

# Learning to change neighbourhoods

Lessons from the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme







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Summary evaluation report

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## Foreword



This is a government committed to decentralisation and devolution of influence, power and control to local councils, communities and citizens. As the Governance of Britain document makes clear, we want to pass power away from Westminster and Whitehall, and put it in the hands of the real experts: the British people.

That is why the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme has been such an important project, and another step on our journey to put communities in control. This report makes it clear that ordinary people are capable of extraordinary feats, that neighbourhoods can be made into safe, stable places where people want to live and bring up their families, and that what works in one area can often be replicated in another.

The report is full of insight and hope, and should serve as an inspiration for the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hazel Blears". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a horizontal line.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

## Key lessons

The Guide Neighbourhoods Programme was funded by The Home Office, and subsequently Communities and Local Government, between 2005 and 2007. The aim of the programme was to explore the effectiveness of resident to resident learning in promoting positive change in neighbourhoods. The key findings of the evaluation are:

- The Guide Neighbourhoods offered a menu of learning opportunities that were shown to be effective in engaging residents in client neighbourhoods, with inspirational visits often forming a key starting point for longer term mentoring and consultancy support.
- The more in depth work was shown to have produced positive regeneration and empowerment benefits in those neighbourhoods supported. In some cases, these took the form of progress in achieving hard social outcomes. In other cases, it meant building good community governance and preventing fragile community groups from collapsing, thus avoiding a serious reversal in the regeneration of a neighbourhood.
- The features of Guide Neighbourhood support that client neighbourhoods particularly valued included the personal experience and accessibility of residents and colleagues, the willingness to share learning and the honesty with which they did so. Guide Neighbourhoods were described by some as “the human face of regeneration.”
- The Guide Neighbourhoods helped the client neighbourhoods to move beyond their initial angry adversarial stance to recognise the value of building collaboration with public sector partners and understand the place of local action within the bigger picture.
- Residents were central to, but not the sole providers of the learning process. Resident to professional learning became an important part of the programme in terms of effecting change.
- The organisations involved as Guide Neighbourhoods were very diverse. This was both a strength, in that they were able to offer a broad range of learning, but also a weakness of the programme, in that it sometimes lacked a clear focus and profile.
- The findings reinforce those of previous regeneration initiative evaluations. Engaging and empowering residents is crucial, but it takes time and adequate funding if local residents are to participate in regeneration as equal partners. National networks are powerful tools for promoting learning but they need a clear purpose and robust management and resourcing.

## Summary

### The policy concern

“Many people feel powerless to do anything about the issues that affect their daily lives...For some, the organisations which take the decisions seem beyond their influence, so people are left with a diminishing sense of confidence and responsibility.”<sup>1</sup>

### The Guide Neighbourhoods offer

“We were treated like partners maybe for the first time” (client neighbourhood)

“Since (working with a Guide Neighbourhood) it has made me more confident and able to talk to others...I have grown in confidence. It has been stupendous... ” (client neighbourhood)

## Regeneration from neighbourhood to neighbourhood: strategies for delivering learning

Working at neighbourhood level has become a cornerstone of policy delivery. It is seen as a means of re-connecting services with the communities they serve, building public trust, encouraging active citizenship, accountability and good governance<sup>2</sup>. The Guide Neighbourhoods Programme (2005-7) was designed to contribute to this development through both the passing on of specialist knowledge (e.g. on community managed housing) and the building of community confidence and organisation at the neighbourhood level.

The process was one of translating the inspiration and enthusiasm of key individuals into learning for others so that they too could contribute to the building of sustainable communities. The programme can also be seen as building a learning network between neighbourhood based ‘community anchor organisations.’

## Guide Neighbourhoods: a profile

There were originally nine neighbourhoods involved and funded to act as guides. A further five joined the Programme in late 2005 and early 2006. The organisations involved were diverse. They ranged from:

- groups on peripheral estates (Castle Vale, Birmingham) to inner city communities (Seedley and Langworthy Trust, Salford);
- predominantly white working class neighbourhoods (Burrowes Street, Walsall) to others in multi-cultural areas (Leicester North West Community Forum);
- an estate of just over 140 households (Pembroke Street, Plymouth) to a whole ward, (Balsall Heath, Birmingham) or more (INclude, Liverpool);

<sup>1</sup> Civil Renewal Unit (2005) Together We Can: People and government, working together to make life better. Home Office, London, p4.

<sup>2</sup> Communities and Local Government (2006) Strong and prosperous communities: The local government white paper (white paper CM6939) The Stationery Office, London.

- long established agencies – for example Poplar HARCA (London), a substantial local employer, or Goodwin Development Trust (Hull) which has a considerable portfolio of community owned assets – through to relatively new community groups (Stubbin Neighbourhood Association, Sheffield) and a small national group (National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations);
- those organisations offering broad based community development skills to those sharing specific, technical knowledge and expertise from social enterprise development (Eldonian Group, Liverpool) and neighbourhood management (for example Royds Community Association, Bradford).

<b>Table 1: Guide Neighbourhoods by region</b>	
<b>London</b>	<b>North West</b>
Poplar HARCA/New Mill Consultants Walterton and Elgin Community Homes – WECH (Associate Guide Neighbourhood from March 2006)	The Eldonian Group, INclude – Liverpool Seedley and Langworthy Trust – Salford (from March 2006)
<b>Yorkshire and Humberside</b>	<b>West Midlands</b>
Royds Community Association – Bradford Goodwin Development Trust – Hull (from March 2006) Stubbin Neighbourhood Association – Sheffield (from March 2006)	Balsall Heath Forum, Castle Vale Community Housing Association – Birmingham Perry Common – Birmingham (from February 2006) Burrowes Street Tenant Management Organisation – Walsall
<b>South East</b>	<b>South West</b>
Neighbours4U – Kent (from January 2006)	Pembroke Street Estate Management Board – Plymouth
<b>East Midlands</b>	<b>National</b>
Leicester North West Community Forum (from July 2005)	National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations

## Guide Neighbourhoods: the principles

The underlying principle of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme was that residents could learn from each other about ‘what works’ in neighbourhood regeneration and apply those lessons at a practical level within their own communities. In fact, the programme was more complex in terms of responding to – and in some cases anticipating – fast changing policy contexts.

A number of Guide Neighbourhoods have been at the forefront of developing and delivering ‘new’ policy agendas including social enterprise development (the Eldonian Group), neighbourhood management (Castle Vale Community Housing Association) and community management of assets (Goodwin Development Trust). The initiative’s focus however, has remained allied with the starting principle, namely – that learning based on sharing between residents can be an effective stimulus to regeneration and change.

It should be noted, however, that Guide Neighbourhoods had different approaches to learning for regeneration. Whilst some saw themselves as experts through experience. Others adopted a more collaborative approach and acknowledged that they too could learn from client neighbourhoods.

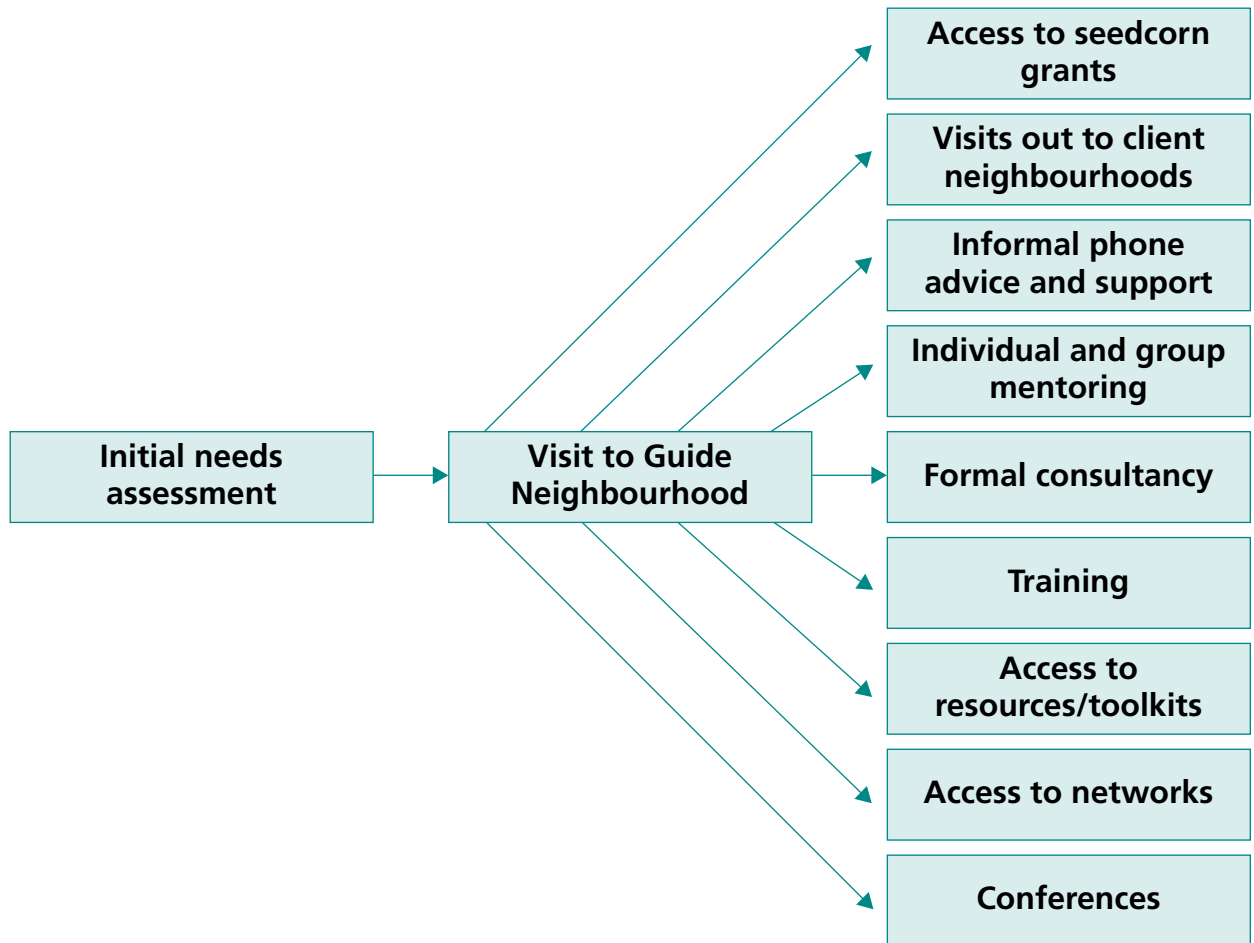
As well as 'horizontal' learning (between residents, neighbourhoods and community based organisations) there has been 'vertical' learning (from residents to professionals and policy makers and vice-versa). Some Guide Neighbourhoods actively promoted particular regeneration models (such as development trusts) and encouraged the involvement of local professionals and agencies as well as residents in their activities.

"Building the confidence of residents is important. But they need to be confident in talking to the professionals. So we bring them together so that the professionals learn from the residents as well." (Guide Neighbourhood)

## **The Guide Neighbourhoods: models for learning**

All the organisations within the programme had particular expertise to share with others, often built on years of experience. Different methods were adopted to enable this learning transfer – visits into the Guide Neighbourhood, visits out to the client neighbourhoods, informal training sessions, mentoring and consultancy advice being the most common. In addition, Guide Neighbourhoods were allocated a small grants fund to enable client neighbourhoods to purchase a range of professional support, advice and resources (of between £500 and £10,000 per neighbourhood).

## The Guide Neighbourhoods learning menu



## Visits: inspiration and learning

### Summary of activity

170 visits to Guide Neighbourhoods involving over 3,000 people took place between April 2005 and March 2006. A further 258 community groups were involved in visits to the expanded network over 2006-7, with Guide Neighbourhoods offering additional visits out to 93 groups.

Visits, though initially slow to build, became a mainstay of the programme and illustrated the value of raising aspirations and confidence. Residents were able to see what could be achieved as well as to understand the commitment and sheer hard work involved in bringing about change. The financing of visits enabled residents to travel further afield and this contributed to a wider forum than would be available otherwise.

“We will be telling everyone of our visit and encouraging people to come on more visits because ‘seeing is believing!’ When you can see it you know you can do it!”  
(client neighbourhood)

The enthusiasm that comes from seeing something first hand is hard to beat, though visits alone are often not enough. The ‘seeing is believing’ concept is only a part of the picture.

Client neighbourhoods particularly valued the offer of visits out to their communities as a way of reinforcing learning and the energy generated by initial visits:

“About six of us went and were really impressed...but when we got back all enthusiastic...people were like ‘yes, so what, really’. Then we got [them] down to a meeting. There were about 60 there, residents, [council] officers and it was only then when they saw and heard it for themselves that they believed us. It’s given people a new energy.” (client neighbourhood)

## Mentoring and consultancy support

The level of government funding enabled Guide Neighbourhoods to extend their range of support beyond one-off visits.

Between 2005-07, Guide Neighbourhoods gave advice, mentoring and consultancy support to over 200 groups. This has taken different forms and included:

- the community development approach adopted by Royds Community Association. This involved intensive work with a limited number of neighbouring communities in Bradford, starting with initial needs analysis studies and progressing through to advising on the implementation of action plans.
- specialised and technical consultancy, the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations worked closely with a range of groups to explore community managed housing options and issues of good governance in housing management; Poplar HARCA/ New Mill Consultants advised a housing association on its housing policy; the Eldonian Group and INclude promoted social enterprise models as a sustainable response to community need and Leicester North West Community Forum developed a model for community based online networks.
- the provision of more general advice on good community governance and resident engagement (Burrowes Street).

Several Guide Neighbourhoods, including Castle Vale and the Eldonian Group, described their role not simply as providing learning opportunities but as being active in brokering more positive relationships between community groups and local authorities.

However, the training offered by Guide Neighbourhoods, in the formal sense, did not really take off within the programme. Rather Guide Neighbourhoods offered a safe space in which to discuss problems, as well as successes, and this was highly prized by client groups. One of the key selling points of their approach to neighbourhood to neighbourhood learning was that:

“They tell it like it is. There is no spin, it’s warts and all. This worked, but also this didn’t. We achieved this...but it took time and was difficult. Regeneration has become about ‘quick wins’...so inspiring people when you are also saying ‘it’s a hard struggle and can take a long time’...is really much more honest.” (client neighbourhood)

How client neighbourhoods have applied the learning involved is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Applying the learning from Guide Neighbourhoods		
An organic approach to learning seen from the client neighbourhood's point of view	Time	Levels of engagement and influence
<p>We visit the Guide Neighbourhood</p> <p>↓</p> <p>We reflect on what we have learned</p> <p>↓</p> <p>People from the Guide Neighbourhood visit us to reinforce what we have learned</p> <p>↓</p> <p>We adapt the learning for our local situation</p> <p>↓</p> <p>We apply the learning – with support from Guide Neighbourhoods</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Guide Neighbourhoods provide support as and when we need it.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>We review what works for us and what doesn't</p> <p>↓</p> <p>With new confidence we start building networks, alliances and partnerships</p> <p>↓</p> <p>We begin to see our activity having an impact on our neighbourhood or community of interest</p> <p>↓</p> <p>We begin to be able to influence wider strategic planning in our area/authority</p>		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px; text-align: center;">                     Supporting the establishment and development of autonomous community/neighbourhood organisations                 </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px; text-align: center;">                     Building the accountability and capacity of neighbourhood organisations and their ability to engage in local partnership working                 </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px; text-align: center;">                     Neighbourhood organisations engaged in local strategic planning mechanisms (e.g. local and community strategic partnerships)                 </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;">                     Networks of neighbourhood organisations able to influence regional and national policy development and implementation                 </div>

## Tools for change: seedcorn grants

In addition to offering visits and ongoing consultancy, Guide Neighbourhoods offered 'seedcorn grants' to community based organisations to stimulate activity and implement innovative project ideas. This was a successful element of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme with a total allocation of £729,821 over two years. The grants, ranging from £500 to £10,000, were promoted and administered locally by a panel within each Guide Neighbourhood.

The Guide Neighbourhoods trialed different methods of grant distribution – from targeting monies to groups they were advising through to open advertising. The Eldonian Group focused their efforts on three large 'investment' grants (£10,000 each) to promote the maximum impact on the capacity of organisations working to become social enterprises. Neighbourhoods4U gave out the minimum grant in order to reach a larger number of the smallest organisations in Kent.

Seedley and Langworthy Trust developed a two tier system with a fast track for grants below £1,000 and a more detailed process for the bigger grants of £1,000 to £10,000. Other Guide Neighbourhoods (such as Burrowes Street) adopted an outcome based system, holding back 10% of total allocations until recipients had reported on spend and outcomes.

Grants delivery involved critical learning for Guide Neighbourhoods and for those who received the grants:

"We had to think very carefully about (seedcorn) grants. What were we trying to do (with the money)...what criteria we needed to apply, how to design the application form and how do we follow up and ensure the money was spent well. I think we are now more aware of what funders are looking for...and have learned loads about how to be transparent and accountable for funds." (Guide Neighbourhood)

The seedcorn scheme raised awareness in client neighbourhoods of the requirements of funders and the importance of transparency in decision making processes and reporting. For many small groups this was the first external money they had received and it enabled them to attract other funds. An important aspect of the seedcorn process was the support for clients to produce action plans (i.e. it was not only the money itself, but also the planning associated with the awards that had an impact on organisational capacity, especially in small and fragile groups).

Seedcorn money has been an extremely useful tool enabling Guide Neighbourhoods to 'kick start' or maintain community activity, particularly with highly marginalised groups. Small grants do not on their own, however, guarantee that such small organisations can grow and become sustainable.

### Case study 1

#### Seedcorn Grants: supporting growth and development

In Plymouth, Pembroke Street worked with Morice Town Community Forum through advice and visits, and granted seedcorn money to support the development of a community flat, which “is to be a youth space, with access for education and meeting space.” After the Guide Neighbourhood support “it is now snowballing, with public health offering money, and we are applying to the Local Network Fund for youth provision.”

The African Refugee Health Access & Support Project in Bradford was awarded £6,900 to run a drop in centre for young people aimed at crime reduction by addressing bullying, harassment, drugs and gun crime in discussion workshops. The relationship with the Guide Neighbourhood was an important part of this delivery. The community consultant visited the project three times and brought the chair of Royds community association to visit which helped them feel “the day to day touch”, where “other funders forget you and let you struggle.” The young people were motivated by this involvement to feel that what they were doing was worthwhile and that it fitted into a broader picture.

## Learning across Guide Neighbourhoods

Because of the different histories, starting points and strengths of each neighbourhood the Guide Neighbourhoods network became a learning system in its own right. The national network met frequently during the programme and enabled members to see the bigger policy picture. Resident guides repeatedly cited the life changing aspects of being involved at a wider national level. This was particularly significant for the more geographically isolated organisations in the programme.

Networking proved useful at a regional level too. In the West Midlands the Guide Neighbourhoods worked together to promote the programme and a local support network through regional events.

### Case study 2

#### Birmingham networking events: strategies for sharing learning

##### “When you meet other people, it changes your life”

Over 2006-7, the National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations, with support from the West Midlands based Guide Neighbourhoods, ran three mini-conferences. The first of these was essentially a showcase to raise the profile of Guide Neighbourhoods. Forty participants in later events were supported to develop and present their own case studies, share problems and solutions and explore potential collaborative strategies.

Two key themes to emerge from events were around the developing mature partnerships:

“It’s not just about telling the authorities what they should do for us, but helping them see what we can do for them;”

and the value of openly sharing learning between neighbourhoods:

“It’s not like they (Guide Neighbourhoods) knew everything. They weren’t teachers...we were all learning together. So we shared...and gained confidence ... not like we know it and you don’t. Been to too many (events) like that before.” (client neighbourhood)

The majority of Guide Neighbourhoods reported that network membership and the credibility that goes with having government funding enhanced their status and capacity to develop more positive relationships with key statutory partners. This was particularly the case in regions with a cluster of Guide Neighbourhoods where the capacity to collaborate and share expertise within a local authority area enabled Guide Neighbourhoods to “build some momentum” in these relationships. In Birmingham, for example, Guide Neighbourhoods are beginning to play a role in advising on neighbourhood management pilots. In Liverpool the Eldonian Group and INclude were able to gain £200,000 for a joint Canal Rangers project by working together.

## From learning to action: outcomes of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme

The Guide Neighbourhoods Programme began with a focus on helping the government to achieve three core aims relating to community empowerment:

- **Active citizens:** giving people the motivation, skills and confidence to speak up and act for their communities;
- **Strengthened communities:** giving community groups the capability and resources to bring people together to work out shared solutions;
- **Partnership with public bodies:** getting public bodies to be willing and able to work as partners with local people.

The outcomes of the programme can be seen both in the Guide Neighbourhoods themselves and, more particularly, in the client neighbourhoods with whom they worked.

### Promoting active citizenship

One aspiration of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme was to enable volunteer resident guides to make the transition to paid employment. This proved problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, statutory guidance precludes the members of housing boards from receiving financial remuneration from their involvement in housing management. This prevented the recruitment of many key local activists with lots of experience – unless they were willing to resign from their management positions.

Secondly, a number of potential local recruits in receipt of benefits were reluctant to accept short-term or part time employment which, it was felt, offered little job security and impacted on their benefits. Thirdly, balancing employment with existing community commitments or personal care responsibilities, also proved an issue for recruitment. In addition, whilst there is a level of credibility that goes with being paid as a community consultant, there was a concern about a changed relationship with other residents – being seen as a consultant rather than ‘one of us.’

The neighbourhoods resolved this in different ways. Royds community association and INclude employed activists and provided training programmes, Poplar HARCA set up an arms length social enterprise employing tenants (New Mill Consultants) whilst Burrowes Street took on a New Deal placement. In many cases, residents carried out the role in an unpaid capacity. In all cases, the approach helped activists learn new skills.

In terms of active citizenship, much of the impact on client neighbourhoods has been in encouraging and inspiring community groups to become active and to have the confidence to persist with their ideas. Guide Neighbourhoods have been instrumental in supporting the initial development of neighbourhood organisations. Yet more than this, they have played a key role in re-invigorating those groups which felt they “were on the verge of giving up...had lost direction and members.” For struggling groups, access to flexible advice and support was “what made a difference in us keeping on.”

For both Guide and client neighbourhoods, the process of engaging with a national programme, the cumulative effect of which is seeing exemplars of regeneration, meeting others with the same concerns and attending network meetings, takes people out of their immediate area of concern and helps them to see how their own actions fit into the bigger picture.

“We are starting to build a wider sense of community. We are not alone, we all have the same problems...It made me less impatient, made me less territorial or tribal. I am looking outside my own box.” (client neighbourhood)

## Strengthening communities: developing organisational capacity

Guide Neighbourhoods report an increased professionalism and an ability to engage both within their own communities and at a more strategic level:

“We’ve got a lot of things that we didn’t have before...It’s easier now to look and think ‘so hang on, so what are the required outputs?’ ‘How can we fit the criteria...we spend less time arguing with people I think.” (resident guide)

Royds community association increased the scope of their work and the range of involvement models used. They have updated their marketing materials and reflected on what it is that they offer. Similarly, Goodwin Development Trust found that “the Programme made us think in a focused way about how to share information, what information is useful, and to consider our outward face.”

In addition, the Guide Neighbourhoods ‘kitemark’ has been seen as helpful in building credibility in relationships with power-holders, such as local authorities.

Guide Neighbourhoods have also played a role in shifting organisational cultures and practices and increasing the professionalism of client organisations. Balsall Heath Forum worked with Mirpuri Community Development Trust on quality procedures, building on their committee, and supporting them in moving to new premises. This, as with other Guide Neighbourhoods, involved building the competencies of often small organisations in developing partnership arrangements and building alliances with other voluntary and community groups as well as key statutory players.

However, just as many small businesses fail in the start-up phase, so do many community groups. The nature of the clients supported by Guide Neighbourhoods is that they are small and fragile groups that generally have quite a low organisational capacity. This means that the work of Guide Neighbourhoods is a slow process and success is by no means guaranteed.

“A lot of the groups we are working with are really small. No more sometimes than one or two people just setting out...it's not like you are (working) with strong organisations, with money and assets in the bank. They can be starting from nowhere...so when one person leaves you have to start out all over. But you can't just work with successful groups.” (Guide Neighbourhood)

Burrowes Street noted that there was at least a three to six month time lag between an initial visit and any request for follow up support or consultancy. Guide Neighbourhoods recognised the need to work at the pace of the groups; “Can't be too ambitious on others' behalf – they need to go at their own pace” and that circumstances beyond their control may mean there are few short term results. As one client neighbourhood put it: “We caught the enthusiasm – the vision of safer estates with a difference. (But) We've put it on hold while we get the stock transfer sorted out.”

Nevertheless, Guide Neighbourhoods have contributed to building broad based organisational capacity. A common theme is their support for organisations to develop a physical community presence and profile. With Guide Neighbourhoods support, several communities are establishing 'shop fronts' and Duckinfield Community Forum is developing a 'one stop shop' facility.

### Case study 3

#### Duckinfield 'one stop shop': raising the community profile

Duckinfield Community Forum wanted to establish a drop in 'one stop shop' on the estate and had been offered the use of premises. Seedley and Langworthy Trust (SALT) provided the advice and funding they needed to take up the offer. The forum is now on the verge of receiving the keys to the shop and developing activities for the whole estate.

By visiting SALT, the committee members began to learn about the ups and downs of getting a project off the ground:

“They talked about the problems they had had – ideas that worked and hadn't worked.”

The ongoing support and advice from SALT enabled the Forum to keep going and to develop their project:

“Every time we think 'we can't do this' they come up with something. We wouldn't have come this far without them – funding, expertise and knowledge. SALT have put us in touch with the right people...They've talked us through the pros and cons re becoming a charity. They've helped us work out what we need to get started; they helped us with the forms and to work out how much we needed to pay up front – equipment, insurance etc and how to prioritise this. They help us in practical ways as well...They told us where we could get special deals on equipment.”

The relationship with SALT has also given the forum a sense of what is possible:

“It's been good to see what works – what's been done in their area. It's been turned around.”

## Partnership and influence

“We were doing things and getting nowhere. It was like we were lost in some big system. What [the programme] has done for us is give us a position we never had. We felt like the lost estate, but now we can go to the council and say we are part of something national...and that seems to mean something to the officials. They listen to us now.” (client neighbourhood)

A number of Guide Neighbourhoods have acted as positive role models for encouraging client neighbourhoods to engage in partnerships.

“The real meaning of partnership working is clearer now as well, because...the Guide Neighbourhood is an example of a partnership, and it helps you to understand what a partnership should be like.” (client neighbourhood)

In a number of instances (for example Pembroke Street, INclude and the Eldonian Group) this involved both effecting introductions between community groups and key statutory agencies – or brokering new, more positive relationships where these have been historically difficult – trying to identify ‘blockages’ on both sides and look at solutions. Joint resident/officer visits were therefore seen as important in helping people arrive at agreement. As Burrowes Street commented: “Our role is to help people, residents and professionals, think about their accountability.”

Positive partnership working is closely related to local organisational cultures and histories and there is a concern that articulate resident groups still “get labelled as trouble” by local authorities. Nevertheless, there are clear indications that, as a result of support from the Guides, client neighbourhoods feel and are seen to be more professional, and are able to move on to building relationships with the statutory sector rather than remaining in the mode of ‘oppositional politics.’ One local councillor commented: “the money may only be a small amount but hopefully the relationships that have been built between the community groups in different parts of the ward will continue.”

## Case study 4

### The Goitside Partnership: building positive relationships

Goitside has a residential population of around 1,300 and there are a large number of businesses in the area. Increasingly, the newer residents moving in have been mainly economic migrants and asylum seekers. This is a red-light area and there are issues around drug use. The Goitside Partnership was business sector dominated and Royds community association was approached to help build relationships so that residents could also gain from local development and investment.

In Goitside, the Royds community consultants engaged in:

- mapping the area to identify residential areas and the demographic profile
- networking and making links with the residents group (Chain Street)
- signposting to funding opportunities
- liaising with agencies such as University Estates Department, Police, and Primary Care Trust
- surveying businesses in the area and raising awareness of the partnership
- working with local organisations to encourage links between the sex workers and the Goitside Partnership
- connecting the residents group into local training programmes
- developing the business plan for the partnership
- establishing the Goitside Development Trust

### Impact

The programme provided support to residents who had previously been excluded from decisions being made in the area where they lived. A small grant of £5,000 enabled the group to purchase computer equipment and run classes to attract people into their offices, and for the first time residents became involved in discussions with the local authority and the Urban Regeneration Company.

The local Chain Street Residents Association identified a number of benefits of working with Royds, in particular:

- greater access to information and increased influence and access to decision makers
- support in developing a business plan and accessing funding

“Without Royds we probably would have packed up...[they] enabled the partnership to move from talk to action.”

## Quality of life impacts

Building individual and organisational capacity has been a key achievement of the Guide Neighbourhoods. Given the limited time available to the programme, it might be unreasonable to expect instant 'headline news' in terms of impact. Indeed an important message from the programme is that "quick wins can end up as long term losses if they are not part of a process." (Guide Neighbourhood)

Some client neighbourhoods, for example, expressed the feeling that they were expected to "build sustainable communities in a transit camp" without recognition of the additional resources required or the complexity of achieving cohesion in neighbourhoods in a state of flux.

There are however a number of positive, practical outcomes and learning points from the programme, which can influence the implementation of future policy.

## Neighbourhood management and housing

Neighbourhood management is a key theme in governmental policy initiatives, including the promotion of Tenant Management Organisations, stock transfer, and the introduction of neighbourhood wardens and neighbourhood policing.

These are all areas in which Guide Neighbourhoods (particularly those responsible for housing and community asset management) have a long track record. This experience has enabled client neighbourhoods to 'fast track' local developments. Support from experienced Tenant Management Organisations and community managed housing initiatives (such as Burrowes Street, Poplar HARCA/New Mill Consultants, the Eldonian Group and Perry Common) have focused on preparing tenants to apply for community based housing management; speeding up the process of transferring stock to community control and developing good governance systems, as well as providing support through the decanting and refurbishment process.

Guides can make a unique contribution to 'good governance' as their resident background allows their reflections and advice to be heard.

"Professionals had told us [residents] what we were doing wrong...but no-one believed them. It needed another [resident] group to tell us...this is how it is, this is what you can do. This is what you can't." (client neighbourhood)

## Diversity and community cohesion

Developing a positive approach to diversity and building community cohesion remains an important plank of government policy within the Local Government White Paper (2006)<sup>3</sup>, particular funding streams (e.g. Connecting Communities) and in delivery structures such as Local Area Agreements.

Seedcorn money has been spent on projects supporting young people, BME, and faith communities, as well as women and disabled people. Many of the groups funded with seedcorn money by Royds community association for example, are engaged in cross cultural linking: an inter-faith women's group; the African Caribbean Achievement Project; the Pak-Kashmir United Forum and the Bradford Community Environment programme.

<sup>3</sup> Communities and Local Government (2006) Strong and prosperous communities: the local government white paper (white paper CM 6939) The Stationery Office, London.

### Case study 5

#### Building cohesion: engaging young people

“The whole thing has changed. Come on this estate a couple of years ago, if you parked your car, there’d be no wheels on it. Look, we’re closer to the kids, we’re closer to the elderly. We’ve got more things going on in the estate. We have come a long way thanks to Guide Neighbourhoods and...a lot of forums...will tell you that.” (Lyndhurst Estate on its support from Perry Common)

“After seeing what has been achieved with young people [in Pembroke Street], the older generation [in our group] has improved its attitude towards young people. Pembroke Street have been very supportive and suggested positive steps, which has led to getting new people involved and feeling positive (3-4 new committee members who are 16-21).”

Guide Neighbourhoods have also been active in combating the isolation and social exclusion felt by disabled people.

### Case study 6

#### Working for the inclusion of disabled people

Neighbours4U provided mentoring support and a small grant for the provision of expressive arts classes for severely disabled people, bringing them and their carers out to benefit from social contact as well as self-expression. This has often brought dramatic results in reassessing medication needs and boosting the skills of the disabled people involved. It has also led to the development of social enterprise with business advice and support from Neighbours4U.

In Hull, Danny’s Dream was established in 2003, but has lacked the support structures to enable the group to move forward. Danny’s Dream is a vision of hope for young adults with severe physical disabilities and/or learning difficulties who face social exclusion because of a lack of suitable facilities and support to enable them to integrate into mainstream society.

Goodwin Development Trust has advised on drafting memoranda and articles of association and Danny’s Dream is now registering as a company and applying for charitable status. In addition, Goodwin has assisted in the recruitment of Danny’s Dream’s first co-ordinator and has provided practical support through a ‘hot desk’ at one of Goodwin’s premises so that they can make use of business support.

## Environmental improvements

A number of the Guide Neighbourhoods offered advice and support, as well as seedcorn grants, to help client neighbourhoods to change their local physical environment in ways that raise the community’s self esteem. Visible environmental change has often been seen as a ‘quick fix’ in regeneration initiatives. Guide Neighbourhoods, however, approached the task not as a ‘one off’ but as part of a process which has intertwined with other policy areas such as estate management and community safety.

## Case study 7

### From flower planting to active community

Roman Way is an isolated estate in south Birmingham. Members of the residents group initially felt “on our own and really struggling to get people interested and get things happening...although there were big (regeneration) projects happening all around us.”

Roman Way has worked with three Guide Neighbourhoods: Burrowes Street; NFTMO (Bloomsbury) and Perry Common. Involvement with Burrowes Street and NFTMO was seen as critical in building resident involvement in their move towards Tenant Management Organisation status. Work with Perry Common “has made a real difference about how people feel about the estate.” The Chairperson of the Tenants’ and Residents’ Association explains:

“Flowers might seem a small thing. But at the end of last year, we planted bulbs with the children and we have done litter picks with them. Small thing...But there was a message. It said to older people, children are not the problem...they feel safer ...they talk more and are getting more involved. The message just from having flowers, litter bins, cleaning up is that we all care for where we live...we can do something and it can last. People outside the estate also comment...Even the local authority is taking us more seriously. That’s the message from flowers!”

From a fragile community group “without a way to go,” Roman Way now has plans for a community resource centre.

## Community safety

The Perry Common Community Watch scheme has been used as a model for many other neighbourhood strategies with several client neighbourhoods interested in developing the model of ‘junior wardens’ as a means of engaging young people. West Midlands Police are now using one client neighbourhood as an exemplar of what can be achieved through neighbourhood policing and community involvement.

A common theme from across client neighbourhoods is that focusing purely on crime may actually increase community fears and that building relationships and improving the local environment are vital starting points for enhanced community safety. For example, the Kingstanding Neighbourhood Forum started around environmental improvements, but their use of seedcorn funding and consultancy support resulted in improved community safety, resident engagement and community cohesion through youth involvement.

## Learning for change: some key learning points

The starting point for Guide Neighbourhoods and the evaluation was action research into approaches to resident learning. What has emerged is an approach to supporting learning which translates into neighbourhood action and improvement. There is, therefore, a wealth of evidence on what helps individual residents and community groups to make this transition from seeing to doing.

- Residents need to be part of the solution but they can’t do it all alone.

- Resident learning does not relate solely to the physical regeneration of estates. There is a broader goal of enhanced community engagement, civil renewal, tackling issues of democratic deficit and building active citizenship.
- The ‘visits’ concept is an important part of the mix but visits are not enough on their own; follow on support should be available down the line.
- Small grants can lead to big change but grants are just part of the support.
- Neighbourhood groups need to be funded to act as community advocates – not just to deliver public services.
- Examples of good practice need to be shared through resident based networks and collaborative working practices.
- The current Guide Neighbourhoods, and other neighbourhood organisations with the capacity and willingness to act as guides have a lot to offer current policy agendas and are experienced in sharing their learning with others. This should be built into future strategies and programmes.
- It’s not just about residents sharing with other residents, but residents sharing with workers and policy makers too.
- Change has to be sustained over time – “one off initiatives don’t cut it.” (client neighbourhood)

## **“Not just a box of tricks”: Guide Neighbourhoods – a mechanism for change**

The outcomes achieved by the Guide Neighbourhoods have resulted from the combination of resources they have been able to offer their clients (eg. demonstration visits, training, ongoing day-to-day advice, in-depth consultancy and opportunities to network). The seedcorn grants have been significant as part of this learning and action package, but as part of a process which links community and policy objectives rather than a series of one off interventions:

“The trouble is...people see the physical side of regeneration, not the processes... they see the clock face and not the mechanisms behind it...what makes it work.”  
(resident guide)

The Guide Neighbourhood Programme has a lot to offer new policy developments, both from its attempts to create a learning network of and for resident based organisations and through the contributions that individual Guide Neighbourhoods have made with their specialist knowledge and by modelling resident focused solutions to community renewal.

“Involving residents is not just a box of tricks. It is a process...and often a hard one. But if residents don’t have a voice, if they are not listened to, then there isn’t a solution, just more problems.” (Guide Neighbourhood)

The modelling role of Guide Neighbourhoods was a significant aspect of the programme. Client neighbourhoods valued learning from people who have been through it, getting tips on what to do/what not to do, what to look out for, and not to give up if it doesn't go right the first time. The Guide/client relationship often centred on access to responsive support from people with the relevant personal experience.

The Guide Neighbourhoods understand that it takes time for people to believe in themselves. The client neighbourhoods recognise that working with people “who do it every day, every week, all the time, is invaluable.” Confidence is built because those ‘learning’ can see their mentors ‘practising what they preach.’ This understanding enabled both Guide and client neighbourhoods to become more confident and outward looking and enhanced their capacity to relate local action to the wider policy agenda. The programme's events and conferences led to England-wide networking between residents – an opportunity not often available to those who are not in paid jobs.

The Guide Neighbourhoods Programme has shown that neighbourhood based organisations have a significant role to play in ‘what works’ in regeneration, developing active citizenship and good governance. They are not a ‘cheap/instead of’ support option but a viable and equal option. Guide Neighbourhoods vividly illustrate the distance that can be, and has been, travelled and that is as significant for practitioners and policy makers as it is for residents.

The challenge now is to capitalise on this investment in the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme and to use the resident expertise available as a key implementation tool for the local government white paper and other policy agendas. Resourcing grass roots engagement beyond the purely local will be critical if examples of positive practice are to become more than localised, isolated exemplars and if we are to change the understandings and practice of professionals and policy makers in order to build active citizens and sustainable communities. Investment in neighbourhood learning locally, regionally and nationally is critical to building the belief that articulate and confident communities can make a difference in achieving the goal of sustainable communities.

“We used to say, **if** we can do something. Now we say **when** we can do something.”  
(client neighbourhood)

### About this report

The evaluation of the Guide Neighbourhoods Programme was undertaken by the Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham, Cities Research Centre, University of the West of England and COGS Ltd, Sheffield. The findings are based on extensive interviews and workshops undertaken with Guide Neighbourhoods, their client communities and policy makers between July 2005 and March 2007.

A full report on the findings is available on the Communities and Local Government website at [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

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