

Wolverhampton Neighbourhood Management Pilot Programme

Case Study

Final Report – Executive Summary

Prepared by

SQW

For the

**Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders
National Evaluation Team**

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Case Study

A Report to Wolverhampton City Council and the NRU Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In 2002, Wolverhampton City Council and its partners established a pilot programme of neighbourhood management across a number of deprived areas in the city. In May 2005 SQW and its partners were appointed to undertake the first evaluation of this programme, exploring work in the seven pilot areas, together with the Low Hill initiative, which is employing a similar approach. This is the **executive summary** of the **final report** from our research, setting out our findings.

The research has been jointly funded by the NRU and Wolverhampton City Council. It is intended that this report will not only be of interest in Wolverhampton but will also highlight the lessons learnt through this programme for a wider audience. This report forms one part of the National Evaluation team's work studying seven neighbourhood management initiatives in England, to complement our ongoing evaluation of the NRU's own Pathfinder Programme of 35 initiatives.

The research has been undertaken by a team led by SQW and also including researchers from GFA Consulting, the Cities Research Centre (University of the West of England, Bristol), an NRA and the NRU's research team. Work has included desk research and face to face interviews with Managers, residents and service providers in the eight neighbourhoods, and a series of strategic interviews with key decision-makers involved in the Wolverhampton Strategic Partnership.

(1) Aims, Objectives and Rationale

Wolverhampton has a population of about 240,000, including 20% in minority ethnic communities, is one of the 88 most deprived local authority areas in England and has been in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Funds since 2002.

Neighbourhood management was identified as a key plank of the city's first neighbourhood renewal strategy in 2002. The Wolverhampton Strategic Partnership (WSP) agreed to pilot neighbourhood management in six different parts of the city from 2002, using the model set out in the Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team 4 Report, but allowing for some variation in approach between areas. A seventh pilot area was added in 2003. The flexibility of NRF funding has been useful in allowing experimentation with different approaches; the Pilots have evolved over time.

The seven pilot areas cover 22,337 households, which is 24% of all households in the city and includes approximately half of the city's identified deprived neighbourhoods. A number of the pilots also included some less deprived neighbourhoods, to test the approach in different types of area.

(2) The Neighbourhoods

The seven neighbourhood management pilot areas all have between 2500 – 4100 households but differ from each other in a number of respects:

- **Dovecotes and Pendeford Park** – on the north west edge of the city, including both a deprived neighbourhood and a more affluent area;
- **Wednesfield** – an area north east of the city centre, consisting of five different neighbourhoods stretching from the inner city to the outer suburbs and largely deprived;
- **St. Anne's, Rakegate, Wobaston, Three Tons** – on the northern edge of the city, with a deprived neighbourhood adjacent to some more mixed areas including pockets of deprivation;
- **Penn Fields and Merridale/Chapel Ash** – a densely populated and ethnically diverse area to the west of the city centre and part of the inner city;

- **Eastfield, East Park and Stowheath** – deprived neighbourhoods to the east of the city centre;
- **Millfields, Ettingshall and Stowlawn** – a largely deprived area to the south east of the city centre and adjacent to Bilston Town Centre; and
- **Dunstall and Whitmore Reans** – the seventh pilot added in 2003, to the north west of the city centre and one of the most deprived parts of the city.

Low Hill South is a small area (not a pilot area but also covered by this study) to the north of the city centre and is also one of the city's most deprived areas, consisting largely of a small 1920s housing estate.

(3) The Delivery Process

The main common features of the model being employed by the seven Neighbourhood Management Pilots are as follows:

- There is a full-time Neighbourhood Manager, supported by a Partnership officer (whose main role is community involvement) and an Administrative officer in each area. In most Pilots team members are directly employed by the City Council;
- The teams are based in their neighbourhoods, sometimes co-located with other projects or partnerships;
- The Pilots each have a £20k budget to spend each year on 'quick wins' and projects, together with a budget to run the office;
- Each Pilot has a Managing Agent, which is an organisation that provides practical and professional support to the Neighbourhood Manager and team. The role varies in practice, but generally a representative of the Agent will meet with the Neighbourhood Manager on a regular basis to discuss progress, and provide some oversight of their work. The Managing Agent also usually provides an 'accountable body' function for the Pilot's expenditure;
- Most Pilots are led by a neighbourhood partnership, including local residents and representatives of local service providers. The nature and organisation of these partnerships varies between areas, as they have developed in different ways;
- All Pilots prepared wide ranging neighbourhood action plans in 2002/2003, some of which have been reviewed and updated since. Each Manager also submits a written report to the central Neighbourhood Management Co-ordinator and their Managing Agent each quarter, reporting on progress against key actions; and
- The total direct cost of the neighbourhood management programme (including the cost of the 7 Pilots and the central co-ordination) is £1.1million per year, funded mainly from NRF, equating to approximately £150,000 per neighbourhood per year.

In addition to the activities in each neighbourhood, the Managers and their teams meet together every month and work together on issues in common. Each Manager leads on a key issue.

The Neighbourhood Managers have engaged in a wide variety of activities in the last three years. Most of their activities have fallen into the following categories:

- **Neighbourhood partnership development** – Neighbourhood Managers and their teams have invested time in building up community involvement and service provider involvement in the Pilots, through setting up and operating neighbourhoods boards or similar (in most cases) and undertaking a range of other local consultation exercises;

- **Community capacity building** – In addition to this, there has been some work to build the capacity of some individual groups and local community assets, including refurbishment of community centres and other facilities, together with support for the better networking of local groups;
- **Quick wins** – all Pilots have delivered a range of small, local, one-off ‘quick wins’ to raise their profile and provide particular benefits locally;
- **Local project development/management** – some Managers have worked to initiate or develop specific local projects that will address a local issue or need. These are not always about improving services per se, but can be significant attempts to solve local problems and bring new funds into the neighbourhood;
- **Mainstream service improvement** – all Pilots have worked with a range of mainstream service providers, both in their neighbourhoods and working together across neighbourhoods, to improve those services in some way, to make them more accessible or more effective in addressing identified local needs.

(4) Results and Key Issues

Results

In three years, the Neighbourhood Managers and their teams have built up a network of active neighbourhood partnerships capable of making a difference, and have established their own credibility and profile as practical and capable operators in the city. We found a remarkable degree of support from most stakeholders for the Managers and their teams, signalling a clear sense of momentum.

The Managers have worked with a wide range of service providers and have succeeded in delivering a wide range of tangible local benefits in each pilot area, as well as some significant city-wide benefits. These have included changes to mainstream services, including greater joint working and the better targeting of services on local needs in particular. Most progress has been achieved in relation to improved environmental services, and in improving community safety. Progress has also been made in strengthening local community capacity.

Evidence to date suggests that local impacts include the following:

- There is evidence that Pilot areas are generally cleaner and enjoy faster rubbish removal than previously due to improved local environmental services;
- Some neighbourhoods have experienced a reduction in some types of crime – e.g. burglary – as a result of specific environmental improvements and other projects;
- Specific sites and facilities have been improved and refurbished, providing visible tangible benefits to local users of those facilities;

It cannot be said that neighbourhood management, in three years, has transformed the neighbourhoods in which it has been operating, nor that it is now the main force for service improvement in the city. However, it has certainly made a unique and valuable contribution, delivering a number of mainstream service improvements and local projects that are unlikely to have been achieved any other way. The Neighbourhood Managers have been able to add value to the work of service providers and community networks, helping them to get more from their own programmes.

We are confident that if the Managers and their neighbourhood partnerships are allowed to continue developing they will also grow in effectiveness and impact.

Key Issues

Some of the most significant key issues that we identified in our research include:

- There is too much variation in how each partnership, particularly the board (if there is one), operates. The most effective boards cover the whole pilot area and oversee several initiatives, reducing the duplication of partnerships. We suggest that every neighbourhood management area should have a single partnership board for the area, and that the area should be coherent in nature (with some area boundaries requiring review), and preferably within one ward.
- The level of community involvement achieved overall has generally been good, but there is a need to broaden out involvement, and improve their representativeness of local partnerships.
- The role of Managing Agents should be retained but more clearly defined, and more effort made to enable them to add value to initiatives. Neighbourhood Managers should have clearer line management (and professional support/training) arrangements, probably from the Council.
- The neighbourhood partnerships and teams would benefit from developing a clearer focus and set of priorities each year, including a mix of agreed top-down city-wide priorities and bottom-up neighbourhood-specific issues. This would be facilitated by a move to more formal annual action planning and a clearer performance management framework.
- The routes through which the Neighbourhood Managers seek to influence strategic decision-making in the city should be reviewed to assess whether they could be made more transparent and effective. It may be possible to link more clearly into existing service improvement processes – scrutiny, best value, annual service planning, WSP processes, etc.
- Managers need more support in collating and using quantitative data on service performance and changes to neighbourhood conditions.

(5) Summary of Benefits and Influencing Factors

From our research we would summarise the key benefits of neighbourhood management as delivered in Wolverhampton as follows:

- **Listening - responsive to local concerns** – Neighbourhood Managers provide an open, accessible point where local people and groups and agencies can express their concerns. They provide a 'one-stop-shop for local problems'. Neighbourhood Managers are amongst the few professionals in the city who do not belong to any particular service provider 'silo' and can identify 'joined up problems' and pursue solutions with whoever they need to;
- **Connectivity - promoting neighbourhood networking** – the Pilots have all strengthened and deepened the networks within their neighbourhoods, putting service providers and community groups in touch with each other, encouraging partnership working and increasing information sharing and signposting;
- **Advocacy - acting as a neighbourhood advocate** – the Neighbourhood Managers can bid for funds for their areas and lobby service providers to take account of local needs, as well as take on local 'cases' to trouble-shoot local problems;
- **Improvement - a force for service improvement and problem solving** – The Managers are outcome-focused, not service-focused or organisation-focused.

They provide a unique source of information and energy for service improvement in the city at city-wide and neighbourhood levels;

- **Catalyst – a ‘task force’ approach** – the Neighbourhood Managers also have the flexibility and capacity to take on the development and management of some local solutions themselves, bringing together a local ‘task force’ to fix a problem, improve an area, bid for funding, etc.
- **Consultation - facilitating community-provider links** – Managers can use the neighbourhood networks and partnerships that they have brought together, to facilitate community consultation exercises for local service providers.

The benefits have accrued in each Pilot neighbourhood, but also been strengthened by the ‘group effect’ of having a network of pilots, often reinforcing each other’s work. This has boosted the strategic impact of the programme.

Key Factors

Although each Pilot has been different, and the programme is a complex one, some common factors can be identified as of particular relevance and significance in shaping its progress. Some of the supporting factors include:

- The city has a good history of partnership working and this has provided a positive and collaborative atmosphere within which the Pilots have been able to work. The approach of most Neighbourhood Managers towards service providers has generally not been confrontational, but collaborative.
- Within the Council, there has been clear support for neighbourhood management from the leadership, councillors and senior officers. The Wolverhampton Strategic Partnership (The LSP) has also been very supportive at a strategic level.
- The use of relatively small areas made up of ‘natural’ neighbourhoods has been helpful in ensuring that the pilot areas make sense to local people. Those areas that have been less geographically coherent have been harder to manage.
- Being council employees has given the Neighbourhood Managers credibility with service heads in the council, and meant that they often know who to talk to about different problems. The relationship with Managing Agents, and having a base within the Pilot areas, has also allowed them to present themselves to residents as not just typical council employees. The arrangement has worked to their advantage.
- Having several Neighbourhood Managers/pilot areas has allowed collaboration and collective working between areas on strategic issues that has reinforced messages and strengthened the case for change at both city-wide level and in individual neighbourhoods.

Some other factors have been less helpful:

- Those Pilot areas that have not had a history of partnership working or do not have very coherent areas have struggled to deliver coherent local decision-making structures. The crossing of ward boundaries, requiring consultation with more councillors and forums, has compounded these difficulties.
- The failure to act on a limited set of priorities each year has led most Pilots to work in a less focused way to some extent, reducing their impact.

(6) Implications for a City-wide Approach

We believe that there is a good case for mainstreaming and extending the neighbourhood management programme within Wolverhampton. The basic model is sound, although we recommend some changes to improve effectiveness. We suggest that the key features of the approach should include the following:

- Neighbourhood management should be extended to cover all deprived areas in the city, together with some adjacent 'borderline' neighbourhoods, probably therefore covering 35-40% of the city (at present the pilots cover 24% of households). We suggest that the boundaries for a number of pilots should be reviewed to improve the coherence of those areas, and reduce the crossing of ward boundaries. We are not convinced of the case for continuing to include more affluent areas in the present model, and would recommend that area size does not exceed 10-12,000 population;
- The more affluent areas of the city may well benefit from inclusion in neighbourhood management, or similar, arrangements, but these should be significantly less resource intensive than those in deprived areas;
- We suggest that a clear template defining 'minimum expectations' for local partnerships should be agreed, to include the requirement for a single area-wide board in each area and a clearer role, and functional standards, for Managing Agents;
- Neighbourhood Managers should be line managed more clearly by the Council, and be accountable to a local neighbourhood board; and
- Neighbourhood Managers and their teams should move to formal annual action planning and would benefit from a clearer and more focused performance management framework.

There are also some strategic challenges that need to be addressed, but which require further discussion:

- There is a need to improve the sense of 'ownership' of the issues raised by Neighbourhood Managers by different service providers, especially at a senior level, and to find more effective ways of progressing discussions and reviews at a strategic level;
- Managers may benefit from an enhanced central support team, both through line management arrangements, support on collation of quantitative data (possibly as part of the Local Area Agreement monitoring process) and some additional policy officer resource to support research/investigations;
- Local area structures do require rationalisation as duplication is clear between some structures; and
- The prospects for local mainstream funding of the initiative need to be assessed.

(7) Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on our research we are confident that the Neighbourhood Management Pilots have demonstrated added value, and are recommending that the Council and its partners move to both mainstream and roll-out the programme in the city. We recognise the resource constraints, but would encourage the Council and its partners not to dilute the intensity of resources devoted to deprived areas in the process.

There are lessons to learn from the experience in Wolverhampton that should be of interest to others in local government and the NRU, and we recommend further reflection and discussion on the lessons and issues identified in this report.