



National  
Empowerment  
Partnership

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# Evaluation of Year Two of the National Empowerment Partnership

A Project Report

May 2009



University of the  
West of England

IVAR

Institute for Voluntary  
Action Research

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The research team.

May 2009

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

This document is a report of the evaluation of the second year of the National Empowerment Partnership (NEP). The evaluation was commissioned by the Community Development Foundation (CDF), the accountable body for the NEP, and carried out by a consortium of the Institute for Voluntary Action Research and the University of the West of England.

The National Empowerment Partnership was established in April 2007, and is scheduled to run for four years (until 2011). It works through Regional Empowerment Partnerships (REPs) in each of the nine English regions and its overall aim is to empower citizens and communities in England by:

- Demonstrating the difference community empowerment can make to individuals, community groups, communities and public agencies
- Developing effective methods of quality assurance for community empowerment
- Promoting examples of good practice across the country.

### How this report works

This report contains four sections:

Section one contains an introduction to the National Empowerment Partnership and to the evaluation brief.

Section two explains in detail the approach taken to the evaluation, the challenges presented by such an evaluation, and the methods used.

Section three presents the findings arising from the range of different methods used.

Section four discusses the implications arising from these findings and makes some recommendations to inform the development of the programme in years three and

four.

The main report is accompanied by the following appendices:

- Appendix A: Interviews
- Appendix B: Evaluation Framework
- Appendix C: Activities Summary:
- Appendix D: Recommendations from Regional Evaluators

## **The evaluation**

The IVAR/UWE consortium was appointed in December 2008 and carried out the evaluation over a period of four months. The brief from CDF required an evaluation of year two of the programme and a plan for evaluating years three and four. It identified the following research questions:

- To what extent and how has the NEP achieved its aims?
- How is the NEP contributing to the NI4 indicator at national and regional level?
- How is the partnership developing and providing an infrastructure for empowerment activity?
- What is the added value of having a dedicated empowerment partnership in each region?
- What are the key issues that need to be addressed in developing the NEP?

We adopted an approach that used a variety of methods, which was participatory, and which could locate individual activities and achievements in a more comprehensive 'theory of change'. The theory of change model allowed us to set individual pieces of work and medium term outcomes within a larger and longer-term picture and assess whether they made sense in the overall context of the Programme and what it was meant to achieve. It also allowed us to assess, even when it was too early to assess impact, whether initiatives carried out as part of the Programme were 'on track' to achieve certain outcomes. Work on developing the theory of change model informed the development of the framework for year two and the detailed plan for evaluating programme in years three and four. The framework is described in detail in section two and in Appendix B to this report.

Our evaluation framework was structured around the three levels at which the NEP aims to make a difference:

- Supporting individuals and communities to engage and take up opportunities to be involved in and influence local decisions
- Building the capacity of local authorities and other public agencies to engage and empower (both of which were seen as problematic and contested words)
- Ensuring a co-ordinated approach to empowerment activity across the third sector and public agencies.

Five principal methods were used to gather data to inform the evaluation:

- Document review
- Semi-structured interviews with national and regional stakeholders, including REP Accountable Bodies (REP ABs), Government Offices and Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships
- A national survey of REP partners, local authorities, third sector intermediary bodies and front-line organisations.
- A case study in each region, looking at a piece of work carried out by the REP.
- Two participatory workshops for REP ABs and evaluators.

## **The findings**

Section three discusses the findings from the evaluation. These may be summarised as follows:

### ***The rationale for the programme***

The year one evaluation reported confusion about the rationale for the programme and what it aimed to achieve. Although some aspects were now clearer, particularly the required focus on NI4, we found residual confusion in year two and continuing 'fault-lines' between different stakeholders in relation to their understanding of the programme. The fault-lines discussed in section three are:

- The shift in the rationale for the Programme between Year One and Two.
- The emphasis given to NI4.
- The balance between local authority-oriented work and community-third sector oriented work.

- The understanding of community empowerment.
- The question of whether the REP was basically a facilitator and broker, or whether it should itself be a delivery agent.

However, there was widespread agreement on the potential for NEP to make sense of what most people felt was a bewildering array of community empowerment initiatives, which was variously criticised as ‘messy’ and uncoordinated, a ‘total mish-mash’, a ‘pick and mix’ of initiatives or even a ‘spaghetti junction’.

### ***The structure of the Programme***

The **national consortium** has now been disbanded, with the original partners brought together as and when necessary around particular themes. When we carried out our fieldwork, however, this news was only just filtering through and there was still a lot of confusion. While some respondents could not see the value of a national partnership, others regretted the fact that there was now no opportunity for an overarching structure. The NI4 Delivery Group was not seen as an alternative as it had a much more specific focus.

The **partnership between the regions and CDF** has the potential to be ‘greater than the sum of the parts’, but most respondents felt that this had not yet been realised. There was considerable frustration with what was seen as a failure on CDF’s part to promote active co-ordination and learning between the regions and some REPs had taken their own initiatives to join up at a sub-national level. This is now being addressed, but there is clearly an ambiguity in CDF’s role, expected to be a delivery agent by government – an insider – and a source of support to the regions on the other – an outsider. CDF recognises this ambiguity and some of the national partners were also sympathetic to the balancing acts it had to perform, but respondents in and beyond the REPs still argued that it seemed to be more concerned with monitoring and contract compliance than enabling.

There were also concerns about the **administration** of the Programme, with particular anger about delays in funding in both Year One and Year Two. This had meant the Programme had a ‘stop-go’ feel about it. It is not the task of the evaluation

to allocate blame for this (and opinion was divided on where the blame might lie), but the stop-go funding has undoubtedly sapped energy, stalled momentum and hindered the progress of the Programme. However, this again has now been addressed and REPs received funding in the first week of April for the Year 2009-10.

The variety in **accountable bodies** was seen as a strength of the Programme. At the time of our fieldwork **Regional Empowerment Partnerships** were at different stages of development. Our evaluation found that, to some extent, REP membership depends on the accountable body and its networks. Those who could build on structures and relationships already developed in the region had a head start, but some were starting from scratch. Overall, good progress had been made in developing partnerships in all regions, taking into account the starting point for each. However, most REPs felt that more work needed to be done on the membership and structure of their partnership.

It has become clear in Year Two that the **relationship with RIEPs** is vital to the success of REPs. But, given that RIEPs were themselves only set up this year and are said to have a heavy workload, this was bound to be a challenge. Most have made good progress in this respect with joint initiatives planned or in progress. In some regions, it has taken longer to establish the REP agenda with the RIEPs, although even here there are signs that progress is being made. **Relationships with Government Offices** are almost universally positive. In many cases, this builds on an already existing relationship between the accountable body and the GO and the trust this has generated has allowed the GO to act as what one REP called a 'critical friend'.

### ***Delivery***

Appendix C of this report provides examples of the main activities carried out by the REPs. In section three we classify some of the main initiatives carried out by the REPs according to the priorities identified for the NEP.

Overall, the most successful REPs are putting together a package that operates at different levels and addresses all parts of our evaluation framework: supporting LAs

to provide empowerment opportunities (level 2 of the Empowerment Framework); supporting communities to take them up and exploit them to the full (level 1); and ensuring a coherent, strategic and integrated approach which can use the available resources to best advantage (level 3).

This report highlights some of the problems people raised about **National Indicator 4**. While this had provided a much-needed focus to the work, there was concern as to how far the NEP could change people's perceptions of how much influence they had, especially since REPs did not deliver empowerment activities directly. External factors would further complicate the picture, especially in a period of recession. Nonetheless, REPs are structuring their action plans around NI4 and there is evidence of contact with over 200 LAs. However, it will take time for relationships to be built beyond specific empowerment teams and our survey showed that there is currently very low awareness among local authorities of the role and contribution of REPs. As a result, LA respondents did not think they were effective in helping to improve NIs. From the perspective of REP Accountable Bodies and respondents from GOs and RIEPs, it is also too early to judge how the NEP is impacting on NI4, particularly as the place survey results were not available at the time of our interviews.

Some respondents were puzzled by the inclusion of **community led research** in the priorities, but most REPs were in fact carrying out activity under this heading. One of our case studies shows how community led research can address CLG's desire for feedback on how local authorities are performing, but this of course, requires careful work with local authorities to establish trust.

There was a lot of work designed to identify and share **best practice**. Often this took the form of 'showcasing' through events and roadshows, which can attract large numbers of people. REPs (and the national coalition in the first year) had produced an impressive variety of toolkits and guidelines. Toolkits and guidelines on their own are not enough, however and, as one regional evaluation argued, good practice does not always 'trickle down' of its own accord. One of our case studies had developed a 'bespoke' service to help local authorities to understand how best to use empowerment tools to improve their NI scores while another had mounted a series of

Learning Exchange seminars to embed good practice.

The Partnerships themselves and the task groups which they have spawned are one example of the work that has been done to encourage **sharing across sectors** and several REPs felt that this was one of their most significant achievements to date. Other key stakeholders shared this view.

## Challenges

The interviews we carried out identified a number of challenges for the NEP at regional level:

Respondents pointed out that the money involved – some £175-185,000 per region this year, with less to come in 2010-11 - was small for such a huge agenda and REPs typically found it challenging to cover what are often large and very diverse regions. The challenge was particularly hard in the regions and sub-regions with no legacy of community empowerment.

But the more fundamental challenges that emerged from the evaluation were:

- Changing local authority cultures
- Sustainability
- Timescales, funding delays and changing goalposts
- Measuring impact
- Fit with other initiatives
- Rural work

These challenges are discussed in detail in section three.

Finally, in section three we consider some inherent tensions in the empowerment process, which are common to any programme of this kind and questions for which there is no one simple answer but a great need for learning. We explore perceptions of what can be achieved through a 'top down' programme and the potentially conflicting requirements to focus on both communities and local authorities.

## Recommendations

The report concludes in section four with a series of recommendations.

The Year One evaluation made a number of recommendations. Some, in particular the recommendations in respect of the national consortium, have been addressed. The process for developing a common evaluation framework is also underway, building in a participatory approach. In the sense that there is now a greater focus on NI4, it could also be argued that a common definition of community empowerment has been reached (although it is not yet shared). However, the recommendations regarding better communication and increased opportunities for sharing and learning still need to be addressed. Delays in funding decisions also mean it has been difficult for REPs to embed work that they rushed to achieve in Year One. A start has, however, been made on quality assurance.

Following on from the Year Two evaluation, we make the following recommendations:

1. Delays in funding have serious consequences for continuity and value for money. We welcome the fact that this has been addressed this year and trust that steps will be taken to ensure that this will also be the case for the final year of the NEP in 2010-11. (CLG/CDF)
2. There was some concern about the timing of the evaluations so far and their link with action planning. These processes need to be clearly aligned in years 3 and 4, so that these processes can inform planning. (All)
3. Lack of co-ordination in Whitehall has led to fragmentation and confusion on the ground as to the support Programmes that exist and the relationship between them. This does not represent good value for money. More needs to be done to establish synergy between different governmental programmes at regional and sub-regional level. This applies to programmes inside CLG, in

- the OTS and DefRA. REPs need to be promoting integration at regional level, but this integration also needs to be supported nationally. (All)
4. Related to this, CLG should seriously consider an overarching evaluation which addresses the whole portfolio of its Community Empowerment Programmes. This would increase the feasibility of demonstrating whether the investment that has been made leads to attributable empowerment outcomes. (CLG)
  5. Recent communications from CLG have clarified the criteria to be addressed in years 3 and 4. Although CDF has a key role in ensuring effective communications between the REPs and CLG, there is a strong case for an annual meeting in which there can be direct communication of the learning from the ground and its implications for policy (linked to the evaluation). (All)
  6. Awareness of the NEP and REPs at the front line is low. Although, the nature of the work means that we should not necessarily expect high recognition at this level, more could be done centrally and regionally to promote the aims and potential of the NEP to potential beneficiaries on the ground. (CDF/REPs)
  7. This, coupled with the nature of the NEP, makes it difficult to establish the outcomes of the investment in NEP. A priority for years 3 and 4 needs to be the creation of robust evidence on the value of empowerment activities. This can build on work already in progress to test out the evidence base for NI4 and to make the business case. But REPs should also develop their own indicators alongside NI4 to contribute more generally to the development of effective empowerment indicators. (CDF/REPs)
  8. Links should also be made with any regional work done on NI7. A thriving third sector does connect with community empowerment, as one of the regional evaluations argued, since many individuals find an influential voice through community and voluntary groups. (All)

9. REPs should make it their business to gather intelligence about the context in which LAs in their regions are trying to improve NI4 and any issues that are getting in the way. CLG say they would value 'intelligence' and feedback. (REPs)
10. Specifications for REP delivery partners should include a requirement to evaluate their work in a consistent way. There should be some attempt to say how the impact of the activity on the objectives of the REP have been demonstrated. (REPs)
11. Related to this, both REPs and CDF should take steps to evaluate the use and usefulness of toolkits and guidelines published nationally and locally. (CDF/REPs)
12. A clearer steer needs to be given to RIEPs by CLG to work with REPs, if synergy is to be achieved and REPs are to achieve their aims and target their work effectively. (CLG)
13. There is scope for much more promotion of sharing and learning across REPs – with CDF's new staffing, this should improve in the coming years but will require continued commitment also from REPs. More could also be done to publicise the published outputs of the Programme nationally (CDF/REPs)
14. CDF should consider whether an annual meeting between the NEP (with REPs) and the members of the disbanded national consortium would offer a opportunity to share experience and promote the work of the NEP more widely. (CDF)

## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

### The National Empowerment Partnership

The National Empowerment Partnership is one of a number of initiatives set up to further government's community empowerment agenda. Established in 2007, it is scheduled to run for four years (until 2012). Its overall aim is to empower citizens and communities in England by:

- Demonstrating the difference community empowerment can make to individuals, community groups, communities and public agencies
- Developing effective methods of quality assurance for community empowerment
- Promoting examples of good practice across the country.

It aims to achieve this through:

- improving and increasing empowerment activities,
- co-ordinating dialogue between infrastructure agencies and grass roots organisations,
- developing robust evidence and
- engaging national, regional and local government in the empowerment agenda as key to underpinning policy for public service delivery.

At the beginning of Year Two, the NEP was focused more tightly on supporting local authorities in achieving improvements in National Indicator 4 – the percentage of people who feel they can influence decision-making in their area.

The Programme is worth £6.7 million over the three years from 2008 and is funded by Communities and Local Government (CLG) and managed by the Community Development Foundation (CDF). It is providing some £500,000 per region over the three years. It initially operated through a national consortium and nine regional partnerships, but in January 2009, the national consortium was disbanded, with the

'partnership' taken to mean the partnership between CDF as the managing agent and the nine regions working together. National partners are now only involved in relation to particular themes, although some are represented on the NI4 Delivery Group.

## **Year one**

An evaluation of Year One was carried out for CDF by Gray-King and Gray Limited in early 2008. It noted considerable uncertainty after the first few months in relation both to the aims of the NEP and to its funding and argued that it was too early to expect significant impact. Nonetheless it found that significant progress had been made and that 'NEP has every opportunity to be a successful programme' (p.2). Its key findings were that, while there was considerable optimism about the NEP's potential and government's commitment to empowerment, there was a lack of clarity about the role of the national partnership as well as the lack of a shared understanding of empowerment. However, it noted improved networks regionally, an increased profile for community empowerment and inspiration of local authorities and local strategic partnerships. It reported great interest in quality assurance and a common evaluation methodology, but concern about National Indicator 4 as the defining measure of success. Its recommendations were therefore that:

- The role and purpose of the national consortium be clarified
- A shared definition of community empowerment be reached
- Decision-making be more transparent and communications streamlined
- Increased opportunities for learning and sharing experience be created
- The opportunity to develop a creative quality assurance framework be embraced;
- A common evaluation framework be developed, using a participatory approach;
- Regional partnerships be given 'space' to embed and build upon work that they rushed to achieve in 2007/8.

## **The current evaluation**

In December 2008, a consortium of the Institute for Voluntary Action Research and the University of the West of England was commissioned by CDF to carry out an evaluation of the second year of the NEP's operation and to develop a framework for the evaluation of years 3 and 4. This consortium carried out the evaluation over a period of four months, using a mixture of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, studies from each region and a survey, which attracted a response of some 442 people. In keeping with the Year One recommendations, the evaluation adopted a participatory approach, with two workshops for regional partnership accountable bodies and evaluators to report back initial findings and develop the evaluation framework.

## **The research questions**

This evaluation is a Programme evaluation of the National Empowerment Partnership. Local evaluations are taking place in parallel in several of the regions and the REPs also fill in regular monitoring forms that monitor performance. The developing framework seeks to distinguish clearly between what can be provided at the different levels.

The evaluation brief identified the following research questions:

- To what extent and how has the NEP achieved its aims?
- How is the NEP contributing to the NI4 indicator at national and regional level?
- How is the partnership developing and providing an infrastructure for empowerment activity?
- What is the added value of having a dedicated empowerment partnership in each region?
- What are the key issues that need to be addressed in developing the NEP?

## **This report**

The next section (section 2) begins by describing the approach taken to the

evaluation and the challenges that any evaluation such as this will face. It then presents the evaluation framework used for the Year Two evaluation. Section 3 reports the main findings, drawing on the different methods used. Section 4 then identifies key issues for the future and offers some recommendations for action.

The main report is accompanied by the following annexes:

- Annex A: Interview topic guides and survey questions
- Annex B: Full report of the survey
- Annex C: Evaluation framework and plan for years 3 and 4.

## SECTION TWO: APPROACH TO THE EVALUATION

### Challenges

#### *What is the NEP?*

The first challenge in carrying out an evaluation of the National Empowerment Partnership was its name. For some, the term partnership was taken to refer to the national consortium that has recently been disbanded; for others, the term was applied to the individual regional partnerships, many of which carry the NEP logo; however, with the disbandment of the national consortium, the term was also beginning to be used to refer to the partnership between the regions and CDF. In addition the term 'Partnership' could be seen to refer purely to the structure and relationships within NEP rather than the programme of work it was carrying out. In this report, we define NEP as the partnership between CDF and the regional partnerships. For the sake of clarity, when discussing the structure, we refer to the NEP unless we are referring specifically to the disbanded coalition or the individual REPs. We refer to 'the Programme' when we are discussing the work NEP is carrying out.

The evaluation of a Programme such as this also presents a number of more fundamental challenges:

#### *Attribution*

Empowerment is a notoriously difficult concept to pin down and measure, although the national indicator set attempts to do this and we will return to this later. But even if a reliable and appropriate measure were to be found, the NEP operates indirectly and there is a long chain of causality between national and regional partnerships, local public bodies, action at the frontline and the perception by individuals that they have influence (NI4). If individuals and groups do feel more empowered, it would be extremely difficult to attribute this change to any action by REPs; if they do not, there may be many factors external to the REP that have contributed to that feeling. If

individuals are to feel able to influence decision making, much depends on the ability of the REP to influence local authorities and other public agencies. Indeed, many people on the front-line might not even have heard of the NEP or link a particular event or action with it – especially where the delivery is carried out by partners rather than REP ABs.

### ***Timescales***

Most experts also agree that empowerment – and the culture change that is required to bring that about - is a long-term process and many respondents felt that it was too early to measure impact. There were also more practical problems in relation to this particular evaluation. Delays in funding meant that Action Plans were late in getting under way and much of the work we wanted to evaluate was incomplete at the time of the evaluation. This was a particular problem with the case studies, which in some regions were more about planned than completed work.

Although we were commissioned to evaluate Year Two, understanding and analysing the information we were gathering required considerable understanding of the earlier development of the Programme. Nor was it always possible to separate developments out clearly into Year One and Year Two, especially since the different REPs have developed at a different pace, depending on histories of community engagement and government investment, infrastructural capacity and the experience and networks available to the accountable body.

### ***Ownership and buy-in***

Evaluation can feel threatening to participants, if they believe that they will be criticised without due understanding of the context in which they operate or the constraints upon them. Evaluation also makes demands on the time and energy of those whose work is to be evaluated. Getting buy-in from those who are being evaluated and securing their trust is essential if all those involved are to be honest and to learn. This applies as much to CDF itself as to the REP ABs.

REP ABs already have a number of monitoring demands as well as local evaluations and it is important that the national evaluation respects this. In addition, the people

we wanted to interview – in and beyond the REPs – were busy people with a lot of demands on their time. To a certain extent, persuading people to fill in a survey or give us their time depended on them having some commitment to the Programme or their REP, which could have introduced bias.

### ***Programme evaluation***

This is a Programme evaluation, designed to identify what can be achieved through a regional Programme and how this varies according to regional context. It is not designed to assess or make comparisons between the performance of individual REPs. The latter is part of the monitoring process, and there are also local evaluations which explore in more detail the lessons for each of the REPs. However, we have tried to identify factors which affect progress and impact across the different regions.

### **Methodology**

To address these challenges we adopted an approach that used a variety of methods, which was participatory, as recommended by the Year One evaluation, and which could locate individual activities and achievements in a more comprehensive ‘theory of change’.

### ***A variety of methods***

Five principal methods were used:

- The research started with a **document review** to allow us to map the activities that had been undertaken and the development of the rationale for the Programme. These included documents about the NEP; monitoring reports and action plans; some of the outputs produced by the regional and national partnerships, and CLG guidance and plans on the implementation of empowerment strategies.
- We then carried out a series of **semi-structured interviews** with national and regional stakeholders, who are listed in Appendix A. This included key players

from CLG and CDF, those who had been national partners in the consortium, and at regional level the REP ABs, the principal RIEP contacts and the GO link person.

- The third research tool we used was a **national survey**. This was sent to REP partners, local authorities, third sector intermediary bodies and front-line organisations. Using Survey Monkey and keeping the questions as simple as possible in order to maximise response, we publicised the survey through as many channels as possible, drawing on lists provided by GOs, RIEPs, REPs themselves and regional third sector forums where these existed. The use of Survey Monkey allowed us to tailor the questionnaire to specific regions and, in one case, add in local evaluation questions. We allowed four weeks for responses and received 442 completed questionnaires<sup>1</sup>.
- The survey allowed us breadth, although there were concerns that many front-line organisations would not have heard of the NEP as such. To get more depth, we aimed to carry out one **case study** in each region, looking at a piece of work carried out by the REP. It did not in the end prove possible to carry out three of the case studies in the time available, partly due to the capacity of regional stakeholders to participate and partly because some of the work was not sufficiently advanced. Other case studies reflect early developments rather than the completed project. The case studies are summarised in boxes at various points in the text and were selected to represent different priorities and types of approach.
- The fifth approach we used involved **participatory workshops**, which are described below.

We also co-ordinated our work with the evaluators carrying out the regional evaluations. However, only two regional evaluation reports had been produced at the time this report was being written – one more has now been produced. All

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<sup>1</sup> Because the survey was snowballed out through the various channels we used, we cannot say how many organisations would have received it and therefore what response rate this represents.

evaluators who had been appointed by the end of March took part in one or both of the evaluation workshops and fed into the plan for years 3 and 4. We also met with the evaluators of the Network of Empowering Authorities – another CLG initiative in the community empowerment portfolio that is managed by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDEA – who were also among the national stakeholders interviewed for this study). They were also working towards producing an evaluation framework by the end of March, but their evaluation is scheduled to run until March 2010 and there are no findings to report as yet.

### ***Participation***

The Year One evaluation recommended a participatory approach and this was very much in keeping with the principles of the NEP, as an Empowerment Programme. To this end, we built two workshops into the study design which brought REP ABs, CDF staff and local evaluators together to inform the design of the evaluation framework (see below) and to feed back emerging findings for comment. They were well-attended and lively events and we would like to thank all the participants for their time and commitment at these two days as well as their help in accessing respondents for the wider study.

### ***The framework***

The evaluation framework is reproduced in Appendix B and was devised, as the previous section states, in partnership with CDF, the REP ABs and regional evaluators, as well as taking into account responses from the interviews. It also took into account the framework being developed for the evaluation of the NEAs. It was designed to reflect:

- The issues and problems that the NEP was intended to address (the Programme rationale):
- The desired outcomes from the Programme in the longer term
- What the Programme would do at a national and regional level to help bring about those outcomes (inputs)
- The changes we would hope to see in the medium and short term that would indicate progress towards the longer term goals (indicators)

It allowed us to set individual pieces of work and medium term outcomes within a larger and longer-term picture and assess whether they made sense in the overall context of the Programme and what it was meant to achieve. It also allowed us to assess, even when it was too early to assess impact, whether initiatives carried out as part of the Programme were 'on track' to achieve certain outcomes.

This was particularly important in relation to NI4. Many respondents were highly critical of NI4 as a measure. They felt it was unreliable and open to interpretation. As a perception indicator, it would reflect people's expectations and external factors, including the performance of central government and the recession. Crucially, it was dependent on action beyond the control of the REP, particularly by local authorities, and on the branding of empowerment activities as well as on marketing by local authorities. We discuss this further in section three. This meant that it was essential to develop a framework which would show how NEP activities could be expected to contribute to the achievement of this indicator in the medium and long-term.

### **The evaluation framework**

Our interviews and workshops suggested that there were three main strands to community empowerment. Our evaluation framework was structured around the three levels at which the NEP aims to make a difference:

- supporting individuals and communities to engage and take up opportunities to be involved in and influence local decisions
- building the capacity of local authorities and other public agencies to engage and empower (both of which were seen as problematic and contested words)
- ensuring a co-ordinated approach to empowerment activity across the third sector and public agencies.

As explained above, the framework (see Annex C) is based on a 'theory of change' model. For each of the three strands of activity, the evaluation framework attempts to explain how the Programme will address the issues identified by participants in the

two workshops as 'drivers' for a co-ordinated empowerment programme; what the Programme aims to achieve in the longer term, and what indicators of progress we can expect to see in the short to medium term. The framework gives us a basis for being able to measure progress towards the ultimate aims of the Programme, even though these aims may not be fully achievable within the lifespan of the NEP.

The framework has also been used to develop a more detailed plan for evaluating the Programme in years 3 and 4. This plan appears in a separate document, which forms Annex C to this report.

## SECTION THREE: THE FINDINGS

### The rationale for the Programme

The Year One evaluation reported considerable confusion over changing aims and outcomes for the Programme both nationally and regionally. It was important for the Year Two evaluation therefore to establish how far there was a common understanding of what the Programme was about among REP ABs and other stakeholders.

Interview respondents identified the issues the Programme was designed to address as:

- A lack of connection between people and government
- A need for a closer understanding between community groups and those with more power
- Inequalities within communities
- The need for tangible evidence on what empowerment looks like and the difference it can make.

There was felt to be an assumption in government that empowered communities would lead to improved services and efficiency gains, but a number of respondents also saw an intrinsic value in empowerment, with a rhetoric of 'a wider devolution of power, giving power back to citizens'.

Many saw the Programme as having the potential to pull together existing regional initiatives, to capitalise on existing good work, to find out what makes a difference on the ground and to promote and share best practice. It thus had the potential to make a much more effective resource out of what was already being done nationally and regionally and to inform a coherent and comprehensive national policy. One REP AB described the work she was doing as 'negotiating understandings', relationship building, getting sectors to work together, getting partners on board, developing processes of partnership. She talked about it as an opportunity to move local

authorities from engagement to empowerment; others described the need to inspire cultural change at local authority level.

However, our Year Two evaluation found continuing ‘fault-lines’ between different stakeholders in relation to their understanding of the Programme.

The first and most fundamental of these related to the clear shift in the rationale for the Programme between Year One and Two. One national partner described the national consortium as creating ‘an independent conduit to work with government and co-ordinate the work of different bodies’, building on previous programmes like Every Voice Counts and Together We Can. It was also felt by most of those involved to have a strong third sector and community development focus, reflected in the national partners and choice of some of the REP ABs. Despite the lack of clarity reported in the Year One evaluation, therefore, many felt that there was a strong ethos underpinning the Programme.

In Year Two, NEP was much more tightly defined in terms of supporting the achievement of National Indicator 4 – and targeted at ensuring that local authorities had the capacity and commitment to pursue NI4. Despite the reservations about NI4 reported above, some REP ABs felt that this gave the NEP a clearer focus and helped to bind in the local authorities – who were after all crucial to the achievement of empowerment objectives. One saw the NI4 focus as *‘a key way to think about a number of issues and how to take these forward, e.g. workforce development and the links between empowerment and cohesion.’*

However, given that the partnerships had been brought together and REP ABs appointed on the basis of the Year One objectives, there were some concerns about whether these were all still appropriate and indeed two had changed the composition of their partnership to adopt a more cross-sectoral approach and reflect the new focus. However, some respondents (especially in the national consortium) felt that this shift in focus had ‘hi-jacked’ the original rationale for the Programme. Inevitably, the legacy of the first year’s understanding and ethos lingered on in a number of regions, along with a commitment to its original aims:

*It was meant to be an oak tree but turned out to be an elm. It is still a tree, but it doesn't look as some thought it ought to*  
(National respondent).

There were also strong feelings – from some GOs as well as other respondents – about what they described as constant moving of the goalposts:

*They put these plants in and then pull them up by the roots... Having set up REPs, government should let them get on with the job.*  
(GO respondent)

The second and third 'fault-lines' are related to this concern about shifting objectives. The second centred on the emphasis given to NI4. Although it had the potential to provide a clearer focus for the NEP, as we have seen, most felt it should be widened out to include national indicators NI-7, on the one hand, and to the Duty to Involve and the CAA process on the other, which had the potential to be a better and more comprehensive measure. Indeed, one REP was working with the Audit Commission with this in mind. There was also uncertainty as to whether REPs should focus solely on those authorities which had NI4 as a target. Some felt that this had been a strong CLG steer, though we learnt that this was not the case. Others felt that focusing on NI4 authorities confined the Programme to working with those already committed to the CE agenda.

Several – especially those from regions with a strong rural dimension - highlighted the importance of working with authorities who had not received neighbourhood renewal funding before and who had little in the way of infrastructure. Some reported excellent progress in this respect (for example, in South Yorkshire). Indeed there was scope for rural to urban as well as urban to rural learning - one of our case studies focused on Parish Planning with a view to replicating this process in urban areas. But participants argued that a rural focus would require more synergy between CLG and DefRA.

The third 'fault-line' centred on the balance between local authority-oriented work and

community-third sector oriented work. There was concern in some quarters (national partners and some REP respondents) about the priority given to targeting local authorities, which some felt had prevented proper debate about what the Programme should be trying to achieve. The legacy of the first year lived on in a community development ethos in most regions and many respondents felt that it was important not to lose the focus on community development and capacity building in the community – without this, citizens would not be able to take up the opportunities for empowerment that were being developed. Work was needed on ‘both sides of the equation’. There was also a strong feeling amongst REP accountable bodies that the Programme did not give sufficient recognition to the role the third sector played in representing the voices of marginalised individuals. In this respect, although this was not mentioned by respondents, there is a strong case for greater co-ordination with Change Up, given its recent emphasis on supporting voice in the third sector.

On the other hand, there were some voices – principally amongst RIEPs and national stakeholders - that were critical of continued adherence to ‘old-style’ community development approaches - one national respondent argued, for example, that the Programme should move beyond traditional understandings of community development to develop empowerment skills amongst other professions. There was some criticism too of a continued focus on the community and third sector in one or two regions, which, respondents argued, allowed local authorities to dismiss the Programme as irrelevant to them, especially where the accountable body was strongly identified with this sector.

A fourth fault-line centred on the understanding of community empowerment. There was a view in some quarters that CLG’s understanding of empowerment was very narrow – about individual rather than collective empowerment, about service delivery and enabling people to complain:

*Community empowerment is more than a few petitions and participatory budgeting. There is a need for it to be in the DNA of an organisation. It is not a bolt-on it needs a new approach to everything.*

(national stakeholder)

This national partner argued that the Programme needed to be based on a much more fundamental analysis of what was needed to change the culture of public authorities than was apparent in the operation of the NEP so far.

A fifth fault-line centred on the question of whether the REP was basically a facilitator and broker – as described above – or whether it should itself be a delivery agent. In fact, most REPs argued that delivery of REP initiatives should be commissioned or brokered through partners, using NEP or the partners' own resources and thus maximising the resources available locally. Indeed one respondent argued that the REP Business Plan should acknowledge all the resources of partners and not just the REP funds. However, there seems to be a serious mismatch between this view and the concern of some in CLG that REP ABs should play a diagnostic role, identifying and working with local authorities who are falling short or need more support and feeding back to CLG on the issues this raises. There was also criticism in one or two quarters that REP ABs who were focusing on the third sector were 'rebranding' work they should be doing anyway.

On the other hand, there was widespread agreement on the potential for NEP to make sense of what most people felt was a bewildering array of CE initiatives, which was variously criticised as 'messy' and uncoordinated, a 'total mish-mash', a 'pick and mix' of initiatives or even a 'spaghetti junction'. There was considerable frustration among all stakeholders we interviewed about the lack of coherence in government's wider community programme with 'at least three different bodies doing community empowerment at regional level':

*The landscape is incredibly cluttered and needs sorting. It's astonishingly crowded and there's territorial rivalry.*

Initiatives had started at different times, with some 're-badging' of earlier initiatives leading to particular confusion. There was no sense of strategy. There was strong criticism of Whitehall for not being joined up itself and particularly of the disconnect between the policies of the Office of the Third Sector and CLG – as evidenced by the

parallel developments of Change UP and the CE programme. There was also some concern in regions with a high rural population about the lack of co-ordination between CLG and DefRA.

Nonetheless, at regional level, the REPs are in a strong position to make sense of this and several saw it as a central part of their mission.

In summary, then, compared with Year One, there is certainly more clarity in Year Two about what CLG wants from the Programme – a focus on NI4 and on LAs (although there is still some confusion about whether this can include non NI4 LAs). But this clarity has taken some time to filter through – especially to those of our respondents who were not REP ABs - and there is concern that in narrowing the focus, the breadth of the earlier Programme is being lost - along with opportunities to play a wider role and work ‘on both sides of the equation’.

## **The structure of the Programme**

### ***The national consortium***

The national consortium has now been disbanded, with the original partners brought together as and when necessary around particular themes. When we carried out our fieldwork, however, this news was only just filtering through and there was still a lot of confusion. The experience of the first year had left a legacy of resentment at regional level among those who were unclear about the role of national partners and saw the national funding programme as an unseemly ‘bunfight’ for resources with little or no accountability (compared to the high level of monitoring required of REPs). Indeed it was the conflict of interests between the roles of national partners as both commissioners and bidders which had led to the whole idea of a consortium being questioned. However, while some national partners had made a point of steering clear of the ‘bunfight’, others argued that the resources had allowed important work to be done. Nonetheless there was a strong feeling that not enough is being done to publicise the resources that came out of the Programme at this stage and that, as a result, they are not being used. On the other hand, one REP AB was sceptical about

the value of yet more research and toolkits, arguing that the national consortium should instead have been 'our voice on the national platform'.

One partner felt that the whole process had damaged trust between CDF and key community sector bodies. Despite the criticisms, there were some at national level who saw the demise of the national consortium as a missed opportunity to have a strong independent but integrated national voice for empowerment and that not enough had been done to clarify their role:

*It could enable the regions to get together, enable sharing of good practice, provide problem solving fora, provide ways of finding out information – in short, empower the regions.*

While one national partner described the early debates in the consortium as 'toxic', another felt there had been a mismanagement of expectations and regretted the fact that the opportunity had been lost to create a genuinely overarching structure: 'the sum of the whole has to be greater than its parts'. The NI4 Delivery Group was not seen as an alternative as it had a much more specific focus and a different rationale for membership. There was also some debate as to whether one partner could represent all the original consortium members, given there was now no mechanism for accountability.

### ***Administration***

The partnership between the regions and CDF has the potential to be 'greater than the sum of the parts', but most respondents felt that this had not yet been realised. There was considerable frustration with what was seen as a failure on CDF's part to promote active co-ordination and learning between the regions and some REPs had taken their own initiatives to join up at a sub-national level. As in Year One, they found the evaluation workshops a valuable opportunity to share ideas and experience but some argued that other national meetings had been less use - indeed they have asked for fewer of these. However, another REP AB felt that CDF were now creating more opportunities for sharing and that the arrival of new staff would help, while the new structure should help regional managers to deliver. It will also be

important for all REPs to identify opportunities for sharing, as some have already done. One specific example of where cross-regional sharing would be valuable was in response to emerging issues, e.g. the work on urban extensions in the SW and the Thames Gateway in EE.

There was considerable criticism of CDF's role and performance, which was felt to be 'controlling rather than enabling' and not reflecting community development principles. As one national partner acknowledged, there is an inevitable tension in programmes of this kind between the regional and national level, with the centre seen as a bottleneck for resources. And criticism of the centre might be expected from organisations with a strong community development ethos. As this section will make clear, there were times when CDF found itself acting as 'pig in the middle' taking the blame for constraints imposed and poor management by CLG as well as the change in direction from a community development oriented ethos under earlier programmes such as Together We Can to a much more centralised strategy. But the criticisms did not only come from REPs – one GO described the tone of CDF emails as 'high-handed' and some national partners felt squeezed out.

What then did respondents want from CDF? One national respondent argued that its role should be about co-ordination and challenge with a bridging role into government. Another argued that it should communicate messages in and out of government and step in quickly but sensitively when things were going wrong. REPs wanted it to play a developmental role, sharing experience across regions, brokering and mentoring.

There is clearly an ambiguity in CDF's role, expected to be a delivery agent by government – an insider – and a source of support to the regions on the other – an outsider. CDF recognises this ambiguity and some of the national partners were also sympathetic to the balancing acts it had to perform, but respondents in and beyond the REPs still argued that it seemed to be more concerned with monitoring and contract compliance than enabling. Monitoring demands were felt to be high with short timescales for reporting. Some felt the blame for this lay with CLG and the demands it imposed; others that CDF was too risk-averse and did not 'stand up' to government.

There were also concerns about the administration of the Programme with particular anger about delays in funding in both Year One and Year Two. This had meant the Programme had a 'stop-go' feel about it. The need to spend by the year-end despite a late start meant that initiatives were truncated, without the lead-in time needed, for example, to bring LA partners fully on board or to reach more marginalised groups. It also meant that, where REPs employed staff, their contracts were uncertain – which prejudices their ability to keep good staff.

We were told that Ministers saw NEP as a four-year programme and there should not be uncertainty about whether the money will be forthcoming. CDF had also negotiated some tide-over funding in Year Two from the previous year's underspend. But there had still been problems with staffing as a result of these funding delays. Again, opinion was divided about whose fault this was – one respondent referred to a blame game between the two parties - and we were not in a position to judge. However, we do know that there have also been funding delays in other programmes too that are not associated with CDF. It is not the task of the evaluation to allocate blame in any case, but the stop-go funding has undoubtedly sapped energy, stalled momentum and hindered the progress of the Programme and its ability to meet expectations. However, we are able to report that, after pressure from CDF, this appears to have been addressed, with funding coming through at the beginning of April.

### ***Regional structures: accountable bodies***

The variety in accountable bodies was described by one respondent as a strength of the Programme. Two are regional centres of excellence, another is housed in the LA, a fourth is a consultancy with considerable experience in partnership working and support, a fifth is a regional third sector body, a sixth is a regional third sector intermediary body, a sixth is a partnership created for the earlier Every Voice Counts initiative. In three regions the REP AB is either new (appointed in EM in December 2008) or was being covered by a consultant at the time of our fieldwork (SE and NE). In a fourth (EE), delays in funding meant there was no co-ordinator in post between

April and October, while a fifth (WM) also had staffing problems which led to a loss of momentum.

In two regions (SE and EM) the breakdown of the original REP AB arrangements has given rise to a legacy of confusion and, in some quarters, mistrust. Here, Year Two has been devoted almost entirely to developing a functioning partnership, which means that these regions are a long way behind the others in terms of delivery. Notwithstanding this, the South East has made very good progress with putting in place a coherent programme of projects and activities, and the EM is beginning to do some innovative work on NI4. We do not think it is particularly helpful to explore the reasons for the failure of the previous arrangements in the SE and EM, since the issues are now resolved and the focus of all partners is on delivering the programme in years 3 and 4. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the ability of these regions to deliver on the objectives of the programme has been severely compromised.

### ***Regional structures: REPs***

Much of the first year was concerned with partnership development at regional level and this was still an issue for Year Two. A particular issue this year has been getting the membership right and at the right level. In the first year one partnership was described as ‘the great and the good sitting around the table muddling through the first Action Plan, with patchy attendance and little focus’ – which made it hard to get the right people on board. As a REP AB argued, it is important to have these big guns on board but it is difficult to run meetings that are an efficient use of their time.

Most REPs have experienced tensions between being inclusive and being efficient. To get this balance right, most now have or are proposing a focused core group with a wider inclusive partnership group meeting less frequently – although this is not universal. Several have ‘task and finish’ groups working on particular pieces of work or themes (communications, NI4 leads, equalities are common examples) and bringing in players who are not on the Partnership itself (e.g. Planning Aid in the South West where a key issue is urban extension). This was acclaimed as a way of spreading involvement in the SW evaluation. Some RIEPs have emphasised the

importance of effective chairing and one REP has recruited a paid independent chair.

Membership of the wider regional partnerships ranges from 14 to 40 and is now usually cross sector. One had recently structured to reflect the changed agenda of the NEP and its focus on LAs (EE). Another, which had earlier been described by a stakeholder as 'a meeting of third sector partners', has also recently agreed a new structure to broaden its membership. While REPs mainly engage bodies with a regional or subregional remit (e.g. NW), they will bring in lower tier third sector bodies, where they are felt to have a particular contribution to make ('people who get things done' - SWREP).

The contract with the REP stipulates that there should be both a GO and RIEP member on the partnership and one respondent wondered whether the contract should also have stipulated that the NEAs and/or other LAs should be included. As it happens, most do now have local authorities as REP members, usually including the regional members of the NEA. Our most recent information suggests there were 5 LA members on the EE and London REPs, 4 in YH and 3 in SW, with one in the SE, EM, NE, WM and NW.

In Yorkshire and Humber, the issue of engaging communities themselves had been tackled by creating a Community Panel of people from across the region, many of whom had not been active before at this level. This Community Panel was represented on the REP but also met separately with key regional players, including the Audit Commission and GO to bring a community view to bear. A sub group of Panel members and GO officers responsible for rural issues also met separately., to bring a community view to bear.

There is scope to involve public agencies beyond the LA. Not all REPs have health, police or LSC reps as members. It is rare to have private sector partners on board – in one region, respondents pointed out that this was difficult because there was no identified regional grouping. And while several REPs included RDAs, others had either declined or rarely attended.

To some extent, membership depends on the accountable body and its networks.

Those who could build on structures and relationships already developed in the region had a head start, but there were some regions where there was relatively little community infrastructure to build on (the EE REP set up the first Community Development Network in the region, see Box 4). There was still felt to be scope for expanding the membership further in some regions, e.g. to include reps from those LAs who are not so engaged or to bring in constituencies not yet represented, like young people (NW). Most wanted to bring in more marginalised groups, but felt this would best be done initially through the more focused task groups.

There were concerns about possible conflicts of interest where REP partners were commissioned to carry out particular pieces of work, but this was not the issue at regional level that it had been nationally. One REP had a separate commissioning group (NW) and the two-tier structure made this possible elsewhere. The WM REP restructuring was partly introduced to tackle this issue.

There were still some criticisms of existing structures. RIEP comments tended to focus on the need for a more focused group and the importance of good chairing. In one region a partnership set up from scratch was felt to have a 'closed feel' about it, with the rationale for selection 'lost in the mists of time'. Another was criticised for not being a partnership and too third sector oriented. A third was felt to have too much of a community development bias. But these criticisms are now being addressed. Generally speaking, and with the benefit of hindsight, the feeling was that it was best to have an accountable body which was not associated only with the third sector, both because of potential confusion over its role and also because of the need to bind local authorities into the REP - as we have seen, two REPs have restructured to reflect the LA focus that the NEP now has. However, in the West Midlands, which has had a largely third sector membership, there is already a body in existence (ECCE) with a remit to bring together key regional players with representation from both the REP AB (in its role as the third sector regional infrastructure body) and the RIEP. Here we were told that there was potential for the REP AB and the RIEP to form a steering group, which would become the official REP, with one funding pot.

Generally speaking, the more established partnerships felt that key regional stakeholders were playing a central role in agreeing and implementing the Action

Plan. But one expressed concern that key regional players might fall by the wayside as a result of the recession and funding cuts, which will of course affect the potential for delivery. However, the comment in the SW evaluation that the REP now needed to move from being a collection of projects to a learning organisation could probably be applied more generally.

### ***The relationship with RIEPs***

It has become clear in Year Two that the relationship with RIEPs is vital to the success of REPs. But, given that RIEPs were themselves only set up this year and are said to have a heavy workload, this was bound to be a challenge. Some were still recruiting staff and agreeing their action plans in Year Two. One national respondent reported 'huge levels of mistrust' between the two structures at the outset and saw this as an extremely problematic area, while a survey respondent argued that overlap between the REP and RIEP in his or her region was causing confusion and recognition problems. However, there are signs that relationships are improving. In four regions, the relationship appears to be particularly strong, with both parties acknowledging the importance of the other to their own agenda and the RIEP seeing the REP as essential to delivering its own community empowerment strategy. For example,

*There is a genuine supportive relationship and partnership together with excellent co-ordination of agendas (North East)*

*There is an excellent relationship and mutual respect. The links are very strong. (North West)*

In each of these regions the RIEP has funded REP work – in the NW it even provided funding to tide the REP staff over when there were delays with the NEP funding.

In three regions, however, there had been concerns about the relationship with the RIEP, during Year II, despite considerable efforts on the part of REP ABs to engage; in another, there were conflicting views. In some regions, we were told, for example, that the RIEP saw the REP as being 'about the third sector'. Our evidence suggests

that the relationship so far has depended on the quality of key personnel in the RIEP and particularly on leadership from the top, which varies between regions as does the culture of the RIEP. However, it also suggests that relationships are improving. In London, for example, the function of the RIEP was taken on by an already existing partnership - Capital Ambition – whose priorities, as its name suggests, lay elsewhere. However, the NEP has now been invited to a new London Councils Empowerment Group, which could provide another route for influencing LA agendas in the region. In Yorkshire and Humber we were told that things had moved on ‘considerably’. We were also told that the RIEP in the SW started out with no empowerment agenda in Year One but that this had shifted dramatically in response to a sustained effort from the REP.

Another key factor which plays into the REP/RIEP relationship is politics. Where the RIEP is dominated by Conservative councillors, the community empowerment agenda is likely to be seen as a New Labour agenda and thus not as a priority. This has certainly been the case in the South East and in London, which is ‘turning blue’. This also means that even where the relationship between key players is strong, this might not filter through to their wider constituencies.

A third factor that has complicated relationships is the fact, mentioned earlier, that RIEPs themselves are new this year and establishing their regional role and presence. If community empowerment is not seen as a priority, then the REP is just another diversion at a key stage in the RIEP’s development. Their relative youth will be less of a factor in the future (although heavy workloads might continue to be so), but there is a sense in which the REP-RIEP relationship can mirror the suspicions that often characterise relations between elected councillors and the community sector, with RIEP members either suspicious of the REP or seeing it as irrelevant. In one of the regions which was having difficulties with its RIEP, we were told that councillors preferred to sort out their own problems rather than having an outsider come in and do it.

It is not clear, however, even where the relationship is positive, how far understanding penetrates beyond key players. In one RIEP, we were told, several member authorities saw community empowerment as ‘just another layer of targets

being imposed on local government'. We were told by another RIEP respondent that, because councillors aren't seen to be central to the NEP agenda, there is an issue for many members about its lack of democratic involvement. An Empowerment Officers Network has now been set up nationally and it will be interesting to see what impact this has on the profile of NEP work in RIEPs. However, some RIEPs send REP ABs to this meeting.

The importance of the RIEP is demonstrated by the fact that in all but the West Midlands, the RIEP is a member of the Partnership – as stipulated in the contracts for the REPs - and in most they attend regularly. In the West Midlands, the REP AB is a member of the RIEP, but this is in its capacity as the regional third sector forum and both are members of ECCE – the regional hub. In the North East, the REP is represented on the RIEP Board and, in the South West, on the RIEP's Stronger Communities Board. Here and in other regions with good relationships, there is regular contact. As we have seen, there has been pooling of funds in some regions and even where the relationship is still problematic there have been some joint events.

Examples of some of the work that has been specifically targeted at LAs are included in the Delivery section of this chapter. Monitoring forms also show the numbers of LA personnel who have participated in activities and CDF estimates from these that personnel from some 200 LAs have been engaged in one way or another.

Examples of the ways in which LAs have engaged in the REPs in Year Two include hosting exchange visits (EE), learning exchange seminars (NW) and roadshows (EE); showcasing REP work in London (Southwark and empowerment mapping) and the SE; involvement in major initiatives like the SW Empowerment Good Practice Programme, the London Community Evaluators Programme or the NI4 testing in Yorkshire and Humber; involvement in the planning and delivery and hosting of events in several regions (e.g. the Champions Of Participation event which showcased international experience in Yorkshire and Humber, providing workshops at learning events).

However, one REP AB pointed out that LAs from the NEA were very stretched already and it is important to have realistic expectations of what levels of involvement

can be expected. It is also important that over the next two years of the Programme, engagement percolates through authorities and particularly to members – we will return to the question of member engagement later.

### ***Government Offices***

Relationships with GOs are almost universally positive. In many cases, this builds on an already existing relationship between the accountable body and the GO and the trust this has generated has allowed the GO to act as what one REP called a 'critical friend'. However there was one GO that felt 'quite out of the loop' because the money went through CDF – this GO contact preferred to work with the RIEP where there was a direct funding relationship. This was in a region where the REP was seen as a TSO. In most regions, however, there is frequent contact, with GOs engaged in strategic planning through REP steering groups. Nor are they simple messengers from CLG. Many were quite critical of government and the way the Programme had been set up, which may reflect the fact, reported to us by one GO, that they were not consulted in the design of the programme and their expertise was not used.

GOs have no funding to put into REPs, but they do have other valuable resources. One REP described the GO role as providing access to LSPs and other key bodies, providing a government perspective, explaining how community empowerment fits with LAAs, and gathering information on NI4. GO staff have facilitated workshops, managed 'task and finish' groups, helped to secure speakers, acted as a broker where there are blockages, and played a 'challenge role to ensure the third sector doesn't get too caught up in its own interests'. In the East of England, where the REP co-ordinator was only appointed in Autumn 2008, a third sector secondee was working in the GO carrying out a mapping exercise on what LAs in the region were doing on community empowerment. As in the case of RIEP contacts, however, it is not clear how far relationships extend beyond the key contacts and one GO respondent lamented the lack of communication and co-ordination within her GO.

## Delivery

In the most developed regions, while Year One was mainly taken up with establishing the structures we discussed in the last section, Year Two has been embedding these structures and relationships. Similarly, Year One, for these REPs, typically involved mapping and research to establish the state of play in the region. This was felt to be a key strength since it ensured that subsequent activities were firmly based on research (such as the research in the SW on benchmarking efforts to achieve NI4 amongst local authorities). Year Two was thus able to build on this to develop and implement workplans agreed within the REP<sup>2</sup>. However, in some ways, Year Two was a new start, given the shift to a focus on LAs and NI4. It also introduced a new set of priorities, and some work programmes which were already underway had to be adjusted accordingly.

The detail of NEP activities can be found in the monitoring report for the Programme and are briefly summarised in Appendix C to this report. Here we classify some of the main initiatives carried out by the REPs according to the priorities identified for the NEP. Not all the respondents knew what the priorities were, but most agreed that they were 'difficult to oppose'. They were, however, quite broad – one respondent described them as 'bland and not very profound'.

Although Appendix C bears witness to a considerable amount of activity in some regions, most respondents in and beyond the REP ABs argued that it was too soon to say what had been achieved, partly because they had been establishing baselines and gathering evidence as the basis for their work and partly because key initiatives were long-term in nature. A number of the activities they were developing required a run-in period to establish relationships with key players (as in the case of the Community Evaluators initiative in London, where pilot authorities needed to be recruited before the work could get underway – see Box 2). The funding delays in Year Two meant that funding only came through in the summer and this meant that a number of initiatives were only getting up to speed as the evaluation started.

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<sup>2</sup> See Section Four for a model of how the work of REPs can be expected to develop over the four years.

Nonetheless, there was evidence of good take-up of initiatives - there are plenty of impressive figures on participation in events and numbers on mailing lists. There are also some very positive comments from GO or RIEP partners, who felt that their REPs could point to genuine progress, for example, in working with LAs who haven't been involved in this kind of work before: The South Yorkshire Improvement Partnership, for example, was said to have made 'amazing progress' in the two years of the Programme so far. However, much of the evidence is anecdotal, the place survey is still to come and at this stage it is only possible meaningfully to evaluate inputs - how far the REPs were putting activities in place that were likely to generate the outcomes sought – and some outputs - what the uptake was.

### ***National Indicator 4***

This report has already highlighted some of the problems people raised about NI4. While this had provided a much-needed focus to the work, it was difficult for the NEP to change people's perceptions of how much influence they had, especially since they did not deliver empowerment activities directly. External factors would further complicate the picture, especially in a period of recession. Nonetheless, most REPs were structuring their action plans around NI4. Two of our case studies looked at initiatives that were strongly related to this priority: Yorkshire and Humber's Empowerment Commission (see Box 1) and the North West's Learning Exchange seminars (see box 5).

#### ***Box 1***

##### **The Empowerment Commission: Yorkshire and Humber REP**

The Empowerment Commission was established to 'explore how regional and local strategies and activities are contributing to the empowerment of communities'. Its aim is to improve practice and knowledge in relation to NI4. It was intended to be a meeting of peers that would encourage people to share evidence about empowerment. It is '*not a formal Commission where groups go and are questioned but more a concept of having a space where people come together, discuss topics .it is about friendly criticism and challenge*'.

Launched at the end of October 2008 the EC brought together regional agencies, local public sector agencies, TSOs, community networks and activists. The focal point of the launch was showcasing the work of three local authorities which had piloted the NI4 evidence framework developed by GOYH and partners. Open to all

comers, it attracted 60 people from across the region and from nearly all the LAs. Each pilot authority took a different approach and were said to be quite honest about the process. A summary of their approaches is available on the REP website.

The idea came from GOYH and the intended outcomes are: a greater understanding of the difference that CE can make to individuals, community groups, communities and public agencies; the promotion of effective practice; and more effective methods of quality assurance for CE. The launch was followed by an Empowerment Month which ran eight empowerment-focussed events and it has also linked to the NI4 Community of Practice which met after the Commission and took forward some of the issues using open space technology. The next step will be to develop themes for further exploration which link to the priorities of the RIEP. Current themes include: Workforce development; achieving an outcome focused approach; neighbourhoods and communities; innovation and efficiency; the economic downturn.

### **Learning points**

- The whole process is geared towards making NI4 more than a tick box exercise and understanding issues of community empowerment in more depth.
- The pilots were short but even with this limitation all three LAs found the NI4 evidence framework a useful tool.

### **Challenges**

- Keeping a loose approach, whilst keeping people engaged.
- Getting people to be honest, and to own up to what they are and are not doing
- Encouraging constructive criticism and avoiding defensiveness.
- Achieving tangible outcomes, making sure that it is more than just getting people together once a year.

In the less developed REP regions, some mapping is still being done to explore how data which contributes to NI4 is being captured (EE, SE, EM). An LSP survey has also been carried out in London which will complement the place survey when it comes out. Elsewhere, work has been carried out to find tools to assess progress towards NI4 and to test them out in pilot authorities, such as the testing of the NI4 evidence framework in YH in three authorities. This has helped to encourage a focus on activities rather than just measurement (YH). Workshops have been held to raise awareness of NI4 in a number of regions and to showcase examples of empowerment activities, while elsewhere task groups and NI4 communities of practice have been set up/supported. Some have expanded the focus to look at NI7 and explore how both indicators relate to the broader Stronger Communities Framework (SW). In Yorkshire and Humber a dialogue has been set up with the

Audit Commission on the assessment of CAAs and the Duty to Involve, while work in the NW has developed around PSA21, focusing on impact for the area and people living there rather than 'just indicators'.

A lot of work has been done to identify training needs and test out existing empowerment tools and while this is not directly related to NI4, more effective training and guidance can certainly be expected to contribute. Others are looking to identify Empowerment Champions. Empowerment workers in local authorities are often isolated and the work done by some REPs to bring them together can be a major source of support.

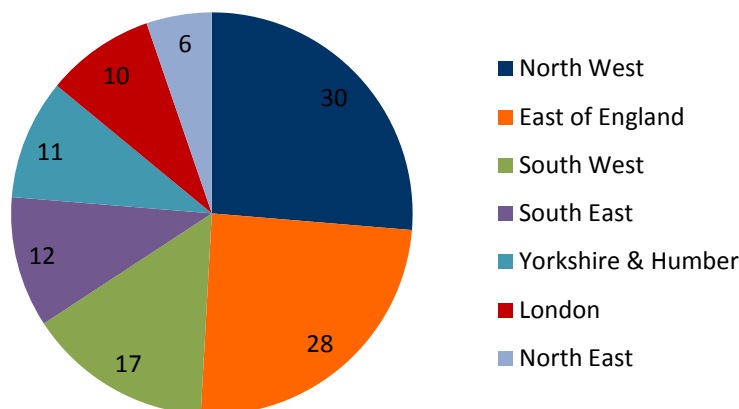
*Working in a council as the only person concerned with community empowerment, you can feel trapped and really appreciate some outside help in working out how to use your capacity strategically and creatively.*

Another interesting initiative is the work being carried out in the SE with schools and parish councils, which has the potential to raise awareness among young people and increase their sense of influence.

One of the aims of our national survey was to establish a baseline for measuring local authority and LSP perceptions of progress towards improving NI4 (as well as other indicators) and of REPs' role in supporting LAs to do this.

This first survey yielded 114 responses (out of a total of 442) from local authorities and local strategic partnerships in seven regions. As figure 1 illustrates, more of these respondents were based in the North West of England and the East of England than the other regions. However, this is likely to reflect the overall number of local authorities in the different regions, which is higher in these two regions than most others.

Figure I: Number of Local Authority and Local Strategic Partnership survey respondents by region



The survey included a set of questions specifically for people from local authority and LSP respondents; only respondents who ticked the 'local authority' or 'LSP' boxes were able to see these questions. We asked respondents to tell us which of a set of 'empowerment related' indicators they had selected as part of their Local Area Agreement. NI 4 was the most commonly selected (with 71 respondents), with cohesion (NI1) second and a thriving third sector (NI7) third.

Figure II: Indicators selected as part of Local Area Agreements

| National Indicators  | Number selecting as part of LAA |
|--|---------------------------------|
| NI1 Percentage of people from different backgrounds who get on well together in their local area | 60                              |
| NI2 Percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood                        | 19                              |
| NI3 Civic participation in the local area  | 13                              |
| NI4 Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality                 | 71                              |
| NI5 Overall / general satisfaction with the local area   | 31                              |
| NI6 Participation in regular volunteering  | 39                              |
| NI7 Environment for a thriving third sector  | 56                              |

Respondents were then asked to comment on the effectiveness of their relevant Regional Empowerment Partnership in helping them to achieve improvements in national indicators.

Generally, there was very low awareness among these local authority respondents of the role and contribution of REPs, reflected in the open-ended comments made at the end of this set of questions. As a result, respondents did not think they were effective in helping to improve NIs. The following figure shows that for each of the indicators more people felt that the Regional Empowerment Partnerships were ‘not effective at all’ in helping to achieve improvements than for any other effectiveness category. Interestingly, however, effectiveness was rated more highly for NI4 than for any other indicator, with 43% of those who answered the question saying their REP was ‘very effective’, ‘effective’ or ‘fairly effective’. The responses for NI7 were next highest at 41%.

*Figure III: Effectiveness of the Regional Empowerment Partnerships in helping to achieve improvement in the following National Indicators*

|  | Very Effective | Effective | Fairly Effective | Not that effective | Not at all effective | Grand Total |
|--|----------------|-----------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| NI1 Percentage of people from different backgrounds who get on well together in their local area | 2 (3%)         | 5 (8%)    | 16 (25%)         | 15 (24%)           | 25 (40%)             | 63          |
| NI2 Percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood                        | 1 (2%)         | 7 (13%)   | 9 (17%)          | 14 (27%)           | 21 (40%)             | 52          |
| NI3 Civic participation in the local area  | 1 (2%)         | 6 (12%)   | 12 (24%)         | 12 (24%)           | 20 (39%)             | 51          |
| NI4 Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality                 | 2 (3%)         | 12 (18%)  | 15 (22%)         | 14 (21%)           | 24 (36%)             | 67          |
| NI5 Overall / general satisfaction with the local area   | 1 (2%)         | 5 (10%)   | 10 (20%)         | 13 (26%)           | 21 (42%)             | 50          |
| NI6 Participation in regular volunteering  | 2 (4%)         | 4 (7%)    | 14 (25%)         | 13 (24%)           | 22 (40%)             | 55          |
| NI7 Environment for a thriving third sector  | 2 (3%)         | 7 (11%)   | 17 (27%)         | 14 (23%)           | 22 (35%)             | 62          |

Many of the open-ended comments about the support respondents would like from the REPs in order to achieve improvements in the National Indicators referred to not having enough information or not being aware enough of the REP’s role to properly answer the question (for example: *The impact of the Regional Empowerment Partnership is not very apparent. We have just been involved in one workshop so far. The REP is quite remote from the work that we are undertaking locally*). One respondent said that there was confusion between the REP and the RIEP. This lack of clarity is not surprising, given that REPs only really began targeting support towards local authorities in the second year of the programme. However, the results

do give a baseline against which to measure awareness in future years, together with an indication of what kinds of support and help local authorities would like to receive from REPs.

Other comments indicated a demand for REPs to provide information on 'good empowerment practice' and to research and share examples of what has worked elsewhere. In total, there were 18 comments of this nature; examples include:

*Clearer idea of what activities would help contribute locally to improvements and make a real difference.*

*Evidence of what has made a difference elsewhere. Funding.  
Acknowledgement that different areas will take different approaches, in contrast to the prescriptive approach of CLG (e.g. participatory budgeting)*

*Evidence of what works to deliver the outcomes we want (which is not necessarily the same as improving the indicators, but may have that effect).*

*I am less interested in improving these (methodologically flawed) indicators than in developing good practice and learning from others in relation to empowerment related to service-delivery and more widely to the strengthening of social capital in local areas.*

*Simple 'if you did the following five things...' advice recognising that NI outcomes relate to organisational culture not just community engagement work.*

*For the perception targets, NI1 & 4 it would be useful to have some analysis of how people's perceptions are changed - what are the factors which improve perceptions is media reaction to local decisions important?*

From the perspective of REP ABs and respondents from GOs and RIEPs, it is too early to judge how the NEP is impacting on NI4, particularly as the place survey results were not available at the time of our interviews. As noted above, there was

some doubt about the ability of REPs to influence this indicator, especially in circumstances where RIEPs and local authorities were not receptive to joint working. CLG's view is that feedback from REPs would be 'immensely helpful'. For example, if REPs cannot get access to particular local authorities, they should feed this back to CLG and explain why. If there are local or regional factors that could affect performance on NI4, then the REPs should feed this back, rather than talking about 'external factors' in the abstract. From CLG's point of view, REPs have an important role to play in 'diagnosing' potential problems and identifying possible solutions.

A final point in relation to the survey findings is that it provides a fairly blunt measure of impact. If respondents are not aware of the NEP/REP, it is hardly surprising if they do not think it has had much impact. In future years, it will be important to track – probably through the regional evaluations – what the impact of particular initiatives has been on the participating authorities.

### ***Community led research***

Some respondents were puzzled by the inclusion of CLR in the priorities, but most REPs were in fact carrying out activity under this heading. This included training community evaluators (London – see case study - and SW), Empowering Diversity action research with young people and faith groups (London), research and showcasing events on community led planning in rural parishes with reports and case studies (WM – see case study, EE and SE), action learning sets with seldom reached communities, such as refugee and migrant women's groups (NW), a planned showcasing event in the SE and action research on community anchors in Yorkshire and Humber. Y&H was also supporting dialogue between power holders and communities through its Community Panel and had produced a 'Voices' publication on gypsy and traveller empowerment. These activities also fed into the intention of this priority to tap into community knowledge and views.

The London case study shows how community led research can address CLG's desire for feedback on how local authorities are performing, but this of course, requires careful work with local authorities to establish trust.

## Box 2

**Community evaluators (London Empowerment Partnership)**

This initiative is a community evaluative feedback programme which has been piloted in two local authorities in the London region. It aims to train community participants to assess the effectiveness of different public bodies in empowering and listening to communities. So far, the programme has involved training community participants in techniques for the evaluation of community empowerment activities, and supporting participants as they attend and evaluate a specific activity run by a local public body. Participants' evaluation is 'invisible' (cp. mystery shoppers) – their identity as evaluator is not known to the public body. It is intended to be a practical and grounded way of promoting quality assurance in CE and aims to engage with 'ordinary' people who are not usually involved in community empowerment initiatives, giving them the skills to develop and use their own evaluation tools.

The project came out of LEP's work in Year One on quality assurance. Two pilot authorities, who have both prioritised NI4, have been recruited into the Programme. At the time of the case study in early April, community evaluator training had been completed in one LA and was being set up in the second. Once the community participants have completed their evaluation, the plan is to give the authorities their feedback on the understanding that the LEP will then support the authority to act on the evaluation findings. The intention is that the feedback that the community evaluators provide and the subsequent work with LEP will enable these local authorities to achieve better against NI4. Once the pilot is complete, the programme will then be revised and rolled out to other LAs.

**Learning points**

- The pilot has tested how this kind of activity needs to be structured and the language that needs to be used.
- The learning so far is that the training needs to be run over a longer period to give participants time to build up their understanding of the concepts.
- It is also important to allow adequate time to engage with local groups in order to recruit participants, on the one hand, and to recruit local authorities and secure their commitment, on the other.

**Challenges**

- Delays in funding led to a late start since the project manager was not recruited until autumn 2008.
- The community participants recruited tend to be those already involved in local decision-making. Even so, they tended to focus on the bottom rungs of the CE ladder: how easy was it for me to get to the meeting; did people listen to me when I spoke, was it easy to ask a question – rather than the potential for influence.
- Even in authorities committed to CE, there is a tendency to want to 'control' the programme. The challenge is to get LAs on board but keep them at arm's length so that they do not try to select the participants and mechanisms themselves.

There is of course no obligation for LAs to act on the recommendations that come out of the process.

In the South West, a small community researchers' training project was felt to have been particularly successful because it involved a recently formed parents' group which wanted to start influencing the way that services were delivered. Because it is a group that will form a voice for the wider community, its activities could have a wider influence on NI4 scores for the estate (SW evaluation report).

### ***Best practice***

There was a lot of work designed to identify and share best practice. Often this took the form of 'showcasing' through events and roadshows, which can attract large numbers of people (e.g. In EE, five roadshows attracted 323 delegates from 33 LAs).

Such events not only allow practice to be shared and replicated; they also celebrate effective practice where it is occurring:

*It was very good having the project there from the alleygating<sup>3</sup> scheme. A couple of activists stood up and let people know how they had gone about it and it made it much more real.*

*The sessions we have where people talk about examples of their work are particularly useful for members, as many projects can be replicated by other groups. For example, at the last event we had the example of a successful credit union and a number of people went away to set up a similar scheme in their area.*

In three regions workshops have been held on participatory budgeting – usually in partnership with CLG's Participatory Budgeting Unit - and in YH, a Champions of Participation event was held to learn from wider international experience (working with a Champion from a local LA who was involved in an international champions

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<sup>3</sup> Alleygating is an initiative to close access to alleyways in order to improve community safety and prevent the accumulation of rubbish etc.

network). In EE, NE and YH, case studies of good empowerment practice have been or are being commissioned to provide a website resource for others as well as providing the basis for showcasing events. For example, YH has produced case studies on community policing, empowering older people ('Expert Elders') and neighbourhood governance, which have been used in events and on the website. These are part of a series of 'Voices' publications which also cover work with gypsies and travellers, community anchors and community led development. Work on standards led by the South Yorkshire Improvement Partnership is now being picked up by a number of authorities. Training events have been held and toolkits, guidance and reports produced, such as the EE report on tools and training and influencing policy and the NW routes to empowerment publication

Tools and guidelines on their own are not enough, however and, as the South West evaluation argued, good practice does not always 'trickle down' of its own accord. In the North West Learning Exchange seminars have helped local authorities to understand how best to use empowerment tools to improve their NI scores (see Box 5). In the South West, the REP argued that spreading effective practice needed to be embedded through a 'bespoke service' as the case study in Box 3 explains.

### Box 3

#### **The Empowerment Good Practice Programme: Empowering Communities (South West).**

The Empowerment Good Practice Programme is a pilot programme that aims to support local authorities to improve their understanding of NI4 and develop their practice in relation to this indicator. It follows a benchmarking study in Year One of twelve local authorities, which found a lack of capacity to engage with the community, and identified a need for training in community leadership and facilitation skills. The Zebra Collective – a local organisation – has been commissioned to provide a brokerage and training service in six authorities who have NI4 as a priority. This is provided through 'expert practitioners', and each of the LAs involved has an internal 'champion' who recruits staff for training and promotes the programme with managers.

Local authorities have been keen to engage with the programme, which builds on the bench marking work they had already been involved with, and is tailored to their own particular needs – a 'bespoke' service - as well as being a free resource. They were given a choice of which practitioners to work with, and partnered up with those that had relevant skills. The local authorities liked the fact that the practitioners were experienced in the field of working in local authorities but came in as outsiders with a

fresh view. The exact shape of the programme is agreed with the LAs and has included: mentoring/coaching individual officers in developing their strategic capacity; facilitating the development of a Community Engagement Strategy; and conducting a focus group with community participants to establish changes needed in the LA's practice of community engagement. Training topics have included community leadership, facilitation skills, monitoring and evaluation, and change management. The RIEP will be increasing its contribution to funding the Programme. Future plans are to provide more focused training in each LA, to work with elected members to bring their community representation role together with council consultation strategies, and to work with LSP partners.

### **Learning points**

- If authorities are to learn from best practice, they need a bespoke service to which focuses on the individual or team and starts from where they are.
- A focused intervention which takes the officer away from the demands of day-to-day work can achieve in hours what might take a month or more in 'normal time'.
- Empowerment work needs a dedicated worker who can act as champion in the LA - it should not just be lumped in with other things a worker has to do or it is likely to be approached as just another tick box.
- The fact that the REP was cross-sector was crucial in securing LA buy-in.

### **Challenges**

- Engaging local authorities with NI4 as a stretch target, who already felt over committed.
- Engaging elected members who struggle with community engagement and find their own community representation role threatened.
- Engaging other LSP partners without the spur of Duty to Involve.
- The complexity of governance, with a chain running from expert practitioner to Zebra to the REP and REP AB to CDF and finally to CLG.

The SW REP had also identified the need to make the business case for empowerment, had commissioned a report on this which is now available and is working with GOSW to show how empowerment work could improve services.

### ***Sharing across roles and sectors.***

The Partnerships themselves and the task groups which they have spawned are one example of the work that has been done to encourage sharing across sectors and several REPs felt that this was one of their most significant achievements to date. Other key stakeholders shared his view. Many of the events mentioned in the previous section also involve dialogue across sectors. Inspire East has also run two

exchange visits while, in the North East, sounding boards and best practice events have provided similar opportunities.

We have already mentioned that empowerment workers can be very isolated. This is especially true in regions with a limited history of investment in community empowerment via neighbourhood renewal and other funding. The East of England is one of these and here the REP has established a Community Development Network in EE which has brought community development workers from the different sectors together for the first time in that region.

#### Box 4

##### **Community Development Network: Inspire East**

The Community Development Network (CDN) is a gathering of community development practitioners from across the East of England who want to share knowledge and ways of working. It was started because of concerns about the isolation of many such workers in the region and the fragmented nature of initiatives and knowledge and involves workers from all sectors who adopt a community development approach to their work (including a growing number of housing association officers). While the idea of such a Network is not of itself unusual, the CDN is innovative in its region, which does not have the history of investment in community empowerment initiatives that other more urban regions have.

The CDN runs events twice a year and has a dedicated website with a range of resources to help community development practitioners in their role. This includes a 'who's who of community development practitioners in the region, a document library, an events calendar, careers and skill information as well as case studies showing examples of good practice. The planning and organising is dealt with by a steering group which reflects the spread of membership. A GO officer attends and the RIEP is part of the wider network.

REP funding allowed Inspire East to develop an initiative they had already started in a small way prior to the NEP, by creating a website and organising more regular gatherings across the region. The Network has a database of about 200 people and the sessions where practitioners showcase their work are said to be particularly popular with members. It is now developing to provide training programmes aimed at specific target groups – elected members, people new to the profession, etc. The Network has recently produced a number of short guides on community development including *A Community Development Practitioner's Guide to Influencing Policy* and *A Policy Makers Quick Guide to Understanding the Role and Impact of Community Development* which drew on exercises at Network meetings.

**Key learning points**

- Dedicated resources have helped to establish a functioning network in a region where parochialism has been an issue and previous networks have been cut due to lack of support.
- Respondents did not all agree on its potential to influence policy, but one respondent felt that it provided a mechanisms through which issues common to different localities could be fed through the central government.

**Challenges**

The size of the region creates significant challenges and there may be a need to develop additional subregional groups.

***Regional priorities***

Not all the regions had identified regional priorities. But where they had, a common concern was to give priority to work on equalities and diversity, working with marginalised groups, young people, women, Asian woman practitioners and BME groups or refugees and asylum seekers, gypsies and travellers – work which was often praised by GOs. Sometimes the equalities work was part of the community led research activity already described earlier. The NW was also working on a community reporting initiative to take IT out to excluded communities and running action learning sets on cohesion.

Often support for marginalised groups took the form of network development and support – a common activity across the REPs which has not been reflected by the analysis above but which was particularly important in ‘reaching large numbers of individuals who may feel, as a result of being part of a network, that they are able to influence public service decisions’ (SW evaluation report). As the SW report explained, network support might simply take the form of raising the profile of an existing network as a model for empowerment and influencing service providers as in the case of the Working With Networks programme and its support for the older people’s forums. Organising regionally for these forums helped individual forums to exchange good practice around influencing their own local agenda. It also provided an opportunity to band together to influence regional and national policy:

*The potential for influence is enormous – the older people’s forums in the*

*South West already involve over 38,000 people.*

Community development also emerged as a priority in two regions – the NW and the EE, while the NE was setting up a Community Empowerment Network workers network.

### ***The balance and spread of activities***

Listing activities by priorities only captures part of what the REPs have achieved so far. It misses the picture in the round – what all this activity adds up to. And it underplays the value of work which cuts across these different priorities but is a crucial part of the theory of change developed in the Empowerment Framework. The first proviso is perhaps best captured by a description by one GO of what its REP had achieved so far:

*They have raised awareness, sharing language and communication skills around. Our REP is really good: their events are well managed – there is always a feedback report. They've tried to communicate with everyone. They are very successful at getting people to talk across sectors, getting them to talk about what's on their agendas, so we are not all duplicating. The REP adds value to what we are doing – there is better sharing; a very strong approach to engagement and empowerment and how to move from one to the other. Examples of good practice have increased.*

The most successful REPs are putting together a package that operates at different levels and addresses all parts of our evaluation framework: supporting LAs to provide empowerment opportunities (level 2 of the Empowerment Framework); supporting communities to take them up and exploit them to the full (level 1); and ensuring a coherent, strategic and integrated approach which can use the available resources to best advantage (level 3).

This overview highlights a large amount of work directed at increasing understanding in local public bodies (level 2 of the Empowerment Framework) – through unpacking what NI4 means, sharing examples of good empowerment work, identifying training

needs and putting together bespoke training, mentoring and support packages for empowerment practitioners, like the SW Practitioners Good Practice Programme. Indeed an emerging theme across a number of REPs has been the need to support empowerment officers in local authorities, who are often isolated and unsupported.

At community level (level 1), REPs are supporting networks to provide support to their members on the front line and providing a range of resources which are showcased on websites as well as through roadshows and other events. The wide range of equalities work is equipping the most excluded groups to engage with decision-making processes, while initiatives like YH's Community Panel are bringing community members into direct contact with authorities such as the RIEP and the Audit Commission. They were also supporting third sector organisations

Some respondents were critical of the tendency to put on events, and questioned how far they added value to what was going on anyway. One, for example, argued that REPs should be building skills rather than organising events (although REP ABs would undoubtedly argue that events are part of that process). Although the numbers they attract are impressive and most also attract positive feedback, there is a danger that events may be seen as a 'quick win' and easy way to demonstrate that something is happening. But high quality events – such as the Champions of Participation event in YH - can be inspirational and have many spin offs, as people take ideas and contacts away to follow up in new ways. Similarly the learning exchange seminars in the North West have attracted a large turn-out and were seen to be 'good at spreading the word amongst local authorities and spreading ideas to authorities who were less "up to speed" '. However, the REP feel that these now need to be followed up if they are to have lasting impact and is planning to do so.

#### *Box 5*

##### **Learning exchange seminars: North West Together We Can**

The Learning Exchange Seminars seek to promote awareness and skills in public agencies by showcasing best practice. The intention is that by demonstrating practical ways of putting government CE policy into practice, they will stimulate local

authorities to see this agenda as both practically deliverable and exciting and thus 'prepare and nurture the ground for achieving NI4. They started in the early part of 2008 in the wake of the Communities in Control White Paper and have continued through 2008/9. They have been hosted by local authorities across the region, on topics chosen by the relevant local authority. They are intended primarily for local authority personnel – elected members and officers, policy makers and front-line workers – with an opportunity to explore ideas and advice on the implementation of the elements introduced in the White Paper. However, they have also been open to third sector organisations (voluntary and community organisations) and this has encouraged cross-sector learning.

REP funding allowed NWTWC to develop an existing initiative that had proved extremely popular in the past. The seminars are fairly informal and include a networking lunch, a presentation from an expert in the field (often national) and a short case study, and workshops to allow participants to talk about their work and how the ideas presented might be put into practice in their area. Topics have included: participatory budgeting; Duty to Involve; making the case for community development (involving a speaker from another REP); community charters. One involved a visit to a local project

*I saw some projects that blew my mind. The local group that were showing us their work were passionate to show us what they had done. The community has set up a Communiversity – it's a brilliant scheme and everyone there was amazed at what was possible. Real food for thought*

Attendance has been good with an average of 40 participants per seminar and the seminars are now leading onto further learning events which are already proving popular.

#### **Key learning points:**

- Involving local authorities in hosting and organising the seminars allows LAs to showcase what they are doing well on their own patch and to 'own' the seminar series.
- It also provides a safe environment for those with less experience to learn without being 'put on the spot'.

#### **Challenges**

- The region is large and varied from Cumbria to Greater Manchester. Different sub-regions face different challenges and attendance tends to draw mainly on the relevant sub-region. Transport can be a problem.
- More needs to be done to engage rural populations
- Organising the seminars and ensuring local authority buy-in requires a long run-in and a considerable time investment – NWTWC employed a consultant to manage this.
- Some feel the seminars attract too broad a constituency and this might dilute the opportunity for LAs to learn.

It will be important over the next two years to build a narrative about the longer-term impact of the different kinds of events that REPs have held.

At level 3, the REPs themselves, as we have already argued, represent a significant achievement in a crowded policy environment and relationships are being forged with the GO in all regions and the RIEP in most. However this is proving challenging in some regions.

After two years, REPs are at very different stages of development in terms of the development of the REP and of a Programme that addresses all the priorities. It seemed to us that a key ingredient in successful development had been the capacity to 'hit the ground running', based on the experience and reputation of the REP AB body, combined with a legacy of community based organisation and partnership working:

*Our REP was ready with the right people, innovative ideas, well-regarded in the region and so could get a partnership together.*

*(GO respondent)*

REPs also emphasise different aspects of the work, with some closer to the community level. There was some criticism from RIEPs and GOs that their REPs were focusing too much on 'community development' or the third sector'. One survey respondent argued that:

*The REP has been generalist in its previous activities, not clearly identifying itself with NI4 and LA needs (most of its early events did not include local authorities to any real extent) with elements of preaching to the converted (i.e. community agencies).*

He thought it needed a clearer identity and brand. However, all REPs now have

initiatives targeted at local authorities. Making the connections between the two levels will be crucial. In this respect, the example of the regional Community Panel in YH is particularly interesting. The London REP, meanwhile, was praised by its GO for its ability to ‘explain democratic processes to people’.

### **Wider awareness of REPs and perceptions of effectiveness**

We tested out awareness of the work of REPs through our national survey. A full report of the survey results appears in Annex B to this report. Overall, the survey revealed:

- Low levels of awareness of existence of REPs and their work, amongst both local authorities and community groups. There was a low response rate – in itself an indicator of low levels of awareness - from some regions making regional comparison difficult at this stage.
- Where people had used REP resources, they had found them useful.
- Awareness and use is most well developed in Y&H, NW and SW.
- In particular, respondents found the most useful activities provided by REPs to be the seminars, workshops and other opportunities for meeting together to share learning.

### **Challenges**

The interviews we carried out identified a number of challenges for the NEP at regional level:

*What we are doing is difficult. It's difficult to get buy-in from all the different partners that you need if you're going to make progress in empowering communities and mainstream it – there's always someone who doesn't want to buy in to CE. You need cultural change to get people to take it on board.*

Respondents pointed out that the money involved – some £175,000-£185,000 per region in 2009-10 with less to come in 2010-11 - was small for such a huge agenda and REPs often found it difficult to cover what are often large and very diverse regions – this was an issue raised particularly by the EE and NW reps. The challenge was particularly hard in the regions and subregions with no legacy of community empowerment.

Inevitably there were particular initiatives that had not taken off as yet: community led research in the NE; some of the rural work in the SW; websites that needed revamping (e.g. WM); ALSs that did not get enough subscribers – perhaps because it was too early in the life of the programme. But the more fundamental challenges listed were:

- Changing local authority cultures
- Sustainability
- Timescales, funding delays and changing goalposts
- Measuring impact
- Fit with other initiatives
- Rural work

### ***Changing local authority cultures***

Even if there was the occasional quibble about the focus on local authorities, there can be no doubt that empowerment and thus the REP agenda can only happen if local authorities and other public bodies are fully on board. One REP AB commented therefore that the key challenge was to capture chief executives and make the business case for the CE agenda, in terms of how it could improve services and efficiency and the SWREP has now produced a report on this. It was not only REP ABs who questioned how far a regional body could achieve cultural change at LA level. A GO respondent asked:

*How can the REP influence community empowerment when empowerment can only happen through the political process?*

Our SW case study suggested that the concept of NI4 was difficult to sell to LA officers because there were no standards to work to, no set rules, a lack of resources and a lack of training, but these are gaps which the REPs can help to address with support from the RIEPS.

Some external actors felt the LA agenda still felt 'bolted on' to the CE strategy rather than an integral part. There were RIEP and GO respondents who still saw the role of the REP as focusing on the third sector and community with the RIEP focusing on local government. These respondents were more likely to see community empowerment as 'woolly'. Even empowerment officers in the local authority/RIEP themselves were tarred with this brush, and often isolated (described by one respondent as 'quite an embattled group'), which is why REP initiatives to support them were important.

The term 'culture change' cropped up a number of times in our interviews and this is not, as several respondents argued, something that can be done in three years. Most agreed that engaging members was particularly challenging. One RIEP respondent surmised that about a third of councillors were signed up to this agenda in her region, which still left two-thirds to be convinced. One REP AB suggested that they saw the third sector as 'gatekeepers'. Achieving change is complicated by the diversity of structures in local government and by the fact that the recent reorganisations have left district councils feeling that their noses have been put out of joint. Certainly this diversity argues for a flexibility of response and recognition of the different tasks facing different regions.

Another barrier to change is the sense in many LAs that this is an agenda imposed by government. More than one person commented that local authorities themselves feel disempowered in what remains in England a very centralist system, without even 'single devolution' let alone double devolution:

*We are asking members to act as an agent of empowerment in a system that doesn't empower them to do that (RIEP).*

*Government needs to join up nationally and leave local authorities [and other local organisations] to run the programme locally (national respondent).*

This tension is exacerbated by the fact that in many regions it is the Conservative party that is dominant in the RIEP and they see the NEP as a New Labour agenda.

In these circumstances it might be argued that the progress that has been made is remarkable. But reaching councillors is still an uphill struggle – for some events it was difficult to get them to attend - and REPs are very dependent on RIEPs to deliver in that respect. Some REPs were finding that a targeted ‘bespoke service’ was the best way forward, but not one which was judgmental. Although one or two respondents argued for naming and shaming, part of the success of the Learning Exchange seminars in the North West was due to the fact that:

*They enable authorities with little track record in the areas of engagement and empowerment to come along and learn without being ‘put on the spot’. As such it is a gentle way of getting people to take on board issues of good practice, without pointing the finger at lack of performance against a whole range of engagement and empowerment indicators, including NI4.*

(REP AB)

But most respondents felt that a clearer steer to RIEPs from central government was essential if real progress was to be made.

### ***Sustainability***

The economic downturn, combined with the prospect of a change of government in 2010 has certainly focused minds with respect to the longer-term future of the REP agenda. It puts a premium on the need to make the business case. But those who have developed the furthest are turning their minds to the question of how to maintain the partnership and ‘keep the momentum going’ if there is no longer-term funding. They are already thinking about how to step back. This will be an increasingly important issue and especially challenging for those regions where the

Programme is still in its infancy, not least where these are regions which have had little investment in CE, partnership working or the infrastructure in the past. Respondents also cited DEFRA cuts and the potential changes in LA control come the May elections as potential problem areas.

### ***Funding delays and changing goalposts***

Sustainability depends on adequate planning from the start and several respondents from different quarters commented that the 'rush to spend the money' and the 'stop-go' nature of the NEP had been damaging and led to poor planning. It prevents strategic thinking and increases the risk, as one stakeholder in a regional evaluation put it, that all the NEP will amount to is 'a bunch of commissioned projects'. Some exercises (e.g. the mapping in Year I in EE) had to be repeated. The change in Programme direction has also been a problem and has left fault-lines in the Programme between what REPs originally thought they were doing and what they are supposed to be doing now. One person argued that it raised questions about whether all the REP ABs are now the most appropriate types of organisation for the job. Some of this has to be regarded as water under the bridge, although there are important policy lessons to be learnt. But allowance has to be made for this and the inroads that this has made on what was described as a four year Programme.

In addition, there can be no doubt that the delays in funding have been damaging (although this is not an experience confined to the Programme or even to CLG). Again, the most developed REPs working in regions which are better resourced and/or better networked are better placed to maintain some kind of continuity. But even they feel that as a result activities have been rushed, without time to get partners properly on board. We were assured by CLG that this was a four-year programme (subject to annual Parliamentary approval), which as one REP AB pointed out, would of course be more in line with Compact principles, but there is still no sense of security for next year in some regions and if momentum is to be sustained across all regions, this issue must be addressed. Pressure to spend money over short timescales is unlikely to be cost-effective. In the case of Change

Up, which had even greater delays, an NAO report<sup>4</sup> recommended that help should be provided for support providers to plan ahead by providing clear information on when funding would become available. Where there were unavoidable delays, funders, they argued, should assess the risks to value for money from a shortened timeframe against those that might arise if it were extended. While the programmes are not strictly comparable, there are parallel lessons to be learned here.

There was also a strong feeling that the monitoring, evaluation and funding cycles needed to be better integrated. In the 2008-9 financial year, the money didn't really come through until the end of the summer of 2008, but the annual monitoring report was expected in January. Wherever the fault lies, this makes no sense. There are. Of course, constraints dictated by the processes of government, but now that the funding is coming through on a more reliable basis, it should be possible to align the national and regional evaluations and their reports more constructively with action planning.

### ***Measuring impact***

The concerns about NI4 have already been reported, as have the challenges of evaluating an 'indirect' programme of this kind. But regional respondents were very aware both of the need to demonstrate impact and the difficulty of doing so. There was particular concern about the extent to which they would be able to drill down to local level and complete the chain from CLG through the regions and the LAs right down to the front-line, and indeed whether it was realistic to expect high recognition amongst front-line organisations. One REP argued that, it was important for the sake of sustainability beyond 2011 to deliver key programmes through partners rather than branding them as the REP. Otherwise, they would be 'setting up the community we serve to feel that something of value has been lost, which helps nobody'. Regional evaluations will be better placed to assess impact at different levels. Nonetheless, there was a strong sense in some regions of the need to make the business case and to build a narrative that would clearly link the work they were doing to NI4.

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<sup>4</sup> NAO (2009) *Building the Capacity of the Third Sector*, HC132 Session 2008-9, London: The Stationery Office

However, as we have seen, they felt a wider measure would be essential, recognising the other national indicators in the stronger communities set and also linking into the CAA process and the Audit Commission's assessment of the Duty to Involve. This would seem to be a priority for the coming year.

Respondents also raised questions about the impact of the national spend in Year One. They were aware that the documents produced as a result of the work commissioned by national partners were listed on the CDF website. But they felt that the outputs needed to be marketed much more effectively and that some assessment needed to be made of how the products were being used and thus of the effectiveness of this part of the spend.

### ***Fit with other programmes***

Again this is an issue that has already been raised. Some felt that they ran the danger of stepping on other people's toes in developing their programme and that it was a major challenge to avoid duplication. It was difficult, for example, to draw a line between empowerment, cohesion and equalities work. They wanted to see more integration with the NEA initiative and other CLG CE initiatives as well as co-ordination with OTS with regard to Compact and Change Up and with DEFRA over rural work.

### ***Rural work***

Working in areas which did not have a tradition of community empowerment funding – and especially where the infrastructure was poorly developed was both an exciting and a challenging opportunity. There has been a mixed response. Some REPs reported major progress with authorities which had been left out of previous programmes in regions where there had been investment elsewhere. However, in regions where there had never been much investment, raising awareness is a greater challenge and likely to require a longer lead-in time. There were doubts in some regions as to whether this work would pay off, but a strong feeling that something needed to be done.

**Box 6****Community Led Planning: Every Voice Counts Partnership (West Midlands)**

The Community Led Planning (CLP) is bringing together Rural Community Councils (RCCs) and local authorities across four rural counties of the West Midlands to investigate the possibility of developing a consistent regional approach to community led plans (CLPs) and their role in service planning and delivery on NI4. It is also exploring the potential to transfer this model to urban neighbourhoods through neighbourhood anchor organisations.

Parish plans have emerged as a crucial way of bringing rural communities (e.g. villages) together to develop a strategy for the community. They can be seen as a 'business plan for the Parish Council'. The process of developing a plan can be quite extended but it produces a strategic document of what the local community wants for the area and has proven to be effective as a means of implementation directly through volunteer activity, or through access to third sector support, or indeed through working with public service providers - particularly local authorities. It also avoids repeated overlapping consultations with the same people.

The current initiative has developed from a study in Year One of Community Plans. Led by the West Midlands Rural Community Action network, with some funding from GOWM, it aims to demonstrate to local authorities that the parish plan process is an effective and powerful mechanism through which genuine community empowerment and engagement can be achieved. A feedback meeting on the draft findings of the project was held towards the end of Year Two and was attended by all the rural community councils and RCCs. The work was still ongoing at the time of the case study, but in the third year the project will attempt to explore ways of engaging marginal groups that currently are not really represented in CLPs – older people, young people, people with disabilities and gypsies and travellers.

**Learning points**

- EVC describes the West Midlands as more rural than it is usually perceived to be. This initiative offers the opportunity of learning from rural to urban and also of supporting the achievement of other NIs concerned with volunteering and a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood.

**Challenges**

- The project was only commissioned in mid-February and is working to a very tight timescale.
- Local authorities still tend to regard community intelligence as inferior to hard data.
- The volunteer-driven model of parish plans, which tend to be most effective in the more affluent areas will be difficult to replicate in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods and will need to relate to the funding streams available to community anchor organisations.

### **Tensions and dilemmas**

The evaluation of the NEP is not a simple case of assessing whether REPs have achieved their aims or not. It also brings to the surface a number of inherent tensions in the empowerment process which are common to any programme of this kind and questions for which there is no one simple answer but a great need for learning.

#### Top-down vs. bottom-up. Can empowerment be achieved through a top-down programme?

The NEP is what some have called a 'cascade' model, i.e. one that seeks to generate improvements at the front line from national and regional level. In that sense it is similar to some other government Programmes, such as Change Up and there should be some lessons to be drawn from the evaluation of that Programme, although it has a 10-year rather than 4-year cycle<sup>5</sup>. Some argued that CLG should have allowed much more space for the initiative to be defined from below. But is this a realistic expectation of a funder? REPs need skills in exploiting the opportunities that the Programme offers while recognising what it is and is not realistic to expect of government. On the other hand, government respondents wanted REPs to be a more active conduit of information up as well as down about CE and how it was being implemented. If so, they need to be prepared to listen. There is evidence that this two-way communication is happening at GO level in most regions. But there is little trust that it is happening at CLG level. Some felt that CDF needed to be

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<sup>5</sup> This evaluation has been done but interim findings will not be available until later this year. However, like NEP, it aims to bring about change at an infrastructure level and with an investment that, while significant is a fraction of overall expenditure.

prepared to 'engage in the politics' and make this case more strongly, but others felt that, as a quango and the delivery agent for the Programme there were limits to what CDF could do.

Related to this was the tension REPs and CDF itself felt between CDF's role as the delivery agent of a government programme and its role as a strategic – and critical - partner. How much room for manoeuvre should there be?

Most respondents recognised that NEP was very much dominated by the CLG agenda – not surprising given that they are the funders. But there is a balance between running a focused and well managed programme and allowing the flexibility to test out different and locally appropriate approaches. While the Programme had been very flexible in the first year, perhaps too much so, most felt the balance had now swung in the opposite direction. Some felt there were real problems with a chain of command that went all the way from CLG to small projects supported by the REP. The government commitment was essential to bring the LAs into line and indeed Programme participants wanted the government to be tougher with the RIEPs. But at the same time they wanted a more hands-off approach and more devolution of power to both LAs and the REPs themselves. This could be seen as a case of 'wanting it both ways' but there is scope for a better balance to be struck?

#### LA or community focus?

We have argued throughout, as the evaluation framework shows, that empowerment requires support both to local public bodies, in terms of giving them the will and skills to engage effectively with communities and support to communities to allow them to take up those opportunities and define empowerment for themselves. There were clear differences of opinion between those in government who felt that the programme was still too community development oriented and the majority of the REPs and GOs, who saw support for community development as being an important ingredient and were concerned that capacity building had been sidelined. This was a debate that took place in the national consortium but was never really resolved. One REP said that 'It is not the REP role to join up but to increase the mass of empowered people'. This is clearly not the CLG view and would not be shared by all

the REPs. But, as the evaluation framework shows, community development is not incompatible with a focus on LAs – indeed most of the participants in the Programme would argue that it is essential - and there needs to be greater recognition of this from government.

The NEP is an ‘invited space’, i.e. an initiative into which the community sector has been invited by government, but research has demonstrated that it is important that participation in invited spaces such as this is supported by popular spaces in which communities can find their own voice. A CE policy needs to find a way of supporting this. At the same time, NEP is no longer simply a community development programme and REPs need to be clear in their Action Plans about how this part of their work fits with the LA agenda and NI4 on the one hand and with programmes like Take Part with a more central capacity building brief on the other.

This debate reflects other tensions in the understanding of both the Programme and empowerment. The first is the tension between individual and collective empowerment. Most REPs are agreed that they cannot impact upon individual perceptions of empowerment and there was some criticism, again not just from REP ABs, of the individualist slant of government’s CE policies. But they are supporting networks and workers who are supporting collective action and feel that they can make a difference there. It is individual empowerment that NI4 measures. But NI7 was felt to be equally important. And this brings us to the second related concern - that the third sector had been sidelined. Perhaps this reflects the continued distance between CLG and OTS, but a number of respondents felt that CLG needed to be convinced of the role that third sector organisations could play in this agenda. Again, making this case is a role that CDF is well placed to perform.

Meanwhile, one GO respondent argued:

*CLG sees community empowerment as something that government can deliver through local authorities and didn’t see that the third sector already had interfaces and networks that make community empowerment easier – are CLG wary of getting their agenda hijacked by the third sector?*



## SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

Community empowerment is central to current government policy and finding effective ways of supporting government policy is thus critical. The NEP is a Programme that tests out what can be done at national and local level to support this agenda and – at least since the second year of the Programme – to contribute to the achievement of National Indicator 4.

This report has provided evidence of a range of activities emerging across the regions, even where the NEP has been late in establishing itself. While there is some variability in the extent to which REPs are targeting LAs, there is robust evidence that a start has been made on this agenda. However, it will be important to see how REPs respond to the results of the place survey when they come out in the near future.

Establishing a programme of this kind inevitably raises questions at the front-line:

*The view from the ground is that there is very little added value from regional bodies that just soak up money and create jobs.*

An important task for the evaluation therefore is to assess whether or not this is the case. In these conclusions, we will ask therefore what we have learnt so far about the capacity of a national and regional programme of this kind to add value to empowerment activity at the front line and how far this Programme adds to what the infrastructure has already been doing. We will try to identify some of the factors that have helped or hindered its development, drawing on comparisons between the regions as well as feedback on the national Programme. We will also summarise the issues that the development of the NEP so far raises for the next two years.

## **Does it add value?**

The NEP has now been in operation for two years and in many ways 2009-10 will be the crunch year in relation to demonstrating its added value. So where does it stand at present? The overall aim of the Programme is to empower citizens and communities in England by:

- Demonstrating the difference community empowerment can make to individuals, community groups, communities and public agencies
- Developing effective methods of quality assurance for community empowerment
- Promoting examples of good practice across the country

There is evidence in a number of the regions that NEP has the potential to achieve this, especially now that there is a very clear steer on this from CLG. The work on the evidence base for NI4 and the collection and promotion of examples of effective practice and individual empowerment are evidence of this. There are also signs that in some regions, REPs, working closely with RIEPs, have the potential to draw together what for many on the ground still appears a confusing mix of empowerment initiatives. But regions are at different stages of development.

## **Can it change local authorities?**

The co-operation of RIEPs is essential to achieving the NI4 objective and getting local authorities on board as well as ensuring that REPs are not simply identified with the third sector. Relations between RIEPs and REPs are surprisingly positive given the relatively young age of both partnerships and the legacies of mistrust between local government and the community sector. Some RIEPs were highly complimentary about their REP, which they saw as central to the achievement of their empowerment strategies. However, this has not been the case everywhere and although things are improving in this respect, some of our respondents argued that a clear steer was needed from CLG to the RIEPs to ensure their full commitment to the NEP agenda. Most REPs feel that there is some way to go in convincing elected

members of the value of the empowerment agenda and the RIEP is crucial to this. There is also work to be done by all REPs on making the business case for empowerment activity to local authorities and other public bodies, given the budgetary pressures that are now being experienced as a result of the recession.

One other important point was raised by a number of REPs. Although some respondents would like to see poorly performing LAs 'named and shamed', others felt that a more 'softly, softly' approach was needed which would be less threatening and allow learning in a safe environment (see NW Box 5).

### **When can it be expected to deliver?**

The NEP is a four-year Programme and it is now halfway through its life. Understandably, CLG is anxious to know what difference it is making on the ground. As we have reported, however, most of our respondents say that it is simply too early to tell. There has been some criticism of the time taken to set up partnerships, but bringing together the key players across different sectors in a crowded policy environment does need to be given time and there is some evidence that partnerships set up at speed in order to draw down the money have had to be restructured, as the aims and objectives of the Programme have become clearer. We have also reported the problems caused by uncertainty about funding decisions. In four cases, staffing difficulties further slowed progress down – and although this was not always due to funding delays, such delays meant there was no slack to deal with problems of this kind.

But what can be expected in the coming two years? Based on the work so far, a trajectory is emerging whereby the first year is typically spent mapping CE activity and structures locally and getting partners on board so that the Programme be jointly owned. In some cases, as we have seen, this didn't work well first time around and the second year saw significant restructuring. Although most REPs still feel there are others to be drawn in, most REP structures now seem to be fit for purpose – assuming current proposals for restructuring are taken up. For others, Year Two has been about embedding partnerships – setting up task groups and making adjustments to make the structure work more effectively. On the activities front, the

early years have seen a series of showcasing and training events, which build up the contact base and get the REP known as a source of support. Then more targeted core initiatives have been developed, some of which are described in the case studies here. In Years Three and Four we would expect to see more of this kind of activity, taking into account the results of the place survey alongside the intelligence that the REP itself has gathered. We would also expect to see strategies in place to generate the robust evidence base that the original objectives require and indeed, there is evidence of this in a number of regions. Some are on course already for this and Year 3 will be crucial for them – others still have some catching up to do. REPs will also need to prepare for the future beyond 2011, ensuring that the relationships built are sustainable:

*We now need to embed relationships. We've got to do less and less ourselves*

REP AB

Fig IV shows the trajectory that the Programme seems to be taking. The model sets out key tasks that REPs need to accomplish throughout the life of the programme in order to achieve national and regional objectives, and a timeline for achieving these milestones, given what had been achieved by the end of Year One. The model shows a best case scenario, taking into account the initial teething troubles around funding and contracts.

Figure IV: Model timeline for key components of delivering the NEP programme at a regional level

|  | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| <b>Developing a partnership</b>                            |        |        |        |        |
| Recruiting partners & building partnership                 |        |        |        |        |
| Embedding partnership & ensuring structure fit for purpose |        |        |        |        |
| Delivering with & through partners                         |        |        |        |        |
| Developing sustainability strategies                       |        |        |        |        |
| <b>Diagnosing empowerment support needs</b>                |        |        |        |        |
| Mapping needs & gaps                                       |        |        |        |        |
| Supporting existing networks                               |        |        |        |        |
| More refined diagnosis                                     |        |        |        |        |
| Testing out initiatives to fill gaps                       |        |        |        |        |
| Making the business case                                   |        |        |        |        |
| Developing evidence of impact                              |        |        |        |        |
| Building on evidence base                                  |        |        |        |        |
| <b>Working with local authorities</b>                      |        |        |        |        |
| Building relationships with RIEPs and GOs                  |        |        |        |        |
| Assessing the support needs of individual LAs              |        |        |        |        |
| Delivering general & bespoke support to LAs                |        |        |        |        |
| Developing sustainability strategies                       |        |        |        |        |
| <b>Delivering support for empowerment</b>                  |        |        |        |        |
| Commissioning quick wins                                   |        |        |        |        |
| Commissioning & testing guides, toolkits etc               |        |        |        |        |
| Commissioning strategic work                               |        |        |        |        |
| Recruiting participants to key programmes                  |        |        |        |        |
| Rolling work forward                                       |        |        |        |        |
| Building up a core of skilled empowerment champions        |        |        |        |        |
| Developing sustainability strategies                       |        |        |        |        |

Our evidence suggests that, at the end of Year Two, three REPs were on course or ahead of target on each of the main headings in this table. Five were on course or ahead on the development of the Partnership and six on diagnosing needs, but only three on working with local authorities and delivering support for empowerment. However, as this report has already argued, a momentum was building up in most regions.

The evidence suggests that investment at a regional level has a particular part to play in developing a strategic approach and generating learning between peers and across sectors in different parts of the region, as well as supporting the strategic capacity of other regional and subregional networks. Sometimes, research elsewhere suggests, regional support can help to transcend local politics, but issues remain about the extent to which the REPs can gain a higher profile at local level and demonstrate their relevance. Again we would expect progress on this in Year Three and it will be important for REPs and regional evaluations to track how far their initiatives are penetrating at local level.

So what is it that determines the stage of development in the different regions? And what are the factors that make REPs more or less well-equipped to deliver on the objectives of the Programme? The factors that emerge from the research are:

- Leadership: an AB that is well-embedded in the region and well-respected across sectors, but also a RIEP that takes the CE agenda seriously and is prepared to invest in it.
- A legacy of joint working and good relationships, with agencies and networks who are ready to move the REP agenda forward and networks that can spread good practice and learning
- Linked to these, a good relationship with RIEPs and the GO and with the Third sector regional infrastructure
- The composition of the partnership: balancing inclusion of key players from all three sectors with focus, though a simple structure which separates strategic direction from the development and implementation of tasks
- Dedicated staffing resources that are clearly identified with the REP

- A strong communications strategy – while most have recognised the importance of this, several have also suggested that it is a priority for improvement.
- Vision and strategic thinking – understanding how activities will contribute to the achievement of NI4 and other targets.

Factors that have acted as barriers include:

- Regional politics: especially where leading politicians in the region do not buy into the agenda of the government of the day;
- Delays and lack of clarity, which have already been covered in this report.
- Over-identification with the third/community sector, although the fault sometimes lies with the perceiver rather than the REP.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Design***

The NEP is part of what many feel is a confused landscape at regional and local level with a variety of empowerment initiatives, some reshaped from previous Programmes and some new, competing for attention. The REPs could potentially play a central role in clarifying this confusion and in some cases has done so, but it is not seen to have this purpose in all regions, which leaves it competing with other initiatives for space to operate. This needs to be clarified. Indeed if there is to be clarity on the ground, Whitehall needs to be joined up with clarity in particular about how OTS and CLG Programme relate to each other.

### ***Purpose and aims***

Although this is an evaluation of Year Two, developments in Year One have left traces which affect current operations, so it is necessary first to look backwards. There has been a lot of criticism about the way the Programme was set up (and this is a criticism that has been levelled at other government programmes such as

Change Up). There was a lot of confusion about its purpose in Year One and, while some welcomed the flexibility this allowed for participants to shape the Programme, there was a sense that a programme had been allowed to come into existence in a crowded field without clear aims and objectives. This has been clarified in Year Two, but confusion remains in the minds of some of the partners, while teams, structures and work plans that were hurriedly set up to achieve one set of priorities – with a strong community development/ third sector focus - are now being bent to another set. If the oak tree has turned into an elm, as a national respondent put it, it is perhaps not surprising therefore that there have been some fault-lines this year. However, there is now, as we have said, a much clearer steer.

Most REPs have clearly tied their Action Plans to supporting local authorities in achieving the NI4 objective and some valuable work has been done on fleshing out what achieving this objective means in practice. However, there is a reluctance to abandon valued objectives from Year One and most feel there is scope for a wider view of empowerment than NI4 implies. They argue that the true test of the success of the NEP would be the extent to which there was improvement across the range of indicators from NI1-7 and improvement in the relevant parts of the CAA. We would recommend that the tight focus on NI4 is relaxed to take account of this and that these aims are given priority in work with GOs and the Audit Commission.

This is a debate that needs to be had with CLG, so that there is clear communication and understanding of the respective positions that are being taken and the place of community development in the Programme and so that CDF is not reduced to the role of pig in the middle. Related to this, and particularly to NI7, more clarity is needed is the place of the third sector in the Programme, with a recognition of the role that it can play in empowerment and the support it needs to do so (but see above about joining up in Whitehall). As a regional evaluation argued:

*A thriving third sector does connect with community empowerment, particularly in view of the fact that, as some partners mentioned, many individuals find an influential voice through community and voluntary groups.*

Meanwhile, there is still more scope for REPs to gather intelligence about the context in which LAs are trying to improve NI4 and any issues that are getting in the way. CLG would value such feedback. For its part, CLG needs to ensure that the CE message is taken seriously by RIEPs .

### ***Funding and continuity***

Funding delays mean that valuable time has been lost. We welcome the improvements which have been achieved on this score and recommend that every effort is made to ensure that they are maintained. However, there are still two regions whose permanent REP AB is brand new and a further two which have only appointed their co-ordinators in Year Two. The factors that have led to them being late starters are likely to affect their ability to achieve the objectives of the Programme in the remaining two years. Realistic aims need to be set for the late starters so that they are not set up to fail.

In future years, the evaluation should be phased in a way which feeds into the action planning process.

### ***Communications***

Most of the key stakeholders recognise the need to step up the communication of what the NEP is doing and what its purpose is, as well as its published outputs. New appointments at CDF will help with this and most REPs are giving this a high priority – with task groups set up to provide a focus. That said, there is a need, as a regional evaluation recommended, to evaluate how the toolkits and guidelines that are being produced are being used and the impact they are having. Making a business case for community empowerment will be a priority for Years 3 and 4, if the work of the NEP is to be sustainable and there is a growing body of work in the NEP that can contribute to this.

### ***Sustainability***

REPs will also need to develop strategies for sustainability that can continue the momentum as the funding is withdrawn and that can take into account an environment that may well be hostile – in terms of a continuing recession and change

in government.

## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEES**

### **CLG:**

Henry Tam

Ed Cox

Helen Marsh

### **CDF**

Alison Seabrooke

Jayne Humm

Debbie Ladds

Jane Dobie

### **National partners:**

Toby Blume, Urban Forum

Matthew Scott, Community Sector Coalition

Beth Longstaff, CDX

Bec Clarkson, Community Alliance

Jill Bedford, Take Part Network

Sue Oppenheimer, IDEA

Helen Hughes, IDEA

### **REPs**

East of England: Leah Douglas, REP AB); Cecilia Tedget (Director of Improvement East Partnership for Improvement and Efficiency; Tracey James at GO East.

East Midlands: Aruna Bhagwan (REP AB)

London: Hannah Peaker (LEP); Lisa Greensill (GOL); Kris Hibbert (Capital Ambition)

North East: Liz Greer (REP AB), Minna Ireland (REP Chair), Ian Dodds (GONE), Name (RIEP)

North West: Eve Davidson (REP AB); Dennis Artess (RIEP), Jacqui O'Neill and Eamonn Green (GOL)

South East: Nicky Stevenson (REP AB), Jacinta Thorley (REP Chair), Vicky Westthrop (GOSE), Name (RIEP)

South West: John Skrine (REP AB); Paul Clarke (RIEP lead), David Curtis (GOSW Safer and Stronger Communities Directorate)

West Midlands: Sharon Palmer (REP AB); David Galliers (RIEP); Helga Edstrom (GOWM)

Yorkshire and Humber: Mandy Wilson (REP AB); Kath Lindley (LGYH - host body for the RIEP); Liz Hardy and Isobel Mills (GOYH)

## APPENDIX B: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

### 1. Evaluation of activity to promote empowerment at a community level

| Issues to be addressed through the programme   | Desired outcomes over the longer term  | What will the National Empowerment Programme do to achieve this outcome?   |   | Indicators of progress (short or medium term)   |
|--|--|--|---|---|
|  |  | At a regional level  | At a national level   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People are not engaged, don't feel there is any point</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge and confidence about how to influence</li> <li>• Fragmentation of action to empower citizens and groups</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities working together to have an effective voice</li> <li>• More knowledge of how to engage in decision making processes</li> <li>• More effective community networks</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build/support channels for community voice at regional level</li> <li>• Promote examples of effective engagement</li> <li>• Build community networks across region</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a national voice for communities</li> <li>• Identify and share examples of good practice</li> <li>• Feed back to CLG and NI4 DG re: gaps and needs</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community organisations aware of and participating in REP initiatives and using REP resources</li> <li>• Groups involved in empowerment feeling that they are making a difference</li> <li>• Community networks developed and supported</li> </ul> |

### 2. Evaluation of activity to promote empowerment at a public agency level

| Issues to be addressed through the programme  | Desired outcomes over the longer term   | What will the National Empowerment Programme do to achieve this outcome?  |   | Indicators of progress (short or medium term)  |
|---|---|---|---|--|
|   |   | At a regional level   | At a national level   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No mainstreamed culture of empowerment within public agencies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A responsive and engaged public sector across the country</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote a clear understanding of community empowerment through research and promoting good practice</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and share examples of effective practice</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of LAs involved in the empowerment agenda and NI4 etc. who weren't at the start</li> <li>• Recognition through CAA processes that empowerment has been mainstreamed</li> <li>• More opportunities for communities to get involved in</li> </ul> |

| Issues to be addressed through the programme  | Desired outcomes over the longer term   | What will the National Empowerment Programme do to achieve this outcome?   |   | Indicators of progress (short or medium term)  |
|---|---|--|---|--|
|   |   | At a regional level  | At a national level   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of awareness and skills in public agencies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public agencies reacting to what local people say they want</li> <li>LAs and other public agencies working differently because they believe in empowerment, not just because of sticks and carrots</li> <li>Sustainable investment in community</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide support for the achievement of NI4</li> <li>Influence CAA strategy</li> <li>Identify and promote good practice in empowerment</li> <li>Promote and</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback to NI4 Delivery Group re: gaps and needs</li> <li>Broaden scope beyond NI4</li> <li>Promote CAA strategies that support empowerment (cp. Equalities standards)</li> </ul> | <p>decision making across the country and evidence of influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in 'empowering initiatives', e.g. Participatory Budgeting, asset transfers, parish plans etc.</li> <li>LAs (including councillors) and other public bodies across the country: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ aware of NEP/REPs and government's empowerment strategies</li> <li>➤ participating in REP initiatives</li> <li>➤ using REP resources</li> <li>➤ feeling more informed about what community empowerment means</li> </ul> </li> <li>QA systems in place for public agencies across the country</li> <li>More LAs and other public agencies have community engagement and development strategies with implementation plans and resources</li> </ul> |

| Issues to be addressed through the programme  | Desired outcomes over the longer term | What will the National Empowerment Programme do to achieve this outcome? |  | Indicators of progress (short or medium term) |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|
|   |                                       | At a regional level  | At a national level  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure to recognise the need for or resource community development</li> </ul> | development across the country        | support community development across the region                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote investment in community development and training</li> </ul> |   |

### 3. Evaluation of a co-ordinated approach to promoting empowerment

| Issues to be addressed through the programme   | Desired outcomes over the longer term  | What will the National Empowerment Programme do to achieve this outcome?   |   | Indicators of progress (short or medium term)   |
|--|--|--|---|---|
|  |  | At a regional level  | At a national level   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fragmented, unconnected empowerment initiatives of variable quality</li> <li>Fragmentation of knowledge, effort, energy and voice across the country</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategies co-ordinated and data pooled at national and regional level</li> <li>Agencies at all levels acting strategically</li> <li>Best practice embedded within policy</li> <li>There are banks of case studies and toolkits based on effective community empowerment practice</li> <li>Increased understanding across sectors</li> <li>Public agencies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Position REPs as hubs for community empowerment in the region</li> <li>Develop complementary strategies with partners, especially RIEP</li> <li>Test out different approaches to see if they work</li> <li>Develop</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote greater joining up between government initiatives through NI4 Delivery Group and other channels</li> <li>Active dissemination of NEP/REP work, resources and analysis</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All relevant partners using or participating in REPs across the country</li> <li>Good relationships between GOs, REPs and RIEPs across the country</li> <li>Sharing of national research evidence and good practice</li> </ul> |

| Issues to be addressed through the programme  | Desired outcomes over the longer term   | What will the National Empowerment Programme do to achieve this outcome? |  | Indicators of progress (short or medium term)  |
|---|---|--|--|--|
|   |   | At a regional level  | At a national level  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of trust between public agencies and communities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>have stronger relationships with the third sector and community</li> <li>Sustainable relationships so that impetus continues beyond programme</li> </ul> | <p>communication and understanding across sectors</p>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop communication and understanding across sectors</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholders feel more able to trust one another</li> </ul> |



## APPENDIX C: EXAMPLES OF MAIN ACTIVITIES

|               | <b>NI4</b>   | <b>Community led research</b>   | <b>Best practice</b>   | <b>Sharing across roles and sectors.</b>  | <b>RIEPs</b>   | <b>Other</b>                                    |
|---------------|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| <b>EE</b>     | Mapping ways in which data which contributes to NI4 is being captured. NI4 task and finish group<br>One LSP event held | Research on Community led planning<br>3 reports on CLP at national and regional level and case studies. | 5 Case studies completed (including participatory budgeting) and to be showcased on website<br>3 Community Development Network meetings sharing best practice and knowledge.<br>183 people trained.<br>Research report produced on tools and training; and on influencing policy.<br>5 Roadshows held attended by 323 delegates from 33 LAs. | Community Development Network ( <b>see case study</b> )<br>Two exchange visits<br>LSP events<br>Research on training. | Supporting a Member Empowerment Champion and a CX one?<br><br>RIEP attending all the road shows and chairing working groups. | Community empowerment champions                 |
| <b>EM</b>     | NI4 Think Tank<br>Input to regional conference   | Empowerment Integration Consortia?<br>Established and producing action Plans                            | BP workshops   | EME Forum   |  |   |
| <b>London</b> | LSP survey completed to provide baseline Case studies  | Empowering Diversity Action Research (with young people and   | Empowerment Map to showcase empowerment activities and as a tool for LAs   | Event to showcase role of TS in delivering LAA  | Joint event for councillors on CE attended by 45 elected   | Young people, refugee and asylum seekers, faith |

|           | NI4   | Community led research  | Best practice  | Sharing across roles and sectors.   | RIEPs   | Other  |
|-----------|---|---|--|---|---|--|
|           | <p>developed Event planned with NEAs to showcase examples of empowerment ALS with third sector reps on LSPs.</p> <p>Rating of LA readiness for NI4 improvement identifies LAs in need of support Network of councillors with empowerment portfolio.</p> <p>Event to showcase role of TS in delivering LAA</p> | <p>faith groups Training for community evaluators (<b>see case study</b>) CD Network London</p> | <p>Training and Support Directory Application of Community Empowerment Evaluation model – process developed for QA and evaluation of empowerment practice (also will provide robust evidence base for NI4)</p> | <p>PB and Youth Participation events held Guidance for LSPs on empowerment and representation and ALS for TS reps on LSPs. CDNL</p> <p>Events on CE White Paper and Duty to Involve</p> | <p>members RIEP engaged with results of LSP survey and NI4 rating Engaged in planning of Community Empowerment Peer Support Programme</p> | <p>groups.</p>   |
| <b>NE</b> | <p>Use of Sounding boards to raise awareness of NI4; shared intelligence gathering with RIEP to inform AP for years 3&amp;4</p>   |   | <p>Case studies of individual empowerment Sounding Board and Best Practice events</p>  | <p>Sounding Board and Best Practice events</p>  | <p>Working with RIEP to determine priorities for small grants fund</p>  | <p>CEN workers network</p>                             |
| <b>NW</b> | <p>Research on NI4</p>  | <p>Refugee and migrant women's groups Action Learning</p>                                       | <p>Routes to empowerment publication PB workshop</p>   | <p>Workshop to identify your learning needs. Learning</p>   | <p>RIEP funding titled the staff over when there were</p>   | <p>Community reporting to take IT out to digitally</p> |

|           | NI4  | Community led research  | Best practice  | Sharing across roles and sectors.   | RIEPs  | Other  |
|-----------|--|---|--|---|--|--|
|           |  | Sets on cohesion  | Learning exchange seminars to help LAs understand how best to use empowerment tools highlighted in the WP to improve their NI scores.  | exchange seminars ( <b>see case study</b> ) which are regarded as exemplary                                   | funding delays. RIEP sees REP as delivery arm on CE  | excluded communities. ALSs on cohesion Taking the CD challenge forward Empowerment and the environment |
| <b>SE</b> | 2 learning events held Conference for community groups on NI4 to share good practice especially EAs Mapping how NI4 is being measured Programme developed for schools working with parish councils | Quality standards for Community Led Planning showcasing event                                   | Training programmes on peer support for people with learning difficulties With consultation tool developed and tested  | Show case event for community development practitioners and local authorities                                 | 2 meetings held with RIEP started joint research project on Las community empowerment needs                          |  |
| <b>SW</b> | Improved knowledge base and clear baseline against which to measure future progress. NI4 (and 7) workshop provided a platform for  | Training the trainers 10 trained Small project with 12 residents of a local housing association | PB workshop - now a live topic in the region in a way it wasn't before. Practitioners Good Practice Programme ( <b>see case study</b> ) Supporting community networks (including | Task groups Learning to involve Exeter CVs and statutory partners get service users and carers to engage with | 4 RIEP players directly involved in REP work. Significantly increased level of interest in empowerment. Part funding |  |

|           | NI4   | Community led research   | Best practice  | Sharing across roles and sectors.  | RIEPs  | Other   |
|-----------|---|--|--|--|--|---|
|           | sharing information and left participants feeling better informed about NI4 and how it fits into the broader Stronger Communities framework. Learning to Involve and pilot programme with Devon CC. |  | Older people's network to give them voice) and Network Support Fund  | public agencies Workshop to spread C&YP practice across other areas.   | PGPP   |   |
| <b>WM</b> | Research and consultation with LAs on role of Community Led Planning in delivering NI4  | Research on Community Led Planning in rural Parishes with cross sector workshops ( <b>see case study</b> ) | Case studies produced in video media format  | 100 visitors to Guide Neighbourhoods<br>3 Empowerment events: on PB, Community asset transfer and the White Paper on housing | RAWM has a seat on the RIEP and both sit on the regional strategic body ECCE | Regional Priorities: rural parishes; Rural event held                   |
| <b>YH</b> | NI4 evidence framework tested in Leeds, York and East Riding Empowerment  | Report on community anchors development programme Rural CP met with GOYH CP meet with                      | Mapping good practice PB event 6 case studies (including community policing, empowering older people and neighbourhood | Events on community empowerment, and community anchors Champions of Participation  | Ongoing liaison with the RIEP and its lead body                              | 7 self-assessment workshops held about community anchors across region; |

|  | <b>NI4</b>  | <b>Community led research</b>   | <b>Best practice</b>  | <b>Sharing across roles and sectors.</b>   | <b>RIEPs</b> | <b>Other</b>  |
|--|---|---|---|--|--------------|---|
|  | <p>Commission (see <b>case study</b>)<br/> Masterclass on CAA/Duty to Involve. 2 dialogues held with Audit Commission Workshop at LAA meeting<br/> NI4 Community of Practice<br/> Encouraging focus on activities rather than measurement</p> | <p>Parliamentary Outreach workers Northern Networks of Gypsies and Travellers supported to run training courses for local authorities</p> | <p>governance). Case study learning shared through success workshops<br/> Showcasing ER's locality approach<br/> Strategies and Standards conference has raised interest across the region; 'Voices' produced on expert elders, gypsies and travellers, community anchors and community led development</p> | <p>residential conference held with participants from range of sectors – evaluation showed learning and networking</p> |              | <p>(including Conferences included; (1) for refugee community organisations (2)s and empowering refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers, (3) Support for Campaigning, (4) CD and Mental health, (5) CD and the Duty to Involve, (6) Community Governance, (7) Community empowerment in rural communities</p> |

## APPENDIX D: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM REGIONAL EVALUATIONS

### East of England

Evaluator: Kamila Zahno

#### Extract from the draft report

4.1 This section lists the recommendations that the EEEP could take on board in the coming year to build on the work it has been done over the past six months. We know that Action Plan for this year does indeed build on this work, but the following recommendations are designed to ensure that some of the findings from the evaluation are not lost. Thus the recommendations are designed to be able to fit into the current work programme, rather than being additional activities.

#### **Recommendation on process**

4.2 Communicating the role that community empowerment has to play in the region is one of the most important priorities for the Partnership in the coming year. The Task and Finish Group is key to this. The communications strategy should include:

- A strategy to disseminate the good practice events and the resources of the website widely throughout the region
- Exploring how all partners can disseminate the work to their networks
- Exploring how partners can formalise the exchange of good practice between themselves so that they take the new ideas on board (a possible mentoring role)
- Communicating good practice nationally so as to influence the national agenda e.g. the community led planning research

4.3 There was a view expressed that the partners should be more senior. However, we are unsure how appropriate it is to ask existing partners to nominate more senior officers at this stage. However, existing partners could be asked to report back on how they have influenced community empowerment work within their own organisations.

4.4 We recommend that a close connection be made between EEEP and the NI7 Regional Forum. A thriving third sector does connect with community empowerment, particularly in view of the fact that, as some partners mentioned, many individuals find an influential voice through community and voluntary groups.

#### **Recommendations on activities**

4.5 EEEP has attracted funding from Improvement East (the RIEP) this year and is running its community empowerment programme using the CLG and the REIP funding. The main emphasis this year is to consolidate on last year's work and to improve on community empowerment practice throughout the region and to ensure

that the resources produced last year and in this coming year live on and are embedded into practice. The recommendations below should enhance the impact of the planned activities.

- 4.6 Work should be done to explore how to make the voices of marginalised more influential. We understand that this year a research report will be commissioned on the role of faith based communities the delivery of engagement and empowerment and would advise that the researchers should be briefed to make clear recommendations on a project that enables faith based groups to be more influential.
- 4.7 Work to improve NI4 scores should be done not only through learning and exchange events, but through people who will embed good practice into the way the public sector engages and involves residents i.e. through the NI4 leads, through public sector communications officers, and through the proposed Champions, all working together.
- 4.8 The community led planning research should be disseminated and we recommend that EEEP partners, through their own networks, support Rural Action East to implement its proposed framework agreement for LSPs.
- 4.9 We recommend that the Tools and Learning Task and Finish Group look at evaluating the use of case studies, tools, training courses and other resources placed on the website by undertaking a survey of a sample of users to see how they are using these resources and what could be improved. We also recommend that there is some independent review of the quality of the tools in the Toolbox.
- 4.10 EEEP should consider the recommendations in the Guild's report on empowerment training opportunities, in particular the one on developing an over arching empowerment training strategy.
- 4.11 We recommend that the CDN Steering Group explore how grassroots community development practice could have an influence on national community empowerment policy, as suggested by some of the participants interviewed by the national evaluators.

## South West

Evaluator: Kamila Zahno

### Extract from the report:

#### **Recommendations on activities**

- 4.4 It is very important that the good work started is taken further forward this year. For some activities, such as the Empowerment Good Practice programme, replication is the best way forward; for others it is about taking forward recommendations that came out of events so that it does not get lost. EC or one of its partners, should:
- 4.5 consider how a regional hub for different communities of interest (e.g. older people, equalities) could be supported as this would raise the awareness of, and give useful information to, sub-regional forums and networks on how they can influence public

- policy and decisions;
- 4.6 show-case good practice of recent Gypsy Traveller forums with a view to their being set up in other local areas;
  - 4.7 build on the equalities work that has started, especially drawing together sub-regional cross-sector equalities groups into a regional network with the specific remit to explore how to better influence public policy;
  - 4.8 run some bespoke training for elected members and more senior officers through an expanded Empowerment Good Practice programme;
  - 4.9 ensure there is a link between EC and any regional work done on NI7 – a thriving third sector – as this is possibly the weakest link in EC’s current work and we feel it is important to build on any user involvement work that the third sector does;
  - 4.10 roll out more cross-sector work, such as the Learning to Involve programme;
  - 4.11 publicise Chanan’s two papers [on the business case and indicators] for national discussion and consumption.

## West Midlands

Evaluator: Martin Honeywell

Extract from the report:

### 7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.1 Programme Governance.

It is recommended that the new governance arrangement as being proposed should be implemented. That the work of the new governance structure be checked as part of an interim evaluation in September 2009, to ensure that it is functioning correctly.

#### 7.2 Programme criteria for years three and four.

It is recommended that the accountable body should talk with CDP about the issues of programme timing and programme criteria. The aim being to ensure that years three and four can be planned and programmed now to avoid further certainties and delays in the future and to put in place programme coordination for the remainder of the life span of the EVC.

#### 7.3 Ensuring programme activities and spend for 2008/2009 are distinguished from activities for 2009/2010.

It is recommended that, given that some programme activities for 2008/2009 were not completed and have been shifted into 2009/2010, a report goes to the governance group in three months, clearly indicating how budgets have been adjusted (i.e. spend for 2008/09 activities moved into 2009/10) in relation to this shift in programme work.

#### 7.4 Programme and Financial Monitoring.

It is recommended that the programme and financial monitoring system be fully implemented and that its operation be overseen by the programme coordinator. Full monitoring reports for each strand of work, outlining work undertaken against the work programme and spend against the budget, should be produced every three months.

#### **7.5 Programme coordination.**

It is recommended that a permanent programme coordinator be appointed. With the support of the RAWM administration and finance function, this work could be undertaken as a half or three quarter time job.

It is further recommended that the coordination and liaison work that RAWM undertakes regionally with other providers of NI 1 to 7 activities is seen as an integral aspect of the EVC programme and resources adequately.

#### **7.6 Monitoring the EVC Website.**

The EVC web-site is the public face of the programme. To implement it requires coordination and input from all parts of the programme. It is recommended therefore that;

- the programme coordinator draws up a plan to integrate the work of the EVC web-site into the work of all other strands of work, outlining the responsibility of all to regularly input data into the site.
- progress in establishing the EVC programme web-site is monitored externally in six months time.

#### **7.7 Monitoring of recruitment of empowerment champions.**

Recruiting empowerment champions needs to be seen as an integral part of all activities of the EVC programme. As with work on the web-site, it is recommended therefore that;

- the programme coordinator works with the strand leader responsible for the recruitment of compact champions to develop a programme wide strategy involving all strands of activity in the recruitment process.
- that progress in recruiting and servicing empowerment champions is monitored externally in six months time.

#### **7.8 Working with NI 4 Areas.**

It is recommended that EVC plans to work in coordination with and adding value to other NI 4 initiatives locally across the region and especially in those areas that have NI 4 as a priority.

It is recommended that joint planning and coordination meetings take place with those responsible for NI 4 in each of the six areas that have NI 4 as a priority. It is further recommended that a mechanism is established to ensure that on-going coordination is established.

#### **7.9 Integrating EVC work into the region-wide ECCE coordination structures.**

It is recommended that learning from EVC continue to be fed into the ECCE coordination structures in the region by RAWM, and that learning from other programmes is input into future EVC design.

#### **7.10 Future Evaluation.**

It is recommended that, as part of the on-going evaluation process, an external monitoring exercise take place in six months time, i.e. late summer, to review that;

- the governance arrangements are working effectively,
- the data monitoring processes are working effectively,
- the EVC web-site is functioning effectively
- progress in recruiting empowerment champions is up to target
- coordination with NI 4 areas is taking place effectively,
- outcome data is being collected by all strands of work
- the outcome data for the work programmed as 2008/09 activities is evaluated.

This interim monitoring and evaluation work will be undertaken in recognition of the timing of the start up of 2008/09 activities. It would;

- ensure that all the plans afoot for the coordination, monitoring and governance of the programme have bedded in effectively.
- provide an initial (and brief) evaluation of outcome data referring to 2008/2009 activities.
- prepare and clarify the second part of the programme evaluation for 2009/2010 to be undertaken in March 2010.

This interim process could be light-touch and provide learning for the 2009/2010 programme at a time when such learning could still impact on the delivery of the programme.