA and they currently receive £30K funding from NRF.

### Membership and Structures

There are 402 voluntary and community groups on the mailing list of the network and around 40 of these attend bi-monthly meetings. The BME network meets separately and has not been 'introduced' to the wider network, although there are plans to 'integrate' the two networks in the future.

Stockton Renaissance has a Board, 4 area partnerships and 6 thematic groups. All of the area partnerships have network representatives on them apart from one which is in the affluent part of Stockton and it is difficult to get representatives. Across the three area partnerships where there is representation there are a total of 40 representatives. On the Board of Stockton Renaissance there are 4 community sector representatives (from

locally based groups) and 2 voluntary sector representatives (from issues based groups). The thematic groups have their own channels for VCS representation and the network are challenging this.

There is a 'strict' nomination process for representatives. VCS agencies have to nominate representatives and this must be minuted. This has not always been the case and self-nomination occurred in the past. Feedback and reporting were not good. The cycle of nomination is different for each of the LSP group, some for a year and some for two, some have six reps and half stand down.

## **Equality and Diversity**

It was approved (by the LSP) last year that the BME Network should have one place on each of the area partnerships and one on the Board, although this is not the case with the thematics where there are none. There are also 5 places on each of the area partnerships for 'hard to reach groups' (e.g. young people, older people etc.) as the Board decided it was not fair to only have specific places for BME representation.

A youth network is being piloted in the Billingham in partnership with the area partnership board, youth groups and schools. This is in the early stages and if it was successful it will be rolled out. Stockton Council does have a youth empowerment strategy/ team but it tends to be 'good kids' who participate and the pilot is trying to address by being more inclusive.

There is no monitoring or equal opportunities with the network or representation.

This is a draft pen picture as the CEN was not able to agree the final content.

## **East Durham Community Development Trust**

### **Outline**

Easington Council for Voluntary Services and East Durham Community Network joined together in February 2007 to form the East Durham Community Development Trust. The Trust provides the services which the CVS and Community Network formerly did, plus a range of new services. The 'CEN type work' was previously funded by NRF and is now a part of the LSPs Community Resource Fund Action Plan along with other services the Trust provides. The trust is soon to move into a new building with managed work space which will contribute to its sustainability. There is minimal information on the East Durham Trust website about community representation on the LSP <http://www.eastdurhamtrust.org.uk>

### **Membership and Structures**

The Trust has a membership of 170 VCS groups and around 50 of these are regularly represented at monthly meetings, which include feedback and discussion groups. The Trust provides representation on the LSP and the protocols for representation have come through the Trust. There are six theme/ implementation groups with two representatives in each, four on the executive group and three the five strategic funding group. Some of the LSP theme groups have their own executive; there are six community representatives on the executive. There are a total of 30 representatives to the LSP. The Trust also provides representation on other bodies such as the Community Sports Network the Primary Care Trust and the local authority.

## **Equality and Diversity**

The Trust has Equal Opportunities Policy which mainly covers staffing and general comments about the ethos of the Trust. There are over a 100 groups in the membership of the Trust, with good geographical representation which is monitored. The Trust membership includes Black minority ethnic representatives. A 'Bangladeshi and overseas ladies organisation' is on the Board of the Trust. The Trust membership includes other minorities e.g. disability groups. Elections are currently ongoing are there is confidence that diversity of the Trust membership will be well reflected in representation on the LSP, although this is currently not monitored.

### **Good practice – East Durham Community Development Trust**

East Durham Trust aims to ensure that community voices are heard on all relevant statutory groups and partnerships across the District. Government Office North East has commended the LSP on its community involvement and the feedback mechanisms (Annual Review 2007). A representative of the Trust said that the trust are good at reflecting what is 'happening on the streets,' although one difficulty is getting representatives to think about what is best for the whole area rather than their own locality.

East Durham Trust considers the provision of other services to voluntary and community groups to be an advantage in terms of encouraging people to get involved in representation. As one representative said, there is a lot of work involved in LSP representation and a lot of paper-work; it is therefore very difficult to get volunteers who are prepared to make the commitment.

## **Performance Management**

There is a 'service level agreement' for community representation as part of the Community Resource Action Plan and the Trust is performance managed against this. In 2008/09 the Trust will be reviewing its management systems<sup>10</sup>. A comprehensive independent research project has recently been commissioned by the Trust and this will include looking at the gaps in the trust membership, what is on offer, who is taking it up and why.

<sup>10</sup> Using a system such as PQASSO, a practical quality assurance system for small organisations, or for projects within larger organisations <http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/>

## Principals of representation assessment

Two members of staff from the East Durham Trust responded to the survey and the combined scores are as follows:

Principles	Score	Assessment
Accountability	3.1	Satisfactory
Equality	3.2	Satisfactory
Leadership	3.2	Satisfactory
Purpose	3.4	Satisfactory
Sustainability	3.4	Satisfactory
Openness	3.7	Satisfactory to good
Values	4	Good

The above assessment is said to be affected by the uncertainties faced by the imminent transition into a Single Unitary Authority and issues associated with Local Area Agreements. It was further stated that there needs to be an invigorated impetus towards honing the leadership skills of those involved in representation; the role of the community network type work within the Trust to be more clearly defined; the process of selecting representatives to be reviewed; and communication channels strengthened.

### Other comments

- More development needed with information flow between reps and members
- Ethnic, disability and themed groups included
- Wide range of capability overall empowerment of individuals high
- Sense of purpose established but requires more work due to infancy of Trust
- Open and transparent election process and well resourced by staff
- CEN type work integral to the work of the trust and its values

## Wear Valley Community Network

### Outline

2D acts as the lead body for the Community Network and its funding and employs support staff. A service level agreement with the LSP, sets out the duties and responsibilities of each party, and is agreed annually. A webpage within 2D website provides limited information on WVCN with <http://www.2d.org.uk/> and it is currently developing its own website. WVCH is currently funded by NRF until March 2008 and negotiations are in progress through the LAA at County level regarding further funding.

## Membership and Structures

The Community Network Management Group comprises up to 42 members selected annually by the member organisations. There are nine representatives to the LSP and they are organised by 2 in each geographical area (Weardale; Crook, Willington, Tow Law & Hill Top Villages and Bishop Auckland and District). There are no individual members, though individuals are welcome to attend. The core representatives are from the 12 Community Partnerships, plus a number of Community and Residents' Association and group. Reporting back of information is said to '*vary from excellent to those where it happens only when there is an issue.*' WVCN has organised annual half day community conferences since 2003 attracting nearly 200 people, which was the main community consultation for the District's Community Plan. The format changed in 2006 to an Information Fayre, with displays by local community and voluntary organisations and free services available to people and groups in Wear Valley (attracting upwards of 350 people). In 2007 this became a Community Fayre with a joint theme of displaying groups and services. Attendance rose to around 500 people, 50% or more were under the age of 30.

## Equality and Diversity

WVCN is covered by the equal opportunities and diversity policy of 2D which has guidelines on the following; service provision, recruitment and selection, terms and condition and monitoring. In practice, there is a 'semi independent but very closely linked' participation worker for young people (also employed by 2D). Faith representation is mainly Christian but an interfaith group centred on Bishop Auckland is involved in WVCN. One view is that 'there is no such thing as a BME community or any network in Wear Valley.' WDCN has contact with a Sikh cultural society based in Willington and has good contact with the main 'Gypsies' and Travellers site in the District and this work links with that of the Children and Young People's Participation worker. There is a growing Eastern European population in the area (over 600) and although there is no contact as yet, WVCN/ 2D are planning to conduct a preliminary survey in conjunction with the District Council. Blind Life (County Durham) is an active member of WVCN.

### Good practice – Wear Valley Community Network

The following were also cited as areas of good practice:

- The joint work with the children and young people's participation worker (funded by the Children's Trust) and this linking together community groups, ensuring children and young people have a voice and strengthening the relationship between young people and adult.
- Joint outreach work with what were defined to us as 'Gypsy' and traveller communities.
- Coordinating public information/campaigns and at consultations and public events. e.g. a Climate Change event with the LSPs' Environment Thematic Group and a survey by the Hilltop Villages Partnership on energy developments: an open cast mine and wind turbines.

- Representation and influence on the Local Strategic Partnership

However, there is a lot concern about the impact upon good practice that has developed at District level of the transition to a unitary authority and the County level Local Area Agreement. Another area of concern mentioned is making contact with the ‘seriously rural’ communities higher up the valley and with the small BME population in the area (less than 1%).

## Performance Management

WVCN carry out a self assessment process and have an action plan based upon the Neighbourhood Renewal Performance management criteria. The Community Network Co-ordinator is responsible for the implementation of the annual action plan under the direction of the Chief Officer of 2D. The process was said to be more robust, critical and meaningful under the new arrangements for CENs (i.e. accountability to the LSP itself).

## Principles of representation assessment

One member of staff from the Wear Valley Community Network responded to the survey and the scores are as follows:

Principles	Score	Assessment
Accountability	3.8	Satisfactory to good
Equality	3.5	Satisfactory to good
Leadership	3.8	Satisfactory to good
Purpose	3.8	Satisfactory to good
Sustainability	4	Good
Openness	4	Good
Values	5	Excellent

## Comments

- Core representatives are from community partnership and some have better reporting back mechanisms than others
- Attempts to engage with ethnic minority and faith groups largely failed. Currently engaging central European migrants and good engagement with ‘gypsies and travellers.
- There is a core of 12-15 committed members, mostly good roles or have become so.
- Strengths and weaknesses relate to strong local base in community partnerships. Action plan annually agreed and periodically reviewed
- Real problem with future funding complicated by move to unitary authority
- Core representatives selected by their group or partnership
- Network is semi-independent with its own management and review group, budgets and small grants fund.



## Teesdale Community Network

There is a webpage within 2D website dedicated to Teesdale Community Network <http://www.2d.org.uk/> The Community Network is an extension of the work that 2D undertakes as a CVS and it aims to bring together groups, organisations and individuals to work more effectively together, have a strong collective voice and provide a representative link to the statutory bodies and public sector. The Network continues to have representation through individuals at the Local Strategic Partnership meetings. The webpage states that Teesdale Community Network has:

- *Has a network steering group*
- *Place on the Local Strategic Partnership Board and its thematic groups (e.g. health, housing, community safety, fire service etc.)*
- *Small working group on particular issues*
- *Can take concerns to the Network to let help you find solutions, which will improve services and the quality of life in Teesdale*

The webpage also states:

*From April 2007 a Dales Rural Pathfinder bid will allow DRCC and extended parish planning and 2D to establish fit for purpose community engagement that can be deliberated by the LSP partners. Work is continuing to develop and promote the information and issues raised in the Parish Plans. The Parish Councils have been encouraged to raise awareness of the Parish Planning and opportunities by either attending meetings/ events or to put up displays at their village fayres. Working with 2D, The Teesdale Partnership has been busy trying to push the two way communication between the local communities and the Local Strategic Partnership, through the Parish Councils.*

## Durham One Voice Network

Durham One Voice Network brings together and assists the county's voluntary and community organisations, helping to build support services, *'ensuring an equal working relationship with local government and other statutory bodies and helping voluntary and community groups work together to plan community actions for the future.'*

One Voice Network has one seat on the County Durham Local Area Agreement (formerly Local Strategic Partnership)

<http://www.onevoice.co.uk/>



## Draft Wansbeck Community Empowerment Network

### Outline

Most organisations appear to share information via [www.wansbeckonline.com](http://www.wansbeckonline.com) which is a local government hosted portal. The host agency Wansbeck CVS also has some at [www.wansbeckcvs.org.uk](http://www.wansbeckcvs.org.uk) It can be hard to identify what belongs to the CEN as there is lots of information especially on events and meetings but identifying a CEN or a partnership meeting is difficult. LSP site has information too. Compact is available and sets out some useful information on inclusivity.

The CEN considers clear communication channels and skills to be key to developing effective working relationships.

### Membership and Structures

There are 100 members of the CEN. There are 22 community representatives involved in the LSP but many have more than 1 role and many are paid staff. Information about LSP meetings and feedback from them wasn't clear. There was some performance information about the LSP.

### Equality and Diversity

They have policies and procedures in-house. There are relatively small numbers of black and minority ethnic community members so difficult to have many formal members. They have actively recruited Vice Chair from bme community to facilitate communication.

The CEN to reflect the local community well. All staff are actively committed to promoting equality and diversity.

### Good practice – Wansbeck CEN

The CEN considers clear communication channels and skills to be key to developing effective working relationships. The following areas of work are going well because of this focus.

Supporting community representative to be able to interact with the LSP in a meaningful and effective way is one of their strengths. This is done by 1 to 1 support but also by developing and providing training as needs identified by staff and community members.

The CEN considers their relationship with the LSP to be strong and effective. They have the space to be critical and reflective within their partnership. But this is done in a positive way in order to address problems.

### Performance Management

There was some performance information about the LSP. The CEN has a performance management framework linked to the LSP, Wansbeck Initiative, and they relate to NRF objectives. This is internal and is reported to the LSP and Local Authority.

The CEN considers that development of grass roots representatives are a weakness and it stems from limited resources. Groups have to be performing at a certain level before they can work effectively with them.

### Principals of representation assessment

A member of staff from the CEN responded to the survey based upon the *Principles of Representation*. The results are as follows:

Principles	Score	Assessment
Accountability	2.8	Moderate to satisfactory
Equality	3.75	Satisfactory to good
Leadership	2.87	Moderate to satisfactory
Purpose	3	Satisfactory
Sustainability	2.8	Moderate to satisfactory
Openness	3.7	Satisfactory to good
Values	3	Satisfactory

## Tynedale Community Development Network

Tynedale Community Development Network<sup>11</sup> (TCDN) is a support network for community development professionals working in the area. TCDN is not about communities as such: it is primarily about using community development as a tool within the voluntary community sector and statutory sector and sharing good practice across the district. It is a partnership of agencies who use community development processes and methods and of 'empowering type' organisations.

Most of the areas in the District are covered by the network/ partnership apart from Eastern Tynedale, although one individual (Adrian Hinchcliffe) is active in bringing community groups and organisations together across the ten parishes as an when a need arises, for example, a recent consultation about the regional transport plan. There are active community partnerships in Hexham, Haltwhistle, Prudhoe, Bellingham, North Tynedale (Needale) and Fawside Partnership (Allendale), There are also four Market Towns Initiatives, comprising of; parish councillors, town councillors, traders and churches etc. which address 'improving quality of life' and other issues. The voluntary and

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.tynedale.gov.uk/residents/serviceinfo.asp?type=19>

community sector meets as a group and this is organised by Community Action Northumberland.<sup>12</sup>

The Head of Community Regeneration for Tynedale Council is responsible for organising community representation into the Local Strategic Partnership at a district level from sector and interest groups. The arrangement will cease once Northumbria becomes a unitary authority and there is generally a lot of concern and confusion about the new arrangements. There is a 'belonging communities' element to the single unitary authority proposals to:

*'Provide a good combination of a strategic overview for the county and a grass-roots influence at a very local level.'*

*Stakeholder views on local government re-organisation'*

Opinion Leader, Northumbria County Council, Final Report (undated)

However, there is still concern about how these arrangements will operate in practice.<sup>13</sup>

## Northumberland Community Development Network

The Northumberland Community Development Network (NCDN) was established in May 2002. This was followed by the formation of the Northumberland Community Development Company (NCDC) in May 2003, to attract funds and develop its activities. The Network had been set up as a result of wide consultation with individuals and groups from the community, private and public sectors. The work of the Network is organised around four areas; information exchange, learning and support, inclusivity and collective voice

NCDN has European Social Fund/ Learning Skills Council funding for 2 workforce development projects and 1 young people's project. It has played a role in influencing strategic development for 16-19 year olds in Northumberland and is active in the Community Development Learning Task Group, the Life Long Learning Group of Northumberland Strategic Partnership and its Board for Business, Skills and Enterprise. This influence has come through its infrastructure and partnership development and 'on the back of its delivery of learning programmes. Its main policy influence has been in learning and skills and it has been supported with Capacity Building Funding to bring an action learning set model to localities.

NCDN has also played a lead role in developing good practice in equality and diversity. It was awarded Capacity Builders 'Improving Reach' funding to conduct action research, deliver capacity building around the seven strands of equality and diversity and explain rights under the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights. As a result of this work, new groups formed such as a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) Network. Training has

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.ca-north.org.uk/>

<sup>13</sup> Extract from Tynedale Council Cabinet Meeting, 1.11.07

also been provided in equality and diversity representation for 10 existing 'equalities champions.'

NCDN will be co-hosting an event with the Northumberland Strategic Partnership to look at the development of an Equality and Diversity Forum and as part of this work are contacting other public sector agencies with a focus on what they can bring to the equality and diversity agenda and finding out what is happening regionally. NCDN are also represented on a task group that has been set up to 'get to grips with' empowerment and equality and diversity within the transitional arrangements as Northumberland becomes a unitary authority. EGRC regionally is discussing potential funding to explore models of engagement in rural areas (Durham and Northumberland). It is anticipated that the good practice developing in Northumberland will be disseminated in Durham.

Another aspect of NCDN's work is an IT support project that involves the practical delivery of IT networking using a community development style.

## **6. Vision and values - underpinning the contribution of the CENs to community engagement in the North East**

The investigation into the vision and values of those attending the focus group was carried out using participatory appraisal tools. The participants were asked for responses to the questions:

"What values do you operate within your CEN?"

"What is your vision?"

### **Values**

The values expressed underpin the CENs contribution to engagement within the region.

One CEN operated within the guidelines of National Occupational Standards for community development. These are:

- Social Justice – working towards a fairer society that respects civil and human rights and challenges oppression
- Self-determination – individuals and groups have the right to identify shared issues and concerns as the starting point for collective action
- Working and Learning together – valuing and using the skills, knowledge, experience and diversity within communities to collectively bring about desired change
- Sustainable Communities – empowering communities to develop their independence and autonomy whilst making and maintaining links to the wider society
- Participation – everyone has the right to fully participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives

- Reflective Practice – effective community development is informed and enhanced through reflection on action (Paulo 2003 )

For the CEN operating within these guidelines gives representatives a very clear and a nationally agreed and recognised framework to work towards. All representatives are required to sign up to these values when they become members. There exists a difficulty in challenging poor representation i.e. those representatives not adhering to these values. The need for working within these values is not reinforced regularly enough. There is recognition of the “role of knowledge and skills in empowering people to change” This particular CEN is independent of the CVS and is purely for community representatives – the voluntary sector is seen as separate and serviced by the CVS.

Other participants stated a number of values that they operated but gave no indication of any formal statement or process for the representatives to sign up to them. These values are:

“Inclusion

Encourage community cohesion

Diversity

Individuality (quirkiness)

Human element

Creativity

Trust

Keeping independence to support and develop VCS

Being an equal partner on LSP

Openness

Being a VALUED partner on LSP

Grass roots element”

## **Vision**

None of the participants quoted any formally agreed vision statements. This does not mean that none exist. Rather than outline a specific vision the participants outlined elements of what the vision would contain:

“Independence whilst remaining equal partners

Sustainability

More diversity

Delivery of public services

Consistency

Greater engagement between VCS and LSP (LA)

Recognition of anchor organisations”

One CEN noted that

“Learning from the model will influence} Government New Vision, ward/neighbourhood level governance. – build on last period of work”.

This statement indicates a desire to carry on and improve performance.

Not all participants stayed focused on what the vision for the CEN was and perhaps this is an indication of them having pressing issues to discuss.  
One participant made the statements:  
“In last 3 years – representatives empowered to challenge was when council took notice properly.  
Sub LA consortium approach – gives credence to LSP  
Self-critical ability of network”

### **Good practice**

CENs felt they were now offering the following;  
CEN having representatives with clear roles and responsibilities and a structured training project for all representatives.  
The ability to mobilise areas of the sector in response to specific issues.  
Having a positive reaction from communities manifested in CENs engaged with monthly locality representative’s meetings to tackle issues.  
Service delivery agenda of government.  
Degrees of professionalization of the sector.  
Self evaluation.

### **External evidence of Good practice**

Having middle officer/management level of statutory partners who want to engage with the CEN.  
Being treated as a site of expertise for workers who want to engage.  
Support and invitation of credit union development agency  
Participatory budgeting  
Community directory  
Gender equality duty for VCS  
Having trust within the communities  
Gaining feedback

## 7. Analysis of equality and diversity issues in CEN activities

Gathering information about equality and diversity was integral to the process of the research, this took the form of seeking to speak to representatives of communities of identity and interest groups from individual CENs, asking specific questions relating to equality and diversity to inform the pen pictures and conducting two exercises through focus groups with regional CEN workers:

- To talk about practice in equality and diversity with reference to a set of prompts based upon the *Principles of Representation*
- To identify good practice in relation to different diversity strands

Many practices and approaches are used to encourage the participation of diverse groups. This includes grass roots practices such as supporting residents groups and putting on sports activities that target specific groups such as Muslim women, Bangladeshi women, Filipino groups, migrant nurses. Some areas still have small grants to support the participation of smaller groups, such as Newcastle CEN and Gateshead. Newcastle also has an 'Infranet' a 'network of networks' of different geographically based organisations. In other areas equality issues are addressed informally and there are plans to re-address these issues.

There was little evidence of precisely how CENs address existing and potential conflicts between the priorities and interests of diverse group. One mentioned allowing 'people time to come to a consensus in conflict' and another had put on conflict resolution training for CEN members. Wansbeck has set up a voluntary community sector forum to address diversity with protocols and guidelines promote openness and honesty and a written disclaimer.

Two areas stated that Local Authorities responsibility for community cohesion and the new funding arrangements for CEN has restricted their work around equality and diversity. Only 1 CEN said they engaged in monitoring equality and diversity in membership of CENs and representation on LSPs. There was no evidence of positive action for the engagement and representation of diverse group. The only exception to this was in Middlesbrough and Stockton where the LSP itself has assigned places for representation for specific groups. For CENs there is a concern that positive action will be perceived as positive discrimination or tokenism This suggests some training for CENs about the differences between positive action and positive discrimination might be useful.

At the second focus group and in the interviews participants were asked to identify good practice in relation to specific diverse groups, the following is a summary of the results:

## Young people's groups

Wear Valley, Wansbeck, Sunderland, Gateshead, Stockton and Newcastle all identified specific practices and approaches to engage young people's groups. Wear Valley has its own Participation Officer for Children and Young People funded by the Children's Trust and both Stockton and Gateshead are piloting work to set up a Young People's Network. Wansbeck has an existing section of the CEN for young people that elected its own representatives from the CEN to the LSP. Others are working through existing youth forums (such as Sunderland).

### What works with young people

- Issues that directly involve young people e.g. plan for a particular area, youth centre, views of youth on healthcare etc. (Wear Valley has model of this)
- Well attended and involved in youth forum – link well into children and young people's themed groups on LSP
- Accessing the views of young people to identify things they like and don't like
- Young people's forums
- Working through other networks

### What doesn't work with young people

- Business meetings
- Plenty of research carried out and report prepared about the way forward – very little happens
- Very formal approaches are sometime too much
- Using the same structures as for adult participation

CENs identified varying levels of resistance and hostility from LSPs in relation to youth representatives. One example was the LSP using confidentiality as a reason why Community Voices can not sit on the Children and Young People's Executive another identified the attitudes of senior officer of Local Authority and LSP member organisations as a barrier.

## Older people's groups

Newcastle, Redcar and Cleveland and Sunderland all identified practices and approached older people and most worked through existing agencies and forums such as Elder's Council, Pensioners Associations, Older People's Partnerships. From the evidence that we have, older people seem to be well engaged with CENs and represented on LSPs, although one did mention that LSPs tend to focus on health rather than care for older elderly people that are ill.



### **What works with older people's groups**

- Good dissemination of LSP working to older groups associated with NCEN and raising elders issues at a strategic level
- Receiving higher profile on agenda, LAA, health and social care
- Working with older people's groups to develop action plans, supporting focus groups, workshops etc. Timing of meetings so they can use bus passes

### **Women's Groups**

Although there is evidence of good male and female engagement and representation, there is only slim evidence of engagement from women's groups and representation on LSP, and this correlates with the findings of recent national research where the women's sector makes up 7% of the VCS and only 2% of CEN's.<sup>14</sup> The following examples of practice and approaches to working with women were cited:

- Sunderland CEN is engaging with an Independent Advisory Group on Gender set up by the LSP
- Redcar CEN works closely with South Bank Women's Centre
- Middlesbrough works through Lesbian and Bisexual Officer and Co-Faith's Women's Officer

### **What works with women's groups**

- Representation and involvement in Gender Equality Duty (Redcar)
- Heightened awareness of women's role in LSP (but at a grass roots level)
- Supporting involvement through provision of crèche, timing of meetings and access etc.

### Barriers to engaging women

- Perceptions and attitudes of some councillors
- People feel that gender issues, particularly women's issues have been resolved – what about equal pay!
- Capacity, resources and seeing the relevance

### **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and transsexual groups**

The one area where we evidenced concerted practices and approaches to engage Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and transsexual group is Middlesbrough; Middlesbrough Community Network leads on homophobic and transgender

<sup>14</sup> *Where are the women in LSPs? Women's representation in Local Strategic Partnerships*, Elin Gudnadottir, Urban Forum, Women's Resource Centre and Oxfam UK September 2007

hate crime and LGBT hate crime is a theme case group under the Safer Middlesbrough Partnership. A reporting centre for LGBT community has been developed and has give a higher profile of the issue across the LSP. The mayor and an executive member (Community Safety) have taken the issues to the Council and staff have been trained in reporting. This work looks as if it will be mainstreamed into the work of Middlesbrough Strategic Partnership.

## **Black, Ethnic Minority Groups**

Some areas have established a specific Black and minority ethnic network or forum such as Middlesbrough, Sunderland and Stockton, Newcastle established a BME support group and North Tyneside have flexible support groups facilitated by BME worker, Wansbeck work through Northumberland Multi-national Minority Ethnic Group. Wear Valley CEN have developed very successful approaches with 'Gypsies' and travellers. However attempts to set up a cultural and ethnic minority group and welcome pack did not work and the CEN also commissioned a study which failed to have an impact, so there is currently no formal BME representation in this area.

### What works with BME groups?

- Understanding the lack of paid workers in BME work therefore impact on what they can be involved with
- Reasonable numerical representation
- Working with existing networks and groups
- Building on already successful work and establishing the support needed
- Personal contact, groups and faith communities have their base outside of Wear Valley (Durham and Darlington)
- Contacts with main Gypsy site via Dene Valley Community Partnership
- The key seems to be showing that the contact is useful for the individuals/ communities (e.g. translation of driving test material into Punjabi)
- Contacts need to be easy – e.g. propose coffee morning for contact with Polish communities

### What doesn't work with BME Groups?

- Consulting for tick box
- Official approaches – Gypsies and Central European migrants avoid these

Under resourcing, lack of politicization and minimising issues by the public sector were all cited as barriers to BME engagement and representation. Poor cross network communications, misperceptions and historical animosity between networks were also cited as barriers. In many areas the faith/ cultural/ social focus for BME communities is outside of the geographical boundary for the CEN and this frustrates attempts to engage effectively. BECON, who have access to BME networks and groups stated that they have no formal role with CEN's, although they did do some research about BME

participation in Sunderland in 2003 which helped to establish Sunderland BME Network.

## **Disability groups**

Newcastle, Wear Valley, Sunderland, Redcar and Cleveland all cited practices and approaches with disability groups and work with such agencies as Disability North, Better Days (learning disabilities), Blind Life in County Durham and the Real Opportunities Forum (Cleveland), Disability Forum (Redcar). In Sunderland, an effective Disability Independent Advisory Group is developing, although this was initiated by the Council/ LSP.

### **What works with disability groups**

- Direct work with local groups and gearing the facilitation directly at their needs e.g. a group with hearing disabilities, offering accessibility
- Working via other agencies that support people with disabilities
- Themed meetings that are of direct interest, small groups, public events allowing them to show/ display materials and make contact
- Involving in access decisions
- Very independent groups

Business meeting were said not to work with disability groups and the following were also identified as barriers:

- Reaching those people who are not already engaged through their communities i.e. social exclusion because of disability
- Work load for active volunteer officers
- Materials produced for sighted people
- Not enough focus by CEN on disability

## **Faith Groups**

Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Wansbeck, Redcar and Cleveland and North Tyneside all came up with examples of practices and approaches with faith groups and the following are some examples:

- Through Council of Faith – sit on Middlesbrough CEN steering group
- Methodists, Muslims, Christian groups in Saltburn
- Accessed funding and did research by faith consultant
- Newcastle CEN has strong links with Council of Faiths and Regional Faiths Task Force and lots of local faith groups are part of the network. Representatives of faith on NCEN steering group and direct representation on LSP as a Community Voice from Muslim, Christian and Jewish Faiths
- Redcar and Cleveland do extensive work with faith forum, also work with 'helping hands' (Christian/ Methodist)
- Wansbeck have commissioned work in faith and migrant workers from BME groups

- In both Redcar and Cleveland and Wansbeck – inter-action with individual religious representatives (e.g. Bridges Project)

In all but one area, where it was said that faith communities have good networks to raise issues on the LSP and to feedback to their constituencies, representation of faith groups on LSPs was said to be poor. One CEN, who is doing a lot of work with faith groups said this is because they are very *'hands on and don't really engage strategically.'*

### What works with Faith Groups

- Good communication – Middlesbrough CEN helps out financially and has good engagement
- Faith groups into grassroots delivery of public services – young people, disadvantaged, really hard to reach

Capacity and resources were said to be the main barriers to engaging faith group particularly as many Faith Groups are regionally based and there are lots of different groups, trying to make links between.

### Individuals

In most instances, where we have evidence, where individuals are involved in CENs, the terms of representatives do not allow them to be representatives on the LSP. However, they can influence the decision and planning process and service delivery through involvement with the network. The exception is Gateshead where individuals are on the steering group of the CEN and representatives on the LSP. The advantages of individuals involvement was said to be that:

*'They often provide a more objective perspective about the issues and what is required to deal with them (no vested interest)'*

The disadvantages that

*'Individuals who use the community partnerships or forums to express their own narrow agenda and on occasions dominate proceedings'*

If there is a demise of Community Empowerment Networks at the same time as the Government is prioritising citizen empowerment, the position of individuals within representational structures is likely to become more of an issue in the future and some comments are made about this at the end of section 8.2.

## 8. Evaluation of the contribution of the CENs to the engagement agenda in the region

The values and vision of the CENs expressed in this research highlighted their understanding of and commitment to active and effective community engagement. Their pen pictures provide a snap shot of the range of models and mechanisms they use in order to develop and support community engagement. There are numerous examples of their good practice highlighted in the report.

### Impact evaluation and barriers

As noted earlier in this report 'measuring' community engagement is difficult, time consuming and resource intensive. Thus few of the CENs have been able to do any work in this area as they have not been resourced to do so.

We have looked at the barriers for their work and have considered the following benchmarks from 'Active Partners; Benchmarking Community Participation in Regeneration (Yorkshire Forwards- RDA Yorkshire and Humber).

#### *Community recognised and valued as equal partner*

Very few of the CENs felt that this was true. Even where relationships with partners in the LSP were considered good this wasn't considered true within all members of the partnerships.

#### *'meaningful community representation on all decision making bodies from initiation'*

No CEN claimed that this was the case. Where they felt that they had good relationships and effective representation this was considered to be the result of hard work over time.

#### *'Communities have access to and control over resources'*

This was something that was changing slightly in different areas but on a very small scale e.g. small grant making capacity for small/new/ emerging community groups. All CENs are facing a very uncertain future. Even where they have been assured of interim funding it is only for up to 6 months.

#### *'Evaluation of regeneration partnerships incorporates a community agenda'*

There was little information on this from CENs. The NEEP commissioned research into LSP and local Authorities may have found more on this.

**The 'Principles of Representation'** currently being consulted on have been identified by the CENs as forming much of the basis of their work. They lead on from traditional community development values. What is clear is that the

full utilisation of these principles requires resources. They also take time to embed into organisational structures and ethos.

CENs have had to work to support the development of the community representatives in order to enable them to begin to engage on these principles. It is clear from their responses that they consider that partnership organisations still have a long way to go before they will be able to engage with local communities in ways that follow the principles.

CENs clearly have a vital intermediary role in the process of enabling LSP partners to adopt the principles into their working practice.

## **8.1 Strengths and weakness of the CENs**

This section will look at strengths and weaknesses both currently and historically but in a generalised fashion i.e. not naming the CENs. Elements of the contribution CENs make to the engagement agenda feed into the strengths and opportunities. Gaps in the work of CENs are highlighted in weaknesses and threats.

### **Strengths**

- CENs employ experienced and skilled staff who have considerable local knowledge.
- CENs have, or are beginning to, develop lines of communication and networks of contacts which support the effective working of the CEN and engagement of the community in the work of the LSP
- CENs have begun to organise structured support to meet the needs of their communities and enable them to be effective in LSP work.
- CENs have begun to establish roles for individuals in community engagement.

### **Weaknesses**

- Since CENs ceased to be accountable directly to Government Office there are no universal frameworks for performance management of CENs.
- Community engagement work is hard to measure and takes time and resources few CENs have.
- CENs, generally, do not promote them selves and the work they do e.g. whilst they are clearly doing a considerable amount of work on equality and diversity issues they are not communicating this well either externally or with each other.
- It is sometimes unclear how CENs are accountable to their own members and wider communities.
- Tensions exist between some CENs and the local CVS who may or may not host the CEN. There is a suggestion that the independence of the CEN is at risk of being compromised or not clearly understood by other partners including the LSP.

## Opportunities

- CENs are well placed to take a major role in the new performance framework as facilitators for the voices of the communities they serve. LAs will need to demonstrate they understand, and involve, local communities.
- New LA performance indicators in LAA – both DCLG and GONE giving very strong direction to LAs about the need to include 'Community empowerment and engagement' giving CENs a self-marketing opportunity
- 8 out of 12 regional LAs have selected performance indicators requiring community engagement and development. The other 4 have agreed to include this in their portfolio of performance indicators.
- Working together to support each other and develop shared good practice
- New Health consultation mechanisms i.e. LINKS offer an opportunity for CENs to begin to co-ordinate public body consultation and deliver it in a meaningful and effective way for the communities they serve.
- Should be working to develop central role in new Community Contract work

## Threats

- A universal factor facing the CENs is uncertainty about funding after 2008 and this is severely limiting all CENs ability to strategically plan and focus their work.
- The impact upon the effectiveness of CENs in the transition to unitary authorities in Durham and Northumberland. This was cited as a particular concern, in Wear Valley where representation in decision making at a District level is working well and there is uncertainty about how this can continue within the new structures.
- LSP agencies continued failure to understand the role of the CEN and the third sector in its work and in the new performance management framework.



### **Good Practice – Elements of a good CEN**

Throughout the different exercises in the focus group, CEN workers identified elements of what makes a good CEN. Based on a count of the frequency with which each element was mentioned, the two most important issues were: independence and equal partner (both cited 6 times). Diversity was cited 4 times. Delivery of public services, greater engagement between VCS and LSP (LA), and clarity of roles, responsibilities and process was cited 3 times. Trust, human element, reflexive practice, and grass roots elements was cited twice. National operation standards, inclusion, cohesion, individuality, creativity, openness, consistency, and recognition of anchor organisations were cited once.

The timelines of the development of a CEN produced by participants at the focus group identified the following successes that were experienced during their development:

- Clear roles and responsibilities paper produced for community voices.
- Dealt with a massive change in the structure of the LSP which produced a clear election process of community voices.
- Developed area umbrella infrastructure networks across the city which legitimised community voices on the LSP.
- Induction process for representatives
- Ensure support structures are in place to continue good practice that has been learned.
- No compromise on core principles, only on tactics or strategy.
- Building on what already exists i.e. a network of networks supporting and involving groups/networks that already exist and avoiding setting up new organisations.
- Communication with a newsletter and website to keep people informed.
- Diversity i.e. having a wide range of community representatives reflecting the make up of the general population.
- Independent, community led and engaging equally with LSP partners

## **8.2 Equality and diversity issues in CEN activities**

It is clear from the evidence that CENs have developed a range of practices to engage a range of diverse groups with models of good practice developing with different groups in different CENs. There is notable good practice with young people, faith groups and BME groups, although gaps are notable in working with the women's voluntary and community sector and LGBT group. Participants of the focus groups seemed to welcome the opportunity to discuss and share both their practice and difficulties in integrating equalities and diversity into CENs and notably as an outcome of the focus group Newcastle and North Tyneside have decided to work jointly around engaging faith groups. It appears that there should be more opportunities for CENs at

a regional area to disseminate good equality and diversity practice where it exists, share lessons learned and help each other to overcome difficulties and problems,

Barriers to access and equality and diversity of participation are partly attributed to the resources available to the CEN and to the variable capacity of community groups and representatives to get involved in the work. In the case of faith groups, although there is good engagement in Newcastle in other areas (Middlesbrough) they are too occupied with dealing with social problems to become involved strategically. Another barrier when it comes to representation is that the structures of the LSP are simply not accessible to some groups and this is particularly the case with young people and disability groups. Attitudes of elected members and a perception that gender is no longer an issue are barrier representation for women's groups. In short, in cases where CENs have used their limited resources to secure engagement from particular groups the structures and cultures of the LSP prevent effective representation of diverse interests.

Although all the CENs that we talked to were actively involved in working to improve the diversity of their CENs in particular area, very few CENs had open statements of inclusivity at the 'front' of their information (although we did find references to this in various documents). Most CENs are clear that they still have some way to go to get some communities involved. Apart from Middlesbrough BME participation in CENs is generally low and tends measured against the percentage population in the area rather than the level need for BME communities to have their voice amplified in strategic arenas. Further gaps identified in integrating equality and diversity within CENs is the lack of any processes of monitoring equality and diversity and linked to this a reluctance to target particular groups with positive action and resources because this could be deemed as positive discrimination. It is also of concern that, apart from in one case, CENs have not developed effective ways of working through the differences, disagreements and conflicts that inevitably arise from diversity of engagement and representation.

The involvement of individuals in networks and partnerships is likely to become more of a challenge for those CENs who manage to sustain themselves through the current changes brought about by LAAs and the end of NRF funding. As the Government's agenda shifts towards citizen empowerment and engagement but away from Community Empowerment Networks as a vehicle to achieve this, it is difficult to imagine by which mechanisms power and equality issues between individuals and within communities will be addressed. As is evidenced in these findings, although individuals can provide an objective view, they can also dominate networks and partnerships. Without Community Empowerment Networks, which at least provide some level of accountability upwards and downwards, there is a danger that dynamics of inequality and power within communities will be re-enforced and the voices of those with the least power cease to have any influence.

## 9. Recommendations and Conclusion

### Recommendations

This section draws upon all of the findings above and information gathered in the research and takes into account the new performance framework for local government. Many of these recommendations support the integration and promotion of equality and diversity work in community engagement.

1. More opportunities at a regional level for CENs to disseminate good equality and diversity practice where it exists, share lessons learned and help each other to overcome difficulties and problems. This should be a standing item at regional meetings.
2. Declaration of principals of representation to be promoted as central to CENs work and integrated into performance management frameworks. CENs to take lead on ensuring LSP practices and structures also follow the principles.
3. Clear systems for monitoring and improving equality and diversity in CEN participation and in representation on LSPs should be developed by all partners in LSPs. CENs should lead on the development of these mechanisms ensuring that the power, equality and accountability issues involved in the representation of individuals are addressed.
4. Clear descriptions of communities involved, who is representing who and how to contact them should be openly available both on-line and CEN facilitated message service e.g. e-mail contact for representatives as used in North Tyneside.
5. Training in the difference between positive action and positive discrimination for CENs so that they can more confidently target their resources at particular groups with clear justification for doing so.
6. CENs could consider joint work with sub-regional and regional community of interest networks such as Mental Health North East (MHNE) who can facilitate consultation and joint working with their members.
7. Develop mutual understanding and respect between the different partners. Training for staff in public bodies.
8. Develop an external evidence base for quality and effectiveness of the CENs with local communities.
9. It may be useful to consider research into other Regional Government Offices. If their approach to the development of CENs varied, what impact has that had on the effectiveness of the engagement of the VCS in LSPs.

10. Whilst it is clear that the resources needed by each CEN will vary there should be a regional agreement on minimum funding and resourcing.
11. Use existing good practice to draw up some general recommendations for regional good practice standards which will encompass local variation in response to local circumstances.
12. Good practice standards to be promoted to the LSP partnership agencies.
13. Develop a regional portfolio of case studies illustrating the principles and the role of CENs in the place shaping and LA performance framework agenda. This will be used to support the above recommendations.

## **Conclusion**

The CENs are facing a period of great opportunity and uncertainty. There are opportunities within the new performance framework for them to place themselves as stated the DCLG guidance that came out in December;

“The third sector may wish to consider how it positions itself and builds skills and relationships, so that it can be appropriately engaged with LSP structures and in the negotiating and delivery of LAAs. Local third sector organisations have an opportunity to play a vital role in the following ways:

Informing and negotiating local priorities  
Voice and engagement  
More responsive local services”

Some of the CENs in the region are clearly placed to take part in the new performance framework in this way.

Others face a more uncertain future which is, in part, complicated by pending local government reorganisation. But the biggest barrier has been, and in some cases still is, the failure of public bodies to understand the value of the work they do. LSPs across the region are potentially going to throw away the best tool they have to support them in the performance framework. A tool that has taken time and resources to develop and which cannot be replaced quickly, easily or cheaply.

## Appendix 1 – Principles of representation

In the following statements, please circle the number that best describes your perception of CEN you work for.

1 = poor      2 = moderate      3 = satisfactory      4 = good      5 = excellent

This information will be kept confidential and reported anonymously. Please be as objective as you can. There is space at the end of each section for you to make any additional comments.

### Accountability

Anyone representing or speaking on behalf of the VCS should be responsible to the VCS they serve. They should have clear lines of communication and be able to explain actions. This means they need to understand their role, have ways of exchanging information with the VCS community involved and have appropriate support. How do you rate your CENs performance in the following?

Clear lines of communication      1      2      3      4  
5

Able to explain actions      1      2      3      4  
5

Understand role      1      2      3      4  
5

Information exchange with VCS community involved      1      2      3      4  
5

Have appropriate support      1      2      3      4  
5

Comments

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Equality

Reducing inequality is at the heart of community development work. Networks should ensure their organisation acts with equality at the centre of its operation with regards to all practice. How do you rate your CEN against the following statements?

Are open to all groups that work to equality principals

5	1	2	3	4
Work to engage with groups from diverse communities, specifically from faith and equalities groups				
5	1	2	3	4
Ensure network reflects the communities it serves				
5	1	2	3	4
Accept that engaging with 'hard to reach' communities and individuals will take time and resources and work to ensure they are available or strategies to engage them are in place				
5	1	2	3	4
Any comments				
.....				
.....				
.....				
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**Leadership**

Community representatives will be dealing with senior public officials and will need skills such as negotiation, mediation and assertiveness. As they represent the wider sector they need to be able to develop and use the skills of its members, ensure inclusivity in consulting about the network, balance the needs of minority groups with majority interests, and be prepared to tackle difficult issues. How do you rate your CENs performance in the following?

Negotiation 5	1	2	3	4
Mediation 5	1	2	3	4
Assertiveness 5	1	2	3	4
Developing members skills 5	1	2	3	4
Using members skills 5	1	2	3	4
Inclusive consultation about the network 5	1	2	3	4

Balancing needs of minority groups

with majority interests 5	1	2	3	4
Tackling difficult issues 5	1	2	3	4

Any comments

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**Purpose**

CEN's need a clear sense of purpose which includes a vision for the future and clarity about the issues it will deal with and what will be dealt with by others. This requires a broad consensus about shared values feeding into common goals. It also requires clear definitions of stakeholders and who will sit on any decision making bodies. The Network needs to be responsive to change and anticipate the need to support new and emerging groups. How do you rate your CEN against the following statements?

Have a clear sense of purpose 5	1	2	3	4
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Have a vision for the future 5	1	2	3	4
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Clear about issues the CEN will deal with 5	1	2	3	4
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Clear about issues others will deal with 5	1	2	3	4
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Obtain a broad census about shared values that feed into common goals 5	1	2	3	4
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Have clear definitions of stakeholders 5	1	2	3	4
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Clear about who will sit on decision making bodies 5	1	2	3	4
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Responsive to change 5	1	2	3	4
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Anticipate the need to support new and emerging groups 5	1	2	3	4
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Any comments

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### **Sustainability**

CENs' need resources in order to deliver on the principles outlined in the previous sections and some can be shared with the groups it works with. Work on sustainability should be built into the relationships between the network and the community it serves. This can include resources to support the expression of the collective voice and development of skills and capacity of members. This requires flexibility from the network to take advantage of opportunities as they arise and to use the talents of the network. How do you rate your CEN against the following statements?

Have resources to support the expression of the collective voice 5	1	2	3	4
Develop skills of members 5	1	2	3	4
Develop capacity of members 5	1	2	3	4
Have a flexible network able to take advantage of opportunities as they arise 5	1	2	3	4
Make use of the talents of the network 5	1	2	3	4

### **Openness**

CENs need to be open in conducting business in order to be credible with members and other stakeholders. They need to ensure that all discussions and decisions are recorded and open to all. How do you rate your CENs performance in achieving the following?

An agreed and well publicised process for selecting representatives 5	1	2	3	4
Clear and prompt communication channels with all stakeholders 5	1	2	3	4
To welcome challenges and deal positively with failures by addressing them 5	1	2	3	4



## Appendix 2

### Telephone interviews with CEN Co-ordinators (staff), Chair's of CENs and Community of Interest representatives

<b>1. Performance Management Systems (Staff only)</b> a) What systems are in place for the performance management of the Community Empowerment Network? b) Who does the performance information go to (i.e. LSP, Local Authority, other?) c) Can we have copies of recent performance management information?
a)
b)
c)
<b>1) Performance Management Processes (CEN representatives only)</b> a) Do you/ CEN members take part in any processes to assess the performance of the CEN? b) If yes, can you tell us what this entails?
a)
b)
<b>2) Equality and diversity</b> a) Are there any policies and procedures (if so can we see them?) b) How well does the CEN reflect the equality and diversity of the area? c) What practical steps are taken to promote equality and diversity?
a)
b)

c)
<b>3) Have there been any external evaluations of the CEN recently (in the last two years? (Staff)</b>
<b>3) Have you participated in any external evaluations of the CEN recently (in the last two years? (CEN representatives)</b>
<b>4) What does your CEN do best?</b>
<b>5) What does your CEN do worst?</b>
<b>6) Do you want to say anything else?</b>