

**PRESS RELEASE: 19 September 2007**

**SOUTH WEST TO BENEFIT FROM  
'EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES'**

A new project aimed at giving communities in the South West a more powerful voice and be heard at a national level, has been established this month and is being officially launched on 5 October. 'Empowering Communities' is the South West regional consortium of the newly formed National Empowerment Partnership (NEP) and is being run by Creating Excellence, the south west centre for sustainable communities.

When Hazel Blears MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, announced the formation of the NEP earlier this week, she said: "Bringing Government closer to people, passing power from Whitehall to the town hall and direct to local communities, isn't just the right thing to do. It's the best way to revitalise the local roots of our democracy. It's the surest way of making local services reflect people's needs. And it's the only way we can get to grips with some of the biggest challenges we face - from climate change to childhood obesity - where people making little changes in their everyday life are a vital part of the solution."

Dominic Murphy, Executive Director of Creating Excellence, said: "Supporting the NEP, 'Empowering Communities' is aimed at getting more people in the South West involved and influencing the decisions that affect their lives and local communities."

The initiative is looking to increase the number of people, particularly in disadvantaged areas, who participate in public issues, press for and contribute to the improvement of public services, and help to shape the future of where they live. 'Empowering Communities' will encourage local communities to link with strategic bodies in order to influence Government, provide guidance in relation to funding and grant options and raise awareness of the important benefits an active and engaged community has in shaping the long term success of an area.

**Event details**

The official launch of the 'Empowering Communities' programme will take place in Taunton on 5 October, when key stakeholders and organisations which may be able to take part in the initiative will hear about and discuss plans for the next six months and the prospects beyond April 2008.

## **Case studies**

### Gloucester

The key to neighbourhood management for Community Counts in Gloucester is all about how residents, and their knowledge of their neighbourhoods, can directly shape and influence the public services which impact on their everyday lives.

Di Robinson, Neighbourhood Manager at Community Counts, explains: "At Community Counts, we have developed resident engagement around local priorities and through this now have groups of experienced residents who are actively shaping, monitoring and influencing the delivery of key universal public services such as neighbourhood policing and street care delivery."

Community Counts has developed issue specific engagement processes whereby residents can be involved in time limited or even one off pieces of work, which can change the shape of services. For example:

- Working with local residents to evaluate the experience of being parent/community school governors, and re shaping the support and training available to better meet their needs and to encourage more residents to take up the roles.
- Encouraging involvement with site-specific work, such as planning consultations, which will impact on the neighbourhood, or developing a resident engaged management and maintenance plan of a key local park with the City Council owners.

*For more information about Community Counts, contact Di Robinson on 01452 554420 or visit [www.communitycounts.org.uk](http://www.communitycounts.org.uk).*

### Plymouth

A good example of how communities can work together to influence Government decisions and create significant change at a local level is the inner city Pembroke Street Estate in the Mount Wise area of Devonport, Plymouth. Here, local people got together in a determined bid to halt the spiral of decline. Residents formed the Estate Management Board which ultimately led to the complete refurbishment of the local authority owned flats. The resident led

initiative liaised with the local authority and focussed on the physical improvement of the estate, new management arrangements, implementing employment and training initiatives, and expanding non-housing activities.

*For more information about Pembroke Street contact Christine Watts on 01752 607277 or visit [www.pembrokestreet.co.uk](http://www.pembrokestreet.co.uk).*

**For more information on 'Empowering Communities' and Creating Excellence, or to enquire about the launch event:**

- email [events2007@creatingexcellence.org.uk](mailto:events2007@creatingexcellence.org.uk)
- visit [www.creatingexcellence.org.uk](http://www.creatingexcellence.org.uk)
- or call Creating Excellence on 01823 250804

## **ENDS**

### **Notes**

**Empowering Communities** is the South West regional consortium of the National Strategic Empowerment Partnership. It comprises of an Executive Board, members of which include:

- Community Counts, Gloucester
- Creating Excellence
- Equality South West
- Exeter CVS
- Government Office South West
- Penzance Central Initiative
- Plymouth City Council
- Plymouth University
- South Somerset District Council
- South West Forum, the regional voice of the Voluntary and Community Sector
- South West Foundation

The **National Empowerment Partnership** was set up by the government to improve improve the quality, coordination and evidence of community empowerment across England.

The **Local Government White Paper** (Oct 2006) embodies a central intention to empower local communities in order to improve public services, local democracy and the capacity of communities to have a greater influence over and involvement in the conditions of their lives; and **The Governance of Britain** (July 2007) green paper gives further substance to the vision of a truly participative society and the fundamental role of empowerment in achieving a more equal, cohesive and productive society.

**Creating Excellence** is the regional centre of excellence (RCE) for sustainable communities in the South West, working to secure better regeneration, renewal, and sustainable development throughout the region.

It does this in two ways;

- o building the skills and knowledge of people currently working for sustainable communities
- o by attracting more people to work in this field.

Creating Excellence was established in 2004 as an independent organisation by the South West of England Regional Development Agency (RDA) which worked in conjunction with a number of partners including the Government Office for the South West to bring the organisation to life. The South West RDA continues to support Creating Excellence and provides the majority of its funding.

### **FAQs re the National Empowerment Partnership**

#### **What is the National Empowerment Partnership? (formerly Every Voice Counts)**

The National Partnership Empowerment (NEP) is a national partnership of interested parties set up to improve the quality, co-ordination and evidence of empowerment across England.

The partnership will support and inform the government to help implement its vision of a truly participative society and promote the fundamental role of empowerment in achieving a more equal, cohesive and democratic society.

#### **What is empowerment?**

Empowerment is not the same as engagement. It is the result of strategic and practical actions - such as engagement, participation, partnership working - that increase the capacity of people to influence the decisions that affect their lives and is central to community development principles and practices.

#### **Why is the partnership's work necessary?**

Currently, there are numerous community empowerment projects and community engagement initiatives already taking place at a local level and some have a long history. However, investment in these is often sparse, scattered, unstable and of variable quality. In addition, the knowledge of what works and what doesn't work has not been uniformly compiled at local, regional or national levels.

#### **What impact will it have on communities?**

Ultimately, the impact of the National Empowerment Partnership and the initiatives outlined by Government will be the empowerment of citizens. The National Empowerment Partnership is an important first step towards creating a more participative society.