



REPORT 6

Engagement and Empowerment in an Urban Unitary Authority in the South West of England: A Case Study

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A Report to the Empowering Communities Consortium

A Note about this Case Study

This case study was commissioned by the South West Regional Consortium of the National Empowerment Partnership. It forms part of a set of reports reflecting research and other activities undertaken through the South West Empowerment Development Project (October 2007 – March 2008). All the reports may be downloaded from the Creating Excellence website at:

www.creatingexcellence.org.uk

- Report 1** An Overview of the Learning from the South West Empowerment Development Project
- Report 2** Engagement and Empowerment among Black and Minority Ethnic and other Equality Communities in the South West of England: A Case Study
- Report 3** Participation and Empowerment of Children and Young People in the South West of England: A Case Study
- Report 4** Engagement and Empowerment among Older People in the South West of England: A Case Study
- Report 5** Engagement and Empowerment in Rural Local Authorities in the South West of England: A Case Study
- Report 6** Engagement and Empowerment in an Urban Unitary Authority in the South West of England: A Case Study
- Report 7** No Boundaries: A Study of Networks and Empowerment
- Report 8** Engagement and Empowerment: Measurement and Indicators

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These reports, as with all research, reflect the views of those who took part and are a snapshot in time and there may be other perspectives that are not recorded.

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Acknowledgements

The members of the research team working on this case study would like to express their sincere thanks to all the people who have contributed their time and shared their knowledge, observations and insight into engagement and empowerment among older people in the South West region (see Appendix 1).

Although not all of this material could be referred to within the case study, it has informed the project's wider learning and will form part of a continuing regional resource on community empowerment.

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1. Introduction to the Case Study

In launching the Action Plan for Community Empowerment in October 2007, Hazel Blears named Plymouth as one of a new national network of 18 'empowerment champion' local authorities (2 per region). Selected for their pioneering work to involve local people, the intention is for these authorities to work with Government to stimulate positive change across the country.

The decision was therefore made to focus on Plymouth as the urban case study for the Empowerment Development Project in the South West region, in order to draw out any learning that would be of value to other areas and to Plymouth City Council in undertaking its 'champion' role.

Following telephone interviews with some key stakeholders in Plymouth, and discussion with the regional consortium, it was agreed not to attempt a comprehensive mapping of all engagement and empowerment work across the city. Instead, the case study focuses on some particular examples of engagement and empowerment practice in Plymouth, spanning both the public and third sectors, and on the emergent role of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in bringing this work together within a more coherent framework.

The case study draws on documentary evidence and on face to face and telephone interviews with Plymouth City Council and other public sector officers and with representatives of a number of key third sector organisations.

Where interviewees have identified particularly important ingredients in achieving effective engagement and empowerment, these are presented in the case study within text boxes.

A focus group was also held with 6 community representatives (both workers and members of the community) to capture their experience of engagement and empowerment work 'on the ground'.

The focus group's comments on their experience are included in the case study within speech boxes.

2. Background

The city of Plymouth is the third largest urban area in the South West. Although located within the ceremonial county of Devon, it is a separate unitary authority with a population of 248,000 citizens. The city's ethnic minority population is relatively small (3%), but is highly diverse and growing, particularly in primary schools, where around 4.4% of all new admissions are from a black or minority ethnic (B&ME) background. Although the population is ageing, it is doing so less markedly than across the region as a whole, with 18.5% being of state pensionable age in Plymouth, compared with 22% across the South Westⁱ.

As a major port, Plymouth's economy has historically been closely linked to the sea, through fishing, sea-trading and the military. All of these have been in long-term decline, although some Royal Navy presence continues at Devonport Dockyard. Productivity levels for Plymouth are comparatively low, and unemployment levels are the highest in the region.

In the national Indices of Deprivation (2007)ⁱⁱ, 46 of Plymouth's 160 Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are among the most deprived 20% nationally, and 16 are among the most deprived 10% nationally. Two LSOAs, in St Peter and the Waterfront ward and Devonport ward, are among the most deprived 1% nationally and they are the two most deprived LSOAs in the South West. The key aspects of deprivation relate to employment, health, crime, educational achievement among children, and the indoor living environment.

In recent years, Plymouth has attracted funding under a number of government and European initiatives to address these issues:

- £49 million was allocated under the New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative (2001-2011), to tackle deprivation and social exclusion in the Devonport area;
- The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) was awarded a third round of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (£5.2 million between 2006 and 2008) to tackle problems in the city's other most deprived neighbourhoods of Stonehouse, North Prospect and Barne Barton;
- £23.8 million of the Single Regeneration Budget has been committed since 1997 to deliver a comprehensive regeneration package across a number of neighbourhoods. Projects have included £6 million to the East End Renewal Area for a range of housing improvement schemes, traffic management, commercial and environmental improvements;
- Funding to Sure Start schemes, that work with families in disadvantaged areas to promote the development of children under 4, has included £2.1 million to North Prospect, £1.8 million to West Plymouth, and £1.6 million to Plymouth Keystone.

3. History of Engagement and Empowerment in Plymouth

There is a considerable history in Plymouth of community activism, much of it inspired and led by residents from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods as they have sought to direct attention and resources towards the pressing needs of their own areas. Parts of the third sector also have long histories of advocating for and seeking to empower communities, through their work with both geographical communities and communities of interest (e.g. young people; the B&ME communities; refugees and asylum seekers). All these activities have continued alongside the efforts of the local authority and other public sector bodies to engage with and involve the community through different government initiatives and during successive political administrations.

One of the key changes affecting engagement and empowerment work across the city appears to have been the disbanding of Plymouth City Council's Community Development Unit around eight years ago, just as a draft Community Development Strategy had been produced. This left a significant gap in capacity within Plymouth City Council to undertake direct work with communities (except through its Tenant Participation Team) and the loss of some important empowerment 'champions' as officers moved out of Plymouth to take up posts elsewhere. Due to its own lack of capacity and funding for infrastructure, the third sector has struggled ever since to fill this gap, and has only gradually been able to secure the necessary resources to undertake a more central enabling and supportive role for engagement and empowerment activity in the city.

Focus group comments on this history:

- *Community development work is not valued by the Council. The Community Development Unit was disbanded just as a Community Development Strategy had been drafted.*
- *Plymouth City Council still has no Community Development Strategy.*
- *There is very little **funded** community development work. It is being squeezed out. All good community development practice seems to have gone from inside the Council. There is no political goodwill or understanding of what it means.*
- *Some key community development champions have been lost.*

As will be seen in the following examples, these historic influences have very much shaped the way that community engagement and empowerment have developed in Plymouth in more recent times.

4. Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership (DRCP)

DRCP is one of two NDC programmes in the South West (the other is in Bristol), funded between 2001 and 2011 to tackle deprivation and social exclusion in Devonport, an area which in 2001 had a population of 7,000 residents but which is now likely to grow to 8,000. For many years Devonport had been seen as a 'sink area' with high levels of deprivation, worklessness, poor health, premature mortality, crime, and low educational attainment. When DRCP started, there was already an active community sector working to improve conditions in local neighbourhoods, and it was therefore important for DRCP to draw on that experience and to build on previous initiatives such as a Planning for Real event held in 1997 and the Devonport Urban Village Framework Plan produced in 2000.

DRCP's Executive Director describes the whole ethos of the partnership as being about bottom-up, community-led regeneration. Strong empowerment values were built into all decision making processes from the outset, and local residents have always been in the majority on the DRCP Board. Of 23 voting members, 10 are elected residents, 5 are appointed community representatives, 8 are statutory agency representatives including 3 members of the Council, and there are two non-voting members from the City Council and GOSW. Residents are also in the majority on all sub-committees.

In the early years, DRCP employed its own Community Development Team and invested significant time and resources to reach out, consult with and involve the community in developing the plan for Devonport. Workshops were held covering the themes of crime, health, education, work and the environment, and specific methods (project cycle management and problem trees) were used to tap into residents' aspirations and identified problems. A number of locally-led initiatives have since developed from that initial work, for example the 'Bobbies on the Beat' scheme, whereby DRCP has funded its own local Police team to tackle priorities set by a community steering group.

In the second phase of the partnership, the focus shifted somewhat to bring in the public sector and private funders and to achieve partnership around a tangible Devonport Development Framework (2003) which was then successfully adopted through Plymouth City Council's Local Development Framework as the Devonport Area Action Plan (2006). A number of large scale community consultation events were held throughout this period to present plans and capture feedback.

The interest and involvement of the community have been galvanised by DRCP securing the release of surplus MOD land, whereby an additional c.60 acres, over three sites, have been incorporated into the Devonport Development Plan. Local people became very involved in developing this Master Plan for the whole area. The

quality of this work was reflected in the 2005 award to Plymouth City Council of the prestigious Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Silver Jubilee Cup for its Local Development Framework, with Devonport cited as an outstanding example of community planning. The work was also recognised in RTPI 'Sustainable Communities' and Regeneration and Renewal 'Best Use of Planning in Regeneration' awards in 2006.

The transfer of the MOD land has probably been the issue of most interest to local people during the lifetime of DRCP and has been a real focus for community engagement, representing a major achievement and outcome for Devonport and providing a lasting legacy for the community beyond 2011. In addition, arising from the national Naval Base Review in 2007, there is now the prospect of further MOD land becoming available in Devonport. If these plans go ahead, the level of informed community involvement is likely to assist in maximising the benefits to the immediate area as well as across the city.

DRCP assert that particular efforts have been made since the start of the Partnership to support the inclusion of people from Devonport's B&ME communities, with help from the Racial Equality Council (REC), and to address their identified needs within its themed Diversity and Equality Improvement Plans. In May 2007, for example, DRCP supported the REC and Devon and Cornwall Police in organising the Respect Football Tournament and Family Day, welcoming over 1,500 people to the Devonport area to celebrate the 10th Anniversary year of Respect. Following concerns expressed to the DRCP Board about the lack of dedicated funding for capacity building among B&ME people in Devonport, Fata He (the city's B&ME infrastructure organisation) has now secured funding for a Community Development Worker who will be able to spend time in Devonport to further develop links between the B&ME population and service providers, together with undertaking a research element to be shared with DRCP.

A significant challenge for the remaining three years of the partnership is to achieve sustainability once the structures and staff capacity provided by DRCP are no longer in place. Current work is therefore focused on ensuring that the plans for Devonport are well aligned with Plymouth's Local Area Agreement (LAA) and other statutory sector targets. For example, DRCP is already well linked to the LSP, being represented on its Executive Group. Two new Community Trusts are being established to manage the development of transferred land and leisure assets, and DRCP is working to get the necessary capital investment and revenue funding in place to take plans forward. So far, investment of £250 million has been levered from the original NDC funding of £49 million.

It is central to the Devonport vision that the community should continue to play a leading role in local decision-making. One of the positive outcomes of DRCP has therefore been the emergence of the 'Voice of Devonport', a group initiated by local people to represent the area, with a strong interest in shaping the future post-DRCP.

In terms of measuring the impact of its engagement and empowerment activity, DRCP has benefited from the employment of a dedicated Research Officer. As well as routinely collecting monitoring evidence to measure progress against its

objectives, DRCP has commissioned a number of evaluations of particular local projects, their achievements and community impacts. DRCP is also subject to a rigorous Performance Review overseen by the Audit Commission which has shown Devonport achieving consistent improvements in both local and national indicators. The 2007 Review resulted in DRCP achieving an 'excellent' rating for its community involvement work, compared with 'fair/good' ratings in the early years.

One of the most helpful sources of information about the community impacts of DRCP has been the MORI survey commissioned by NDC nationally. This has tracked a statistically robust sample of 400 Devonport households since the start of the partnership, seeking their views every two years about DRCP and its impact on their quality of life in Devonport. The survey findings present a clear picture of change over time. For example, asked whether they felt able to influence decisions in their local area (the question now being used as part of the national indicator set for community empowerment), 30% said 'yes' in 2006 compared with 27% in 2002.

DRCP has undoubtedly achieved a high profile in the community, with 94% of those surveyed in 2006 saying they had heard of the partnership, compared with 79% in 2002. The partnership's increasingly close links with the community are also reflected in the number of people who have been involved in activities organised by DRCP, a figure which has doubled from 12% in 2002 to 25% in 2006. The survey includes many other qualitative questions that together provide a rich picture of what it is now like to live in Devonport, with 79% thinking by 2006 that their quality of life was very or fairly good, compared with 75% in 2002.

This is not to say that DRCP has been without its critics, either locally or in other deprived neighbourhoods that feel they have been disadvantaged by the investment in Devonport. Overall, however, the MORI data give a real sense of residents viewing the area as looking and feeling better, with 60% saying in 2006 that DRCP had improved the area, compared with 50% in 2002.

DRCP's Executive Director believes that the key message from the Devonport experience is the value of investing heavily in community development work at the start of a programme such as this, even though it takes up a lot of time and resources:

There is the need to spend a lot of time in the early days working with the community, to be clear about what is wanted to be achieved, and to decide how it will be measured.

At the same time it is essential to have systems in place to act on the identified issues and to work towards tangible outcomes:

...aligning funding and smoothing the planning routes to create the right conditions for investment.

The active involvement of the community also needs to be continuously reinforced:

Engagement and empowerment processes continue to be highly relevant because no decisions are peripheral to the people who live here.

5. Other Examples of Neighbourhood Empowerment in Plymouth

There are many other examples in Plymouth of efforts to empower neighbourhoods to tackle pressing local problems.

5.1 Pembroke Street: An example of self-empowerment

One of the communities within Devonport with a considerable history of effective local activism is the **Pembroke Street Estate**, where a small group of residents set out in 1987 to address problems of vandalism and poor living conditions, and secured government 'Estate Action Funding' to redesign the layout of the Pembroke estate and oversee a £5.1 million refurbishment contract. This work was so effective that since 1994 the estate has been managed by a resident-led Estate Management Board (EMB), working in partnership with Plymouth City Council. The whole neighbourhood has effectively been transformed:

Pembroke Street was a very dangerous and frightening place to live at that time... but local people now take a real pride in the Estate. (EMB member).

With a devolved budget from the City Council's Housing Revenue Account, the EMB took over responsibility for the day to day management of the estate office; repairs; planned maintenance; grounds maintenance; caretaking and cleaning; and minor neighbour complaints and disputes. The City Council maintained responsibility for rent collection and major structural repairs. Allocations are carried out strictly in partnership with Plymouth City Council, following their points system and criteria.

A wide range of area-based activities has been developed by Pembroke Street EMB since then, including arts projects, employment and training initiatives. For example, following the establishment of DRCP in 2001, the estate repair and maintenance service was expanded with funding from DRCP, and introduced training and employment opportunities for local people at the same time. Two successful training courses were recently run for local people, funded by the Learning and Skills Council. Many individuals have benefited hugely from the personal development opportunities provided through these initiatives. The majority of the staff team who work for Pembroke Street EMB are from the local area and some live on the estate.

There is now also a major focus on youth work, with 360 children and young people from across Devonport involved in the project's activities. Building on the success of this work, the EMB have developed a training programme on 'Involving Young People' using an Awards for All grant, which they hope will be of interest to a wider audience around the region and nationally.

The success of Pembroke Street's resident-led approach to regeneration has been nationally recognised through the Guide Neighbourhood Programme (2005-2007). As part of this programme, members of the Pembroke Street EMB have offered consultancy to residents in other parts of the country based on their own experience of building confidence and self esteem and unlocking the individual potential of local residents to achieve lasting change. Pembroke Street has also hosted numerous visits from groups from other regions. The Guide Neighbourhoods are now working with DCLG to develop a further strategic partnership arrangement to sustain this work. Meanwhile, groups are continuing to visit, with two booked in for next month.

The impact of the work of Pembroke Street EMB and its effective engagement with the whole community have been reflected in a number of external evaluations and in the national report of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programmeⁱⁱⁱ. Since 2001 Pembroke Street area has benefited from the same regular monitoring and MORI survey work as the rest of the DRCP area, and the EMB undertakes formal monitoring for its housing association contracts. An estate residents survey was also carried out in 2007.

Overall, Pembroke Street EMB attributes its success to the passion and commitment of local people, empowering themselves to bring about change:

We have been so focused on overcoming disadvantage... that was the starting point for the key people involved... We were able to empathise with all the other people here and grow local solutions. (EMB member)

Despite these successes, Pembroke Street EMB faces considerable challenges if it is to maintain progress and carry out its ambitious plans for the area. Much of the core work is carried out by a small senior management team and capacity is therefore a real issue:

There are only three key people here and we struggle with the sheer volume. (EMB member)

Although the Estate has benefited from a number of funding awards (e.g. from the Home Office Civil Renewal Unit 'Together We Can' programme; Children in Need), its main source of income is now its repair and maintenance contract with DRCP and there are concerns about the sustainability of some work streams, e.g. the youth work, post-DRCP. There are also uncertainties about what will happen if Plymouth City Council's plan to transfer its housing stock to Housing Association ownership is endorsed by ballot in November 2008, although the EMB have now received written reassurance that the existing management agreement will transfer across in that event.

Focus group comments on housing stock transfer:

- *Things are happening like the current decision about PCC housing stock transfer without proper consultation. There is a fear that this real opportunity for community empowerment will be squandered.*

In order to be ready for these changes, and to develop its role as a social enterprise, Pembroke Street EMB has had to increase the volume of work it does under contract (e.g. by selling its cleaning and maintenance services to outside agencies and by developing marketable training programmes). It now needs to develop an identity and governance structure that properly reflects its aspirations. Steps have already been taken to become much more business-like, (e.g. strengthening the Board and

producing a Business Plan in 2007 with support from the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit).

Pembroke Street is also working hard to build partnerships and linkages that will help it grow and prosper. It has developed strong links with Councillors who can act as champions for Pembroke Street, and the local ward Councillor sits on the Board. Until recently, resident Board members had not had much direct contact with the LSP or LAA processes. However, better linkages are now being made. This has come about largely as a result of Plymouth City Council agreeing to 'gift' a building to the EMB, and South West Regional Development Agency making a financial commitment to fund a feasibility study looking at Pembroke Street's sustainability post-DRCP.

At regional level, the EMB would also like to be networked with other similar resident-led initiatives across the region, and linked with external sources of expertise at the right level, to help them continue to prosper as an example of community-led regeneration.

5.2 North Prospect Partnership: The challenge of sustainability

Sustainability is clearly a difficult issue for a number of other neighbourhood initiatives in Plymouth that have not benefited from the same long-term investment in community-led regeneration as Devonport.

Focus group comments on sustainability:

- *Plymouth has had millions of government money over the years but where is the legacy work and what is there to show for it?*
- *Preventative work has come and gone – all short term.*

On the North Prospect Estate, an area under Neighbourhood Management, the **North Prospect Partnership (NPP)** is now approaching the end of seven years' Neighbourhood Renewal Funding to improve the quality of life for all who live and work there. Of 2,000 homes on the estate, half are now in private ownership, but the 1,000 properties still in Council ownership require major improvements estimated at £20 million.

North Prospect estate has not benefited from a history of resident activism and NPP has had to work hard with limited resources (two staff members) to engage with residents and enable their active involvement in the Partnership at whatever level suits them, for example by offering mentoring and shadowing support for people

attending meetings. There has been a need to start and facilitate an ongoing dialogue between local people and different agencies, so that local people understand fully what the agencies are there to do, and to give time for their own stories and issues to be listened to. For example, NPP has run regular 'Service Providers' Breakfasts' to encourage service providers to hear about the work being done and to get more involved at a local level.

Agencies such as the PCT, Police, third sector organisations and private businesses have all been involved alongside Plymouth City Council as key members of the Partnership. Although Council and Police staff working locally have been highly committed to the process of engaging with the community, NPP has found it difficult to embed the same involvement and commitment at a more senior level within the Council and other statutory service providers and to secure sufficient staff time and resources to achieve effective partnership working on the ground. It has also been difficult to engage the Planning Department despite there being some substantial planning issues, because of the timetabling of the Local Development Framework and the fact that North Prospect is not one of the top priority areas for their work.

Against this background and with only quite limited time and funding at their disposal, it has been difficult for the partners to grapple with the scale of the challenge and achieve significant progress. It is felt overall that the involvement of local people in the LSP has improved but that without ongoing support their engagement may not be sustained. There are also concerns about the difficulties faced by a small number of community representatives on the LSP in trying to speak for the whole city including neighbourhoods such as North Prospect. NPP has been less well engaged with the LAA and now sees the need to get more involved and to advocate for community engagement to be more actively commissioned as a service.

In terms of measuring the community impacts of its work, NPP has had to produce detailed monitoring information for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, but this has focused latterly on hard output measures rather than on residents' views of outcomes. The neighbourhood is however covered by Plymouth City Council's 'Quality of Life' survey (described later in more detail), which does capture their perceptions more effectively. Although the NPP holds the necessary information to satisfy the '6 box' Quality Assurance Framework that has been proposed nationally as a means of evaluating community engagement and empowerment work, it would not currently have the staff capacity to complete it.

In light of this experience, North Prospect Partnership's Community Development Manager would advocate sustained longer-term funding (i.e. 5 to 10 years) to develop community anchor organisations in neighbourhoods such as North Prospect, that can support meaningful mutual networks feeding into the LSP, and provide ongoing training for residents taking up representative roles.

5.3 The Wolseley Trust: A community anchor organisation

One local body that has been identified as a community anchor organisation providing important support to a number of neighbourhoods, including North Prospect, is the **Wolseley Community Economic Development Trust**. It operates as a democratic, community-led organisation, and exists to encourage local businesses to develop and prosper in order to benefit people from the former Plymouth Wards of Ham, Stoke, Keyham and Trelawney. In 1997, the Trust became an innovative forerunner in community development trusts, opening and operating its first 25 unit Business Park in an area of Plymouth desperately in need of regeneration and jobs. The Trust now manages two Business Parks and a Healthy Living Centre. This has been achieved through a successful partnership with Plymouth City Council to achieve the transfer and redevelopment of a derelict site at Wolseley Road and of the former Scott Hospital.

The Trust provides tangible benefits to the local community by using the trading surplus from its successful Social Enterprise activities to support local community organisations and individuals, as well as through the encouragement of community businesses, such as those associated with child care, security, site maintenance, cleaning and catering. It also uses its own experience of successful asset transfer to enable local communities to benefit from similar partnerships and acquisitions.

Focus group comments on community anchors:

- *There is a need to develop and support community Centres of Excellence – around organisations / buildings / facilities / resources / infrastructure / professionalism.*

5.4 Tamar View: The power of asset transfer

On the Barne Barton Estate, residents have benefited from this advice and expertise in developing **Tamar View Community Complex**, starting with the acquisition of the Community Centre on what was previously the largest Royal Naval housing estate in Britain. Barne Barton is often referred to in Plymouth as the 'forgotten island' owing to its isolation and poor amenities. When the Navy announced it would be moving out in 1999, there were very few shops, no pub or café, business premises, church, doctor's surgery or readily accessible post office and there was only one road connecting Barne Barton to the rest of Plymouth.

After Annington Homes purchased the site from the MOD, residents wanted to keep the Community Centre and Annington Homes agreed to let it to them at a peppercorn rent for two years while the community raised £80,000 to buy it. This was finally achieved with help from the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA).

The community-led Board of Tamar View Community Complex had very little revenue funding to develop its activities until 2006, but then managed to build a much-needed shop with funding from the Plymouth SRB Partnership and the Plymouth and South West Co-operative Society, plus £180,000 raised locally. The shop is let to the Co-op under a profit-share agreement, providing the necessary revenue to support a range of activities at the Community Complex. SWRDA have now transferred another large asset for use as a Community Centre and work space to be rented out to local groups and businesses. The hall will thus be subsidised for community use. There are further plans afoot to develop another transferred building as a GP surgery.

These projects have taken time to mature but again have been driven by the passion and commitment of local residents, the availability of tangible assets as the focal point for action, and the availability of external advice and expertise to help the community realise their ambitions. Although not formally evaluated, the Tamar View work has clearly resulted in thriving community buildings and initiatives that local people are using.

Focus group comments on asset transfer:

- *One or two communities have benefited from MOD asset transfers in this way but mostly the assets are being sold off for commercial / property development rather than community benefit.*

Until quite recently, members of the Tamar View Board did not want to get personally involved in other city-wide activity such as the LSP, which they viewed as something of a distraction from their own plans and activities. Tamar View Community Complex does however have membership of Plymouth Community Partnership (the leading third sector infrastructure organisation in the city) and has empowered other local community representatives who link with the LSP to speak on its behalf.

In terms of securing the commitment and involvement of local people, one member of the Tamar View Board of Trustees says that:

*...engaging with the community has been the key. In Barne Barton there was **nothing** once the MOD went. We asked the community what they wanted – they said ‘a shop’ – and we’ve been able to build on the back of its success, prove it to people and get them on board.*

Partnership with the local paper that covers the immediate area was another key. Tamar View provides all the editorial – a ‘free voice’ – and local people respond well because it’s a real community newspaper. They get fantastic feedback.

It is important to note that there is much other work going on in Barne Barton to involve residents in the regeneration of the area and in improving its ‘liveability’, with funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. Other residents’ groupings such as SABRE are also working to improve local facilities, for example by lobbying Plymouth City Council to develop much-needed sports and swimming facilities on a local school site.

5.5 Efford: Direct engagement by Plymouth City Council

Although Plymouth City Council now undertakes relatively little direct neighbourhood engagement and empowerment work, the sustainability of its own direct work is as much an issue for the Council as for its third sector partners, given the short-term nature of so much government funding. For example, in **Efford**, SWRDA funding has permitted the Council’s Neighbourhood Regeneration Team to employ a full-time regeneration worker over a time-limited period to work with the Heart of Efford Community Partnership in delivering its Master Plan for local regeneration.

Unlike some of the other more deprived neighbourhoods in Plymouth, Efford has not benefited from major asset transfer as a focus for community engagement. Nonetheless, the Council’s Neighbourhood Regeneration Team feels the work has got buy-in from all sides and that some very effective strategy groups of local people and agencies have formed to tackle the key issues of youth, community safety, open spaces and street scene, health, and skills.

In this short-term funding environment, the Manager of the Neighbourhood Regeneration Team believes that the Efford example shows:

...it is really important to build on the community's existing strengths and to work with what's already there. However, community leadership needs to be continually supported and encouraged to bring about long term sustainable change.

She also sees the value of taking time to achieve better relationships and work practices, as a way of building trust:

These good examples of partnership really help with effective community engagement. They put the focus on how to make better use of all existing resources and how to achieve better joined up working.

At the end of the day, however...

...the community needs to see things happening; people need a product.

6. Plymouth City Council: A complex set of roles

It is clear from these few examples that, working at the heart of such a diverse set of neighbourhoods and communities with very particular needs and histories, Plymouth City Council has to play a highly complex set of roles if it is to be seen as a truly listening, responsive and empowering local authority. Paradoxically, where the Council has worked with the greatest sensitivity to encourage and support community-led initiatives at very local levels, this may not have been very visible or measurable. In DRCP, for example, it is acknowledged that Council officers and local Councillors have all made extremely important contributions to support community-led regeneration, but without being seen to take control.

The subtleties of these approaches are not readily captured in policy, and are often more to do with the building of trust over time through particular local relationships and partnerships. Nonetheless they do point towards the need for a more pervasive listening culture at all levels within the Council, and strategies that reflect an understanding of the time and effort that are needed to engage with citizens and equip them to become full and active partners in local decision-making.

The following section highlights some of the responses that the Council has made at a strategic level in seeking to improve the level and quality of its own engagement with the community.

6.1 Strategic Responses

As already noted, following the disbanding of its Community Development Unit around 8 years ago, the Council had greatly reduced staff capacity to engage directly with communities at local level. From the late 1990s onwards, successive Corporate Assessments of Plymouth City Council by the Audit Commission identified significant weaknesses in terms of poor local services and weak community leadership, and challenged the Council to show how it was using consultation and engagement, especially with vulnerable groups, to shape its ambitions.

In 2004, Plymouth City Council signalled its intention to improve its performance in this area by signing up as a member of the Home Office's Civic Pioneers, a national network of local authorities committed to engaging with communities in order to develop policies that really answer local people's needs. In 2005, the work undertaken in Plymouth's award-winning Morice Town Home Zone was highlighted by Civic Pioneers^{iv} as a particular example of good practice, enabling residents to transform their community and raise their quality of life by reducing crime, lowering traffic speeds, and making the streets safer and more pleasant places to live. Also praised in the 2005 report was the Council's work within the East End Partnership, which had revealed the need to capacity build in the community to enable them to participate fully in decisions and in improving services. The Partnership set up structures whereby 26 volunteers represented a particular street or streets and brought issues to the Partnership, consulting people in their street and giving feedback to them individually. This was seen to build confidence in local people that services would respond when the community required it.

A 2006 Civic Pioneers Case Study Review^v focused on the work of Plymouth Young People's Civil Renewal Project, in which 90 young people were trained by independent facilitators as leaders within their own communities through an 'Active Citizen Programme', with many positive outcomes. In this instance, however, it was noted that relationships with Plymouth City Council "continued to be a challenge". Officers were found to be more sceptical about the project than members, and it was thought that the allocation to the project of a named lead officer within the Council would have helped enormously.

In carrying forward the learning from Civic Pioneers, The Council published a new *Consultation and Participation Framework* in May 2006. It pledged to introduce Area Forums to facilitate community dialogue with the Council, and to use Plymouth Points of View (the Plymouth residents' panel) to consult regularly over issues of common public concern.

This was followed in August 2006 by a *Civic Pioneer Plan*, which highlighted that despite its Civic Pioneer status, the Council did not have a coordinated or consistent corporate framework for its community engagement activity that was easy to understand or explain to the community. The Plan, which was subsequently adopted by the LSP Executive Group, proposed a focus on four strategic areas, with named officers managing a programme of work under each heading:

- Compact Plus – strengthening relationships with the third sector;
- Diverse Plymouth – improving engagement and consultation with diverse communities of interest;
- Neighbourhoods across Plymouth – engagement and consultation with geographical communities;
- Commissioning – commissioning services from voluntary, community, independent and other sectors.

In recognition of this and other work across the full spectrum of Council responsibilities, the Audit Commission's *Corporate Assessment* described Plymouth City Council in December 2006 as 'performing adequately', acting as a strong community leader with improving local services^{vi}. The report highlighted however that many of these initiatives were still new and that it would take time before their effectiveness could be judged. The 2007 *Direction of Travel Assessment*^{vii} further commented that, although the Council had strengthened its approach to equalities and diversity, there remains more to do on this and on community engagement.

Council officers agree that further work is now needed to build on the *Civic Pioneer Plan* and, under the auspices of the LSP, to develop a more detailed and coherent Community Engagement Framework. Much of the Audit Commission's most recent assessment of Plymouth City Council focused on its work to revitalise the LSP, under the title *Plymouth 2020*. Although the Council does not have the capacity to undertake its own outreach work to involve communities in the LSP and LAA, its strategic enabling role within these initiatives has nonetheless become one of the main ways in which its commitment to engaging with the wider community is seen and measured by others. The challenges of playing this indirect, enabling role within the LSP and LAA are discussed later in the case study.

6.2 The Commissioning Role

As has already been seen, Plymouth City Council has increasingly worked in a commissioning role, through third sector partners, to facilitate engagement with both geographical communities and communities of interest. One instance of the successful adoption of this approach has been the work of Plymouth City Council's **Children's Department** to involve the third sector as a key partner in the setting up of the multi-agency **Plymouth Children and Young People's Trust**.

The Commissioning Manager of the Children's Department acknowledges that until three years ago their links with the third sector were distant and formal. Relationships were under strain and the sector had become distrustful and frustrated. The opportunity for the third sector to elect representatives from its own Forum onto the Children's Trust Board and Executive has resulted in a gradual shift to a more open and equal relationship. Commissioning activity is thought to have benefited hugely from the knowledge and understanding of local voluntary and community organisations concerned with the education and welfare of children, and from their campaigning and influencing roles.

Running alongside this work a User Participation Strategy has been developed, based on the experience of a range of participation support services including the Plymouth Children's Fund Participation Team, NCH Care Leavers Service, Plymouth Youth Service, Devon and Cornwall Connexions Services, Devon Action for Youth and The Zone. Plymouth Children and Young People's Trust adopted the strategy in May 2006 and have subsequently undertaken a range of events where they have consulted with children and young people, families and carers, based on the principles in the Strategy.

From the perspective of **Routeways**, a third sector partner in the Trust, one of the key benefits of improved third sector involvement has been the opportunity to ensure that children and young people continue to be engaged and consulted with. Routeways hosts the **Children's Fund Participation Team**, whose training work with young people has achieved some important outcomes. For example, young people from the black and minority ethnic communities now have a very active voice, and there is a trained group of 'Young Mystery Evaluators'. Another group of young people have been trained as interviewers and the Council now routinely includes them on the interview panel for relevant posts. A shadow Children and Young People's Board has also been set up to represent the voice of all 0 to 19 year olds in Plymouth and feed views into the Children and Young People's Trust.

Both the Children's Department and Routeways feel that the Council now really understands the importance of involving children and young people in its work, and that this has had a significant knock-on effect on the quality of commissioning and delivered services.

These improvements, and the engagement and participation work underpinning them, are believed to have played an important part in the CSCI / Ofsted rating of Plymouth's Children's Services as 'performing well' in 2007, compared with its 'failing' status three years ago.

6.3 Direct Work to Engage with the Community

Alongside this indirect, commissioning role, the Council does of course continue to engage directly with the community across a number of different initiatives, including:

- the work of the Council's Neighbourhood Regeneration Team to support resident-led regeneration in Efford, with funding from SWRDA (1 of 4 pilots in the South West);
- partnership work with residents in areas under Neighbourhood Management (in North Prospect and Stonehouse);
- the ongoing work of the Tenant Participation Team to engage with residents living in City Council properties;
- the involvement of the community in the Local Development Framework;
- work by those commissioning adult care services to involve users in service planning and development.

This case study focuses on one of these examples: the Local Development Framework.

6.4 The Local Development Framework

As already highlighted in the DRCP example, Plymouth City Council has received considerable recognition for its work on the Local Development Framework (LDF) - part of the Sustainable Community Strategy - and for the effective and innovative community engagement that has informed it.

Since 2004 each local authority has been required to produce a set of planning documents to guide development and change over a 15 year period to 2021, which are subject to approval by the Secretary of State. All the documents must demonstrate that they are rooted in community involvement, and this statutory requirement (regulation 28 of the Framework) has acted as a real lever for change. In Plymouth, the process started with the production of a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which was approved by the Secretary of State in August 2006. So far only 7 LDF documents have been approved nationally and 4 of those have come from Plymouth (the Core Strategy and 3 local Area Action Plans for Millbay and Stonehouse, North Plymstock including a minerals DPD, and Devonport).

The City Council's Planning Department seems to have fully embraced the process of involving the community in the LDF in order to create quality places where people want to live and provide for long term sustainable change. In order to effectively deliver this new process, Plymouth has recognized the invaluable contribution of non-planners to the LDF team including experts in consultation, graphics, and natural environment. Managers have encouraged and supported staff to think laterally and be creative. For example, when a temporary reception area needed to be erected in front of the Civic Centre, it was agreed to cover it with paper and encourage people to write and draw their views about Plymouth all over it. This was part of the National 'Big Draw' and was taken up by local people with considerable enthusiasm!

The Community Planning and Partnership Co-ordinator for the Local Development Framework believes one of the key elements of Plymouth's success is that managers have been *'brave enough to employ non-planners for certain roles'*. She, for example, had a background in engaging the community in the work of Museums, before joining Plymouth's Planning Department.

Considerable work has also gone on within the Council to raise the profile of meaningful engagement, to get cross-departmental work going, and change hearts and minds within other Departments and among Council Members:

That has been really crucial. The team has had great support from managers, championing their role and work within the Council.

In working with the community to develop Area Action Plans (focused on the 9 highest priority areas in the city), the Planning Department has taken a whole range of approaches to reaching out and involving people, through newsletters, exhibitions and consultations in unusual places and at unusual times, e.g. on station platforms, in football matches, in pubs (with information printed on beer mats), and in school assemblies. The focus has been on going to where local people are, including at weekends and in the evenings, and there has been a conscious effort to move away from 'the classic public meeting' as the main method of engagement.

The Planning Department has also tried to give local people the chance to acquire new skills, to engage fully with the formal planning process for the Area Action Plans, for example linking them to computer courses available through the Adult and Community Learning Department. There has been a clear published timetable of events in each area and lots of support to help people through the formal planning processes, with surgeries to help people fill in forms, and community breakfasts every 3 months to bring people up to date with progress.

Not all of this work has been conducted by City Council staff themselves. The Council has also brought in *Planning Aid*, an independent body with lots of experience of helping local people to understand and engage with planning processes. This is thought to have been a good use of independent expertise, given that the Council has not always enjoyed a good public image, and has built capacity to raise the level of debate.

As yet there has been no attempt to measure the outcomes of the LDF in terms of the community's awareness of the planning process and whether the LDF has left people feeling better able to influence local planning decisions. The informal feedback is that people have valued the process adopted for the LDF, and there has certainly been a massive increase in the volume of community responses - an increase from 24 people commenting on a document, to 7-800 people now participating with their views. The LDF focus on 'front loading' the engagement process has meant these views can, in the main, be reconciled in to the final plan - leaving very few representations to be dealt with at public examination. The quality of objections at the submission stage of the Area Action Plans is also believed to have improved dramatically through the use of open surgeries to assist people, resulting in many more constructive proposals being received, while the number of formal objections at the later stages has tended to reduce.

In the 43 neighbourhoods not covered by the Area Action Plans, local Councillors have been going on initial 'walkabout' with officers from Planning and other interested Departments, to identify issues and opportunities and to look at potential development sites for the next 15 years. The involvement of local Councillors from the outset is thought to have been extremely productive.

The 'walkabouts' have been followed up through community workshops, using 'planning for real' exercises to look at all the potential sites within a given locality and to debate what could or should happen to achieve sustainability over the next 15 years. Other agencies have played helpful roles within the workshops, for example the PCT has discussed potential sites for health facilities, and Plymouth and South

West Co-operative Society has considered the wider role that shops can play within sustainable communities. This is followed by an interactive exhibition at a supermarket, the park and ride or another local public venue. Key stakeholders have also been involved as landowners or developers. All of this work will inform Plymouth's *Sustainable Neighbourhoods Development Plan*.

The detailed neighbourhood focus of the *Sustainable Neighbourhoods* work has meant that...

*...local people have got very involved in the process - it's on **their** patch and it's real...*

As has been found elsewhere, however...

...a lot depends on what change is going on... the more change there is in the offing, the more likely people are to engage.

(Community Planning and Partnership Co-ordinator)

Other Council departments and agencies have been encouraged to 'piggy-back' on all these events, the dates for which are mapped out well ahead, to consult on specific issues. A number of agencies have taken up this opportunity including Education, Housing, the PCT including Public Health, the LAA and the Police, as part of their work on Police and Communities Together (PACT). This is helping to address the complaint of 'consultation fatigue' voiced by some communities. The LDF is thus now acting as a 'hub' for lots of other engagement activity, and as a result is developing even closer links to the LSP.

Although much of the success of the LDF has been its investment of time and resources to engage with people at a very local level, there are concerns about the way this process may have reinforced a tendency towards 'silo thinking about neighbourhoods in Plymouth'. Staff have therefore undertaken a lot of work to identify and highlight the commonalities between neighbourhoods and to encourage people to take a city-wide perspective on city-wide issues. It has also been important to link the LDF with other cross-cutting work to involve people from particular communities of interest, for example older people and those with disabilities, to make sure their needs are properly identified and addressed in every plan.

Over the next 18 months, all 9 Area Action Plans will be completed, and the LDF will then concentrate on its implementation phase to monitor and manage change. That will in many ways be the acid test of the community engagement work that has been undertaken through the LDF to date, if local people are to be empowered to take greater ownership of their Plans. In Millbay, for example, one positive outcome has been the setting up of an Advisory Forum in which local people are involved in considering planning applications in relation to housing, transport and any other new developments in the area, and in assessing how they fit with the Millbay Area Action Plan.

Focus group comments on social cohesion and the need for community-led investment in deprived neighbourhoods:

- *Plymouth is still a collection of very fragmented communities, a series of 'villages'.*
- *The environment is very competitive and discourages partnership working between communities;*
- *Decisions about the focus of the NDC on Devonport rather than Barne Barton were not community-led and have left resentments festering.*
- *In Stonehouse, properties developed on the historic MOD yard have been sold off privately with no benefit to the surrounding community. There still is not enough affordable housing.*
- *Deprivation is not really shifting. Some people are moving out into more affluent neighbourhoods but levels of social disadvantage in the old neighbourhoods remain. There are fears of **worsening** social cohesion in places like Stonehouse – a very diverse, eclectic community.*
- *The result is divided communities. The impacts on the community are **disempowering**. There is very little civic pride. On other measures, e.g. number of people taking up self-employment opportunities, things are not improving.*
- *There are pockets like this all over Plymouth, of investment that gives very little public benefit. It just leaves poverty cheek-by-jowl with new affluence.*
- *The RDA and PCC have not entered into sufficient s.106 agreements to require developers to invest in local communities.*
- *The Council should use s.106 effectively to release money for communities to use. But realise that without effective and professional community development input this won't be sustainable.*
- ****No economic development without community development****

7. The Work of Other Public Sector Agencies

It has been beyond the scope of this case study to explore in any depth the engagement and empowerment work of other public sector agencies in Plymouth. However, in the course of conducting this research it has become apparent that there are countless examples such work. These include:

- The role played by the PCT in Devonport, in exploring with the community the potential to re-provide community health facilities on a new site, and in developing and delivering responsive community-based services such as the '4u Young Persons Sexual Health Service' and 'Devonport Stop Smoking Service';
- The extensive engagement work undertaken by Devon and Cornwall Police through their local PACT meetings (Partners and Communities Together);
- Police Officers' direct work to engage with young people in priority neighbourhoods through the 'Runaways Project', and to run a highly participatory 'Youth Sport and Opportunity Project' in the Mayflower Centre. The young people involved in the Centre have now elected their own representatives on Plymouth Young People's Parliament and have established a group to conduct a survey of their peers in the troublesome Central Park area. The Police report a noticeable reduction in criminal damage statistics for the area, which was previously a criminal damage 'hot spot';
- The 'Strike It Out' partnership, in which the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service engage with Year 6 pupils from the 20 schools most affected by arson. The children are given a day out at a Royal Navy venue and receive football coaching from Plymouth Argyle Football Club while also hearing football-related stories about the dangers of fire and how to fight it. None of the participating schools has experienced deliberate fire setting since the programme started;
- The work of the Plymouth Expert Patient Programme to empower people with long-term / chronic health conditions, through a six week training course in managing their own health and taking control of their lives, reducing isolation and overcoming loss of confidence;
- The role of the Plymouth Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) Forum (facilitated by Scout Enterprises, a third sector organisation) in representing the views of PCT service users and seeking to influence and improve the way that local healthcare is delivered. (The PPI will be replaced from April 2008 by a Local Involvement Network (LINK), which will have a wider remit to cover all health and social care services and will be supported by a host organisation appointed by the Local Authority).

Clearly this is just a small sample of the engagement and empowerment work undertaken by other public sector agencies in Plymouth. Currently it is not well mapped or collectively measured but all of it is highly relevant and makes a very important contribution to the work of the LSP and LAA.

8. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Role of the Third Sector

8.1 Plymouth Community Partnership

Plymouth Community Partnership (PCP), as the largest infrastructure organisation in the city, has led and developed mechanisms for community representation supporting networks of community organisations and activists for the past 11 years. For example, PCP placed by election and supported community representatives on the Pathfinder LSP and SRB Partnership.

In 2004, Government funding was awarded for the development of Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) in the 88 most deprived local authority areas in England, including Plymouth. The aim was to help marginalised community and voluntary sector groups to get more involved in the LSP and in decisions affecting the delivery of local public services. (A more detailed appraisal of the work of the CENs in the South West region may be found in the research team's separate 'South West Networks' report).

In Plymouth, building on its existing role, PCP was funded to form a CEN and was the lead accountable body of a consortium incorporating the REC, PETRA, Plymouth Guild and Refugee Action. The CEN existed as a separate entity with its own website and dedicated staff, undertaking a range of outreach, development and support work. In 2006 the Network was mainstreamed into PCP. This development has enabled the future of community engagement and empowerment to be more focused, efficient and to provide value for money for service providers and local people.

In April 2005 a Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF) was introduced to bring together funding streams aimed at tackling crime, anti-social behaviour and drugs, empowering communities and improving the condition of streets and public spaces, prioritising the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In 2007 with the introduction of Local Area Agreements (LAAs), funding from the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund was ring fenced to support community engagement work for one year in Plymouth.

PCP's key objectives are thus to:

- ensure the community sector has strategic representation on the LSP Board and its associated Theme Groups: Healthy, Wealthy, Safe and Strong, and Wise;
- ensure equity through best practice;
- increase the knowledge and skills of community groups so they are able to:
 - manage their organisation effectively;
 - build the effectiveness of their organisation to meet the needs of the community they serve;
 - resource their organisation appropriately;
 - influence decisions that affect their work and their community.

Through its Neighbourhood Renewal Outreach Worker and other staff, PCP now leads on the community engagement work for Plymouth City Council associated with the LSP and LAA. For example, staff have:

- worked in partnership with Stonehouse Action to secure funding and publicity for events to engage the community^{viii};
- facilitated a series of neighbourhood 'Question Time' events, to enable service providers involved in the LSP an opportunity to listen to the concerns of local residents in order to make improvements to service delivery;
- helped Devon and Cornwall Police to prepare for and undertake its PACT consultation work in 43 neighbourhoods.

In addition, PCP trains and supports the community representatives on the LSP, and maintains a membership network of 350 organisations and community groups across the city. It publishes a monthly magazine, *Get Engaged*, that aims to inform and involve the sector in the ongoing work of the LSP and provide opportunity for feedback from the community representatives. PCP is also very active in the LSP at a strategic level, through the work of its Director and Assistant Director.

8.2 Community Representation on the Revitalised LSP

In 2004 the Audit Commission reviewed how the Council was working through the LSP to exercise its community leadership role, and recommended a number of changes that would better support the achievement of future outcomes. These recommendations were incorporated by the LSP into an improvement plan, and during 2006-07 the LSP was restructured around 4 new Theme Groups: 'Healthy'; 'Wealthy'; 'Safe and Strong'; and 'Wise'. Two elected community representatives sit on each Theme Group, one of whom may be from any group in membership of PCP and the other of whom must be from a Neighbourhood Renewal priority area. PCP takes a particular lead on the 'Safe and Strong' Theme Group, of which PCP's Director is the Vice Chair.

The work of the Theme Groups is overseen by the LSP Board, which includes five members from each sector (public, private and community/voluntary), plus the Chairs of the Theme Groups. Two of the community/voluntary places on the Board are reserved for the leading infrastructure organisations, PCP and Plymouth Guild, and one for a representative of the city's B&ME communities. The leading B&ME infrastructure organisation in Plymouth, Fata He, is currently holding this place, while supporting and training two B&ME mentees to take over the role. (For more on this work, please see the research team's case study on engagement and empowerment among the region's B&ME communities.) The remaining two representatives are elected community representatives from PCP's membership.

Focus group comments on the LSP:

- *The community representation on the Board looks good but how real is it? Only two places are freely available across the community.*
- *The infrastructure organisations play very important roles, but the third sector is not the same as the community.*
- *There is a danger that engagement/empowerment is only seen as a community representative issue and not the business of the other sectors.*
- *There is not enough joined-up thinking. The LSP is supposed to address that but there is very little community representation on the theme groups, so it tends to be professionally dominated.*
- *B&ME organisations get invited onto everything to satisfy political correctness but feel like ‘very lonely voices’.*
- *Representation for asylum seekers is an issue. They are so dispersed and fragmented, and are not treated as being within the community. They also have to face all the barriers of local hostility and language. There is very little incentive to get involved – you will **never** get an asylum seeker on an LSP theme group.*
- *As the LSP has so little grass roots community participation, it needs to develop layers of involvement at three different levels, to feed into the LSP as below:*

LSP

The LSP needs to understand that PCP and Plymouth Guild are not the only voices of the community.

Stakeholder Groupings

Need to be developed to cover communities of interest / themes, with ‘good enough’ representation from the grass roots / local level, feeding up to the LSP reps.

Grass roots / Local

Local activity needs to be supported by identified community anchors / centres of excellence / sources of community development support, skilling people up / training / empowering them to take on stakeholder roles.

- *Local councillors also need to become **seriously** involved in local issues. Local people really need to see them on the patch and engaging with their concerns. Currently they are seen as far removed and inaccessible.*

In order to reach a wider group of stakeholders, the LSP currently has its own Forum which brings together members of the Partnership across all sectors and neighbourhoods. It has approximately one hundred members and is continuing to grow. The aim of the Forum, which meets twice a year, is to identify needs, consult, be inclusive, communicate and promote success.

One of the current gaps in membership of the Forum and LSP appears to be the negligible level of representation by Housing Associations which, as this case study has shown, have the potential to play a very important role in the engagement and empowerment of their residents. The need to involve Housing Associations in the work of the LSP will become even more important if full transfer of the Council's housing stock goes ahead later in 2008.

Focus group comments on the role of Housing Associations:

- *Housing associations potentially have a key role – they are calling themselves 3rd sector / Social Enterprises, but they're not acting in that way. The current set-up encourages competition between separate Housing Associations.*

8.3 Support for the LSP's Community Representatives

PCP provides ongoing support and training for the community representatives and provides an induction programme for all newly elected reps. PCP further supports the reps on the LSP Board by ensuring they are well briefed and prepared in advance of every meeting and have an opportunity to talk through papers. Fata He with PCP also supports the B&ME mentees in this way prior to LSP Board meetings. The representatives attend quarterly support meetings facilitated by PCP to share and reflect on their experience.

The report of the representatives' most recent Away Day (September 2007) highlighted a number of issues affecting their role^{ix}, which were echoed in some individual PCP case studies^x. All of these warmly acknowledged the value of the mentoring support provided by PCP, and the progress made in achieving a third sector voice on the LSP, but identified some continuing barriers, namely:

- the weakness and lack of capacity in the third sector affecting its ability to operate as a full partner in the LSP;
- the need for clearer lines of accountability in the LSP structure;
- the lack of commitment from some partners;
- the LSP's top down approach;
- the constant battle to get the sector's voice taken seriously;

- the lack of understanding by others on the LSP of the role of the community representatives;
- the volume of paperwork and the time needed to perform the role well;
- the difficulty for representatives who work in small segments of the third sector, attempting to represent the diverse needs of the whole community (with the appropriateness of the word 'representative' being questioned);
- the looseness of the connection to PCP's wider membership.

The Chairs of all the Theme Groups are currently being asked to evaluate the performance of the community representatives and to identify any perceived needs or gaps, and information is being collected from the representatives themselves about perceived impacts / outcomes of their involvement.

8.4 The LSP's Progress and Future Development

In a city such as Plymouth, it is clearly a major challenge not only for the community representatives but also for the LSP as a whole to reflect and respond to the shifting picture of engagement and empowerment work being undertaken by the Council, 3rd sector, and a host of other partner agencies across the city. As one senior Council Officer has said:

It is a huge agenda and hard to plan coherently.

PCP and other third sector and community representatives have undeniably felt frustrated and disempowered in recent years by what they have perceived as Plymouth City Council's apparent lack of understanding of the time and resources needed to achieve effective engagement with the community, and by reduction of funding to support important projects and services. For example, a number of interviewees have talked about the 'decimation' of the city's Youth Service and the consequent reduction in capacity to engage effectively with young people, resulting in rising levels of youth crime and antisocial behaviour.

Despite these reservations, it is thought that progress is starting to be made in enabling the third sector to play its full part in the LSP and in moving engagement and empowerment up the LSP's agenda. The work of the 'Safe and Strong' Theme Group is believed to have been especially positive in this regard, with its Chair, (the Chief Superintendent of Police) identified by a number of interviewees as a very important champion of engagement and empowerment work and of its role in 'strengthening' local communities.

Joint work through the LSP to produce a *Third Sector Strategy*^{xi} has also been widely welcomed as marking a real shift in awareness and relationships. This work, commissioned by the LSP, has been given a high priority and profile by Plymouth City Council, with strong support from the Chief Executive.

Crucially, the new Strategy includes a proposal to commission one set of infrastructure through the ChangeUp consortium, with one of its goals being to: *'ensure that whole communities are involved in shaping the city's future, including those who traditionally have not played an active role'*, by:

- developing and maintaining a map of third sector organisations and ensuring comprehensive ways and means to achieve involvement and engagement across communities of geography and interest including B&ME and other marginalised sections of the population;
- identifying gaps and encouraging activity to reduce / close them;
- encouraging innovation to engage the 'seldom heard';
- ensuring the development of links with marginalised groups;
- ensuring 'representativeness';
- bringing together and encouraging alignment amongst groups.

There appears to be a general consensus that, if the third sector infrastructure capacity can be adequately supported to deliver the objectives of the new *Third Sector Strategy*, Plymouth's LSP now offers a much better opportunity for all sectors to work together in order to achieve city-wide, joined up community engagement, and to embed understanding of this work at all levels of the City Council and within other public sector bodies.

The new local authority 'duty to involve', which will come into force on 1 April 2009, is thought likely to provide an especially important lever for change.

A number of interviewees have also suggested that the time is now right for the LSP to build on the Third Sector Strategy and to develop a Framework for Community Engagement, setting down expectations and standards and attaching a clear development plan.

8.5 Linkages to the Local Area Agreement (LAA)

The LAA is an agreement between Plymouth City Council, the LSP and central Government focused on creating and sharing sustainable prosperity in the city. The majority of the outcomes agreed within the LAA for 2007 to 2010 were however mandatory, i.e. they were set down by Government because they were known areas of underperformance. This means that the local opportunities to control the content of the LAA have been limited to the detailed issues that Plymouth has chosen to prioritise and the ways in which it has decided to tackle problems.

The LAA also has a strict and sometimes restrictive timetable to adhere to, such that *'the rhetoric around proper processes can be frustrated by the timetable'* (Plymouth City Council Officer). For example, in working to refresh the current Agreement to cover the period 2008 to 2011, the LAA recently hosted an LSP Forum event to identify members' key priorities for the next Agreement. This will be followed by further prioritisation exercises led by expert facilitators, but the scope for wider

consultation will be governed by the Government's imposed deadlines for submission.

Focus group comments on the LAA:

- *The LAA is tokenistic towards the B&ME community. It's hard to believe that the most recent meeting to choose LAA priorities appeared to give so little importance to the needs of the B&ME community – quite astonishing.*
- *Older people have been very marginalised until recent work to develop an older people's partnership.*
- *Don't forget other service user groupings too.*

Although the wider engagement work to inform the Plymouth LAA is mainly undertaken through the LSP, the LAA also needs to embrace other cross-cutting work that might otherwise slip through the LSP net, e.g. the work of the Children's Trust and current work to involve older people in the development of a new Plymouth Older People's Partnership.

In consulting with the wider public on the revised priorities for the LAA, the challenge is how to make best use of existing structures and networks, and to achieve wide coverage, particularly when the LSP community representatives are not necessarily well keyed in to all the communities of interest. The LAA Project Manager recognises for example a particular need to ensure that all strands of the B&ME communities in Plymouth have opportunities to engage with the process. It has however proved difficult to persuade the wider community of the relevance of this work and to attract them to get involved in local meetings. The ability to 'piggy back' on other engagement work being undertaken through the Local Development Framework has been helpful in this respect.

It is also recognised by officers that the LSP and LAA need to get better at giving feedback to the community on the outcomes of their involvement, otherwise people will get '*turned off*' and their engagement is likely to '*fizzle out*'.

8.6 Measuring Impact and Assuring Quality through the LSP and LAA

All the examples of engagement and empowerment work presented in this case study have described very different systems of monitoring and evaluation to measure their impacts. These have ranged from the simplest forms of informal verbal feedback to costly but informative MORI surveys. Some interviewees have commented that although the '6 box' Quality Assurance Framework proposed by the National Empowerment Partnership looks sensible, they would not currently have the capacity to use it.

The challenge facing the LSP, LAA and Plymouth City Council in seeking to unify this array of work within one manageable system of measurement is clearly massive. However the partner agencies in the LSP feel they have now gone at least some way towards achieving common collection methods around a core set of indicators, and they agreed in September 2007 to take a combined approach to future surveys in order to avoid duplicating effort and overburdening communities.

In terms of the 'new' national set of PSA 21^{xii} indicators announced by the Treasury in October 2007 to measure local authority performance in building more cohesive, empowered and active communities, these were already included in Plymouth's pre-LAA. However, it proved extremely challenging to establish baselines or obtain reliable updates through Plymouth City Council's triennial 'Best Value Satisfaction Survey'.

In order to improve on the information available through the 'Best Value Satisfaction Survey', the LSP's 'Safe and Strong' Theme Group worked with Plymouth City Council to design and commission a city-wide 'Quality of Life Survey' which was conducted for the first time in December 2006. This included not only questions linked to the PSA 21 indicators, but also a range of other questions about people's perceptions of their neighbourhoods and of the city as a whole.

Plymouth Community Partnership felt this was a good example of the third sector's involvement in the LSP Theme Group having an important impact, in that they were able to press for the inclusion of some key qualitative questions that might otherwise have been left out.

The survey was administered to a large sample of households across the city, with boosted samples from the 4 priority neighbourhoods. In relation to Indicator 4, it provided a baseline figure of 22% who said they felt they could influence decisions about their local areas.

Before deciding whether to repeat the 'Quality of Life Survey', the City Council is awaiting the outcome of the national consultation about the new 'Place' Survey,

which will replace the triennial 'Best Value' Survey and seems likely to be required every two years, starting in Autumn 2008.

For a more detailed appraisal of systems currently used to evaluate community engagement and empowerment, please see the research team's separate report on this topic.

9. Learning from the Case Study

9.1 General Learning about Engagement and Empowerment

Drawing together all the Plymouth case study material, there appear to be a number of factors that positively support effective engagement and empowerment:

History, ethos and infrastructure

- A strong history of local community activism
- The passion and commitment of local people, empowering themselves to bring about change
- A strong third sector (i.e. with capacity and funding for infrastructure), with a history of advocating for and seeking to empower communities, through their work with both geographical communities and communities of interest
- Strong empowerment values underpinning a public sector commitment to bottom-up, community-led regeneration / sustainability
- Recognition by the local authority of the value of involving the community in its commissioning activity and the impact this has on the quality of delivered services
- Understanding of the particular barriers to engagement faced by equalities groupings and other vulnerable groups
- High level support and commitment within local authorities and coherent community engagement strategies that reflect understanding of the time/effort needed for effective engagement
- Championing of community engagement work across the whole local authority to raise profile and get cross-departmental work going – changing hearts and minds to achieve cultural shift

Investment and assets

- Investment of time and resources in community development work, especially in the early stages, to engage directly with local communities, identify aspirations and goals, and decide how to measure outcomes
- Time spent putting systems in place to act on the identified issues and work towards tangible outcomes
- Sustained longer-term funding (5-10 years) to develop community anchor organisations that can support mutual networks and provide training and support for residents taking up representative roles

- The availability of tangible assets (asset transfer) or potential change as the focal point for action, matched with external advice and expertise to help communities realise their ambitions

Helpful processes

- Making the issues for community engagement as locally relevant as possible
- Going to where people are and providing innovative and creative ways for them to get engaged
- Recognising and building on the community's existing strengths - working with what's already there
- Continuous work to reinforce the active involvement of the community
- Local Councillors involved in local engagement activities
- The use of independent facilitators as brokers and bridge-builders in situations where the local authority may not yet be trusted, and to build capacity
- Working in partnership with neighbourhoods and communities to focus on how to make better use of all existing resources and how to achieve better joined up working
- Some early wins to show things are happening; a product
- Effective use of local media to inform and give local people a voice
- Regular feedback on progress and outcomes

Ongoing support and capacity

- A 'hub of capacity' in the Local Authority to undertake the direct and indirect work required to support and enable the delivery of its enabling role across all Council activities
- Employment of workers within local authorities with community development and creative skills to work alongside technical staff in multidisciplinary teams
- Well-signposted access to both 'expert support' (professional resources; advice) and 'peer support' (twinning /buddying arrangements; exchange visits; networks)
- Providing learning opportunities and support so that people can build skills in order to engage and influence more effectively

Effective coordination by the LSP

- Secure funding for infrastructure – for outreach work, community engagement with the LSP, and the training and support of community representatives
- Good intelligence about what is happening in engagement and empowerment
- A coherent Community Engagement Framework and Development Plan
- The Local authority giving leadership but not taking control – a listening, enabling role
- High level Champions of engagement and empowerment in key roles on the LSP
- Community representatives empowered to act as a strong voice for the community, respected and taken seriously by other sectors
- Effective linkages between community representatives and wider community stakeholders

- Achieving well-coordinated partnership approaches to engagement to avoid duplication and reduce 'consultation fatigue'
- Clarity around the role of Ward Councillors

Linkages between the LSP and LAA

- Clear linkages between the LSP and LAA
- Awareness and inclusion of other cross-cutting engagement work
- Good use of existing structures and networks to achieve wide consultation
- Feedback to the community on performance against targets

Monitoring and Measurement

- The value of robust MORI surveys tracking samples longitudinally to measure qualitative impacts (but they are costly!)
- Achieving common data collection methods to avoid duplicating effort and overburdening communities
- Understanding of the need for capacity to undertake meaningful evaluation
- Recognising the value of involving the community in question setting

...And some final comments from the focus group:

- *You can point to little bits of success here and there. There has been positive change in some areas, e.g. the Home Zone areas are going well.*
- *The Third Sector Strategy is good news but this is not the same as supporting practice around community development.*
- *The setting up of Community Land Trusts in some neighbourhoods is giving real power to the community and is the way forward.*
- *The main opportunities are through area-owned initiatives, but there are not enough positive models.*
- *Invest in supporting communities to trade, hold assets etc. if they want to.*
- *Support community anchor organisations helping communities to make their own choices; give them more responsibility and accountability to the community they serve.*
- *Plymouth still needs a community development strategy to underpin all this.*
- *Re-educate the Council in what community development is really about – target both members and officers (even though it takes a long time).*
- *Where there is a real local issue to address, local people will get fired up and get involved.*
- *Give everyone a voice and value their contributions.*
- *Value and encourage **passion** and support the role of activists.*
- *Skill people up for empowerment.*
- *Involve people in strategy setting.*
- *Blur the professional / community barriers.*
- *Make it fun!!*
- *Use the media and involve them too – spread the word.*

- ***Plymouth does have lots of inspiring examples and people to draw on. There is still inspiration and passion to be proud of. We need to make people aware of it and celebrate the benefits of engagement / empowerment.***

10. The Future

Much work is clearly going on in Plymouth to put some of these elements in place, but at present the effort can seem somewhat scattered and it is acknowledged that the city-wide approach to community engagement and empowerment requires greater coordination both by Plymouth City Council and within the LSP. The learning from the case study suggests that the next steps in making this happen may be to:

- Progress the development of an agreed Community Engagement Framework within the LSP, with an action plan attached;
- Map more fully the range of engagement work going on across the city and how it has been measured, including any baselines, to inform the Framework;
- Bring together key people from different departments within Plymouth City Council to consider how to build awareness and action within the Council;
- Build an identified 'hub of capacity' within the Council to take this work forward;
- Make the funding more secure for third sector infrastructure to support the ongoing community engagement work of the LSP;
- Explore more fully the role of community representatives and how they can be helped to link more effectively with the wider communities of interest;
- Explore and clarify the role of ward Councillors in relation to community engagement and the LSP, including where / when they could be more involved.

At regional level, there would also appear to be an appetite for opportunities to share and support good practice through twinning / buddying arrangements, exchange visits, and networks. Some Plymouth participants would also value access to regional sources of expert support – professional resources and advice.

APPENDIX 1: Agencies and Groups that Contributed to the Case Study

Devon and Cornwall Police
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue
Devonport Regeneration Community Partnership
Fata He
Groundwork
North Prospect Partnership
Pembroke Street Estate Management Board
Plymouth City Council
Plymouth Community Partnership
Plymouth Expert Patient Programme
Plymouth Public and Patient Involvement Forum
Plymouth Race Equality Council
Plymouth University
Refugee Action
Routeways Ltd.
SABRE
Tamar View Community Complex
Wolseley Trust

APPENDIX 2: References

- ⁱ GOSW (2007) *Fact Files: South West / Plymouth*, at www.gos.gov.uk/gosw/factgosw
- ⁱⁱ GOSW Regional Intelligence Team (2008) *Indices of Deprivation 2007 – Plymouth*, at www.swo.org.uk/observatory/links-1/index-1/indices-of-multiple-1.shtm
- ⁱⁱⁱ Communities & Local Government (2007) *Learning to change neighbourhoods: Lessons from the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme*, at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/changeneighbourhoodsummary
- ^{iv} Civil Renewal Unit (2005) *Civic Pioneers: Local people, local government, working together to make life better*
- ^v Evison, I. (2006) *Civic Pioneers: Case Study Review*
- ^{vi} Audit Commission (2006) *Corporate Assessment Report*
- ^{vii} Audit Commission (2007) *Plymouth City Council: Direction of Travel Summary*, at: <http://cpa.audit-commission.gov.uk/STCCScorecard.aspx?TaxID=106615#sa>
- ^{viii} Plymouth Community Partnership (September 2007) *Case Study: Working Towards Community Engagement - Stonehouse Action*
- ^{ix} Plymouth Community Partnership (September 2007) *Report to Local Strategic Partnership: Community Representatives Away Day*
- ^x Plymouth Community Partnership (September 2007) *Case Study: Working Towards Representation for the Sector*
- ^{xi} Plymouth Local Strategic Partnership (November 2007) *A Third Sector Strategy for Plymouth 2008-2011 – Approved Draft – Version 6*
- ^{xii} The new PSA Delivery Agreement 21 contains 6 indicators for measuring LA performance in building more cohesive, empowered and active communities:
- 1) % of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area
 - 2) % of people who have meaningful interactions with people from different backgrounds
 - 3) % of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood
 - 4) % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality
 - 5) Number of people regularly volunteering & number of FTE staff employed in 3rd sector (as a measure of a thriving third sector)
 - 6) % of people who participate in culture or sport
- For more information see www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/E/9/pbr_csr07_psa21.pdf