

# Empowerment and engagement ... measurements and indicators



**‘Evaluation provides a structure for distinguishing between objective fact and participant judgement’**

Researcher

## **Goals of engaging the community:**

Increase the **capacity** of people to **influence** decisions that affect their lives

Improve the **quality and function** of **relationships** between citizens and government



## what engagement means

**Giving communities the confidence, skills and power to shape and influence what public agencies do for or with them. Making the effort to talk to the communities you serve and listen to what they want from you and other public agencies**

## this is important because ...

- **As of 1 April 2009 you will have a new statutory duty to involve local people in the work you do and your decision-making, the Duty to Involve**
- **You will be judged on your success in empowering people in places where National Indicator 4 is chosen as a local area agreement improvement priority. NI4 measures the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality**
- **You will be judged by the Audit Commission on how well you 'build more cohesive, empowered and active communities' using the new set of PSA 21 indicators**
- **You will be judged by local people through the 'Place' survey, which will ask how they perceive the area they live in. The results will be used as evidence for 20 new national indicators, including PSA 21**

This briefing looks at a significant aspect of the work being done to support and further community engagement and empowerment – how you measure the results. There are two types of outcome – factual and those based on personal judgement. The difficulties come in deciding how best to gather both types of information, agreeing their relative value as a measure of success, and interpreting them in a way that will prove useful

## Why you should read it

THIS is one of a series of briefings based on fuller case studies by Evaluation Trust and South West Foundation.

The principle value of this summary is drawn from a study of efforts in the south west to collect credible evidence of the success, or otherwise, of local efforts to engage and empower communities.

It also looked at how evidence was being interpreted and used to set the course for further action, in particular for

local area agreements, and examined their effectiveness as a measure of engagement and empowerment.

The study used as a focus two projects by Community Counts, a neighbourhood management initiative in Gloucester. The projects offered a useful insight into how local residents can become the primary agents for gathering, interpreting and using data to improve their street cleaning service and neighbourhood policing.

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**'Residents who are committed to helping to improve their community and are prepared to give up a great deal of their time for this often end up with the label "the usual suspect". Their opinion somehow becomes devalued. But this is hardly fair – these residents can be incredibly useful and it's hardly an advert to encourage anybody else to get involved!'**

## Background

Since the late 1990s all local authorities have been devising and using indicators to assess local need and measure the outcomes of efforts to improve their communities.

The delivery agreement for **PSA 21** offers six indicators for measuring a council's success in building more cohesive, empowered and active communities:

- the percentage of the local population who believe that people from different backgrounds get on well together locally
- the percentage believing that they personally interact with people from different backgrounds on a more than superficial basis, ie not just buying train tickets or groceries from them

- the percentage that feel they 'belong' in their neighbourhood
- the percentage that feel they have some influence over local decisions
- the number who regularly volunteer to help others and the number employed full-time in the 'third' sector – as a measurement of how well it is thriving
- the percentage of people taking part in sport or cultural activities.

Many councils have already used some of these to beef up their local area agreements, and will have limited choice to pick those they think it would be fair to judge them on for the new LAAs. This work will feed into the new regime for inspecting local services: the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

### example 1:

## COMMUNITY COUNTS

**Community Counts** is a Neighbourhood Management (NM) pathfinder project that has set out between 2002/09 to make public services more responsive to the needs of people living in three Gloucester neighbourhoods notable for high levels of crime, low income, poor educational attainment and environmental blight.

Some 18,000 people live in the Barton, Tredworth and White City areas. Barton and Tredworth are largely made up of close-packed Victorian terraces within walking distance of the city centre. Up to 45 different languages are spoken and 30% of the population are from minority communities. There is a very large south Asian population and a growing number from eastern Europe. White City has a predominantly white working class population living in a former council estate, now mostly refurbished and owned by housing associations. There are significant numbers of children with dual heritage.



## the Duty to Involve ...

**As of 1 April 2009, all local authorities will need to offer evidence that they 'involve' local communities in their work. As measures of your efforts to empower local people you will need to:**

- **Build evaluation into your work on engagement and empowerment**
- **Draw up clear evidence of your 'starting' baseline so before and after comparisons can be made**
- **Agree what difference you want your efforts to make – so not just evidence of productivity or people feeling they can influence decisions but genuine participation and influence and evidence of service improvements**
- **Distinguish between factual indicators, like less litter or more people voting in elections, and 'judgement' evidence given by workers and participants, and including that gathered by other non-council evaluators**
- **Choose appropriate indicators, bearing in mind how the evidence will be collected and the credibility of the results**

# what works

**Separate** verifiable factual evidence about outcomes and impact from judgement evidence

Establish a clear **context**, highlighting the issues, participants and location, and get evidence before and after to give the full picture

Choose a broad range of indicators that reflect local and national **priorities** and the **impact** of one on a wider range of services or quality of life matters

Pick PSA indicators with **care**: some measure perception or offer diagnosis rather than fact and quantitative and perceptual measures are weaker on quality and complexity

Gather information about **inputs, processes** used and **outcomes**, including the number of people involved, their influence and what changes over time

Make sure your data is **statistically robust** by using a credibly sized sample

Look for evidence of **secondary outcomes** that come about eg social capital, better amenities

Look for any **significant differences** between age groups, gender, ethnicity, etc

Ascertain who is **taking part** and who is not, and why not

▶▶ Early work by the NM team involved extensive talks with local residents, businesses, faith groups and community and volunteer group representatives to ask their views, ideas and aspirations for the three neighbourhoods. MORI poll evidence in 2003 found relatively high levels of community involvement and volunteering, particularly from minority groups.

## POLICING

A pilot scheme to test **neighbourhood policing** was set up in the NM area in 2004. Neighbourhood policing is an idea intended to make policing more responsive to local people by offering them options for working more closely with police from low level – offering information or reassurance – to more intensive – agreeing local problems and solutions, and deciding the strategies that will achieve them.

The police have this aspect of their service measured by a statutory performance indicator for ‘public confidence’, one of the targets in their Police Performance Assessment Framework. Boiled down, it asks how good a job the public think their local police do. This judgement is given context by two ‘diagnostic’ indicators: do people feel the police understand the issues affecting them and are they dealing with these issues?

In Barton, Tredworth and White City, the police wanted to reduce crime and the fear of crime. And Community Counts wanted to make sure that residents’ priorities got equal ranking with police priorities. With both sides sharing the cost of a three-year pilot, Community Counts was able to secure a project dedicated to its neighbourhoods, served by the same team of police officers.

Forging community links was a priority for the 10-strong police team. It worked with Community Counts street representatives and neighbourhood watch co-ordinators, and with local schools. Three police information points were set up in local venues, and a dedicated officer kept each regularly updated with news, events and invitations to join new initiatives. The points provided contact details and a way to report crimes anonymously.

Regular surgeries were held every two weeks, giving locals a chance to call by for an informal chat. The police team also visited youth clubs and events, play ranger projects and set up a stand and information point at a special event for the growing Polish community in a local café.

On the community side, a neighbourhood panel was set up to work with the police team, guiding and directing local policing efforts. The panel met with police every two months, with a more in-depth meeting at six-month intervals.

At the outset, the police gave the neighbourhood panel a list of 62 problems local people had raised with them. The panel members responded with their own anonymous survey of local people asking them which should be the police priorities and

what they thought might solve the issues. The responses narrowed to three top priorities for the police team.

Community Counts puts a lot of effort into making sure the neighbourhood panel properly represents local views. Its 10 members have to account for who in the community they have discussed issues with, eg in a shop or in the streets, and people are encouraged to find out more about the panel.

### Results:

- The Community Counts approach has had a major influence on a county-wide roll out of neighbourhood policing
- A training model for engaging communities in police work, devised by Community Counts, is being given by two officers who took part in the pilot to Safer Community police teams across the UK
- A toolkit for community engagement produced by Community Counts and the neighbourhood panel model have been adopted by Gloucester police as a practice guide. This also gives officers a better understanding of what motivates people to get involved

## idea: measure the outcomes

### Factual outcomes

- An increase of over **100%** in quality information reported to the police
- A **24%** reduction in reported crime since 2004
- A **17%** cut in fear of crime since 2004

### Action and impact

- The number of **drug offences reported to police** has gone up since distribution of a new leaflet 'Want to get drug dealers off your streets?'. Translated into seven languages, it explained what information the police needed to mount an operation and how to report concerns, including a direct line to the drugs officer
- Fewer people **cycling on the pavement**, following Cyclesafe which saw police on bicycles make 62 verbal warnings
- More effective use of CCTV and mobile cameras and regular patrols of a local park in response to **concerns about youths** congregating in different parts of the neighbourhood
- Much improved control of **repeat offenders** by focusing on a targeted few

**'The police team understands the importance of birthdays and anniversaries in patterns of offending. They know the local families – and they see young people in the round'**

Community Counts manager

## what works

Recognise **equality issues** relevant to the area and/or audience, including different age groups, minority groups, sexual minorities and refugees/asylum seekers and migrant populations

Get **data** from other sources relevant to targets like PSA 21 and from local surveys and focus groups

Use **local people** to gather evidence (**peer evaluation**) to give them a sense of being part of the drive to make improvements and pride in those achieved

**Distinguish** between the evidence of professionals, the target population and those who get actively involved

Adopt **user-friendly evaluation models** that do not require a jargon interpreter and many long hours to complete

Act on the evidence **local people** provide and be seen to act on it

Think imaginatively to reach people who might be **overlooked**, eg isolated low income/elderly/disabled people and rural populations

Think **beyond tick-box** answers. An interview will sometimes give a better 'before, during and after' picture than a survey

## what to avoid

**Mixing** feedback from local activists, practitioners/workers and the public

Focusing solely on **self-evaluated** evidence or assertions

Failure to collect evidence **before and after** an intervention

Failure to **monitor and evaluate** frameworks, processes and tools

**Meaningless** or confusing indicators, eg asking a question but not establishing the reason for the response such as why people would not go out at night – fear of crime, no babysitter or even preferring to stay in?

Asking for views or information and then **ignoring** what is said

**Duplicating** data collection – agree a common protocol with other agencies and share your information

## STREET CLEANING

Community Counts' street care pilot demonstrates how a successful innovation can be undermined by selective mainstreaming and a poorly drafted contract.

Dirty, littered streets and parks was one of the main problems identified in the NM area, and not just by residents. The council's own best value review said cleaning standards were weak and the city was ranked in the top 10% of super output areas for environmental degradation.

In 2006 Community Counts set up as a pilot an area-based team of street cleaners, a gardener, neighbourhood rangers and a team leader – with interchangeable roles. Directly responsible for removing fly-tipped rubbish, general cleaning, clearing away graffiti and flyposters and doing minor repairs to street furniture, the team also acted as liaison point and monitors for rubbish collection, recycling and street lighting.

Dialogue with 25 street representatives monitoring 57 streets ensured planning based on accurate and steady information on local issues and trouble hotspots and the reps acted as the eyes and ears of their street, monitoring standards and reporting any work needed to the street care team. All reps were trained to use the nationally recognised Encams assessment methods so any improvements or deterioration could be formally recorded.

The pilot led to a steady improvement in response times and the number of jobs reported by residents and the street care team, recorded by the council. Door to door surveys and a Mori poll noted increased resident satisfaction. One resident street rep claimed the streets were: '80% better. Dog fouling or chips – someone can ring and you'll get a response.'

But challenges included a reluctance at city council management level to support the new way of working. The council also failed to collect and record details of the work being done at the outset, with the lack of baseline data hampering future monitoring.

The service was finally adopted by the council, contracted out to a private company but supported by a forum of local residents, including those from the NM area. Staff from the pilot scheme moved to the new set up.

The service has since deteriorated. Feedback from Community Counts staff and focus group members cites internal management difficulties, a council failure to enforce the contract terms and while the street reps still meet and residents are surveyed once a month, the results are not used. At the focus group, one member mentioned starting a petition to end the contract.

## Results

Before the pilot service was mainstreamed, it had achieved:

- Visibly improved street cleaning
- Greater resident satisfaction with cleaning standards of streets and open spaces
- Improved response times
- An increase in jobs reported by the street cleaning team and residents
- Increased resident involvement
- No public cost increases
- Increase in recycling
- Motivated workforce

**‘Just as a puppy is not just for Christmas, you can’t involve residents and then ignore what they say. The council is not monitoring the contract, eg level of fly-tipping. We can’t really see the value of community involvement at present in this area’**

Community Counts manager

## idea: essential outcomes

- Are local people being **included** and **genuinely listened to** in areas that affect them?
- Do local people playing leadership roles have access to the right kind of **information** and **support** to enable them to change things for the better for their community?
- Do residents work in **partnership** with local services and agencies to change things for the better for themselves and their community?
- Does engagement and empowerment work lead to a **better area** to live in and more **responsive services**?

## Useful contacts

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### The Evaluation Trust

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## find out more

**This briefing is one of a series produced by Empowering Communities, the South West partnership of a national programme, the National Empowerment Partnership, funded by the Department of Communities & Local Government to improve the quality and functioning of relationships between citizens and government, and to enable people to influence decisions which affect them.**

**To find out more about Empowering Communities and the National Empowerment Partnership visit the Creating Excellence website at: [tinyurl.com/5tsuj9](http://tinyurl.com/5tsuj9)**

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**The full report on which this briefing is based (Engagement and Empowerment Report 8) can be downloaded from the Creating Excellence website at: [tinyurl.com/58myhf](http://tinyurl.com/58myhf)**

  
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