Community Engagement in Single Outcome Agreement Review

Scottish Community Development Centre

September 2010

1   Background

I have been working with East Lothian Community Planning Partnership for the past 2 years as part of the Meeting the Shared Challenge programme (MTSC).[1]

The support I have offered to the community planning process has taken the form of facilitating logic modelling sessions with almost all theme groups and additional facilitation support to the health and social care theme group, particularly in the area of community engagement. The East Lothian Community Care Forum was given a grant through MTSC for user led research.

In August 2010 I was asked to undertake a snapshot review to assess how community engagement is facilitated currently, both through the community planning theme groups and the new local planning structures. This review will provide information for the East Lothian Community Planning Forum on 2 December , which will look at how the community engagement and partnership structures, processes and practice, which inform the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA), can be improved.

The following is a description of the methodology and findings of the report and highlights some of the gaps, which seem to be emerging.

2   Methodology

A preparation meeting was held between myself, Meriel Deans, Patient and Community Involvement Worker and Veronica Campanile, Community Planning Officer. At this we agreed the scope of the review and put together a list of those to be interviewed. These included contacts for each theme group as well as representatives of the local planning partnerships, the voluntary sector and community councils.

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[1] The purpose of this nationally funded programme is to support community led health initiatives to have their voice heard within the statutory structure for more information see www.scdc.org.uk

19 contacts were sent a list of questions and asked to indicate a time when they would be available for a telephone interview. Several of these did not respond, or were unavailable for interview within the short timescale so that ultimately a total of 13 were interviewed and 1 submitted her comments in writing. A full list is attached as Appendix 1. The questions are attached as Appendix 2.

Desk research included studying theme group reports, the Community Engagement Strategy and any additional information sent in by interviewees.

3   Findings

Most interviewees agreed that the community planning process was still in its early stages and the theme groups were only just beginning to develop mechanisms for engaging with the community.

In addition the process of local community planning only really took off once the outcomes had been set in theme groups so that the opportunity to influence has had to wait until the outcomes are reviewed.

Several people also pointed out that the process of community planning, and the bureaucracy associated with it, made it hard to meaningfully engage with local people who had limited interest in high level outcomes. Most organisations and communities have a specific local or sectoral interest.

Tight timescales and the lack of flexibility once the SOA outcomes were set for the year were also challenges.

Many of the mechanisms for community engagement had been set up prior to the SOA process being developed and there were good examples of theme groups making use of these.

There are undoubtedly further opportunities to make more use of existing consultation mechanisms and processes such as the forthcoming Council's Corporate Consultation and Involvement Strategy and the East Lothian Tenants and Residents Information Panel.

However, the lack of capacity to undertake consultation, amongst some community planning partners, and to give community

engagement the attention and resources it deserves were identified as real barriers.

Despite this, some real evidence emerged of areas of good practice.

3.1. What's Working

3.1.1 The Environment, Housing and Places theme has worked with the existing Environment Forum to involve communities of interest and has used the local planning structures in Musselburgh and Dunbar to consult with geographical communities. The Environment Strategy was put to public consultation over the summer. The East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel was also clear that it was getting its voice heard through their involvement with this theme group. The Chair, Cathie McArthur was enthusiastic about the community planning process and said that East Lothian Council was well known for its '*forward thinking*' approach and '*works hard*' to involve tenants and residents groups. The community has strong representation at the housing forum, which meets quarterly and feeds directly into the theme group.

3.1.2 Lisa Shine, employed by East Lothian Council as a Young People's Participation Officer is clear about how the views of young people she consults are fed into the Children, Young People and Education Theme Group. She is working with a wide range of young people including many who would be defined as 'hard to reach', and clear structures for consultation and feedback have been created.

3.1.3 The Tackling Poverty theme group used information from consultation which took place as part of the Regeneration Outcome Agreement to set their outcomes and priorities for funding. It is also in close contact with the Equally Well test site and uses the information gathered through it's engagement with local communities. A conference scheduled for October 2010 will focus on setting new priorities and will look at how to engage with local planning processes.

3.1.4 The Enterprise and Skills theme group has successfully engaged with local businesses, the Rural Forum and the Association of Community Councils, all of whom participate in theme group discussions. There is also some input from representative business structures such as Visit East Lothian. Susan Smith, who

chairs the theme group, characterised the business community as '*assertive, they know how to get their voice heard*.' however she did say that she thought that it was harder to get the views of the wider community who would be affected by business regeneration.

3.1.5 Communities of interest such as older people and people with learning disabilities have input into the Health and Social Care Theme Group through their involvement in Joint Planning Groups which inform the outcomes set by the theme group. The Public Partnership Forum has also been asked to participate in the group. Several members of this group also have direct involvement in the local planning processes and in the Equally Well test site and are able to make use of the information gathered from the community through them. John Boyce, co-chair of this group, did have a question about whether all these parts make up a cohesive whole and he highlighted the difficulty of involving the community in prioritising between different sectoral interests.

3.1.6 Community engagement in the Community Safety theme group happens in a variety of ways. The local area community planning forums have discussed community safety issues and their views are fed back into the group; the police have recently carried out a community safety survey and the Community and Police partnership involves local people works to identify issues together which the police can respond to and then report back on. The 2009 Resident's Survey included community safety questions as did the Limesurvey which was completed by 2nd and 4th year pupils. A Community Safety Forum event is planned for early 2011 and '*there is a commitment to doing more (on community engagement) in the future*' (Claire Goodwin).

3.1.7 Local planning processes in both Musselburgh and Dunbar have been very successful in engaging with local people to set community priorities through using techniques such as participatory appraisal, Planning for Real and World Cafe. They are focusing on actions which are '*achievable by communities and professionals working together*' (Kaela Scott). There has been real evidence of 'buy-in' at both a policy and planning level in East Lothian. For example, the Town Centre Strategy in Musselburgh is being developed by a task group, which involves local people right from the start.

3.1.8 Support from the Start has been extremely innovative in the approach it has used to involve community members in setting the agenda. A network of community champions has been established which feeds information into the process and also gives feedback to the community, and methods such as civic conversation and using scrapbooks and photos to enable local people to say what they think of physical space, have enabled real engagement. Participatory budgeting processes have been set up and local people, particularly parents have had input into which themes to focus on in each geographical area.

3.1.9 The Community Engagement Strategy, which draws on the Scottish Government's National Standards for Community Engagement, clearly identifies a vision for stronger community engagement across the area and is backed up by a specific and measurable action plan.

Meriel Deans, Patient and Community Involvement Officer has a specific remit to improve engagement processes and lead on the implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy.

3.1.10 It was felt that there was still some way to go in terms of Third Sector representation particularly on the theme groups. Voluntary Action East Lothian has suffered from lack of capacity over the last year but is in the process of developing a representative and systematic structure to support meaningful involvement in theme group and local planning processes and thus in the development of the SOA. There is no lack of interest or willingness and it was felt that '*the opportunities are there*'. (Sheila Durie). VAEL already has representation at the Community Planning Board and the officers working group. As well as providing access to the community voice, VAEL aims to represent the interests of the Third Sector in policy.

3.1.11 East Lothian Community Planning Partnership provides funding and support to a diversity network which seeks to engage with a whole range of minorities within the area. However it is not clear how any views gathered through this engagement are fed into the theme groups and therefore influence the SOA.

3.2 Gaps

3.2.1 The major gap identified through the consultation was that in most cases, with the notable exception of local planning

processes and the tenants and residents panel, communities were unaware that they were able to influence the community planning processes and therefore high level strategic decision making.

3.2.2 In many cases it was also clear that communities were not yet setting the agenda, but instead responding to service agendas or local consultations.

3.2.3 Although there are many ways in which communities get involved and make their views known in East Lothian, these mechanisms are not always joined up. For instance, the views of local people expressed through local planning processes is not always feeding into relevant theme groups and there is no mechanism for ensuring that issues raised in community council meetings find their way to the relevant theme group.

3.2.4 Joined up practice currently relies individuals and in the main council officers, making the connections themselves eg. Amber Moss from the Environment, Housing and Places group deliberately using the local planning processes as a way of consulting on the Environment Strategy. Not everyone is as clear that they themselves can and should be making the connections.

3.2.5 The gradual introduction of local planning processes mean that all areas have yet to be represented so any use of these by theme groups is bound to be partial.

3.2.6 There is no clear mechanism for feeding information gathered through Support from the Start ' *a community engagement resource for the SO*A' (Steven Wray) into the theme groups, and a real sense that the valuable '*knowledge in the system'* was not being used.

3.2.7 '*One of the problems has been member involvement. The groups are officer-led and members feel remote from the process'* Councillor Barry Turner. The comment indicates that elected members are struggling to see their role as complementary to the community engagement processes being developed to feed into the Single Outcome Agreement.

3.2.8 The Community Care Forum is not represented on the Health and Social Care theme group. This means that the opportunity to hear views from across the spectrum of community care rather

than just from particular communities of interest, is lost. It also means the loss of a useful feedback mechanism to communities. In this context, it was suggested that more ways need to be found of making the process more accessible and relevant. For instance it might be useful to take particular issues and invite people to contribute their views on those.

4   Recommendations

The Single Outcome Agreement has been promoted by the Scottish Government as a mechanism by which communities and local agencies can work together to identify priorities for action, the outcomes they want to achieve in relation to these priorities, and the subsequent resource allocation. This process is increasingly being called 'co-production.

It is a difficult vision to realise, and East Lothian is not there yet. However the Community Planning Partnership has been working hard to develop ways, through the theme group structure and the local planning processes, which result in communities becoming really equal partners.

A number of interviewees pointed out that this process is still in its infancy. The following recommendations are 'first thoughts' on how to address the gaps identified earlier in the report and are intended to form the basis of discussion, both in the theme groups and in the forthcoming Community Planning Forum.

4.1   More work needs to be done with communities (in a whole variety of ways) to inform them of the means by which they can and are influencing the setting of high level strategic outcomes and therefore the direction of resource allocation in East Lothian. This is already being done through the local community planning processes and through some community/voluntary sector groups and forums, such as the tenants and residents panel. These examples could be used as examples of good practice.

4.2   Community Councils, although not the only forum for community engagement, have a clear remit to canvas the views of their local community. A simple structure/system needs to be created by which their concerns, identified in minutes of their meetings can be fed into the theme groups.

4.3   Theme group members could be more conscious of using opportunities they come across in other roles to gather information about community priorities to feed into their theme. This process might be assisted by a network-mapping exercise undertaken in each theme group.

4.4   Clear processes for feeding information, gathered in local planning processes, the Support from the Start pilot and events organised through the diversity network, into the theme groups, need to be developed.

4.5   More work needs to be done on the complementary role of elected members so that community members are aware that they can engage both through the democratic process and the community planning process.

4.6   The implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy will run in parallel with the development of VAEL over the next year. Close communication needs to be maintained to ensure that relevant information is shared and to avoid duplication.

4.7   Particular gaps need to be addressed by particular theme groups e.g. the lack of representation of the Community Care Forum on the Health and Social Care group and the lack of information on the views of the wider community in the Enterprise and Skills theme group.

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Appendix 1

It proved difficult within the scope and timescale of this review to obtain feedback from all areas. I was unable to gather views from the Parent Council, the Public Participation Forum or representatives from the Community Safety Theme Group or the Children, Young People and Education Theme Group.

The following is a list of those I did manage to speak to:

Health & Social Care Theme
John Boyce
Community Safety Theme
Claire Goodwin
Support from the Start
Steven Wray
Environment, Housing & Places Theme
Amber Moss
Enterprise & Skills Theme
Susan Smith
Tackling Poverty Theme
Rebecca Spillane (& Diversity Network)
Effective & Efficiant Services
Paolo Vestri
Local Community Planning
Kaela Scott, 01875 615415,
Young People's Participation Group
Lisa Shine
East Lothian Tenants & Residents Panel
Cathie MacArthur
Rural Forum
Barry Turner
East Lothian Community Care Forum
Lesley Aitkenhead
Association of East Lothian Community Councils
Stuart Baxter
Voluntary Action East Lothian
Sheila Durie

Appendix 2

Questions sent out in advance:

How are we engaging with communities at the moment through the community planning theme groups/local plans?

What existing mechanisms are we using eg. voluntary organisations, community councils, community organisations

What new methods have we tried if any?

How regularly are we engaging with communities?

Are communities able to set the agenda in any way or are they simply responding to consultation?

Are communities getting feedback on how they are influencing priorities when it does happen?