



OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Programme

Interim Evaluation First Annual Report 2002/03



Neighbourhood
Renewal Unit

Developing Pathfinders: Key Findings

In 2001 the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) launched the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder Programme. Twenty Pathfinder Partnerships were established in deprived neighbourhoods around England to provide a practical test of the neighbourhood management model proposed by the Social Exclusion Unit in 2000.

NRU commissioned an interim evaluation of the Programme from SQW Ltd to make sure lessons were learned from the Pathfinders for the benefit of those who might be interested in adopting the neighbourhood management model as well as the participating partnerships themselves. The evaluation team has now produced its report on the development of the Pathfinders from their initial selection in July 2001 to their first full year of operation in 2002-2003.

Partnership Building

- Pathfinders made good progress in building their neighbourhood partnerships, engaging local service providers and the local community, and establishing their teams and necessary systems. Progress was slower than originally anticipated but, at the end of their first year of operation, most Pathfinders had reached, or were about to reach, the stage of being 'fully open for business'.

Capacity and Skills

- Effective neighbourhood management is not primarily about spending money or delivering short-term projects. It requires a clear focus on the long term process of changing the way that local services are delivered. This needs clear strategic direction, a good understanding of resident needs and close working with service providers to help them understand local needs and respond more effectively. Neighbourhood management demands a different mix of skills from conventional area based initiatives.
- It is critical to appoint Neighbourhood Managers early so that they can 'own' and drive the development process. 'Changing drivers' part way through the process caused delays for some Pathfinders.

Delivering Change

- Pathfinders have successfully established relationships with a wide range of important local service providers. The greatest progress was made with the Police, Primary Care Trusts and Council Environmental Services.
- Pathfinders have begun to have an influence on some service providers. So far, these changes primarily involve:
 - re-shaping services, often by joining up different services - e.g. setting up a multi-agency neighbourhood safety team, or facilitating the piloting of 'full service schools', bringing a wider range of services onto school premises;
 - improving access to services - e.g. bringing services into a neighbourhood 'access point' to be closer to local people, or making it easier for residents to have direct contact with individual local police officers.

Background

The Pathfinder Programme, launched in July 2001 by the NRU, involved the funding of twenty deprived neighbourhoods in England to support the development of a partnership, the recruitment of a Neighbourhood Manager and team, and the design and delivery of a seven year programme of activities to bring about improvements in local services and quality of life. After an initial 'foundation phase' the first full year of the Programme ran from April 2002 – March 2003. The aim of the Programme is to test the value of neighbourhood management in practice as recommended by the Social Exclusion Unit in a report in 2000.

The funding of each Pathfinder is to support the recruitment of a full time Neighbourhood Manager with a small team (to date an average of £200,000 pa) and to assist with other running costs, research and projects (£1.5m over the first 3 years). These modest levels of funding clearly signal the intention of the NRU that the primary role of the Pathfinders should be to influence local service providers, at all levels (local council departments, schools, Primary Care Trusts, etc) to improve mainstream services in deprived neighbourhoods rather than to rely on projects that 'plug gaps' and deliver time-limited services.

NRU commissioned a team led by SQW to establish a baseline for the Programme and evaluate the first years of delivery. After an initial scoping study in mid-2002¹, a review of all Pathfinders was undertaken in spring 2003, culminating in a Programme-wide report from which the following key findings are drawn.

¹ <http://www.sqw.co.uk/nme/downloads/ScopingSummary.doc>

Partnership Building

By April 2003, nearly all Pathfinders had reached, or were about to reach, a point where they could be considered 'fully open for business' – that is, they had developed an organisation with the necessary structures and people that enabled them to shift their main focus from partnership building to delivering change. All Pathfinders have sought to involve local residents, to engage with a wide range of local service providers, and to develop their programmes of activities.

Pathfinders are led by their Boards, which have some common features:

- Most Partnership Boards have 20-25 members with a mix of local residents, community and voluntary groups, councillors, local businesses and local service providers.
- Only four Boards have a clear resident majority but local residents, together with community and voluntary group representatives, account for nearly half of all Board places across the whole Programme.
- Three quarters of Pathfinder Boards also include a councillor who is a Leader, Deputy Leader or a Cabinet Member of the Council, showing the seriousness with which Councils are taking the initiative.

The experience of the Pathfinders shows that it is not necessary for a new partnership to establish itself as a separate legal entity if there is an established Accountable Body willing to provide support. The benefits of operating under the wing of established organisations (such as a Local Authority) usually outweigh the costs. They can provide financial, legal and personnel systems, removing the need for the partnership to reinvent their own systems at a time when they can usually ill afford the distraction.

Capacity and Skills

Most Pathfinders required 21-24 months to establish themselves as ready for business. This was partly because of the appointment of most Neighbourhood Managers only part-way through 2002-2003, and subsequent to delivery plan preparation. This led to a 'pause' as the transition from interim to permanent staff absorbed time and led to some review of plans. The early appointment of Neighbourhood Managers, to drive and 'own' the process, would make it faster and more effective.

The early experiences of Pathfinders also highlighted other important issues:

- The nature of neighbourhood management is different from conventional area based initiatives. It relies less on programme management and more on building long-term relationships and influencing service providers. It therefore requires a different mix of skills – analysing, using and managing information about services, engaging residents and influencing service providers.
- Given the key role that Neighbourhood Managers play within their partnerships, it is crucial that they work as an integral part of the partnership team, not only to ensure that they can be properly supported but also to minimise disruption if they move to another job. Whilst they need to be entrepreneurial, Managers shouldn't be left to operate as 'lone rangers'.
- The quality of the chair of the Board and the effectiveness with which meetings are chaired are factors that can be particularly influential in determining a partnership's progress. Clear leadership, inclusiveness and well chaired meetings make for good decision-making.

Delivering Change

For most Pathfinders, the initial development phase in 2001 and the first full year of the Programme (2002-2003) were largely focused on partnership building, establishing relationships with service providers and consulting the local community. Progress was also made in developing and delivering projects and activities but, at the time of the evaluation research, levels of expenditure and programme activities by Pathfinders were still in their early stages.

Pathfinders made progress in reaching out to, and involving, local residents and community groups. Activities have included publishing neighbourhood newsletters, holding community fun days, establishing 'open forums' and identifying 'street reps' to report on local issues. Those involved have often been given support and training to build confidence and capacity. The challenge, as with many neighbourhood renewal initiatives, is to deepen and broaden such involvement and Pathfinders continue to work towards this.

A detailed household survey was undertaken in each Pathfinder neighbourhood by the National Evaluation Team in early 2003. This has provided more information about the neighbourhoods and some of the challenges they face. Local residents identified their priorities as tackling crime, improving the appearance of their neighbourhoods and better facilities for young people. These are all needs that Pathfinders have identified and are seeking to address.

Pathfinders also made progress in engaging with service providers:

- A wide range of providers are involved in Pathfinder Boards and thematic working groups. Those that are best represented overall are the Police, Primary Care Trusts, local schools and colleges and local housing managers (either Council or RSL).
- Engagement has started to lead to some changes in the way that services are delivered. The fastest progress has generally been made with the Police, Council Environmental Services and, to some extent, Primary Care Trusts. The most common type of changes that are beginning to emerge are:
 - Reshaping services, often by joining up different services. For example, several Pathfinders have worked to promote the joining up of environmental services such as street cleaning, refuse collection and graffiti removal, to improve their efficiency and impact. Another Pathfinder has brought a multi-agency team together to work from the neighbourhood to promote community safety.
 - Improving access to, and hence take-up of, services. Several Pathfinders are working with service providers to bring the delivery of services closer to local people. One is establishing a Community Access Centre in a shop unit, where health workers, local police and JobCentre Plus advisors will be more easily available to local people. Another is supporting a 'full service school' pilot to improve the accessibility of adult education and other services to parents.

- More generally, the main 'added value' that Neighbourhood Managers have delivered so far has been in bringing together service providers, improving local networking and information sharing, raising the profile of the neighbourhood and identifying pilot projects that can be trialled in their neighbourhood.

The evaluation has highlighted the complexities and challenges of implementing neighbourhood management. Some of these include:

- The appropriate balance needs to be less on delivering projects that primarily give short-term benefits (to build confidence and meet immediate needs) and more on projects and other longer-term activities to pilot and influence new ways of mainstream working for service providers. At the time of the research, some Pathfinders were proving more adept than others in shifting the emphasis to projects and processes with longer-term objectives.
- Partnerships cannot make equal progress on all outcomes simultaneously. Clear prioritisation is required each year, together with the ability to work strategically. Partnerships are unlikely to make a significant impact through large numbers of small projects operating across a wide range of themes; intervention must be focused.

Lessons learned

- The re-shaping of mainstream services is often likely to require local evidence-based analysis to support the case for change. There were examples of Pathfinders who used this approach to good effect but, generally, the importance of analysing and using information as a tool for persuasion and negotiation with service providers was under-played.
- Having a senior-level ‘champion’ to promote neighbourhood management can transform a service provider’s approach. However, it is important that commitment to neighbourhood management involves all levels in an organisation - middle managers and front-line staff too - actually to secure changes on the ground.
- Service Level Agreements with service providers are being used with the intention of publicly holding them to account for service performance. Some SLAs appear simply to codify existing service levels. But this could be an important start because it brings residents and service providers together in a formal way, defines current entitlements (which may not always be widely understood), and provides the basis for negotiating service improvements.

The key lessons learned from the experience of the Pathfinders to date are that:

Partnership Building

- Partnership building is essential for neighbourhood management. It is likely to take some time to lay the solid foundations required. Allowance should be made for this at the outset of any neighbourhood management initiative.
- Partnership structures and systems should be kept simple. The support of an established Accountable Body should be drawn on.

Capacity and skills

- Skills for effective neighbourhood management are not just about managing projects well. They are also to do with policy and service development, understanding resident needs through analysis and direct engagement, enabling residents to articulate their needs, and negotiating with, and influencing, service providers to respond to them more effectively.
- It is critical to appoint Neighbourhood Managers early enough in an initiative so that they can drive the approach rather than inherit the work of others. It is also important that Managers are not left to operate alone, as ‘lone rangers’ – they need to be able to share key tasks with a supporting team and partners.

Further Information

Delivering change

- Change will be achieved when Neighbourhood Managers persuade service providers to change their behaviour and performance in sustained ways that benefit local residents. This will require Managers to show that the improvements make sense in terms of providers' own objectives (i.e. through careful analysis and research); it will need commitment at all levels within the service provider organisation; and it will require a mechanism of accountability to local people to ensure that the improvements are sustained.

The full report will be published on the NRU website: www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

The National Evaluation of the Pathfinder Programme is being undertaken by a team of Universities and consultancies. The NRU has commissioned the National Evaluation team to evaluate the Pathfinder Programme 2002 – 2005 to learn the lessons from the Programme. The team is being led by SQW Ltd, working with the Cities Research Centre, (University of the West of England, Bristol), GFA Consulting, University of Cambridge Department of Land Economy, European Institute for Urban Affairs (Liverpool John Moores University), NOP & MORI.

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