

Notes from NRLP Event: “Got Something to Say? Where Next?” At The Southville Centre

Date: Wednesday 27th February 2008

1. Registration

2. Welcome and Introduction to the day.

Nigel Newton-Sawyer (NNS), Deputy Chief Executive, Voscur; welcomed everyone to “Got Something to Say? Where Next?” He explained the purpose of the event and that it was designed to be a day all attendees would feel would have been well spent. He explained the history and background to the Neighbourhood Renewal learning plan and outlined the component parts of the day.

3. Panel of Neighbourhood Renewal Learning Plan (NRLP) participants: to share experiences and take questions

NNS welcomed the panel and asked them to introduce themselves and to talk about their experiences of the NRLP and to share their feelings about it ending.

Edwina Molloy

“I moved back to Bristol a year ago as a lone parent wishing to retrain and move sideways in the job I had done before, working with children. One day at a yoga class, my friend and I thought how great it would be to teach this to children! It would be great to have a place where children could go and do something constructive and learn things like massage and yoga. We wanted to do something with value. I came across a list of courses that Voscur were running and went on Catching Confidence, Effective Meetings and Who’s in your Community? The things I learnt at these courses were useful for both teaching children and for myself, personally. The courses are free, taxis and childcare are provided so I felt I should go for it!

From attending these courses, it has reaffirmed to me what needs to be done in the neighbourhoods and the importance of the work that comes from people getting involved. It also opened the door for me for further courses; I attended a course on publicity. The trainers really know it and deliver it from the heart! The courses are dynamic and for me have provided tools that I can carry forward and use.

We applied to Community Champions and got funding for one person to run with our idea. We did need two people to run things with children! We approached Neighbourhood Renewal and the second time we did this, they gave us some funding. With this we set up a community group and we are running our first session on Saturday in Easton Community Centre. Less than a year after we had the original idea, the community group is set up and running!

Voscur really helped! I am concerned about what happens now? I don’t understand why the funding is closing down? If we want healthy, happier communities then how is this expected to happen if the funding for things like this is taken away?”

Rae Gingell

"I am an adviser on the Disability Equalities Forum and also volunteer for the Alzheimer's Society. I attended one of Voscur's seminars that I attended through the Care Forum, where I met Hannah [Parker, Voscur] and she told me about the courses that were coming up.

I had lived outside of England for 20 years before returning and when I came back I was horrified at what does not go on in our communities. I thought that by going on these courses it would help to empower me to be able to do something about this. I went on 'Getting to Know the Local Council' and also through the NRLP shadowed my local councillor, Jon Rogers. My day of shadowing was an enlightenment. I was amazed by the care that goes into preparing legislation. The political decisions that are so difficult and so hard to reach a consensus on. I watched the Full Committee go through the objections to a project that had been put forward for funding by the Leader of the Council. I was a bit unhappy at the games that were played by Committee members as I felt this distracted from the issues that were being discussed. I felt confident enough to challenge one of the issues being discussed and this was picked up on by the Trade Union Representative.

I don't think enough people are aware that they can attend Council Meetings. I would like to see the minority groups more involved as at the moment issues such as access needs, inclusive education are serious issues.

Voscur in the future need to encourage young people in particular. Very few people vote and it is important to capture peoples' interest. The political process is very marginalised, older people make up the majority of voters but are not always involved in activities in their communities.

I am disgusted this project is coming to an end! If something is working then why stop it? We need to ask the Councillors why it is being stopped? If things like this do not continue in the future then I cannot see people being involved in the political process. Neighbourhoods will not be 'renewed' they will wither and die!"

Anita Oxenham

I live in the Hartcliffe & Withywood area and wanted to get involved in my neighbourhood, as there are lots of problems in the area. I heard about Voscur and the courses and I went on the visit to the police [What really happens when you ring the police?], Catching Confidence and I shadowed Helen Holland.

I could not believe the hours that Helen Holland puts in! She collected me at 7.30am and dropped me off in the evening and was still on her way to another meeting after working all day!

Voscur has helped me a lot and I'd like it to carry on to help me become more involved, the courses helped my confidence. It helped me to learn about the police and the council. Helen Holland was so nice and she helped me understand about how the Council works. I am attending a Council meeting soon and all this is bringing me out into the community.

Attending the confidence course really helped, as normally at meetings I would just sit there and not say anything. I didn't think it had helped much at first but now I can speak up! My daughter picked me up from attending the course and we went to get fish and chips on the way home. I came in and started chatting to people in the queue and told them I had been on a confidence course that day. My daughter said that it had worked as I was in there chatting to people and normally I would have waited in the car! For me to be up here talking today is... a year ago it never would have happened!"

Alex Milne

"I'm here today from the Barton Hill / Redfield area. I have attended lots of Voscur courses. After taking early retirement I seemed to be left with bags of time and I wanted to give some of this time back to the community I lived in. I am a Representative on the Community at Heart Board that influences how the New Deal money is spent, I am on Programme Committees; I don't watch telly anymore, as every night seems to be taken up with meetings!

I went on the trip to Wales with the NRLP; it was amazing we visited the valleys. I also attended some training facilitated by Vicky Harrison who is a fantastic tutor! She taught us how to use brain maps and how these can create more time in your life! I've also attended better meetings, chairing meetings, which was useful as I am the Chair of the Crime & Drugs Partnership in the area. I have gained lots of skills from the Voscur courses."

4. Questions to the Panel invited:

Wendy Hill – Neighbourhood Watch Administrator, North Bristol

Q. *When is Renewal Funding actually finishing? Do you have any contingency?*

A. NNS asked if Keith Houghton (KH), NR Programme Manager, present at this meeting could answer this question?

KH – The funding will end at the end of March 2008. There is no funding for the Learning Programme (NRLP) as such. Bristol will receive some transition funding from Central Government but as this is a smaller amount than the funding that has previously been received they have had to prioritise where this funding is spent. Any future work will come from resources that already exist.

Scott Jacobs-Lang – Bristol Community Housing

Q. *Is Bristol City Council going to make a commitment to continue this sort of work from its own resources?*

NNS – This is a question that we would have put to Councillor Hammond. Andrew McGrath, Community Engagement Manager, will kindly step in for Councillor Hammond on the Panel and will try to answer which of the things that Bristol City Council see as priorities for the transition funding.

Lin Westmoreland – Bristol City Council Learning Communities.

The Learning Communities Team does work with a lot of neighbourhoods in Bristol, including Neighbourhood Renewal areas. We will continue to try and develop the work that has been done by the Neighbourhood Renewal Learning Plan. There is information about the courses we are developing for the future on the Learning Communities stall [present at the event].

Anna Smith – REGENworks

Q. *I would like to know what courses Edwina attended?*

Edwina – 'How to Have Better Meetings', this course was good as it also created networking opportunities, 'Catching Confidence', 'Who is in our Community and What Do We Know About Them?'. All these courses had a good energy and amazing delivery. 'How to Deal with Difficult People', Community Resolve were very inspiring trainers. I have also done other Voscur courses such as 'Effective Leadership' and 'Effective Publicity'.

Deborah Morgan – Tenant Participation

Q. *Why is the funding being stopped?*

NNS – The particular pot of money from which this is funded has been greatly reduced. Central Government has reduced the number of authorities that receive this kind of Regeneration Funding (now known as Working Neighbourhoods) and Bristol no longer qualifies. The Council has decided that with the limited funding available, there are other projects that they see as a higher priority.

Lisa Blackwood – St Pauls Unlimited

Comment – *Why was there not a contingency fund to keep things going? Or a plan to keep things going?*

NNS asked the Panel if they had any final comments:

Edwina Molloy – If the money is suddenly axed, everything that has been strived for to get to this point will just slide backwards.

Rae Gingell – Day to day at the community level, people need to challenge the Council to get these things going. People do not feel as though they have a vested interest in their Neighbourhood so it is important to keep things going. If we don't spread the word, my fear is that we will slide backwards.

Alex Milne – Voscur hold assemblies and meetings and this is an important forum for getting voices heard. It is important that we use these opportunities to change things and to pressure for funding.

5. Anna Smith (AS) – REGENworks Evaluation of the NRLP

Give some brief findings from the evaluation:

In the evaluator's experience there aren't many projects like this in the country. It has been very successful.

This programme has been able to support residents to learn and gain skills to better enable them to use skills in the community. Trips and Shadowing have been really useful and innovative as well as learning about other communities. There was a very wide range of opportunities, which meant people could access the learning at different levels. Attendance to programme has increased over time as people have heard of it.

We've had lots of quotes from people; one person who attended a trip to Wales said "a real eye opener, if you think we've got it bad here, you should see it there!"

It has been a great starting point for people seeing and learning from other areas. Networks have been created across Bristol "the networking was almost as important as the training for residents".

Transport, childcare and other access costs were covered making it very accessible, which meant there was little bureaucracy around the programme. Voscur ran the programme very well.

The quality of training has been of a high standard; the programme has done what it set out to do. It has been really innovative and has broken down barriers to capacity building.

Questions from the floor:

Julie Perkins – NR Facilitator Easton

Q. *You have highlighted the value of the courses, where should we now lobby for the continuation of funding for this?*

AS – Use the report to lobby Bristol Partnership, BCC, Learning Communities.

Debby Morgan – Tenants Committee

Q. *We are a small organisation and we would like to see this work carried on, is there a list of names that we should be pestering?*

AS – In the report's recommendations there is a list of organisations people who we could be lobbying. The report will be finished by 10th March and will be available on the Voscur website or we can send it to you if you are interested.

Denise Britt – Resident (Knowle West)

Q. *I've been involved for years and it always comes down to the same thing – funding. Residents put a lot of time and effort in and when they get up and running we lose funding, residents lose confidence, how can we combat this? You do lose really good people.*

Keith Houghton (NR Programme Manager) – You're right, it can be very disheartening, but hopefully the NRLP has been about retaining some of those skills and confidence so that residents don't just lose out.

Mark Williams – Disability Equality Forum

Q. *I think the problem in general is that funding is often one year funding, by the time things get started you have to start thinking about getting funding again. How do you think we could change that?*

Nigel Newton-Sawyer (NNS) – This has been an issue for the VCSE for a long time, Voscur does try to work with BCC on this, but we do all need to try and pressure them to do this.

Scott Jacobs-Lange – Bristol Community Housing Association

Q. *There is always an emphasis on communities to change, but there has to be some responsibility on the public sector, what has been done by BCC to challenge this short term funding culture?*

This is a question for Peter Hammond really.

Rae Gingell – Volunteer (Easton) – There are ways to influence. 10 days before a council meeting you can submit a statement and you can go and watch a meeting in person or on the internet. At a local level with local Councillors is where we need to hold people to account.

Mathew Symonds (Voscur) – There is a section in the Voscur Newsletter in your event packs about decision-making.

6. **Andrew McGrath (AM) filling in for Councillor Peter Hammond - How people can continue to influence and what support will be available for this?**

There are lots of opportunities for people to influence / lobby and make comments:
Fair Comment structure

Citizens Panel
E democracy www
E forums
Neighbourhood Partnerships (NPs)

Neighbourhood Partnerships (NPs) – These are trying to enhance what is already out there, bringing all systems together to influence.

The NP structure – enhancing the ability of the local community to influence – setting up across the city, grouping 2/3 wards together. There will be 14 NPs across the city. There are currently 8 but the target is 10 by the end of the year.

The idea is that they will be a continuation of NR in some ways. It's about building relationships between local residents, Councillors and communities. The ambition is for them to not be too bureaucratic and as interactive as possible. We will be holding meetings and walkabouts in all of the areas. There will be an NP website. We want to devise as many opportunities for local people to be involved as possible. Councillors are central to the success of this structure.

Denise Britt – Resident (Knowle West)

Q. Local residents are involved, therefore with Councillors involved who is going to have the final say about decisions?

AM – This is an attempt to reintroduce some of the powers that Councillors have lost over the past few years. They would work with Cllrs to work out what the priorities should be, and these have mostly been reiterated and agreed with residents.

Lisa Blackwood – Resident (St Pauls), representative for St Pauls Unlimited.

Q. What about this transition from NR to NPs, what about partnerships that are there already?

AM – Where there are action plans in place they are not looking to change anything in areas where things are already set up.

Scott Jacobs-Lange – Bristol Community Housing Association

Q. Areas that don't have Neighbourhood Management structures in place but have lots of activities – what will NPs do when they come into those areas?

AM – NP is enhancement, being as careful as we can to go into an area and not translate, instead we want to work with groups, but if there are any problems please let me know.

Mathew Symonds – Voscur are trying to support the involvement of voluntary groups and partnerships and the role of residents in the NP. Voscur has been supporting a residents forum and we are still negotiating with BCC how this can carry on. If anyone has any thoughts on what should be fed into this, do contact Voscur.

AM – We are developing partnership working as much as we can, in particular we have been working with the police who really want to work with NPs. Meetings with NPs working closely with Senior Managers of departments ensuring culture change that needs to happen takes place. A culture change is necessary and will take time but it will happen.

The biggest challenges are:

Ensuring that the NPs are genuinely open to influence

How to engage with young people

High degree of cynicism – people have seen it all before, difference is that NPs will be here forever and we need to take the time to ensure that people lose cynicism and get involved.

Anita Pearce – Knowle West NR facilitator

Q. How does it all marry up?

AM – Got to make sure that NPs don't hinder any other work in an area and we are taking up the challenge.

Questions to Peter Hammond

- What is going to be NPs first link to young people, what is BCC doing about this?
- Will there be a pot of money for training put aside to skill and enable residents to Make and understand the decisions they are being asked to make?
- What learning are you doing around the success and failures of NR/NM?
- What plans and resources are there to engage residents e.g. Community workers/Neighbourhood facilitators?
- Who is going to walk about and engage residents who don't do meetings?
- What funding resources are you putting into continue residents' involvement through informal learning?
- There are lots of opportunities for engagement/influence but where will the facilitation capacity building be done and the "Marketing"?
- If Councillors are so crucial to making NP's work, what changes are being made to their commitments, time and job roles?
- How many residents are needed to set priorities? At a recent PACT meeting in an area with 600 houses 10 people attended – how is that representative of the community?
- How is BCC going to continue the successful work that the NRLP has accomplished?

Additional Questions

- How are Neighbourhood Partnerships going to be communicated? Very confusing for residents new to the process (Neighbourhood Partnerships, Neighbourhood Management, Neighbourhood Renewal, etc.) How will it be rolled out so that it's not just the same residents who are involved, but new people too?
- (NRLP Evaluation) What was the most successful means of communicating / advertising plan to residents? Did you find it was always the same people attending? How did you reach new residents?
- Is there a complete list of all groups out there?
- Do the Learning Communities Team give funds to the Tenant Participation Unit / Resource Centre for training courses? Will they continue to do so? Does this cover all tenants, not just council tenants?

7. Workshops

Workshop 1: Regenworks – what has been good about the NRLP and how can we continue this work.

Workshop 2: Examples of best practice:

Mathew Hewitt: Trinity Arts

Scott Jacobs Lange: Bristol Community housing Association

Sue Webber: Planning Aid

Cathy Jacobs: Knowle safe

8. **Workshop Feedback:**

Workshop 1:

- Need to get Council on Board – work on what they can do rather than what they can't.
- Need to take ownership ourselves 'What can **we** do?'
- Need to sell what we've got – its good!
- Suggest we set up an Action Planning Group to take this all forward

Other ideas

- Got to be creative – use what we've got
- Look at accreditation to link into colleges
- Look at commercial possibilities – what might people pay for?
- Use community regeneration officers to promote programme (get them out of their offices)
- Use some of the NR £5000 per area pot to run this

Other things

- Still need to address young people issues – how do we teach active citizenship skills better?
- Having a structure on the ground to deliver this stuff is really important – otherwise it just won't happen
- Gaining knowledge of how public sector services work is really important – knowing whose door to knock on

Workshop 2: We need capacity building and recourses to carry on community engagement, there needs to be opportunities to network and share ideas. NRLP – tours have been great, delivered what residents wanted and needed. Easy to access. Good training, admin, publicity. Repeat courses encouraged people through word of mouth. Good to hear the stories from the learners.

9. **Panel: Is local involvement in decision-making still important and possible with the end of Neighbourhood Renewal funding approaching?**

John Skrine (JS) - Creating Excellence, Halina Pasiecznic (HP) - Vivid Regeneration, Andrew McGrath (AM)- Bristol City Council, Community Engagement Manager, Tan Moore (TM)- Barton Hill Settlement

Deborah Morgan – Tenant Participation

Q. I worry about the public money that goes into projects that a lot of it is used up by Committees who discuss the projects?

HP – I am sympathetic about your worries, as everyone asks where does the money go? Any project-based work is good value for money as it is important to look hard at where the money goes.

Subitha Baghirathan – Voscur

Q. Halina, as an activist, what supports you the most and what makes it harder?

HP – There are good days and bad days! I'm very passionate about being an activist as sometimes we do make breakthroughs and do change hearts and minds. The difficulties I think are the time and capacity I have to be able to do this effectively. Bristol is still very much in the dark over Neighbourhood Renewal.

Matthew Symonds – Voscur

Q. *What have you learnt about the introduction of Neighbourhood Partnerships, from areas that already have them such as Birmingham and Nottingham?*

AM – There have been a lot of shadowing in good practice areas and networks existed which have now stopped meeting, but hope to develop into a web-based networks. Bristol City Council has team away days to meet colleagues in other areas.

JS – Plymouth is regarded nationally as leaders in this type of work. Planning is not an area of work that Councils usually manage to engage people over, but in Plymouth has engaged people! The whole culture of Plymouth is changing and the Council has to be responsive to what the people want.

MS asked if Tan Moore would like to add anything to the question about money being spent asked to Halina by Deborah Morgan at the beginning of the session.

TM – Management of that sort of money is very difficult and very complicated and I speak from my experiences in the Community at Heart area.

JS – There is an image of committees out there spending money, it is also about getting it to those communities and telling them what you want the money spent on. Some voluntary ideas lead to successful commercial enterprises.

Marion Cooper – REGENworks

Q. *I would like to pick up on the stuff about the value of learning; one thing that has been apparent in the evaluation of the NRLP is the value of going to other areas. Wouldn't it be great if every time a councillor went somewhere they could take a resident with them?*

TM – In the Workshop at the Settlement we have always tried to deliver the kind of training reflected in the NRLP. We will respond to the needs of the community. We do work in Partnership with other agencies and we are working with the Beacon Centre and with the LSC (Learning Skills Council) to see if there is a way of merging both staff teams to minimise staff costs but to still be able to deliver the training programme.

Nigel Newton-Sawyerr – Voscur

Q. *Can lots of different neighbourhoods come together in some way to pool their resources and carry on a programme like this or some sort of support and capacity building?*

JS – An evaluation is being carried out and this is a very important step. From this evaluation will come an action plan which will enable us to plan a way forward to make sure people are able to engage.

AM – Pooling resources with other neighbourhoods is possible. The idea of Neighbourhood Partnerships is to empower the Neighbourhood so they make decisions on how and what money is spent. So if they decide to pool resources then of course this is OK!

10. Celebration of NRLP

11. Thanks and Close