NEIGHBOURLINESS + EMPOWERMENT
= **WELLBEING**

IS THERE A FORMULA FOR HAPPY COMMUNITIES?

MANDEEP HOTHI
WITH NICOLA BACON, MARCIA BROPHY & GEOFF MULGAN

ABOUT THE LOCAL WELLBEING PROJECT

The Local Wellbeing Project is a unique, three-year initiative to explore how local government can practically improve the happiness and wellbeing of their citizens. The project brings together three very different local authorities – Manchester, Hertfordshire and South Tyneside – with the Young Foundation; Professor Lord Richard Layard from the London School of Economics, who has led much of the debate about happiness and public policy; and the Improvement and Development Agency, who are leaders in local government innovation. The project is also backed by key central government departments.

THE PROJECT

The project covers five main strands: emotional resilience for 11 to 13 year olds; wellbeing of older people; guaranteed apprenticeships; neighbourhoods and community empowerment; and parenting. In each of these areas it will test out new approaches; measure their impact; develop replicable methods; and look at their cost effectiveness. Two underpinning themes will investigate the relationship between wellbeing and environmental sustainability and how best to measure wellbeing at a local level.

THIS REPORT

This report has been undertaken as part of the neighbourhood and community empowerment strand, which aims to accelerate understanding of how local authorities can, through their community engagement and neighbourhood working practices, increase the wellbeing of their residents.

MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

South Tyneside Council

CHILDREN'S TRUST
partnership
HERTFORDSHIRE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A GROWING BODY OF RESEARCH SUPPORTS THE SUGGESTION THAT COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD EMPOWERMENT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE THE WELLBEING OF RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES. THIS REPORT EXAMINES A NUMBER OF HYPOTHESES, DISTILLED FROM RESEARCH STUDIES, TESTING HOW MUCH ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP CAN IMPACT ON WELLBEING IN COMMUNITIES, BY LOOKING AT EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES IN THREE VERY DIFFERENT ENGLISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES: MANCHESTER, SOUTH TYNESIDE AND HERTFORDSHIRE.

Some forms of community empowerment involve power which is a 'zero sum' – where power is handed from one group to another, such as councillors devolving decisions on budgets to the community. However, empowerment does not always require this redistribution; often it requires that communities maximise their own capabilities by working together and involving themselves in civil society.

Both forms of community empowerment can be difficult and regularly involve addressing numerous tensions and barriers. The case studies in this report mainly cover the second type of empowerment, where empowerment is not a 'zero sum' activity. Some of the positive outcomes from these case studies help us to understand the link between empowerment and wellbeing and how this can be achieved in a number of ways, including: neighbourhood management; youth empowerment; environmental campaigns; consultation and engagement; community awards; and local community agreements.

The findings demonstrate that some of the less tangible outcomes of empowerment, such as increased contact between neighbours or improved knowledge of the local democratic process, have the potential to enhance wellbeing. With increased interest from central and local government in using community empowerment as a way of improving services and local engagement, there is a danger that these 'softer', less quantifiable outcomes of empowerment are overlooked in the pursuit of harder outcomes that fit better into the UK's performance management regime, such as improvements to service delivery.

This report aims to give practitioners and policy-makers an understanding of the ways in which community empowerment can be used to increase wellbeing, alongside other outcomes. It presents case study examples where empowerment initiatives are building and nurturing wellbeing at the local level.

This work has been carried out as part of the Local Wellbeing Project, a collaboration between the Young Foundation, the IDeA and Professor Lord Richard Layard at the London School of Economics, working in partnership with Manchester City Council, South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council. The project aims to accelerate local authority action to increase wellbeing, by enhancing existing services and by creating new initiatives. Parallel reports will be published on ways in which parenting services and initiatives to increase environmental sustainability can also increase wellbeing.

Over the past 30 years, the UK has experienced a doubling of gross domestic product with no corresponding increase in people's reported happiness. Happiness – or wellbeing – is determined by a complex mix of factors, ranging from family relationships and job satisfaction to the character of the neighbourhood in which we live. Some of these influences on wellbeing are under the control of the individual, such as eating healthily or doing regular exercise. Others are seemingly beyond individual control, such as the quality of local green spaces or availability of local leisure facilities.

Local government and other statutory bodies can affect some of the factors that influence wellbeing. Even where individuals have control and responsibility over their wellbeing, such as giving up smoking, health services can promote and support that behavioural change. The role of local government and public institutions is even more important when influences on wellbeing are beyond individual control such as poor quality local parks or drugs being sold on street corners. It is in these circumstances that empowering local people to bring about change can result in better outcomes for the neighbourhood.

THE RESEARCH

We have examined various hypotheses that have been drawn from academic literature and tested these using case studies from three very different local authorities. From this we have established that neighbourhood and community empowerment is likely to increase wellbeing in three key dimensions:

1. BY PROVIDING GREATER OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS TO INFLUENCE DECISIONS AFFECTING THEIR NEIGHBOURHOODS

Knowledge of how the local democratic system works can often be confined to a small number of people – the system is there but people are not using it to lobby for change. This is the premise that guides the work of the Democratic Services Team in South Tyneside. Using community development practices, the team is communicating knowledge of how local democracy

works and encouraging residents to assume their civic responsibility by, for example, increasing voter registration and promoting a clear process for petitions.

South Tyneside has also embarked on a campaign to inform its citizens about how their involvement in formal consultation has affected the decisions of the council and improved local circumstances. As well as providing information about local change, officers regularly talk to residents about why decisions cannot be affected, or why progress towards addressing local priorities is being delayed. The campaign, which tries to encourage continuous dialogue between the authority and residents, is keeping local people informed and is helping to build trust between residents and the local authority.

Manchester's *100 Days Campaign* employs a mix of enforcement, education and action to try and change the behaviour of citizens in relation to a particular city-wide priority. The campaign, which in 2008 focuses on the environment, is about residents and public services taking joint responsibility and working together to make a visible difference to the city. The focus is on action.

Residents are seeing the difference they are making and this is raising their aspirations and belief they have in their ability to make a difference. In addition, by working collaboratively on action-focused projects, relationships between residents and council staff have been developed on a basis of mutual respect and honesty.

Similar findings are seen in Hertfordshire's Youth Advocates Scheme, which is encouraging young people to be advocates for their peers. Thus far 60 young people have participated and are representing the young people in their district. The scheme has helped participants look at their communities differently – which has helped them become better advocates. Importantly, the Youth Advocates Scheme is giving young people the skills, knowledge and confidence to engage with complex service providers in order to get the priorities of young people onto their agendas.

2. BY FACILITATING REGULAR CONTACT BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS

Increased geographical mobility and the decline of established civic institutions such as trade unions are just two reasons why the frequency of contact between neighbours is decreasing in many neighbourhoods. *Manchester in Bloom*, a project initiated by the council's environmental campaigns team, demonstrates how local authorities can help redress this through empowerment initiatives that help to develop wide-reaching social networks.

In one neighbourhood, Hulme, *Manchester in Bloom* has helped instigate major social changes. Over 200 residents regularly met in a local car park to discuss and work on the competition entry. The police have used the networks developed through *Manchester In Bloom* to inform residents of community safety issues, and residents still meet in the same car park for tea mornings.

As well as helping to develop relationships between neighbours, local empowerment can help to break down barriers between decision makers and citizens. Those residents who are involved in Boldon Newtown's Neighbourhood Management programme are beginning to develop relationships with senior decision makers at the council. In their own words, more frequent contact with decision makers in an informal community setting has made residents more comfortable working with 'the suits at the council'.

Regular contact between neighbours is an important element, feeling as though you belong to a neighbourhood. Understanding local belonging can usefully underpin neighbourhood and community empowerment initiatives. Manchester's *Sense of Place Framework* helps the local authority and its partners do just this. The Framework is used primarily to encourage residents to think differently about their place and space, and what is important to them.

The Framework is also a tool for the local authority and its partners to think differently about how they engage and consult citizens. It is hoped that applying the Framework will help improve the understanding of what is important to the lives of local people and the area they call home, eventually resulting in better quality local service provision and improved local community spirit.

Community spirit can also be improved by recognising the contributions that residents make to their neighbourhood. The power of recognition should not be underestimated, especially as it is rarely a motivation for the actions of volunteers. *The Pride of South Tyneside Awards* recognises this and celebrates the often unseen achievements of local formal and informal volunteers. The Awards are multi-faceted; another important aim is to raise the profile of both formal and informal volunteering within the borough, with the hope that local cultures of support and volunteering are strengthened.

3. BY HELPING RESIDENTS GAIN THE CONFIDENCE TO EXERCISE CONTROL OVER LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Communities often have aspirations for local change, but lack the resources to achieve them. If public institutions work together with local communities, much needed resources can be matched to local knowledge, passion and vision for change. Vitally, public bodies and communities all need to take responsibility for change, but communities often need the capacity and support from public bodies to be able to assume this responsibility.

In Blackley Forest, a nature reserve in North Manchester, The Friends of Blackley Forest and the local authority are achieving this through Mancunian Agreements. The Agreements are designed to bring people together to solve local problems with local solutions, based on shared understanding, commitment and actions.

These actions are set out in the Agreement and included: the council agreeing to provide some funding for community events, and the police and park rangers increased their patrols of the Forest. To fulfil their commitment, the

Friends put on more community events in the Forest, improved access for local schools and worked on improving publicity and local awareness of their group.

Through the Agreement, local residents and service providers have tackled problems of low usage by local people, groups and schools, anti-social behaviour and perceptions of safety. More residents are aware of the role of the Friends group and as such, are taking greater ownership and responsibility for the safeguarding and improvement of the Forest.

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

To complement the findings in this report, we have suggested numerous practical activities which can be incorporated into existing empowerment initiatives at relatively low cost.

For example, more contact between neighbours could be improved by an inexpensive programme of street parties, or through outdoor dog socialising classes. Greater contact between decision makers and residents could be achieved through senior officers volunteering at a community event, or at specifically designed informal networking lunches. Local belonging could be understood through local consultations or exhibitions based on positive themes such as memories of living in a neighbourhood.

Central and local government are increasingly turning their attention to the different ways in which communities and residents can be empowered. This is motivated by the wish to improve local services, to renew civic and civil life and to engage people in the democratic process. Using empowerment initiatives as a way of increasing wellbeing can enhance all these outcomes, including increasing quality of life for communities and residents. This can only happen however if agencies value the benefits of building social networks and increasing neighbourly contact, and resource this aspect of empowerment alongside its more measurable benefits.

INTRODUCTION

OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS BRITAIN'S GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT HAS MORE THAN DOUBLED, YET THERE HAS BEEN NO CORRESPONDING INCREASE IN LIFE SATISFACTION. THIS SITUATION, WHICH IS MIRRORED ACROSS SEVERAL DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, HAS COMPELLED ACADEMICS, POLICY MAKERS AND POLITICIANS TO QUESTION THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC GROWTH IN IMPROVING OUR HAPPINESS.

NEIGHBOURLINESS + EMPOWERMENT = WELLBEING

Subsequent research into why we are getting richer as a nation but not happier indicates that the overarching ambition of public policy needs to be broadened away from increasing economic growth to incorporate a wide range of **wellbeing** issues.

Increasing recognition that wellbeing is determined by a complex mix of factors – ranging from our relationships with our family to the nature of our community and neighbourhood – is now raising questions about how all public services can promote wellbeing.

The modernisation of public services has encouraged greater involvement in decision making from local communities in order to bring about better, more locally responsive public services. As a consequence, the number of neighbourhood and community empowerment initiatives has substantially increased.

A small but growing body of research is demonstrating the potential for neighbourhood and community empowerment to go beyond improving standards of public services. This body of research suggests that **empowerment has the potential to improve wellbeing**.

Supporting this research are 12 case studies from three very different English local authorities – Manchester, South Tyneside and Hertfordshire. Some forms of community empowerment involve power which is a 'zero sum' – where power is handed from one group to another, such as councillors devolving decisions on budgets to the community. However, empowerment does not always require this redistribution; often it requires that communities maximise their own capabilities by working together and involving themselves in civil society.

NEIGHBOURLINESS + EMPOWERMENT = WELLBEING

Both forms of community empowerment can be difficult and regularly involve addressing numerous tensions and barriers. The case studies in this report mainly cover the second type of empowerment, where empowerment is not a 'zero sum' activity. Some of the positive outcomes from these case studies help us to understand the link between empowerment and wellbeing and how this can be achieved in a number of ways including: neighbourhood management; youth empowerment; environmental campaigns; consultation and engagement; community awards; and local community agreements.

This report is part of a series of publications for The Local Wellbeing Project, a three-year programme exploring how local government action, in collaboration with national agencies and local communities can contribute to a growth in happiness and wellbeing, both by enhancing services and providing or planning new services.[1]

Initially, this report discusses the concepts of wellbeing, empowerment and their relevance to local government. This will be followed by a brief overview of the three local authority partners. Next, the evidence from international and domestic research and the case studies will be presented in three sections, each corresponding to one of our hypotheses:

1. that wellbeing is higher in areas where residents can influence decisions affecting their neighbourhood

2. that wellbeing is higher amongst people who have regular contact with their neighbours

3. that wellbeing is higher in areas where residents have the confidence to exercise control over local circumstances.

Each section will also present a number of practical solutions through which neighbourhood and community empowerment could promote wellbeing.
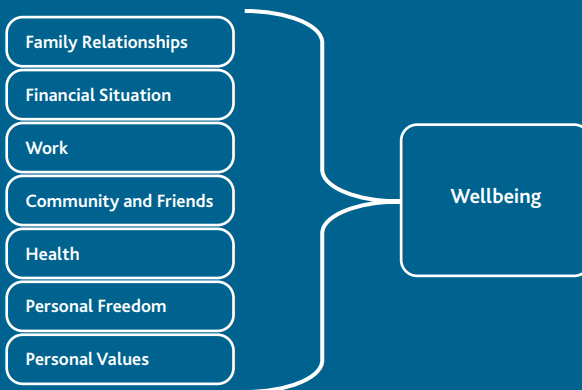
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY WELLBEING?

WELLBEING IS A TERM OFTEN INTERCHANGED WITH HAPPINESS, QUALITY OF LIFE, OR LIFE SATISFACTION.

NEIGHBOURLINESS + EMPOWERMENT = WELLBEING

Defining wellbeing is not simple:

'*There are as many definitions of wellbeing as there are people, since it's a matter of personal opinion*.'[2]

Our wellbeing is influenced by a myriad of factors. Professor Lord Richard Layard, a leading British economist who specialises in the study of happiness and public policy, has identified seven of the most influential factors on our wellbeing.[3]

Family Relationships

Financial Situation

Work

Community and Friends

Health

Personal Freedom

Personal Values

Wellbeing

Within these factors is a complex web of influences. For example, our personal values are influenced by our upbringing, the views of our peers, the political and cultural climate and education to name but a few. Our genetic makeup is also an influence and can make us more prone to finding difficult life circumstances overwhelming.[4]

In many cases we have direct control and responsibility over the factors that affect our wellbeing. However, there are times when our wellbeing is influenced by something we cannot control, such as a lack of local leisure facilities or drugs being sold on our street. In these and many other cases it can be difficult for one person on their own to take action to tackle the problem.

Local government and other statutory bodies can affect some of the influencers on our wellbeing. Even where responsibility and control are with the individual, such as giving up smoking, health services can promote and support behaviour change. The role of local government and public institutions is even more important when influences on our wellbeing are beyond individual control and influence.[5]

WELLBEING AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Local Government Act (2000) has given every local authority the discretionary power to do anything which they consider likely to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their area. The power is designed to encourage innovation and closer joint working between local authorities and their partners to improve communities' quality of life.[6]

The extent to which local authorities understand and apply this power varies considerably. Understanding of the 'wellbeing power' is often limited to senior officials and lawyers and is negligible amongst junior officers and partner agencies.[7]

A new emphasis on local authorities being community leaders and place shapers, along with the move to Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA) and the roll out of Local Area Agreements (LAA), provide avenues for both the use of the wellbeing power and the wider promotion of wellbeing through service provision.

If wellbeing-driven policies are pursued by local authorities and their partners, they will inevitably be linked to outcome-focused targets. Therefore, the question of how wellbeing is practically measured goes hand in hand with efforts to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of citizens.

MEASURING WELLBEING

A number of countries including Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are at the forefront of developing ways to measure wellbeing. Measurement is dependent on how wellbeing is defined and the debate over definition continues. Nonetheless, the range of definitions can be simplified into subjective and objective wellbeing.

Conventional indicators in the domains of educational achievement, levels of income, housing and health, are integral to the measurement of objective wellbeing, defined as wellbeing that is externally measurable.[8]

'On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the life you lead?'

World Database of Happiness Question

Subjective wellbeing is defined as a person's own assessment of their happiness. Subjective wellbeing is regularly measured through psychological tools, as well as surveys.

Interestingly, evidence shows that individuals' assessment of their own wellbeing usually correlates with the result of a sophisticated survey, the assessments their friends and family make of them, as well as their general behaviour – such as smiling.[9]

Both objective and subjective measures of wellbeing provide a valuable indication of the wellbeing of large sections of the population, as well as individuals or specific communities.
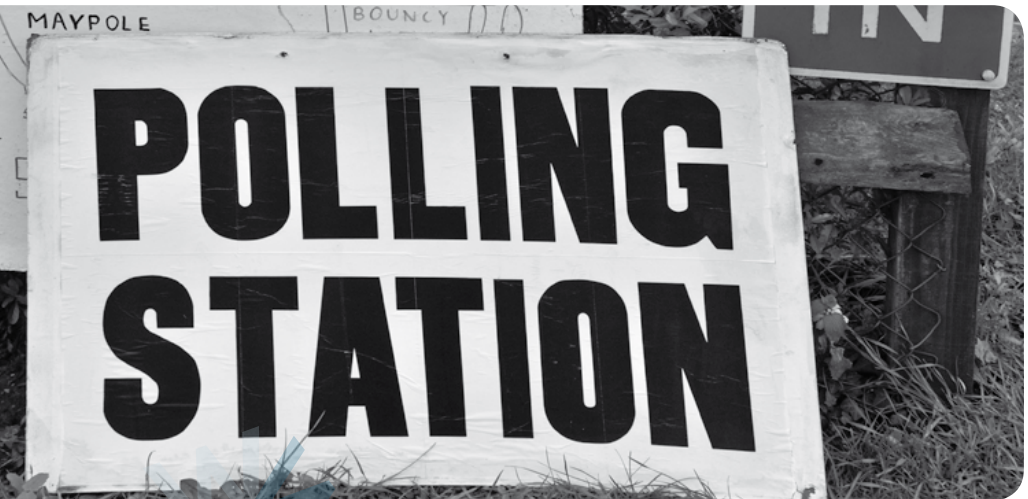
NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The Government defines community empowerment as:

> '… the giving of confidence, skills, and power to communities to shape and influence what public bodies do for or with them.' [10]

The 2006 Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, outlined the government's commitment to 'give local people and communities more power to improve their lives'. Even though the White Paper encourages, rather than compels, local authorities to empower communities, evidence from the Young Foundation's *Transforming Neighbourhoods* programme shows that English local authorities are giving neighbourhood and community empowerment greater emphasis than they were two years ago.[11]

The desire to empower people and involve communities in local democracy is not new and local activity is well established. For decades, residents either in groups or individually, have tried to lobby local decision makers for change. Influential residents' groups have emerged in many areas. On occasion they have developed through public agencies, often they have grown organically in response to a particular local issue.

Local authorities of all political persuasions are now harnessing local activism, and providing opportunities for residents to be involved in making and influencing decisions about their neighbourhoods. They are doing so for a number of reasons.

In response to these concerns, flagship government programmes like New Deal for Communities have been developed to tackle poor levels of health, housing standards, unemployment, crime, environmental quality and education in England's most deprived neighbourhoods.

Why have communities and neighbourhoods risen up the agenda?

Top down reasons

Concerns over public trust, community cohesion, political legitimacy and civic engagment	International benchmarks - local governance strutures larger in the U.K	Evidence of poverty and inequality being concentrated in neighbourhoods	Difficulty of improving public services through centralised intervention
Feelings of powerlessness	Public concern over crime, grime, public spaces	Local capacity, resources and intelligence under-used	Local variations demand more locally responsive services

Source: Young Foundation 2006   Bottom up reasons

Domestic terrorism, ethnic segregation and concerns over the structural and cultural strain of immigration are dominant debates in which community empowerment plays a pivotal role. In its 2007 report, *Our Shared Futures*, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion explicitly stated the importance of empowerment as an enabler for community integration and cohesion.

The report stresses the need to build trust between communities and public institutions by engaging people in civic life. The report also states that of those residents who believed they can influence local decisions, 71 per cent trusted the local council; of those who did not believe they could influence local decisions, only 48 per cent trusted the council.[12] These issues, accompanied by real concerns over weak local institutions, are helping community empowerment rise up the agenda.

In addition, multi-agency partnerships such as Local Strategic Partnerships and Neighbourhood Management boards are involving communities in decision making and influencing to help develop better, more locally-responsive services. Most are trying to break the silo mentality of public agencies, and promote better use of resources and innovative service delivery tailored to local needs and circumstances.

Whatever the reason, people throughout Britain are becoming empowered. They could be sitting on a decision-making committee or standing for election to a local partnership board. Others are taking practical action to solve a local problem or making decisions on budgets. These opportunities are giving people the chance to meaningfully shape their neighbourhoods and improve the wellbeing of themselves, their families and their neighbours.
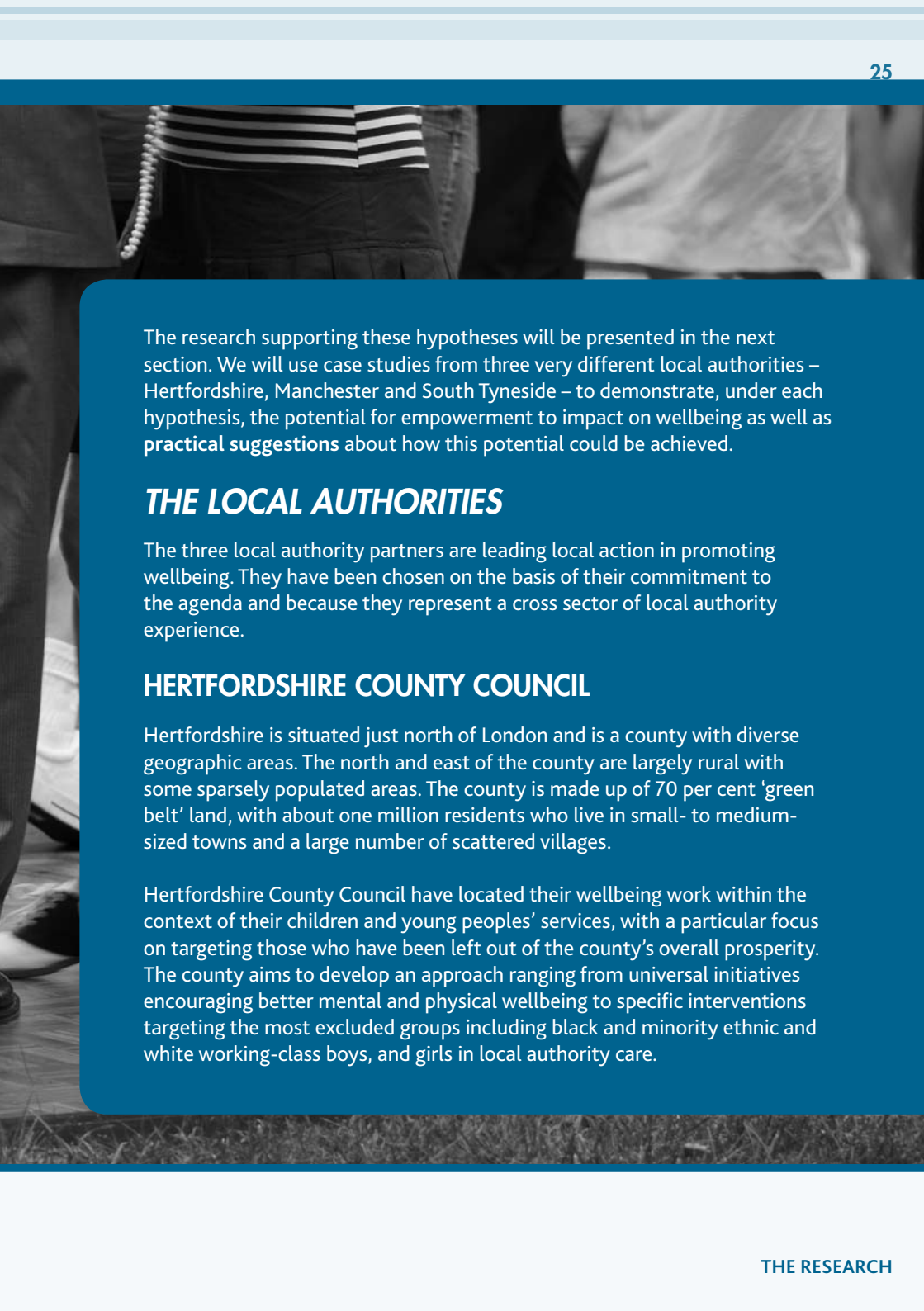
THE RESEARCH

THERE IS A SMALL BUT GROWING BODY OF RESEARCH INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CITIZEN EMPOWERMENT AND INCREASED WELLBEING. FROM THIS BODY OF RESEARCH WE HAVE DEVELOPED THREE HYPOTHESES WHICH REQUIRE FURTHER EXPLORATION:

1. *that wellbeing is higher in areas where residents can influence decisions affecting their neighbourhood*

2. *that wellbeing is higher amongst people who have regular contact with their neighbours*

3. *that wellbeing is higher in areas where residents have the confidence to exercise control over local circumstances.*

NEIGHBOURLINESS + EMPOWERMENT = WELLBEING

The research supporting these hypotheses will be presented in the next section. We will use case studies from three very different local authorities – Hertfordshire, Manchester and South Tyneside – to demonstrate, under each hypothesis, the potential for empowerment to impact on wellbeing as well as **practical suggestions** about how this potential could be achieved.

THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The three local authority partners are leading local action in promoting wellbeing. They have been chosen on the basis of their commitment to the agenda and because they represent a cross sector of local authority experience.

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Hertfordshire is situated just north of London and is a county with diverse geographic areas. The north and east of the county are largely rural with some sparsely populated areas. The county is made up of 70 per cent 'green belt' land, with about one million residents who live in small- to medium-sized towns and a large number of scattered villages.

Hertfordshire County Council have located their wellbeing work within the context of their children and young peoples' services, with a particular focus on targeting those who have been left out of the county's overall prosperity. The county aims to develop an approach ranging from universal initiatives encouraging better mental and physical wellbeing to specific interventions targeting the most excluded groups including black and minority ethnic and white working-class boys, and girls in local authority care.

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

The North West of England is the country's largest growth area outside of London, and at its heart is Manchester. With a population of around 440,000, a growing economy and cultural sector, Manchester aims to be a world class city by 2015. Despite its success, Manchester continues to experience significant levels of deprivation; 27 of the city's 32 electoral wards are in the top 10 per cent most deprived in the country.

Manchester City Council's *Community Strategy* aims to increase material prosperity and wellbeing so that Manchester's people become wealthier and live longer, healthier and happier lives. The intention is to deliver this by enabling individuals to reach their full potential through education and employment; by creating neighbourhoods of choice so that people will choose to stay in Manchester; and by increasing individual and collective self-esteem and mutual respect.

SOUTH TYNESIDE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Situated in the North East, South Tyneside is England's smallest metropolitan borough council, with a population of over 153,000 and covering 64 square kilometres. The largest town in the borough is South Shields. A former centre of shipbuilding and mining, the area has suffered from industrial decline. However, a growing service sector is bringing employment back into the area.

The borough's Local Area Agreement (LAA) focuses on wellbeing and is described as the 'something extra' on top of proposals to improve public services. The aim is that all of the LAA core themes contribute to improving wellbeing, with eight 'big initiatives' highlighted. These are guaranteed apprenticeships, emotional resilience for 11 to 13 year olds, positive parenting, neighbourhood working, reducing financial exclusion, reducing depression, reducing isolation of older people and improving public spaces.

RESEARCH METHODS

This report is based on qualitative research carried out between September 2007 and January 2008, including:

- scoping the current empowerment work of the three partner local authorities

- an action learning day exploring the link between wellbeing and empowerment

- interviews with key officers in the three partner local authorities

- focus groups and interviews with local councillors and community activists in each of the three partner local authorities

- desk-based analysis of programme evaluations.

INVOLVEMENT: WELLBEING AND INFLUENCING DECISIONS

This chapter discusses evidence which demonstrates the link between wellbeing and being able to influence local decision making. Research is presented about direct and everyday democratic cultures internationally, as well as practical findings from neighbourhood initiatives in England.

THE EXISTING EVIDENCE – DIRECT AND EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY

In Switzerland, the democratic culture allows decision making to be lodged with any citizen who wants to participate, usually in the form of a referendum or 'special initiative'. This is known as direct democracy and it has been shown to contribute to people's wellbeing.

In their study of 6,000 Swiss nationals, Frey and Stutzer show that citizens are happier when there are greater levels of local democracy.[13] In fact, Swiss citizens in regions (known as cantons) where there are many opportunities to participate in local or regional decision making, are happier than those in regions with fewer opportunities to participate.

The positive impact on wellbeing comes partly from the process of being involved rather than from outcomes. Frey and Stutzer demonstrate this by comparing Swiss nationals to foreigners in the country, who are not allowed to be involved in decision making. Although both groups benefit from the outcomes of direct democracy, the impact on happiness is almost three times greater for Swiss nationals (controlling for other factors).

As well as benefiting from the process, the outcomes of direct democracy can improve citizens' wellbeing. In particular, greater citizen involvement brings about better scrutiny of politicians and decisions that are in-line with the wishes of citizens. Also, people value the chance to be involved in decision making which is afforded to them by institutions employing direct democracy.

The findings from Switzerland correlate with cross-national comparisons of levels of democracy and subjective wellbeing. Surveys which control for socio-demographic, economic and cultural determinants of life satisfaction support the assertion that higher levels of democracy will lead to procedures and policies that correspond more closely to citizens' preferences and thus increase happiness – democracy has a significant affect on people's subjective wellbeing.[14]

The graph below correlates the quality of everyday democracy with citizens' life satisfaction. 'Everyday democracy' refers to the extent to which democratic values and practice shape not just the formal sphere of politics, but also the informal spheres of everyday life, such as families, public services and communities.[15]
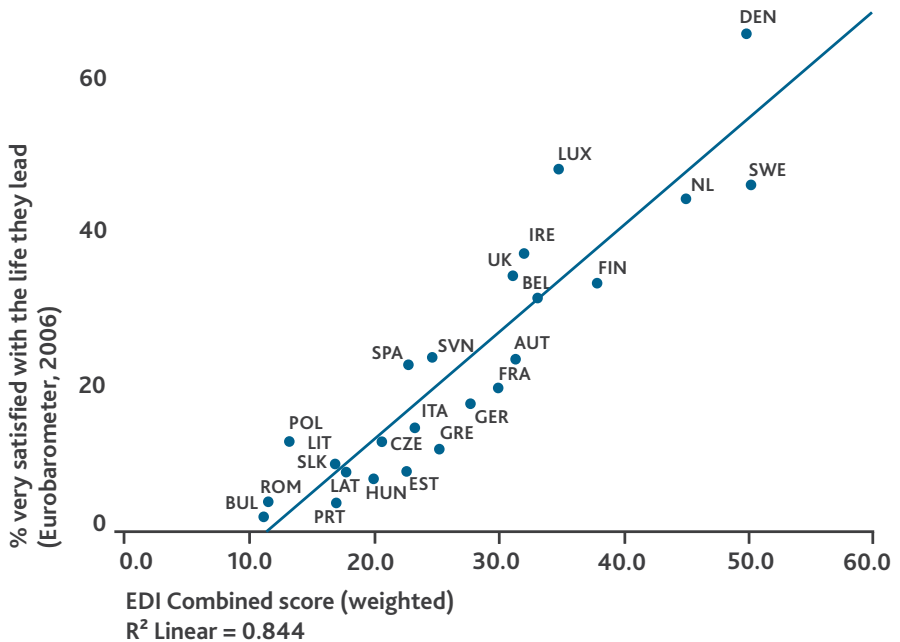
The Everyday Democracy Index is measured along six dimensions: electoral and procedural democracy, which represents the basic integrity of the formal political system; activism and civic participation; aspiration and deliberation, a measure of how much people value democracy as a way of solving problems; family democracy; workplace democracy; and democratic public services which measure the degree of empowerment in public services.[16]

There is a clear and positive relationship between life satisfaction and the extent to which democratic culture disseminates beyond the ballot box and into other aspects of our lives, like our communities, the workplace and interactions with public services.

THE EXISTING EVIDENCE – NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING IN ENGLAND

In the UK, involvement with the democratic process has conventionally revolved around voting and contact with local councillors, MPs, and other decision makers – sometimes through petitions. The landscape of citizen engagement with the democratic process is changing, with increasing and varied opportunities to participate in influencing and making decisions about local services through initiatives such as Neighbourhood Management.

The National Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder programme demonstrates the potential for empowerment to improve wellbeing through better standards of service delivery. In Pathfinder neighbourhoods, residents are more satisfied with their locality, more inclined to think that it is improving and more likely to perceive that local crime and environmental problems have been dealt with, than comparator areas.[17] These outcomes are mirrored in many New Deal for Communities areas.[18]

Interim findings also highlight the potential of these programmes to: support greater involvement of local people in decision making and consultation about services; promote a local 'customer' perspective in public service provision; and quickly identify local problems and communicate them to providers.[19]

Alongside Neighbourhood Management there are several other examples of services operating at the very local level significantly impacting on local quality of life. One such example is the Neighbourhood Warden's Programme. In 2000, 84 warden schemes were funded in England and Wales by the government. Wardens provide a locally-based, uniformed patrolling service mostly operating to a cleaner, safer, greener agenda.

Schemes vary from place to place and are designed to be locally tailored and heavily influenced through resident and stakeholder involvement. Some of the most effective schemes have adopted an approach akin to community development practice and wardens often become the main link between residents and local agencies. Importantly, many of the 84 schemes were located in areas subject to other neighbourhood initiatives and were able to collaborate with initiatives such as Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders.

An evaluation of the three-year programme highlights the potential for neighbourhood warden programmes to significantly improve local quality of life – residents in warden areas reported a 25 per cent increase in satisfaction with their neighbourhoods. In addition, wardens contributed towards: a decrease in fear of crime, especially for older people; better perceptions of local environmental quality; and a small decline in perceptions of youth anti-social behaviour.[20]

THE CASE STUDIES

Initiative: Work of Democratic Services
Location: South Tyneside

The core work of the Democratic Services team at South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council is no different to that in any other local authority. However, in recent years there have been conscious efforts to broaden the department's traditional remit, and now a key aim is to improve public engagement and participation in the democratic process.

To achieve this staff have used community development practices, learning new skills and challenging themselves in the process. Officers have developed arts-based workshops, attended numerous community-based events, initiated intergenerational projects, and have even purchased and learnt to operate their own PA system.

Going into communities to raise awareness about ways to be involved in the conventional democratic process has already borne fruit. Attendance at the borough's Community Area Forums has risen and now stands at an average of 18 participants for each meeting. Petitions have increased and the Local Public Service Agreement target for young voter registration, which was 77 per cent, has been exceeded and currently stands at 86 per cent.

Initiative: The We Asked, You Said, We Did Campaign
Location: South Tyneside

The *We Asked, You Said, We Did* campaign is intended to 'close the loop' of consultation between the local authority and residents. Initially focusing on six areas identified as residents' priorities, the campaign is designed to inform local people about how they have influenced the delivery of services.

Campaign posters show, for example, that when residents asked for more activities for young people, the council responded by developing a skate park with the involvement of a group of young people. Feedback from the campaign shows that residents are happy that the council is listening to them and keen to be involved in further consultation – a process of continuous engagement the council is eager to sustain.

The success of the campaign indicates that a level of trust has been built between the local authority and its citizens. So much so that explicit efforts to improve wellbeing by tackling difficult, perception-based problems such as the fear of crime is now on the campaign's agenda.

Initiative: The Hertfordshire Youth Charter
Location: Hertfordshire

Hertfordshire's Youth Charter has been developed to raise awareness and inform young people and adults about the rights and responsibilities of young people. The Charter is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Human Rights Act 1998.

The Charter aims to empower young people and contribute towards feelings of citizenship, as well as improve outcomes for young people through better service provision. In practice this has involved educating young people about their rights and responsibilities through workshops, poster campaigns, a DVD, school resource packs and a website. As well as being endorsed by the Children and Young People's Partnership, a number of local agencies have ratified the Charter.

The Charter forms an important part of the county's work on empowering young people. Hertfordshire's Youth Parliament and Youth Advocates scheme both use the document to help them campaign on behalf of young people, and the priorities that emerge through Charter-based workshops have informed the county's Children and Young People's Plan.

The Charter is helping to raise confidence amongst young people that their views are as valid as those of adults. In addition, it is promoting – as a fundamental value – the need to include the views of young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of local services.

Initiative: Youth Advocates
Location: Hertfordshire

The Youth Advocates Scheme, developed by Connexions Hertfordshire, aims to have young people from each of the 10 districts in Hertfordshire trained in actively consulting and representing their peers.

The scheme provides passionate young people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to make a positive contribution to their community. These are developed through a programme of workshops, events, debates and a residential trip, and participants gain an accredited qualification in Representing Others.

The 60 Youth Advocates who have progressed through the programme come from a wide range of backgrounds. For the young people involved, mixing with peers from different social, cultural and religious backgrounds has helped them look at their communities differently. Importantly, it has helped them look beyond their own priorities and become better advocates of young people in their areas.

The scheme is an integral part of the county's wider youth involvement structure, which is designed to give young people the opportunity to identify their priorities and influence decision making. Youth Advocates from each district sit on a Youth Shadow Board, which brings the priorities of young people to the attention of decision makers within the county council. The Youth Shadow Board is in turn represented at the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership Board.

NEIGHBOURLINESS + EMPOWERMENT = WELLBEING

Initiative: 100 Days Campaign
Location: Manchester

Manchester's *100 Days Campaign* was developed by the Environment Campaigns Team in response to a Home Office request to explore the links between crime and grime in the city. The campaign covers the whole of the city but retains a local focus, drawing in a plethora of local voluntary and community sector organisations, residents groups, schools and public services such as the police.

Each year the campaign follows a theme that is dictated by the priorities of Manchester's citizens. In 2008, *100 Days* aims to improve the environment and will address themes such as climate change. The campaign is multi-faceted – combining statutory enforcement, resident involvement and behaviour change through information provision. In previous years neighbourhoods have benefited from intensive activity to remove untaxed cars, recycle waste, enforce fines for littering, as well as dozens of events such as recycled fashion shows, community clean ups and anti-social behaviour road shows.

The focus of *100 Days* is on action - it is about residents and public services taking joint responsibility and working together to make a visible difference to the city. It is this that has galvanised so many local residents and community groups to be a part of the campaign. For residents, seeing the effect of their participation has helped them feel a genuine sense of empowerment. For public services, the campaign has demonstrated the impact that involving local residents can have on a community's wellbeing.

Initiative: Community Guardians
Location: Manchester

A Community Guardian is a resident who adopts their local area and who works closely with Manchester City Council to ensure that any environmental problems in their area are dealt with promptly. It is a voluntary role that can involve tasks such as: reporting graffiti, dumped rubbish and broken streetlights; organising local environmental improvements, clean ups and litter picks; reporting dog fouling offenders, watering trees and flower beds in a neighbourhood; and general reporting of environmental improvements or problems that affect a neighbourhood.

The more active Guardians have become well versed in dealing with the complexities of the local authority and have developed the skills and networks to get local environmental issues dealt with swiftly. Many Guardians have chosen to be highly visible within their neighbourhoods, which has resulted in residents using them as a conduit to the council in order to tackle low-level environmental problems.

As well as reporting on behalf of residents, Guardians pass on knowledge to their neighbours about how and who to approach within the council to solve specific issues. To keep Guardians engaged in their roles, the Environmental Campaigns Team tailors activities and events to each Guardian's interests. These interests relate to the city's Green City targets such as reducing city-wide CO_2 emissions, increasing recycling and improving knowledge of fair trade.

The Guardians are helping to improve the standards of service provision within their neighbourhoods and disseminating knowledge to their neighbours about how to get things done. The key ingredients for the success of Community Guardians have been the flexibility that the council has given participants to define the activities and responsibilities of the role, and linking in different environmental initiatives to the work of the Guardians – rather than the setting up of new projects.

NEIGHBOURLINESS + EMPOWERMENT = WELLBEING

Initiative: Westfield Sure Start Children's Centre
Location: Hertfordshire

Westfield Sure Start Children's Centre is one of only two in the country that is situated on the site of a secondary school. This unique placing is helping the Sure Start to support families throughout their life cycle and promote the wellbeing of children and their parents within one of Hertfordshire's most multicultural neighbourhoods.

Along with the Children's Centre and the secondary school, the site is also home to an adult education centre. The addition of the Children's Centre has helped the socially and culturally diverse population access and shape how services on the site are delivered.

This is a central aim for Westfield Sure Start – a chance for parents to have their say on services within their neighbourhood. Parents are actively involved in deciding what activities should be available on site, ranging from those delivered by Sure Start, the extended schools agenda as well as adult education.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THESE CASE STUDIES?

- knowledge of how local democracy works and how citizens can use it to affect local change can be restricted to a small number of council officers, along with elected members. This could be improved through community outreach work

- residents need to know how their engagement with the local democratic system, through tools such as petitions or formal consultations, will be processed through the 'system'

- when consulted, residents appreciate knowing why some of the things they have asked for cannot be done – this will often reduce tension, rather than create it

- highly-visible, action-focused initiatives are an excellent way of encouraging collaboration between the local authority and local residents, which will help to develop positive relationships – which need to be based on honesty and respect

- residents are likely to gain a sense of achievement when they can see the impact of their time and effort to improve their neighbourhoods. Identifying priorities and influencing decisions are important aims of empowerment, but the power of direct action should not be forgotten

- residents who understand and are able to negotiate the complexities of the local authority are an important asset in tackling low-level community issues

- giving residents incentives such as training, equipment and recognition makes civic contribution much more rewarding and can help inspire them to create change.

HOW DOES THIS IMPACT ON WELLBEING? CONCLUSIONS FROM CASE STUDIES:

1. by communicating knowledge about how residents can exercise their democratic rights and assume civic responsibility as a means of achieving change for their neighbourhood

2. By facilitating communication between residents, public institutions and decision makers that is based on mutual respect and honesty, and keeps people informed about progress, or lack of progress, towards addressing local priorities

3. By improving knowledge amongst residents about how to navigate complex service providers in order to get local priorities addressed

4. Through elevating the aspirations of communities by demonstrating that residents do have the power to exercise control over local circumstances and improve their wellbeing.

PRACTICAL WAYS OF ACHIEVING THIS – HOW ABOUT:

- training democratic services staff in outreach work and promoting local democracy through community and schools-based learning

- incorporating training as to how residents can engage with the local democratic process into the induction programme for all staff in frontline services

- promoting a clear process for dealing with citizens' petitions, alongside a framework for managing the tensions that petitions can cause

- maximising the use of the internet using online forums and other forms of e-democracy

- developing direct links between school, youth councils and the decision-making executive of local government

- pairing ward members' surgeries with other regular community events to improve footfall

- encouraging local schools, colleges or adult education institutions to deliver courses on how local democracy works

- in areas where there are neighbourhood structures, why not put on an annual 'Good Neighbours' Awards? By keeping entrants to a geographical area residents are more likely to know the winners and relate to their good deeds

- as the majority of council staff will live within the local authority boundaries, staff could be encouraged to become mentors or 'ambassadors' to residents in their neighbourhoods trying to navigate complex local institutions

- working to dispel the fear that some staff in local institutions have of dealing with the general public. How about encouraging staff to go to public meetings or to volunteer at community events and community action projects?

WELLBEING AND REGULAR CONTACT BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS

This chapter discusses evidence of the link between wellbeing and regular contact between neighbours. This relates to both the impact of having local social networks as well as the impact that social capital can have on feelings of belonging to a neighbourhood.

THE EXISTING EVIDENCE – SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital, regularly called community spirit or neighbourliness, is a phrase repeatedly heard in the dialogue of 'community'. Academic debate on the subject is plentiful, with its most famous advocate being Harvard Professor Robert Putnam. He defines social capital as:

> '… *networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.*'[21]

Putnam distinguishes between two forms of social capital – bridging and bonding. Bridging social capital is the networks and ties between people of different social characteristics, which can be developed through arenas such as interfaith forums. Bonding social capital is the networks and ties that exist between people with similar social characteristics, such as a Pakistani Women's Swimming Group. Bonding capital is easier to develop than bridging capital, but the latter is more important for the development of a cohesive society with a shared sense of belonging.

In his book *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam argues that being an active member of a group or social network, like a bowling league, is declining in America and society is suffering as a result. Diminishing numbers belonging to social networks is leading to fewer occurrences of associated positive social effects.

The positive effects of people belonging to social networks can include: low crime rates, less grime, better educational achievement, and better health.[22] A number of these affect whole communities, not just those involved in the networks or groups – everyone benefits from less graffiti and safer places for children to play. Where social capital is low, these positive social affects are often difficult to find.

For individuals, being connected to good social networks can have profound effects on their lives.

'…the well connected are more likely to be hired, housed, healthy and happy.'[23]

Having strong social networks in your neighbourhood may result in access to reliable informal childcare, neighbours looking after your house when you are on holiday, or passers by closing your garden gate when it has been left open. Despite this evidence, social capital is rarely an explicit outcome of neighbourhood working and community empowerment in Britain. The dominance of performance management through measurable outcomes has meant that social capital is not well understood and is frequently regarded as an add-on.

The potential is there – activities which give residents a greater sense of local identity such as festivals, community centres, and local action groups can all help to develop social capital.[24] These activities can be really useful in developing bridging social capital; in 2005, 73 per cent of people who regularly participated in formal and informal volunteering activity had friends from different income groups to their own, compared to 67 per cent of those who do not volunteer; 55 per cent of those regular volunteers also had friends from a different ethnic group, compared to 45 per cent who did not regularly volunteer.

THE EXISTING EVIDENCE – SOCIAL CAPITAL AND BELONGING

Our sense of belonging refers to how much we feel as though we are part of a group or community. This can be place based, such as our neighbourhood or estate, or non-geographical, such as a religious community spread over a city that congregates at a place of worship.

The extent to which we feel we belong to a neighbourhood is influenced by a number of factors. However, developing a local identity and sense of belonging among residents relies more upon strong social networks and locally-engaged institutions, than attractive buildings, nice shops or shared values.[25]

A study of young people in England reinforces this view – relationships with friends and family heavily contribute towards feelings of belonging and sense of place. For example, how young people feel about their neighbourhood can often depend on their proximity to their friends.[26]

The Home Office Citizenship Survey highlights the link between civic participation and a sense of belonging to a neighbourhood – 78 per cent of people who regularly participated in formal volunteering felt they belonged to their neighbourhood compared to 73 per cent who had not regularly participated.[27]

The relationship between social capital and belonging is demonstrated in a study of three communities in Stirling, Scotland.[28] The study again reinforces the importance of family, friends and neighbours in helping to sustain a sense of community. In addition, it is found that communities rely upon the familiar, often mundane everyday interactions that occur between neighbours. This could be talking at the post office, at the school gates, or at the local convenience store.

The study also demonstrates that sense of community can be very delicate. Even small positive or negative changes in the perceptions local people hold about their neighbourhood can significantly affect perceptions of local community spirit. This change could be the loss of a post office or the closure of a local shop, both of which would reduce the frequency and opportunity to meet other local residents.

THE CASE STUDIES

Initiative: Manchester in Bloom
Location: Manchester

The *Manchester in Bloom* competition is about local people taking pride in transforming and maintaining their local environment. For the competition organisers, the outcomes of *Manchester in Bloom* have often gone beyond this immediate aim.

The lack of vandalism has been apparent – in all but a few neighbourhoods the various new plants and hanging baskets have remained untouched. In a number of *Manchester in Bloom* areas there has been a reduction in graffiti and burglary. In addition, local people are now taking responsibility for the watering and maintenance of some public spaces and it has been estimated that *Manchester in Bloom* could have saved the council services over one million pounds.

In one neighbourhood, Hulme, *Manchester in Bloom* has helped instigate major social changes. Upon first entering the competition over 200 residents, supported by staff from the council and other services, regularly met in a local car park to discuss and work on the competition entry. Local agencies, in particular the police, were quick to capitalise on the goodwill and desire to be involved that was expressed by local people. The Safer Neighbourhoods Police Team took note of the mobile telephone numbers of the residents that attended *Manchester in Bloom* meetings, and have successfully created a text message-based network of local people. The network is used to engage residents in community activities, to encourage local residents to report incidents, and to make people aware when there is concern about particular criminal activity, such as a spate of burglaries. As a result burglary is down, as is graffiti and vandalism.

The links between residents and services in Hulme have been strengthened because of *Manchester in Bloom*. In addition, residents have maintained their contact with each other. Tea and coffee mornings are still held in the same car park, regularly attracting up to 50 residents on Sundays. Other neighbourhoods are benefiting from similar effects as Hulme. Monaco Drive, a little-known affluent area of the city, has seen relationships develop between neighbours that had previously not known each other. Since *Manchester in Bloom*, the street has held communal barbeques and some residents have even been on holiday with each other.

Initiative: Neighbourhood Management in Boldon Newtown
Location: South Tyneside

Boldon Newtown, like many towns in the North East, has suffered from the decline of local industry. Unemployment and the associated economic and social problems during the 1970s and 80s have partially subsided in the last decade; however, Boldon Newtown is still amongst the 10 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods in England, along with 18 other neighbourhoods in the borough.

Improving the quality of life in these neighbourhoods quickly became a major priority and in 2006, as part of the Local Strategic Partnership's approach to tackling deprivation, a Neighbourhood Management Team was assembled for Boldon Newtown.

The extent of community activity in Boldon Newtown has increased since the inception of Neighbourhood Management. More and more people are participating in events, groups and activities and importantly, residents are getting to know each other. New relationships are blossoming – recently arrived families from abroad and home owners in new developments are mixing with long-established residents of the old Boldon Colliery.

New relationships are not just developing between residents. Even for those residents who have been involved in community activity for over 30 years, engaging with council officers or 'the suits at the council' has been a major barrier. Through Neighbourhood Management this is now being overcome, mostly because of two changes: more meetings on residents' terms, in an environment they are comfortable with, and more informal contact between council officers and residents.

Perhaps the most important event for local residents was when a senior council officer accompanied them on a visit to another neighbourhood. The officer chose to take the minibus with residents as opposed to taking his own vehicle, and engaged in banter with them throughout the trip. For both the residents and the senior council officer it was an important journey in discovering that they were not as different as they had first thought.

The impact of new and strengthened relationships in Boldon Newtown can be best seen in those residents who regularly engage with Neighbourhood Management. The trust and respect they receive from their neighbours is a genuine source of pride and happiness. Even a simple walk to the supermarket usually takes longer, as people they know through their community activity stop and talk to them.

Initiative: Pride of South Tyneside Awards
Location: South Tyneside

The *Pride of South Tyneside Awards* is an event designed to recognise the achievements and contributions that local people make to the borough. The Awards, organised by a partnership consisting of the council, local newspaper, local arts centre and numerous businesses, have become the highlight of the annual events calendar.

The Awards are multi-faceted. Recognition is the most prominent aim of the Awards, especially as those nominated rarely seek credit for what to them is a part of everyday life:

"… *All we do is keep an eye out for ways we can help the street*."

The winners of the 2007 Good Neighbours' Award, who had been active in their neighbourhood for over 30 years, went on to visit the Queen at Buckingham Palace:

"… *It's something we'll always remember. We turn 75 soon and this was one of the biggest highlights of our lives.*"

Along with recognition, disseminating positive messages such as the contribution of young people or the unsung actions of a good neighbour through the local media and council publications is helping to counter the negative stories of anti-social behaviour and crime. Importantly, the awards raise the profile of both formal and informal volunteering within the borough, the results of which are often hidden from the public eye.

By demonstrating that regular citizens, whose actions may not be known to many, can have a hugely positive impact on their neighbourhoods, the Awards are helping to create a sense of pride and belonging in South Tyneside.

Initiative: A Sense of Place Framework
Location: Manchester

The *Sense of Place Framewor*k is a concept and a tool to engage Manchester's communities and individuals in different ways. The framework is used primarily to encourage people to think differently about their place and space, and what is important to them. In addition, the framework is a tool for the local authority and its partners to think differently about how they engage and consult citizens, in particular to help challenge assumptions about people, identities and cultures.

The Framework has developed through consultation with Manchester's citizens about how they define their sense of place. What emerged was a feeling that sense of place is, amongst other things, strongly related to belonging, which in turn is influenced by relationships. Friends, families and neighbours – or the social and community networks that exist – are a strong contributor to how connected citizens feel to their neighbourhoods and the city.

The *Sense of Place Framework* has been applied to a number of engagement projects relating to topics like: marketing, young people, regeneration, and refugees and migrant communities. As well as being used to promote belonging and positive thinking about one's neighbourhood, the Framework is being used to change the culture of engagement within Manchester's statutory and voluntary sector agencies. It is hoped that, for those officers who are responsible for engaging citizens on topics such as regeneration, the environment and planning and development, applying the Framework would help improve the understanding of what is important to the lives of local people and the area they call home, eventually resulting in better quality local service provision.

For those involved in the development and application of *The Sense of Place Framework*, what is evident is that sense of place, social capital and wellbeing are interconnected. It is hoped that in the future, projects relating to these themes will be designed and understood by this principle.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THESE CASE STUDIES?

- local projects which involve residents working together to create visible change to their neighbourhoods are a good way of creating meaningful interaction between neighbours. The benefits of this interaction can go way beyond the immediate impact of their efforts and such projects do not have to be expensive

- getting the interaction between decision makers and residents right is vital if genuine empowerment is to be achieved. If the balance of power in these interactions is weighted too heavily in favour of decision makers, it can lead to disempowerment of local residents

- building relationships between residents and decision makers should be based around what makes residents feel comfortable. In practice this will often mean decision makers going to where the community is, not vice versa

- the majority of residents would like to live in an area where people look out for one another and there is a degree of 'community spirit'. This elusive, intangible concept can be promoted by recognising and celebrating the contribution of local residents towards improving their neighbourhood

- understanding the nature of peoples' 'sense of place' or belonging – what makes them feel attached to their neighbourhood – is a useful starting point when engaging and empowering communities and will help develop an understanding of what creates a vibrant, civic culture.

HOW DOES THIS IMPACT ON WELLBEING? CONCLUSIONS FROM CASE STUDIES:

1. By helping to develop strong, wide-reaching social networks within a neighbourhood with resources which can be utilised when taking action on local issues

2. By breaking down barriers between decision makers and residents through increased formal and informal contact within a community setting

3. By helping to understand what makes people belong to an area and what helps form their local identity. This can inform local empowerment initiatives and place-shaping activities, as well as help to strengthen the local culture of support and volunteering.

PRACTICAL WAYS OF ACHIEVING THESE – HOW ABOUT:

- organising informal networking events or fun days for active local residents and key decision makers to mingle

- having some Local Strategic Partnership meetings in a community setting with invited local residents to talk about local issues

- supporting a programme of street parties which can be done with very little funding

- using respected 'brokers' (those officers that provide the link between residents and services) to mentor other council officers in how to build relationships with residents

- encouraging wider community representation on the boards of faith/age/ethnic specific organisations and groups – to help develop 'bridging' social capital

- developing local events which bring together residents who have a common interest together – for example, local dog owners could get to know each other through an outdoor dog show or dog training sessions

- putting on street-based fruit and vegetable cooperatives in neighbourhoods where there is limited availability through local shops

- creating local internet-based wares exchange schemes – where people list their wares, from ladders to DVDs, on a neighbourhood webpage and lend them to their neighbours for a day or weekend

- periodic 'welcome to the neighbourhood' events for areas with high levels of transient population

- developing interactive local exhibitions or other forms of consultation where residents can contribute their stories and experiences of living in a local area, which will help to understand local belonging

- tailoring local volunteering opportunities to aspects of local belonging.

WELLBEING AND RESIDENTS EXERCISING CONTROL OVER LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES

This chapter discusses how wellbeing can be increased by improving the ability of a community to exercise control over local circumstances, such as a poor local park or high levels of anti-social behaviour. Research is presented that shows the benefits of strong social capital plus the willingness of local people to take action to solve a particular problem – what is known as collective efficacy.[29]

THE EXISTING EVIDENCE – COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

In his study of Chicago, Robert Sampson discusses the idea of collective efficacy. Collective efficacy is the extent to which residents decide to take action to tackle the root causes of local problems. Integral to this desire to take action is the existence of social capital – locally-based social networks with individuals who are willing to take action.

Sampson's sophisticated empirical studies of over 300 Chicago neighbourhoods showed that in neighbourhoods with high levels of collective efficacy there were low levels of violence. In neighbourhoods with low collective efficacy there were high levels of violence. Levels of violence were even lower when collective efficacy existed alongside close links and networks between local residents, such as family ties or good friends.

British studies into collective efficacy indicate its role in tackling some of the low-level problems that exist within a community.[30] A study of Colville, a west London neighbourhood, shows how strong social networks and an unofficial local 'code of acceptable behaviour' meant that public behaviour, especially of young people, was subject to a degree of informal community regulation. If the code of behaviour was breached, the community would quickly intervene to restore order. Similar findings were found amongst a close-knit Asian community in St. Mary's, Oldham.

Evidence from the Home Office Citizenship Survey reinforces the findings from Colville and St. Mary's. Of those residents who felt that people were willing to help their neighbours, 83 per cent thought that someone would intervene if children were spraying graffiti. Of those who thought that neighbours would not help each other, 43 per cent felt that someone would intervene. The view that people would intervene in low-level anti-social behaviour was also positively correlated with the extent to which residents enjoyed living in a neighbourhood, and the extent to which people believed they could influence local decision making.[31]

These statistics and case studies indicate the potential of collective efficacy to help tackle low-level problems which can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of a community.

THE CASE STUDY

Initiative: Mancunian Agreements
Location: Manchester

Mancunian Agreements are designed to bring people together to solve local problems with local solutions, based on shared understanding, commitment and actions. The agreement comes from a local idea that grows as more residents become involved, as public service and community agencies commit to their part of the solution, and when actions are agreed. In practice, the agreements involve local people and agencies taking responsibility and action to improve their neighbourhood.

One such agreement was reached between the local authority and The Friends of Blackley Forest, a community group that has been working to improve Blackley Forest, a nature reserve in North Manchester.

The Friends group is a collection of like-minded residents who are determined to improve the Forest and widen its use amongst local residents. Members of the group are very proactive and regularly volunteer their time and effort to help care for the Forest. Through their activity it was evident to the Friends that local people did not make full use of the Forest, with some not even knowing it existed.

The primary reason for low usage seemed to be the perception that the Forest was unsafe. The Friends of Blackley Forest decided that Mancunian Agreements could

help them in their efforts to counter this perception. The Agreement sought to tackle problems of safety and security, access and management of the Forest, community involvement and marketing.

The Mancunian Agreement included actions such as: increased warden and police patrols; officer support for the development of the Forest; regular maintenance; and the promotion of the Forest through organisational newsletters and websites. The Friends also agreed to a number of actions in the Agreement such as: organising events and activities; developing and maintaining their own website; and developing and implementing small improvement projects.

The Mancunian Agreement has helped the Friends of Blackley Forest and other agencies involved with the Forest work towards their aim of increasing usage by local residents. The Agreement provided financial and officer support which allowed the Friends to put on activities and fun days to widen access to the park.

There have also been improvements to the infrastructure of the park, such as a wooden bird-watching platform. The platform has been built by apprentices at one of the city's building firms free of charge, and is purposely located in an area which requires public usage as a way of self policing. The platform has not been subject to even one piece of graffiti, even though before it was erected fears over it being set on fire were raised. In the past, reporting of anti-social behaviour was minimal – not because it did not happen, but because residents did not feel it was worthwhile. Reporting is now more frequent, and incidences of low-level anti-social behaviour such as littering have decreased.

The numbers of people using the Forest has increased substantially thanks to the Mancunian Agreement and the efforts of all involved. The Friends have successfully attracted a significant amount of publicity and media interest which has raised awareness of both the Forest and their role as the Friends group. Now, local residents regularly approach Friends members to talk about the Forest and report incidents of anti-social behaviour. Clearly local ownership and respect for the space has improved.

The Mancunian Agreement has been driven by the positive attitude of the individuals involved, be they residents or council officers. The trust and respect officers and residents have developed between themselves have meant that working collaboratively has been relatively straightforward. Importantly, the aspirations and priorities for the Forest are shared amongst all of the involved parties.

Mancunian Agreements are about people working together to solve a particular local issue. In Blackley Forest this is what has been achieved – residents and the council each taking responsibility to improve a local facility that has the potential to improve the quality of life for all of those in the local area.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS CASE STUDY?

- collaboration between service providers and residents works best when they share the same aspirations for improving local quality of life and can agree on a course of action to achieve them. The quality of this collaboration will determine progress towards improving local areas

- ideally, this collaboration would be based on relationships between agencies and residents. In practice, it is often based on the relationship between individual officers of statutory agencies and residents. These officers act as brokers and their ability to forge relationships based on mutual respect and understanding – and trust – is the keystone in both meeting and managing local expectations

- constructive relationships between individual officers and residents, and collaboration towards improving local quality of life, will eventually impact on perceptions and trust of services and agencies

- promoting and celebrating genuine cooperation between services and residents – with emphasis on the role of residents – will create optimism within the wider community about their ability to affect local change

- the more optimistic that residents are about their ability to achieve their aspirations for their neighbourhood, the more likely they are to take some responsibility and action.

HOW DOES THIS IMPACT ON WELLBEING? CONCLUSIONS FROM CASE STUDY:

1. By compelling statutory services to take collaborative action with 'grassroots' resident-led initiatives that have aspirations for their neighbourhood, but lack the resources to achieve them

2. By encouraging support from service providers to develop the capacity of local residents to take a degree of ownership and responsibility for improving local quality of life.

PRACTICAL WAYS OF ACHIEVING THESE – HOW ABOUT:

- setting up local action groups that can help assume some responsibility and work with local services to take action over local issues

- providing materials and workshops for residents so they can maintain areas within their neighbourhood

- encouraging residents to work together to help their neighbours, for example, a gardening club which develops and maintains the gardens of local residents that are elderly or physically disabled

- encouraging local businesses to use their expertise in helping to solve local issues

- considering implementing a Neighbourhood Charter, a tool which can match aspirations whilst managing expectations

- offering incentives for local voluntary action through time banks and other local exchange schemes

- encouraging residents to maintain their street in line with 'designing out crime' principles to reduce the risk of burglary, for example, by collectively thinking about the design of a row of front gardens.

CONCLUSION

*THIS REPORT HAS PRESENTED DOMESTIC
AND INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ALONGSIDE
CASE STUDIES FROM THREE VERY DIFFERENT
ENGLISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES, IN ORDER
TO DEMONSTRATE THE LINK BETWEEN
EMPOWERMENT AND WELLBEING.*

Few of the case studies in this report were designed or implemented specifically under the categories we have placed them in. Nevertheless, each relates strongly to at least one of our hypothesis and – to a large degree – we have been able to disentangle how these initiatives are likely to impact on local wellbeing.

An implicit, overarching theme from the evidence that has been presented is the notion of control. As individuals, we want to have some control and influence over the circumstances that impact upon our lives. We want self determination – relating to both lifetime aspirations, such as the freedom of choice over who to marry, and everyday desires, such as living on a street free from dog mess or drug dealers.

Each of the concepts set out in this report helps to increase local control. Whether it is learning how to use the democratic process to lobby for change, using neighbourhood management to influence local service delivery, or becoming friends with local youths – empowerment can help people exert some control over local circumstances.

The case studies in this report highlight this fact and can be considered as examples of empowerment 'done well' – **empowerment that helps individuals and communities to exert control over the circumstances that affect their lives, thereby improving local wellbeing**.[32]

Intuitively, we can say the reverse is also true. Empowerment 'done badly' can lead to individuals and communities feeling that they cannot influence local circumstances and that they have very little control over some aspects of their lives. **Poorly thought out empowerment initiatives can lead to disempowerment, which in turn reduces local wellbeing**.

There are numerous central and local government initiatives which support the empowerment of citizens as a way of tackling deprivation, improving services and decreasing the democratic deficit – all of which are headline-grabbing issues.

The work presented in this report shows that some of the positive aspects of empowerment are about local influence over services and engaging people with the local democratic process, but they are also about the day-to-day aspects of people's lives.

This is not a new finding and much of the history and rhetoric around empowerment involves the concepts of neighbourliness, community spirit or community action. Some of this hints at a lost golden age, where local people regularly came together and offered support to one another. This rallying would often be around established local institutions like the church, trade unions, welfare halls, rugby clubs or community centres. Many of these institutions are in decline and in many areas have disappeared – along with the social functions they provided.

Above all, this report demonstrates the importance of looking beyond empowerment as a means for improving public services or tackling the democratic deficit. It highlights how empowerment helps to develop communities that have the networks, resources and confidence to exert control over their local circumstances. By doing this, it demonstrates the power of empowerment to improve local wellbeing.

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