

Newcastle Citizens Assembly Evaluation

Evaluation Report

April 2010

Acknowledgments

Thank you very much to everyone who took part in the Newcastle Citizens Assembly evaluation process. Your time and effort is much appreciated.

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Citizens Assembly in Newcastle Upon Tyne is a new process to engage communities in the work of the Newcastle Partnership, the Local Strategic Partnership for the City.
- 1.2 The Citizens Assembly is hosted by Newcastle Healthy City and was established in 2009 along with a Task Group. It employs 2 members of staff; a Community Engagement Manager and a Community Networker, and has funding from Newcastle Partnership until 31st March 2011.
- 1.3 Northumbria University were commissioned in November 2009 to carry out an Evaluation of the Citizens Assembly. Our methodological approach is based on attending 2 Citizens Assembly Events in November 2009 and March 2010, as well as interviews with Citizens Assembly staff, and stakeholders. We also carried out discussions with community groups involved in the Citizens Assembly and an online survey and documentary analysis. The results of our research form the basis of this Evaluation report.
- 1.4 A Literature review of Citizens Assemblies revealed only one other example, used in British Columbia, Canada between 2003 - 4 to look at electoral system reform. The Citizens Assembly was disbanded once it had submitted its final report to the people of British Columbia and the Government. The recommendations of the Citizens Assembly were put forward in a referendum in 2005 but were defeated. Despite this, Smith (2005), as part of the Power Inquiry, set up in 2004 to examine disengagement in democratic politics in Britain, recognised Citizens Assemblies are one of three 'exceptional innovations' identified to 'strengthen and deepen participation'.
- 1.5 Following the appointment of a Community Networker in June 2009, the Citizens Assembly worked with 14 community groups in the West End of Newcastle to explore a range of issues under the six themes of the Newcastle Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement 2008-11, before agreeing on one city wide improvement. Groups were encouraged to present their improvement at the first Citizens Assembly Event in November 2009 in Newcastle Upon Tyne.
- 1.6 The aim of the Citizens Assembly event was to give each group a platform to share their ideas for their improvements with the wider community. In total, 160 people attended the first event, and each of the 14 groups presented their improvement.

- 1.7 Following the first event, each group was provided with 'support forms' which were distributed amongst neighbours, family and friends so that they could show their support for the improvement they liked the most. To date, 570 support forms have been received by the Citizens Assembly.
- 1.8 The feedback event in March 2010 was an opportunity for the community groups to meet with service providers/ decision makers and discuss their improvements through round table discussions. 140 people attended the feedback event. As part of the Evaluation process a series of questions were asked about both the Citizens Assembly process and the feedback event itself, using 'electronic' voting. In response to each question, over 75% of respondents voted positively about their experience of being involved in the Citizens Assembly.
- 1.9 The Evaluation team spoke to 7 community groups who had participated in the first Citizens Assembly Event to establish case studies. The groups were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of the process and involvement in the Citizens Assembly.
- 1.10 Amongst stakeholders there were mixed views about the Citizens Assembly. Newcastle Healthy City were recognised as a good choice for hosting the Citizens Assembly. Newcastle Partnership were recognised as being both 'actively supportive', but also fairly 'detached' and 'hands off'. Whilst there was broad support from Newcastle City Council for the Citizens Assembly, there was also some surprise at the model and a feeling that many senior officers within the Council were not aware of the Citizens Assembly.
- 1.11 However, there was also some resistance to the Citizens Assembly. A small number of organisations were critical of both the idea and the approach Newcastle Healthy City were using to develop the Citizens Assembly.
- 1.12 There was also some concern amongst Voluntary and Community Sector stakeholders about 'relationships' between organisations and the lack of corporate and collaborative partnerships or agreements to work together in Newcastle Upon Tyne.
- 1.13 A number of issues and risks were identified through the evaluation mainly around the lack of statutory obligation for service providers and decision makers to respond to the Citizens Assembly improvements, the lack of information or awareness about corporate planning and budgeting processes, and dealing with 'unsound' or 'unreasonable' improvements.

- 1.14 Staffing and capacity issues were further identified as potential risk issues. It was recognised that the Citizens Assembly has limited capacity with only 2 staff, which could impact on their ability to follow up improvements, alongside extending the work of the Assembly to other parts of the City and working with new groups in the future.
- 1.15 Funding and sustainability issues were also identified as risks, but equally, the current economic climate, future cuts in public service budgets, and the need to demonstrate good 'value for money' were also cited as critical factors.
- 1.16 The issue of audience and inclusiveness was commented on by a number of stakeholders. It was felt that the Citizens Assembly should be working with those currently not 'engaged', and that the majority of groups who participated in the first Citizens Assembly event were well established groups who were well known to agencies and stakeholders in the area. However, our research found this to be much more of a complex issue which requires discussion and clarification between partners.
- 1.17 A review meeting was held with Citizens Assembly staff and key stakeholders in March 2010. At this meeting the evaluation findings were presented, reviewed and discussed, and a number of recommendations were developed. These included both specific issues for the Citizens Assembly itself to act upon, and wider recommendations relating to organisations that carry out Community Engagement work in Newcastle.
- 1.18 The next section of this report provides details about each recommendation. In some cases, recommendations have already been identified by the project, and are currently being acted upon, as indicated in italics.

2. Recommendations

Citizens Assembly Project Recommendations

- 2.1 **Work with more people** We recommend that the work of the Citizens Assembly is continued and extended so that more citizens can take part, especially from those communities and geographical areas that have not yet been involved in the process.
The Citizens Assembly is developing a new round of improvements with groups from the East End of Newcastle.
- 2.2 **Develop and manage relationships with other organisations** Citizens Assembly staff should continue with their efforts to forge working links with other organisations with an interest in engaging with citizens and the community sector in Newcastle. In doing this, it should be stressed that the Citizens Assembly is not a threat to these organisations and may be able to help them become more accountable to the communities they serve, alongside providing a structure and mechanism for feedback. This could also help the project to tap into existing community networks via the contact lists of other organisations. We suggest the development of Memorandum of Understanding to assist with this process.
Relationship building is an ongoing activity and goal for the Citizens Assembly project.
- 2.3 **Actively promote the Citizens Assembly** Effectively communicating the role, aims and activities of the Citizens Assembly, and where it fits into the range of community engagement structures in Newcastle, will help to raise the profile of the project, while reducing any confusion about its identity and what it actually does. Part of the project's strength is its independence from other bodies, such as the Council, and this should be communicated. The previous strategy of employing a temporary marketing consultant was successful and should be repeated. We suggest investment into branding and identity activity, along with keeping the project website up to date and exploring other networking tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and a blog to keep citizens engaged and informed. Our interviews with Newcastle City Council indicate that not all senior officers are aware of the Citizens Assembly. We suggest Newcastle Healthy City arrange officer briefing sessions to bring staff at the Council up to date with the Citizens Assembly.
- 2.4 **Sustainability and Success** The Citizens Assembly needs to develop and adapt over time so that it remains relevant and effective, or to fulfil the

requirements of funders. It may be possible to develop theme-based strands of work that can be funded by the appropriate service providers, who may welcome this as a way to improve their accountability and fulfil community engagement requirements. We suggest Newcastle Healthy City and Newcastle Partnership explore what success would look like, and how it may be measured and monitored. This information will be vital for sustaining the involvement of both community groups and services providers, as well as engaging any potential funder.

- 2.5 **Capacity issues** will need to be addressed if the Assembly is to continue to support both existing groups and their improvements, and develop improvements with new groups. One option will be to employ more staff, which would of course have implications for project funding, or, Newcastle Healthy City and partners could explore other mechanisms, as discussed under the *'issues and risks'* section of this report. Whatever approach is taken, we encourage Newcastle Healthy City to focus on 'lean' staffing structures that balance management, delivery and administration.
- 2.6 **Funding** With current project funding due to end in March 2011, the project needs to review its options for future funding and consider alternative approaches. In the event that Newcastle Partnership does not provide funding beyond March 2011, the project may have to consider applying to other organisations or funding streams. The idea of asking service providers to fund theme-based work by the project is discussed in the recommendations section of this report. We suggest Newcastle Healthy City and partners engage in early discussions to start exploring a potential funding model and succession strategy. One that builds on what has already been achieved, allows for sustainable growth, demonstrates good value for money, is lean and efficient, and clearly shows strategic fit with other engagement opportunities in the City.
- 2.7 **Value for Money** We suggest that any new funding model is based on offering good 'value for money'. We understand that in the context of community development work this concept is difficult to measure, monitor and demonstrate, but we think it is worth investing time to explore this concept as it will inevitably be at the fore of any potential funder.
- 2.8 **Governance structure** The governance structure of the Citizens Assembly has recently been changed. It now reports to Newcastle Partnership's ICEE (Inclusion, Cohesion, Equalities and Empowerment) Group, as well as reporting to the LSP Strategic and Delivery Boards, the Healthy City Board and its own Task Group. This arrangement is complicated and reporting is likely to take up a lot of staff time. We suggest the reporting process is revisited and streamlined,

so that only one report is made to Newcastle Partnership, and then distributed through the Partnership's networks.

- 2.9 **Enhance impact on service providers.** A potential weakness of the Citizens Assembly model is the inability to provide any guarantees that service providers will listen to, engage with, or act upon the improvements raised through the project. This is something that the project has already tried to address by approaching service providers with the aim of forging partnership agreements. This was not successful in the early days of the project, but service providers may become more receptive to the idea as the project continues and develops a track record. We suggest Newcastle Healthy City and Newcastle Partnership engage in discussions with services providers to explore options that are workable and manageable, so that there are clear and transparent mechanisms in place to influence decision makers. One option maybe to develop a 'contract' between Newcastle Partnership and Service Providers setting out responsibilities to explore implementation of an improvement within a particular timescale.
- 2.10 **Strategic Alignment** Due to time and capacity issues the strategic fit between the Citizens Assembly, and other City Council engagement and involvement opportunities have not been as robust as might be expected. Following the Council review of Community Services, a new post, Head of Community Engagement and Empowerment was created and recruited to in December 2009. This new post brings together responsibility for ward co-ordinators, community development and community facilities into one service. We believe this new appointment provides a good opportunity to explore joint working arrangements. We suggest Newcastle Healthy City and partners clarify the strategic position and fit of the Citizens Assembly with other engagement opportunities such as Ward Committees, Neighbourhood Charters and Participatory Budgeting so that the citizens of Newcastle can be presented with a clear structure of involvement and engagement.
- 2.11 **Dealing with Difficult Improvements** To date, the groups have come up with a set of reasonable, practical, and fairly simple improvements which haven't been contentious or sensitive. As a matter of good practice, we suggest that the Citizens Assembly staff and partners develop internal processes for dealing with improvements, should they occur, that are 'unreasonable' or 'unsound', or seek to exclude one group or another from service delivery. Whilst such processes haven't been needed, we think it is important to communicate to both groups and services providers how the Citizens Assembly would deal with such a situation should it arise. We recommend that the Community Empowerment Framework officers group champion this issue and identify a way forward.

Wider Recommendations

- 2.12 More effective leadership from Newcastle Partnership.** The Citizens Assembly was commissioned by the Newcastle Partnership as a mechanism for empowering the local community. However, the Newcastle Partnership has not so far taken an active leadership role with regard to the project. It is suggested that stronger leadership from Newcastle Partnership could help to fulfil several objectives: it could promote the project and its activities among local organisations; it could strengthen the project's position with regard to other organisations, such as the Council; it could champion the Citizens Assembly model as good practice among its networks; and it could facilitate better partnership working with other organisations. Furthermore, the Newcastle Partnership could be in a position to encourage its service provider partners to commit to acting on improvements raised through the Citizens Assembly process. We recommend a dialogue between Newcastle Healthy City and Newcastle Partnership is established to discuss leadership roles and responsibilities.
- 2.13 Mapping Exercise** In order to ensure that the Citizens Assembly is working with a wide range of community groups we suggest that Newcastle Partnership lead a mapping exercise to identify both current engagement work in Newcastle and the range, profile, and location of community groups. This information should be developed into a 'live' database which organisations can add to as they come across new community groups. This information should be used to alert community groups in Newcastle to the range of engagement opportunities that are available to them, and used by the Citizens Assembly to target community groups.
- 2.14 More collaborative working in the Voluntary and Community Sector.** A number of evaluation respondents commented that organisations in the Voluntary and Community Sectors in Newcastle tend to be unwilling to work in partnership. We believe that greater commitment to joint working with more collaboration, better co-ordination of community engagement and participation activities, less working in 'silos' and less duplication of effort could be highly beneficial to the Sector as a whole. This is particularly important at the moment when the sector is facing large funding cuts. We suggest exploring Memorandum of Understandings between key organisations as a way of not only developing more collaborative working arrangements, but to also clarify areas of work and roles and responsibilities in order to avoid confusion and duplication of effort.

An Away Day is planned for the Newcastle Citizens Assembly Task Group members and other stakeholders in May 2010 to discuss the findings of this Evaluation.

2.15 Definitions of community engagement. There is a need for greater clarity and shared understanding of what is meant by the term '*community engagement*'. Issues such as representativeness, tokenism and the problem of '*the usual suspects*' continue to be argued but with no real conclusions. Linked to this is the question of whether there is a genuine commitment from local authorities and government '*to pass power into the hands of local communities so as to generate vibrant local democracy in every part of the country and give real control over local decisions and services to a wider pool of active citizens*' (CLG, 2008: 12). We suggest Newcastle Healthy City and Newcastle Partnership reach a common understanding as to who the key audience for the Citizens Assembly is, and that this is communicated to all stakeholders.

2.16 Engagement with Elected Members. We recommend Newcastle Healthy City and Newcastle Partnership engage with Elected Members in Newcastle City Council to identify a process for improvements suggested by community groups to find their way into the Political System. Such a process will also help with recommendation 2.9, enhancing the impact of the Citizens Assembly on Service Providers.

3. Introduction

- 3.1 Newcastle Citizens Assembly is a new process to engage communities in the work of the Newcastle Partnership, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for the City of Newcastle upon Tyne. The Citizens Assembly acts as a platform for discussion between the citizens of Newcastle and the Newcastle Partnership on city-wide issues. It aims to influence decision makers and bring about positive change by encouraging people to become 'active' citizens, and championing the issues they raise.
- 3.2 Newcastle Healthy City (NHC), which hosts the Citizens Assembly, commissioned this independent evaluation, which was funded by Newcastle Partnership. The evaluation was carried out between November 2009 and April 2010 by Northumbria University.

4. Evaluation Aims

Newcastle Citizens Assembly outlined the following aims for the evaluation process:

- 4.1 To clarify that the Citizens Assembly's original aims and objectives have been met;
- 4.2 To capture the process of setting up a Citizens Assembly in Newcastle;
- 4.3 To identify good and best practice both through this process and elsewhere;
- 4.4 To document the opinions of the groups and individuals the Citizens Assembly has worked with;
- 4.5 To explore the responses and views of the agencies that have been asked to implement the improvements put forward by the groups;
- 4.6 To identify what could have been done differently, how and why;
- 4.7 To monitor impacts in terms of community engagement and empowerment;
- 4.8 To use lessons learned to influence community engagement and empowerment in future community development work.

5. Evaluation Methods

5.1 The evaluation team's approach involved using a variety of different research methods and tools to maximise involvement and participation, whilst being respectful, ethical, accessible and inclusive to the groups and individuals we worked with.

The evaluation involved four main strands of work:

5.2 **Strand 1** documented the process of setting up the Citizen Assembly and captured the lessons learned from the process. In doing this, four interviews took place with Citizens Assembly staff and other key personnel, and documentary analysis was carried out to provide information on the background, context and motivation to develop a Citizen Assembly. A literature review was conducted on Citizens Assemblies worldwide, to identify good practice and provide comparative data. The evaluators also attended the first Citizens Assembly event on 12th November 2009 to observe proceedings.

5.3 **Strand 2** involved engaging with partner agencies, groups, and individuals involved in the Citizens Assembly to explore their experiences, perceptions and opinions. Evaluation team members attended a meeting of the Citizens Assembly Task Group in December 2009. Interviews were carried out with eleven partner agency representatives, and discussion groups were held involving members of seven groups that had taken part in the Citizens Assembly; seven case studies were assembled to document the process. An online questionnaire survey was developed and sent out by email to the remaining seven groups that participated in the November Citizens Assembly event.

5.4 **Strand 3** involved attending the second Citizens Assembly event on 22nd March 2010, to observe proceedings, present brief details of the evaluation process and findings, and to obtain feedback on the event and the Citizens Assembly. Participants used electronic voting to give their views anonymously, and were given the opportunity to speak to a researcher if they wanted to discuss any issues in greater depth.

5.5 **Strand 4** involved collating and analysing the evaluation findings, presenting them at a review meeting on 31st March 2010 for key staff and stakeholders, and facilitating the process of developing recommendations for the future. This evaluation report was also produced, documenting the evaluation findings and recommendations.

5.6 Interview guides used in interviews with staff and stakeholders, and with groups for the case studies are available in the appendix.

6. Citizens Assembly Literature Review

- 6.1 As part of our remit to look at good and best practice, we undertook a literature review to identify whether Citizens Assemblies (CA), as a model of community engagement, was being used elsewhere, and if so, what could be learnt. What we found however, was only one example of a Citizens Assembly, which was used in British Columbia, Canada in 2003 – 4. Therefore the literature review focuses on this particular example, as no other model of Citizens Assembly currently exists, except now in Newcastle Upon Tyne.
- 6.2 In Britain, as in other Western democracies, citizens have become disengaged with formal democratic processes and politicians have increasingly looked for new initiatives to encourage the “ordinary citizen” to participate in the decision making processes. The Citizens’ Assembly has emerged as a unique innovation to improve citizen participation beyond formal electoral mechanisms. In particular, attention has been drawn to the British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly established in 2003-4 and reviews of this model help provide some understanding of the processes involved. However, the British Columbia Citizens Assembly was established to consider a specific issue, namely the changes to the province’s electoral system. In contrast, the Newcastle Citizens’ Assembly is seeking to establish a deliberative tool which will contribute to city-wide improvements over the longer term. So whilst lessons can be learnt from the British Columbia example, it is important to highlight the common themes across this area of debate to provide the context for the Newcastle Citizens’ Assembly.
- 6.3 Improving participation, engagement and ultimately empowering citizens has been an ongoing theme of New Labour in its attempts to modernize local government since 1997. These objectives can be seen in the 2006 White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities* and even more so in the recent 2008 *Communities in Control: real people, real power* which made clear its “simple aim”: to pass power into the hands of local communities so as to generate vibrant local democracy in every part of the country and give real control over local decisions and services to a wider pool of active citizens (CLG, 2008:12)
- 6.4 *Communities in Control* discusses strategies for local empowerment and the methods local authorities might draw on to improve participation at the local level. The Ministry of Justice’s National Framework for Greater Citizen Engagement (2008) continued the discussion at the national level. Both

followed a dialogue initiated by the Power Inquiry which was established in 2004 to examine the disengagement in democratic politics and make recommendations to reverse this trend. This culminated in the 2006 report, *Power to the People*, which has become a reference point for those looking for steps to improve participation and move towards empowerment of citizens.

- 6.5 As part of the Power Inquiry, Graeme Smith (2005) examined a number of democratic innovations from around the world to assess how well they increased and deepened citizen participation. Smith investigated a whole range of initiatives from electoral reforms to consultation and deliberative innovations seeking to learn lessons and draw recommendations to apply these innovations more widely. In his conclusion, he recognized Citizens' Assemblies as one of three "exceptional innovations" identified to "strengthen and deepen participation" (Smith, 2005). This conclusion was based on the example of the British Columbia Citizens Assembly (CA), a model which has been praised for its unique approach to citizen participation.
- 6.6 The British Columbia CA on Electoral Reform was an independent, non-partisan assembly of citizens. The 160 members were randomly selected, representative of age and gender, from all of the province's 79 electoral districts. The members spent several months learning about electoral systems in use around the world from a committee of experts. They then consulted with the public via public hearings, website and written comments, before coming back to deliberate the evidence and vote to reach a final consensus decision to replace the province's existing First Past the Post (FPTP) system with a Single Transferable Vote (STV) system. The final report was submitted to the people of British Columbia and the government on 10 December 2004, and the CA and its staff were disbanded. The recommendation of the assembly were put forward at a referendum held concurrently with the 2005 provincial election (Lang, 2007; Smith, 2005). Although the recommendation was ultimately defeated in the referendum that followed (May 2005) this unique approach to participation has largely been seen as a successful innovation and one others' have sought to replicate eg the Government of Ontario, Canada and the Netherlands developed a Citizens' Assembly in 2006 to evaluate their own electoral systems.
- 6.7 The British Columbia CA appears to be an innovation not only to consult with its citizens, but also an attempt to move towards a genuine sharing of decision making powers. It sought representation for all of its electorate through random selection and ensured that there was a clear mechanism for the recommendations to feedback into the decision making process. This devolvement of decision making power was strengthened by the use of a

referendum. Some remain cynical about how successful the exercise was and clearly some issues remain unresolved. Whilst attempts were made to have a representative sample, the final commitment to the British Columbia Citizens Assembly was self-selection. Therefore it is likely to have comprised citizens more inclined to participate and debate such matters (Baum, 2007). Indeed they may have a predisposition for electoral reform (Motsi, 2009). Lang (2007) divides these concerns into questions about the independence of such exercises and whether they offer *real* improvement. Often the agenda for such forums is pre-set by the decision-makers and therefore problems and/or solutions to some extent are already defined. The institutional structures must allow the time and offer the support to enable the members of the Citizens Assembly to learn and deliberate with effect. However, Lang (2007) remains positive about the overall benefits of the British Columbia model as a “substantial improvement over consultation processes”. Baum concurs that “the Citizen’s Assembly suggests that meaningful participation in politics is itself a significant and educative spur to further political engagement.” Motsi (2009) believes that although not a success in terms of outcome, the Ontario Citizens’ Assembly was a success in terms of the purpose that was defined for it and the process it followed.

- 6.8 Practical considerations remain and it is clear that the Citizens’ Assembly needs to have the support of local government to have any chance at success. However, as Smith (2005) recognized the unique element of the British Ontario CA was not only to encourage wider participation, but also to have a direct influence on the decision making process itself. The Newcastle Citizens Assembly is not a single issue model and the approach to selection is different to that of British Colombia, however, its aims are similar; to encourage wider participation and active citizens. The Citizens Assembly is therefore part of a wider agenda to transfer decision-making powers and responsibilities away from the centre to the citizens (Hay et al, 2008). To fulfil the potential of the Citizens Assembly it is the latter element which is key, to have clear and transparent mechanisms to influence the decision making process itself. It is this that the Newcastle Citizens Assembly must endeavour to develop if it is to ensure long term success.

7. Setting up the Newcastle Citizens Assembly

In this next section we provide a timeline documenting the events and developments that have led to the establishment of a Citizens Assembly in Newcastle.

- September 2007 A Working Group led by Bob Langley, supported by an Independent Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor, Marilyn Taylor, was set up to review Voluntary and Community Sector engagement across the Newcastle Partnership
- March 2008 Newcastle Partnership Strategic Board agreed to the 12 recommendations made by the working group which included;
- The Community Empowerment Network (CEN) should be the body 'convening' for the Community Sector, relating closely to the local/area based initiatives.
- The Community Empowerment Network and its partners should hold a standing assembly perhaps twice a year, with the various groups in the Network setting the agenda. The Assembly would provide its own report back to the Newcastle Partnership Strategic Board.
- August 2008 A report to the Newcastle Partnership Strategic Board revisited the 12 recommendations made by the Working Group and provided a progress update and explored the next steps in the process. The report made the following statements:
- Newcastle Healthy City, historically the host organisation for the Community Empowerment Network, will be resourced through Area Based Grant to play a 'convening' role within the Community Sector;
- The creation and development of a Standing Assembly will be a key component of the new participation and involvement framework for the Newcastle Partnership. CEN and its partners will play a key role in the creation and development of a Standing Assembly ensuring wide ranging involvement and participation;

Resources will be drawn from the Community Development Unit (of the Local Authority) to host and service the Standing Assembly. The Assembly will report back directly to Strategic Board at least twice each year

October 2008

Newcastle Healthy City wrote a paper outlining how it intended to create and develop a Standing Assembly in Newcastle. Whilst acknowledging its position and track record to take on this role, the Paper also made the case for employing 2 additional workers; a Community Engagement Manager, and a Network Co-ordinator. The Paper also began outlining what a Standing Assembly could be, this included;

- a) A City Wide Event open to anyone who lives or works in Newcastle. A minimum of three city wide events per year
- b) Issue led agenda and incorporate the views, issues and concerns of local communities, especially groups of special interest
- c) Inclusive body that incorporates a wide range of views and perspectives
- d) Ensure that it is able to put forward views that are based upon a consensus of views, rather than representing only the views of a small minority

The paper advocated taking an inclusive approach, using the INFRANET project as a basis to build on and work with other partners. Partners had indicated that they would require financial resources to ensure that they could contribute to the development of the Standing Assembly and this was reflected in the request for resources

The Community Empowerment Network and Community Voices agreed to present a further paper on the proposed principles and functions of a Standing Assembly at the December Strategic Board

Nov 2008

Newcastle Partnership Strategic Board allocated £125k from Area Based Grants to enable Newcastle Healthy City to establish and support a Citizens Assembly, including funding for 2 posts. Newcastle Council for Voluntary Services were allocated £100k to resource and support the work of Regen

Forum, and £50k to support area consortia/fora/alliances was still unallocated

Feb 2009

Suggestion that the name 'Standing Assembly' was not acceptable, some people now referring to the Assembly as the 'Citizens Assembly' but this had not been formally adopted

Recruitment underway for 2 new posts for the Assembly

Agreement to progress the unallocated £50k at the 17th March 2009 Newcastle Partnership Strategic Board Meeting

Acknowledgment of a Review within Newcastle City Council on Neighbourhood/ Community Based Services and that this might have implications on where the management and budget responsibilities would lie in the future

Consultant employed by NHC to work with CEN to conduct a mapping/view gathering exercise with community groups, individuals and the voluntary sector about the Assembly

First meeting of the Standing Assembly Steering Group, which later became known as the Citizens Assembly Task Group

March 2009

Developing a Standing Assembly for Newcastle upon Tyne report published from an independent consultant based on a consultation exercise to explore the issues and potential structure of a Standing Assembly in Newcastle. Key issues arising from this exercise included;

- a) Grassroots Community Development work was identified as a critical component underpinning the Standing Assembly meetings.
- b) The Standing Assembly will be one element of a partnership where liaison and information sharing between ward committees, Regen Forum, and the Standing Assembly is key.
- c) A new name should be created for the Standing Assembly to reflect the voice and views that residents would have through the Assembly.

Second Standing Assembly Steering Group Meeting started discussions on structure, role and delivery

April 2009	Appointment of Community Engagement Manager
May 2009	<p>Community Engagement Managers attends Citizens Assembly Task Group Meeting, and presents an engagement model clarifying involvement in the Citizens Assembly and processes for achieving this</p> <p>Confirmation that no decision has been reached regarding the allocation of the £50k area based grant to area consortia</p>
June 2009	<p>Appointment of Community Networker</p> <p>Community Engagement Manager produces a report on the Citizens Assembly for the Newcastle Partnership Strategic Board. Strategic Board request an update report on the Citizens Assembly to be sent to the Newcastle Partnership Innovation Group over the summer</p>
July 2009	<p>Community Engagement Manager presents a report to the Newcastle Partnership Innovation Group</p> <p>Concerns were raised at this meeting about the reporting structures of the Assembly, engagement with Citizens and the Community Sector, and the development and progress of the Citizens Assembly in light of these concerns. There was also a discussion about delaying the Assembly. Chair asks for early discussions on membership, and circulation of information to group members on how the Assembly will work, suggests an additional meeting if necessary, to ensure that the Assembly structures are workable.</p> <p>A Paper on Communications between the Assembly and the Newcastle Partnership is presented to the Newcastle Partnership Innovation Group. The Leader and Deputy Leader of Newcastle City Council request further information, so a Frequently Asked Questions Paper is produced</p>
Oct 2009	<p>Agreement from Newcastle Partnership and Newcastle City Council to support the Citizens Assembly</p> <p>Funding agreed for 2 years (April 2009 – March 2011) to NHC to develop the Citizens Assembly (Service Level Agreement)</p>
Nov 2009	<p>First Newcastle Citizens Assembly Event</p> <p>Evaluation commences</p>
March 2010	First Newcastle Citizens Assembly Feedback Event

In illustrating the sequence of events to establish the Newcastle Citizens Assembly, there are a number of issues that we would like to raise;

Following the initial review in 2007 of the Voluntary and Community Sector engagement in the Newcastle Partnership, and the recommendations accepted by the Strategic Board in March 2008, the update report in August 2008 clearly states that 'resources will be drawn from the Community Development Unit (Newcastle City Council) to host and service the Standing Assembly'. In a paper to the Community Engagement Officer Group in April 2009, the Newcastle Partnership co-ordinator stated that Newcastle Healthy City had already undertaken several meetings with the Councils Community Development Manager to discuss how the Assembly would work with the Community Development Unit. However, it seems that at a crucial stage in the development of this relationship, the key Newcastle City Council officer left the Council, and Council involvement in the Citizens Assembly was interrupted.

From April 2009, area based grant funding for Newcastle Partnership Voluntary and Community Sector support was managed by the Councils Head of Social inclusion, which included the Citizens Assembly. Following a number of concerns about the Citizens Assembly structure, process and communication, agreement to move forward with the Citizens Assembly was only granted in October 2009, with the first Citizens Assembly taking place in November 2009.

We are unsure whether the £50k earmarked for infrastructure groups to facilitate community group participation into the Assembly was ever allocated. Our evidence is based on Board Papers and Minutes from the Newcastle Partnership website. At the time of writing this report Board Papers and Minutes were only available until June 2009. It could be that this money was allocated at a later date and/or for a different purpose.

8. Working with Groups

- 8.1 Citizens Assembly staff worked with 14 groups in the lead up to the November 2009 event. The groups were identified by the Community Networker contacting existing agencies, organisations and networks. Groups also identified themselves through the Citizens Assembly publicity material.
- 8.2 The Community Networker met each group initially to discuss the aims of the Assembly, the process of involvement and to find out more about the group. Using a facilitated community development approach each group was encouraged to explore a range of issues, under the six themes of Newcastle Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement 2008-11 (see appendix) , before agreeing on one improvement.
- 8.3 The process used by the Community Networker was rooted in Community Development principles and procedures which clearly placed the groups at the heart of the improvement process. This involved respecting and valuing the groups time and working at a pace that suited the groups rather than imposing external timeframes or unrealistic milestones.
- 8.4 The Community Networker worked with groups who came up with several improvements (related or different) to identify possible easy solutions if there were any, and also told them if any other groups had the same idea, in which case they could either choose another idea, or choose to support the other group's work. Groups did not always agree on improvements, but through facilitation work groups were encouraged to reach a consensus. Most groups ended up with a single improvement, or a group of related improvements in one area.
- 8.5 Groups were then encouraged to do some sort of artwork or display (posters, knitted houses, wall hangings etc) to illustrate their ideas, and to come up with a five minute presentation in their own words to deliver at the November Citizens Assembly event.

The November Event

- 8.6 The first Newcastle Citizens Assembly event took place on Thursday 12th November 2009 at the Great North Museum Hancock in Newcastle. The aim of the event was to give each group a platform to share their ideas on their city-wide improvement for Newcastle, and to provide an opportunity for everyone to

discuss each improvement and add their own ideas, comments and possible solutions.

- 8.7 In total 160 people attended the first event, and 14 groups presented their improvements. Over half the groups presented the improvements themselves, the remainder asked their worker to present their improvements on their behalf, whilst standing alongside them. (see appendix) Improvements were presented in a variety of ways and included DVDs, display boards, PowerPoint presentations and artwork.

Post Event

- 8.8 Following the November 2009 event, group members took support forms home and distributed these amongst their own networks, family members and neighbours. People could show their support for one of the improvements they would most like to see happen by completing a support form. To date, Citizens Assembly staff have received 570 support forms. Staff at the Citizens Assembly log all support forms on their database, send out acknowledgement letters and plan to feed back progress on improvements after the March feedback event. The point of having such a robust support process is to ensure that people can still be part of the Citizens Assembly even though they may have not put forward an improvement, nor attended a Citizens Assembly event.

The March Event

- 8.9 The March feedback event took place on Monday 22nd March 2010 at the Centre for Life, Newcastle. The main focus of this event was to follow up on the improvements identified by the 14 groups at the November event by holding round table discussions involving group members and service providers/decision makers. Discussions lasted for half an hour, and then tables were asked to feed back the results (see appendix). 140 people attended this event.

Case Studies

- 8.10 The Evaluation team identified 7 groups from the 14 groups who presented an improvement at the November Citizens Assembly event to develop a case study on (see appendix). Groups were initially contacted by the Community Networker to seek their permission to take part in the Evaluation. Once agreed, the Evaluation team went out to meet groups and then arranged a further visit to obtain information for the case study. Each group was provided with a voucher as a way of thanking the group for their involvement in the Evaluation.

Online Survey

8.11 In addition to the case studies, the remaining 7 groups were sent an online survey to complete in March 2010. The survey sought to obtain their views about the Citizens Assembly, how the Assembly could be improved, and other engagement processes that they had previously used. Groups that completed the online survey were also given an opportunity to enter into a prize draw to win vouchers.

9. Perceptions, Views and Experiences of Stakeholders

This section summarises the views and opinions of the groups, individuals, staff, partners and decision-makers who took part in the evaluation, along with observations made by the evaluation team at Citizens Assembly meetings and events.

Success to date

9.1 The majority of respondents who participated in this evaluation were positive about the work of the Citizens Assembly to date, particularly the community groups who presented improvements, although a number of respondents from agencies did recognise that it was still early days. One person summed this up by saying, *'so far, so good'*. Respondents described the project as 'unique and exciting', and several thought it was 'exceeding expectations'.

Meeting Citizens Assembly aims and objectives

9.2 The aims of the Newcastle Citizens Assembly as stated in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) paper are;
To Influence decision makers in order to bring about change by;

- Encouraging people to become 'active citizens'
- Providing a Platform for city-wide issues to be raised by the citizens of Newcastle
- Championing those city-wide issues.

9.3 The main measurable objective of the Citizens Assembly was based on a Service Level Agreement which committed Newcastle Healthy City to holding two events in 2009/2010. This has been achieved with the November 2009 and March 2010 events.

9.4 Another objective has been to engage individuals and groups in the process. The FAQ paper states *'we aim to work with up to 50 groups in 2009/2010 and support each group to bring forward one improvement'*, although this is not a specific target that has been set for the Citizens Assembly. In the six months since the Citizens Assembly began working with groups, it has worked with 14 groups, and is about to start the process again with a new set of groups.

9.5 In the longer term, the aspiration is to influence service providers and decision-makers, although this will be a lengthy process, and it will be hard to measure success. We believe identifying ‘what success would look like’ and how it will be ‘measured’ are areas of work that would benefit from further discussion between Newcastle Healthy City and partners.

The Citizens Assembly model

9.6 Whilst a number of respondents praised the Citizens Assembly model as a participatory and open approach for identifying issues and solution, one respondent did make the criticism that the model is focused on working with groups rather than with engaging with people at an individual level, whilst another person suggested that the success of the groups may depend on which groups are involved in the process.

Citizens Assembly staff

9.7 Respondents were very encouraging of the two staff members and the volunteer, and praised them for achieving so much in such a short time, in engaging with groups and planning the events. Both their team work and their individual skills were highlighted. The Community Engagement Manager was praised for her understanding of community engagement work, her past experience of working in a big city, her third sector knowledge, and her lack of previous history in Newcastle (which they felt meant she was not jaded and had ‘*no baggage*’). The Community Networker’s manner, approach, and relationship building were identified as crucial to her success in working with groups, as were her credibility, local knowledge, and contacts.

Support from partner agencies

9.8 Because the Citizens Assembly staff team is so small, it is important that they can work in partnership with others, and the support of other agencies and organisations is vital. The remaining paragraphs in this section give an indication of the overall impression of partner agencies and their association with the Citizens Assembly.

9.9 A number of respondents thought Newcastle Healthy City were an appropriate host for the Citizens Assembly, because they considered it to have the right values to take the project forward. It was described as an ‘*honest broker*’, which is willing to take risks if needed, to support its staff, and to work creatively with people at a grass roots level. One respondent said that it tends to go for ‘*more*

activity and less structure'. It is also seen as having good links with other voluntary organisations.

- 9.10 Our interviews with Newcastle City Council suggested that whilst there was broad support for the Citizens Assembly, there was also some surprise at the model, as they had envisaged a 'network of networks'. However, due to the popularity of the Citizens Assembly, and its value as an engagement tool, there was support, but also a feeling that much more work needed to take place around issues such as governance, accountability, strategic fit, and the internal processes that are essential to manage potential issues and difficulties that might arise from the Assembly. There was also a feeling that whilst there was some awareness within the Council about the Citizens Assembly, this wasn't widespread, and that a big effort hadn't been made to get senior officers within the Local Council involved in the process and approach of setting up the Citizens Assembly.
- 9.11 Newcastle Partnership was described by one respondent as being '*actively supportive*' of the Citizens Assembly, and '*keeping a watchful eye*' over it. However, it was also acknowledged that Newcastle Partnership had remained fairly 'detached' and 'hands off' with the Citizens Assembly, and that the Local Authority being both the accountable body for the Newcastle Partnership and the funder were ultimately responsible for the Citizens Assembly.
- 9.12 It was acknowledged by a respondent that whilst there were positive relationships between Newcastle CVS (NCVS) staff and Citizens Assembly staff at a personal level (NCVS is one of the members of the Citizens Assembly Task Group), there was no 'corporate' relationship between the two organisations, and some resistance to developing such a relationship. This may be due in part to both organisations having different histories, different delivery models and different target audiences. This combination of issues may have created an artificial division between these two organisations, supported by funding arrangements, which has prevented both organisations from exploring a more collaborative approach to working together. The respondent felt that this was unfortunate because NCVS could be very helpful towards the Citizens Assembly.
- 9.13 In developing the case studies for this evaluation we met a number of community workers and volunteers attached to the groups the Citizens Assembly have worked with. We found staff and volunteers to be very supportive of the Citizens Assembly and this motivated their engagement with the improvement process and attendance at the November event.

9.14 Our research did also identify some resistance to the Citizens Assembly. A small number of organisations were critical of both the idea and the approach Newcastle Healthy City were using to develop the Citizens Assembly. For example, one organisation commented that it was community workers who were presenting improvements at the November event rather than community members, and that the event had a lot of *'professionals'* attending. We believe this resistance stems from the way this project has evolved, the original expectations of what the Assembly would do, how it would work with existing organisations and consortiums, the lack of funding for infrastructure groups to contribute to the Assembly, and a feeling that they have lost power as a result of recent changes in the local community engagement context.

10. Events

12th November 2009

- 10.1 The aims of the event were to give each group a platform to share their ideas on their city-wide improvement for Newcastle, and to provide an opportunity for everyone to discuss each improvement and add their own ideas, comments and possible solutions. 160 people attended the November Assembly event, and 14 groups presented their improvements. People attending the event were given the opportunity to comment via comment cards on the tables at the event. A debrief and evaluation session with staff was held immediately after the event, to explore what had and had not worked and what improvements or changes would be needed for future events.
- 10.2 Community groups attending the November event described it as 'professional', 'exciting', and 'positive'. Several commented on the *'good vibe'* the event had. A number of agencies and service providers who were also present at this event praised the commitment and enthusiasm of the groups, most of whom had done a lot of preparation beforehand.
- 10.3 Respondents also commented that people's voices were being heard, that groups were discussing each other's ideas with enthusiasm, and that the event was an example of bridging social capital, with people linking up with each other from different groups, and between groups and service providers.
- 10.4 Although a lot of effort had gone into making sure the event was inclusive, with simultaneous interpreters, a crèche, a big screen showing text to speech of all speeches and presentations, the event did suffer from some technical problems. For instance, some people could not see the screen, and the hearing loop did not work.

22nd March 2010

- 10.5 The main focus of the March event was to follow up on the improvements identified by the 14 groups at the November event by holding round table discussions involving group members and service providers/decision makers. Discussions lasted for half an hour, and then tables were asked to feed back the results. 140 people attended the event.
- 10.6 People attending the March event took part in an e-voting session as part of the evaluation process. The e-voting was carried out by staff from 'U Decide', the Participatory Budgeting Unit at Newcastle City Council. The results

overwhelming illustrate how positively the event and the Citizens Assembly process was viewed by the people who participated in the Citizens Assembly. We suggest that Newcastle Healthy City should continually monitor this to ensure this positive feeling remains and isn't just due to being 'caught up in the moment'. The results also illustrate the gender bias of the participants attending this event, and we suggest that further work is carried out to ensure that participants involved in the work of the Citizens Assembly, reflect the socio economic profile of the City.

Citizens Assembly March event e-voting results

Q. Do you think the Citizens Assembly is a good way of finding out what people think about life in Newcastle?

Yes	79% (65)
No	8% (7)
May Be	11% (9)
Don't Know	2% (2)

Q. Do you think the Citizens Assembly could help to change things for the better in Newcastle?

Yes	74% (59)
No	6% (5)
May Be	19% (15)
Don't Know	1% (1)

Q. Do you think coming to the event today has been worthwhile?

Yes	82% (68)
No	4% (3)
May Be	9% (7)
Don't Know	5% (4)

Q. Are you happy with the way the Citizens Assembly has championed your improvement?

Yes	80% (60)
No	4% (3)
May Be	11% (8)
Don't Know	5% (4)

Q. What were the two best things about today's event?

63 voted for Finding out what is going to happen with Improvements
 33 voted for Meeting Service Providers/Decisions Makers
 34 voted for Meeting Other People

Notes

53 people identified themselves as a member of a group, 16 said they were a volunteer with a group, 14 said they were a paid worker with a group, 11 were not involved with a group and 21 were service providers/decision makers

(percentages are not provided because a number of people identified themselves as belonging to more than 1 category).

70% of people attending were female, and 30% were male.

11. Online Survey

11.1 The online survey was sent out to the 7 community groups who were not being evaluated through the case studies. 3 online surveys were completed and overall the survey results are favourable and positive towards the Citizens Assembly. In terms of ideas to improve the Citizens Assembly, respondents suggested more direct feedback and involvement from elected members, making sure all events and information was accessible, and opportunities for informal discussions with community groups to increase their confidence to enable them to speak more openly about the issues that affect them. As part of the online survey, respondents were presented with a number of statements about the Citizens Assembly which they were asked to respond to to show whether or not they agreed with the statement.

11.2 The box below shows their responses.

Statement	Response
I have enjoyed taking part in the Citizens Assembly	Strongly Agree Agree Agree
I think taking part in the Citizens Assembly is worthwhile	Agree Strongly Agree Agree
I would like to be involved in the Citizens Assembly again in the future	Strongly Agree Agree Agree
Things might change for the better in Newcastle because of the Citizens Assembly	Strongly Agree Agree Agree
The Citizens Assembly is a good way to find out what people think	Strongly Agree Agree Agree
The Citizens Assembly should keep going	Strongly Agree Strongly Agree Agree
The Citizens Assembly is a good way of meeting other people in Newcastle	Strongly Agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree
The Citizens Assembly is a good way of meeting service providers and decision makers	Strongly Agree Agree Agree
The Citizens Assembly is a good way of finding out other people's ideas and improvements	Strongly Agree Agree Agree

The Citizens Assembly is a good way of finding out what Community Groups there are in Newcastle	Strongly Agree Agree Agree

11.3 Respondents were also asked to identify what other things they had done to try and change the way things are run in the City. A list of suggestions were made, but a category 'other', was also provided for groups to alert us about something they had done which was not on our list of suggestions. The table below shows their response;

What have you done to try and change the way things are run in the City	Responses
Attended a Ward Committee or Area Committee to raise an issue	2
Taken part in Community Empowerment Networks	1
Contacted your local Councillor/elected representative	1
Contacted the Council or other service providers directly	3
Taken part in community or voluntary campaigning or activities	2
Other (please specify)	1 (Arranged meetings and involved in consultations with organisations)

12. Impacts on Community Group Members

- 12.1 Our observation and analysis of research data illustrates that the main impact achieved by the Citizens Assembly on community members has been bridging and linking social capital. The March event brought together people with different interests, views and experiences. Group members were almost always supportive of the improvements raised by other groups, sometimes even rating other improvements as a greater priority than their own. They also saw potential linkages and similarities between the different improvements, which may have helped them to feel that they shared common ground with others. Overwhelmingly, the groups that we spoke to reported that they enjoyed taking part in the Citizens Assembly and were glad that they had done so, even though they did not always expect that things would change as a result of their involvement.
- 12.2 A number of groups particularly liked the venue where the first Citizens Assembly was held, the Great North Museum as this was the first time they had visited this venue. The events were also potentially empowering for community members as they were given a platform to present their views, and were listened to. They were also given the opportunity to sit round a table and discuss their ideas with a service provider or decision maker at the March event (an example of linking social capital – enabling people with differing levels of power to get together).

13. Geographical Spread across the City

- 13.1 The groups worked with so far have been mainly based in the West End of Newcastle, although some are City-wide groups. This has been largely due to a combination of lack of time, and the fact that the Community Networker previously worked in the West End so had established networks in this area. The Citizens Assembly now needs to work in the North and East End of the City so that citizens are given the same opportunity to suggest improvements to service providers. The North and East End of the City have different histories, and experiences, therefore we add a note of caution to the Citizens Assembly staff to be aware that this may require a different approach and process for engaging with Community Groups. Whilst a particular approach has worked in one part of the city, it can not be assumed that this will work elsewhere.
- 13.2 During our interviews one respondent made the point about mapping improvements geographically to identify patterns and trends in terms of improvements and where community groups are based. We think this is a good idea, and suggest the development of a city wide database of issues.

14. Good Practice and Lessons learnt

- 14.1 The following good practice and lessons learnt have been identified through this Evaluation. They are based on the Evaluators observations and knowledge of Community Development work.
- 14.2 The Community Networker is well known to the groups that have been involved in the project to date. The fact that they know and trust her may well have been a very important factor for them in taking part. However, we would also suggest that her professional practice, rooted in Community Development principles, has undoubtedly contributed to the positive experience that community groups have had during the Assembly process. For example, the Community Networker has worked at a pace and time to suit each of the groups, and used a solution focused approach that has encouraged people to feel more optimistic about service improvement and less helpless.
- 14.3 The Community Networker has worked hard to manage the expectations of groups, telling them she is *'not their fairy godmother and can't wave a magic wand'* to make the improvements happen. She has emphasised that nothing can be guaranteed and that the important thing is going through the Citizens Assembly process. This seems to have been effective: groups contacted for the evaluation were hopeful that there would be some changes made because of their improvements, but understood and accepted that there were no guarantees
- 14.4 The Community Networker has worked in an area of Newcastle (West End) which has been subjected to numerous research, consultations, regeneration programmes, and participation exercises. Our expectation was that groups would see involvement in the Assembly as just another example of being asked for their ideas and then nothing happening and would therefore be reluctant to participate. However, we were pleasantly surprised at the group's willingness to participate in the Citizens Assembly, and their realistic expectations that they were prepared for nothing to change as a result of their involvement.
- 14.5 However, this level of motivation may be due to the Community Networker already being known to a number of groups that participated in the Citizens Assembly. Whether this level of motivation can be repeated in other parts of

the City, using the same principles and techniques will need to be closely monitored.

- 14.6 Added value has been provided in the model through the process of groups getting together at Citizens Assembly events. There have been examples of bridging social capital, with groups discussing and supporting each others' improvements, and learning about each others' needs. For example, a number of groups stated that they enjoyed going to the Citizens Assembly event as they were able to find out what other groups operated in Newcastle, and that this information was useful for informing friends, families and neighbours. The improvement by Deaflink and Nunsmoor Play Centre was frequently cited by the groups as a 'good idea', and that being part of the Citizens Assembly had been useful for hearing about other groups improvements, which would have a wider impact than just the group that had identified the improvement.
- 14.7 In addition, a number of groups stated that they enjoyed coming to the Great North Museum, that this was somewhere they had never been to before, but were keen to visit again with their family. Workers can make assumptions about the geographical location of venues that community groups will be 'comfortable' attending. The experience of the Citizens Assembly demonstrates that not only did groups enjoy going to a City Centre Venue, but that they are likely to visit such venues again.

15. Issues and Risks

- 15.1 There are some potential risks associated with the project. Firstly, there is no statutory obligation for service providers or decision makers to respond to or follow up on the improvements, which means it is difficult to say what will happen with any of the improvements. Linked to this is the risk that agencies do not take the Citizens Assembly and its findings seriously, and that local people will not bother to take part because they do not think that it will change anything.
- 15.2 There is a risk that groups may come up with unreasonable or undesirable improvements. One of the respondents in the Evaluation stated that 'as long as improvements are 'valid', there will be an attempt made to address the improvement,'. However, this raises an issue about what is deemed as 'valid' , and who makes the decision as to whether an improvement is 'valid' or not. In addition, improvements may be suggested in the future that require several different service providers to work together, it is not reasonable to expect a staff team of 2 to manage what could be a complicated issue or time consuming service arrangement.
- 15.3 There is also a risk that unless the Citizens Assembly and partners are explicit about service providers funding, resources, and planning processes this may in the future raise expectations which are not met. Whilst we acknowledge the approach of the Community Networker who has been very clear with groups that improvements may not happen, we think there are additional issues about informing community groups about service providers funding, their service planning processes, statutory obligations and limits on their activity which may also contribute to why an improvement can't be delivered.
- 15.4 One of the evaluation participants observed that the success of the Citizens Assembly model depends quite strongly on relationships with key local players. There has been some resistance to the project from some quarters, and this could be detrimental, particularly if the resistance is from organisations or individuals who have a lot of influence in the community, and could discourage community groups from getting involved in the Citizens Assembly.
- 15.5 The Citizens Assembly has limited capacity with only two staff, which may become a problem as the workload increases, with staff continuing to follow up improvements, log support forms, whilst at the same time keeping the momentum going by working with new groups of people. Related to this, there

is a need for greater clarity on what the project's role is regarding taking improvements further, and how long this should go on for. In some cases, the groups identifying improvements have themselves taken on the task of following up on their improvements, and this reduces the pressure on Citizens Assembly staff. One participant suggested that the job of taking other improvements further could be divided between the Council, Newcastle Partnership, other service providers, or Task Group members, according to the theme of the improvements.

15.6 Several participants identified issues relating to the effectiveness of the community engagement work and inclusiveness of the project. For instance, people questioned whether it was reaching enough people, whether it was reaching the right people (i.e. those who are not already *'engaged'*), and how it could work more with individuals. There was a feeling amongst some stakeholders that some of the groups who participated in the first Citizens Assembly event in November were well known to the Council and were, or had been, recipients of Council grant funding. For example, one service provider commented, ' I was surprised at the groups picked to work with so far, most of them get grant aid from the Council so are not exactly *'unengaged'*,'.

15.7 Two interview respondents stated that they expected that the Citizens Assembly would engage with groups who were *'unknown'* and not currently participating in any form of engagement mechanism. Whilst this may become a feature of future Citizens Assembly work we suggest that working with groups who are currently *'unknown'* takes time to build trust, relationships and confidence, and that despite groups currently being known to stakeholders, this may be their first experience of participating in a process to directly engage with service providers to improve local service delivery. We suggest that this illustrates both a lack of understanding and debate about community engagement, which ignores the complexity around the levels and perceptions of community engagement work. There seems to be an assumption that grant funding a group equates to groups being engaged in local democracy, when the reality is more complex.

16. Funding

- 16.1 Funding for the project is secure until March 2011. Beyond this, the future is uncertain due to potential political changes and expected public spending cuts, which will make it hard for many projects to access funding. There will be less funding available, and more competition for that funding.
- 16.2 It may be appropriate in future to seek funding from statutory service providers and thematic partnerships (e.g. health and community safety partnerships) in return for helping them to fulfil their requirements in consulting with service users. This could help them to make their services more efficient and user-centred.
- 16.3 One service provider questioned whether the Citizens Assembly offered 'value for money'. In the current economic climate of funding cuts, and the pressure to demonstrate return on investment, and value and added value, we think this is a critical area of work for Newcastle Healthy City to explore. This is not simply about creating a list of organisations that the Assembly has engaged with, but something much more complex.

17. Conclusion

17.1 Newcastle City Council has been at the forefront of championing many new community engagement ideas such as Ward Committees, Neighbourhood Charters and Participatory Budgeting. In keeping with this tradition, we believe that the Newcastle Citizens Assembly could be another 'trailblazer' idea that could establish Newcastle City firmly at the forefront of innovative practice associated with Community Engagement. This will require that agencies, alliances, stakeholders and service providers agree to collectively support, co-operate and work through the Citizens Assembly to improve services in response to Citizens ideas and suggestions.

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Appendix 1: Sustainable Community Strategy Themes

Themes of the Newcastle Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement (2008-11)

- Strengthening the Economy
- Improving Wellbeing, health and Independence
- Managing Environmental Impact
- Creating and Sustaining Quality Places to Live
- Creating Safe, Inclusive, Cohesive and Empowered Communities
- Improving the Outcomes for Children and Young People

Appendix 2: Improvement Updates

Improvements

Below is a summary of the improvements raised by groups that did not take part in the case studies, including the progress that had been made by the end of March 2010.

Improvement 03: Visual communications on Metro trains

The Deaflink project at Newcastle Healthy City works to improve access to education, health, employment, leisure and social opportunities for Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard-of-Hearing people in Newcastle.

Deaflink's proposed improvement aimed to tackle communication breakdown, the most common barrier people with hearing difficulties face in their daily lives. They identified a need for visual displays on Metro trains so that people who cannot hear the announcements will be able to find out which station the train is approaching or receive messages of any emergencies. Deaflink felt that such a system could also benefit hearing people who listen to music or talk on their mobile phones while on the trains. They used role play to demonstrate their proposed improvement at the November event.

The improvement was presented to Nexus. At the March event, it was announced that electric visual display units had been installed in Metro trains, and that they would go live in the next two weeks, providing announcements and information about emergencies.

Deaflink members identified a number of next steps at the March event. They plan to continue to work with Nexus, and to be involved in consultation meetings with transport providers on improving public transport for Deaf and Blind people. They also plan to keep on campaigning on this issue, and raising awareness among frontline staff such as bus drivers.

Improvement 04: Develop more culturally appropriate activities for older women

The Mahila Mandel Women's Group meets weekly at the Roshni Centre to socialise and take part in activities. Aged from 60 to over 80, the women travel from across the city to meet, and bring along food they have cooked to share and enjoy.

The group felt that there was a need for more opportunities to socialise with women of their own age so that they can form new friendships, support each other and share

problems, sorrows and joys. They also wanted the opportunity to take part in a range of activities in venues where they feel comfortable.

The women met with a service provider at the March event to discuss the issue. Together they came up with some ideas for taking the improvement forward. One thing they are planning is to look at bringing together existing groups and sessions for older people, to find out what activities and events different groups take part in, and explore whether there are any opportunities for shared activities.

Improvement 07: Improved access to public toilets

The Elders Council provides a voice for older people living or active in Newcastle, on issues concerning their quality of life, health and wellbeing.

Many older people feel excluded from joining in activities because of uncertainty about access to public toilets. The Elders Council identified the lack of provision of toilet facilities in busy areas of Newcastle as a problem. They researched the issue and looked at successful solutions used in other UK towns and cities.

Through this process they proposed the adoption of a *'Use our Loos'* scheme, which they described at the November event. Local businesses would receive funding or help in kind to enable them to open up their facilities to the public. In turn, they would benefit from more customers coming into their premises. The group felt that the scheme would bring greater comfort and convenience for all citizens, not just older people, and would help create a more attractive environment for visitors and tourists.

Since the November event, the Elders Council has done further research, and has asked local businesses if they would like to be part of such a scheme. Reactions have been mixed, and businesses are more supportive of having a day time scheme than a night time one. Newcastle City Council has expressed an interest, but has not yet come up with any funding to help get the scheme off the ground. However, there is a chance that a small pilot project will be set up, to see if it is viable. The Elders Council is also planning to approach Pubwatch and NE1 – Newcastle's Business Improvement District Company - to see if they have any interest in supporting the scheme.

Improvement 08: To enhance our parks for use by all of the community

The Dads and Male Carers Group meets weekly at the Riverside Community Health Project. The men, who are in their late 20s to 40s, take part in activities including healthy eating, walking and swimming, as well as having access to accredited courses.

The group thought that safety concerns and a lack of attractions deter many people from using their local parks. They felt that, with good lighting, security, maintenance and design as well as year-round activities to appeal to all the family, parks could be the hub of the community and places where people can mix. They suggested having different areas and facilities within parks to suit different age, ability, and interest groups. They also welcomed the idea of having more park keepers, cafés and accessible parking.

Having met with a service provider at the March event, they discussed the issue further and identified a number of possible next steps, including enhancing security in parks to make them more family friendly. They thought that it would help if park wardens and keepers had a greater presence – by employing more of them, making them more visible to park users, and asking them to liaise with each other and to report back any issues arising to the Council. One simple solution that is being taken forward is providing park wardens with hi-vis vests to wear, with the park name on. The group also discussed inviting various groups to use their local parks, for instance by asking schools to come along and plant trees.

Improvement 11: People not drinking alcohol in public places where children play

A group of children aged 5-13 years, who attended Cruddas Park After School Club, developed a proposal which they felt could improve local public places. Their improvement arose from a group discussion about things they liked and disliked about their area. They created drawings to illustrate their ideas.

The children were concerned about people drinking alcohol and getting drunk in public parks, which they said made other people, especially children, wary of using the parks themselves. They were aware of the two-month '*safer summer streets*' campaign in the West End in Summer 2009, which stopped shops from selling cheap alcohol to under-age young people, as well as fining adults who were buying it for them. The group felt that this had achieved results and should be extended year round and city-wide. They also thought that it would help if older kids had something else to do instead of drinking.

Unfortunately, Cruddas Park After School Club closed down in late 2009. The remaining people who were involved in the improvement attended the March event and spoke with a service provider. They discussed the activities that are already in place to deter drinkers, such as park patrols and Bottlewatch, which is a scheme where you trace the bottles lying around in parks to retailers, and then challenge them if they have been selling alcohol to young people. The group agreed that this is not an issue that can be solved overnight, but they felt that diversionary activities for

young people could help. They decided to join forces with the group who raised Improvement 09 (more activities for young people) and try to work together.

Improvement 13: Keep cleaner, be greener

Outer West Area Forum includes representatives of groups in Denton, Lemington, Newburn, Westerhope and Woolsington. The forum seeks to influence decisions and acts as a collective voice for these five outer west wards. Members discuss issues of common concern and exchange information on activities, services and events.

The group came up with a range of improvements which aimed to create cleaner and more environment-friendly neighbourhoods. They presented a number of potential activities to achieve this at the November event. One idea was to recycle dead leaves and grass cuttings, which they thought would also help avoid slipping hazards, and generate income through the sale of compost. Another idea was recycling abandoned furniture and white goods by training unemployed people to refurbish them, and selling them at cheap prices to families on low incomes.

The Outer West Forum have taken their improvement forward by making contact with Science City, who are interested in taking forward the idea of recycling dead leaves and grass, starting by researching how this can be done. They have also contacted the Council to get more information on what happens currently with regard to the recycling of waste and abandoned goods. The Council listened, but did not turn up to the March event. A Community Furniture Service representative did attend the event to discuss the idea of recycling furniture idea further. The outcome of the discussion was that recycling white goods is difficult, although grants are available. The group is going to explore the possibility of training young people to refurbish used goods. They also identified the need to raise awareness and educate people about recycling, as well as involving children and young people.

Improvement 14: Unpaid carers to be able to have a break from their caring role

The Carers Centre Newcastle is a city-wide organisation that supports carers in Newcastle. A carer is someone who provides help and support to a relative, friend, partner, child or neighbour who has a disability, a physical or mental illness, is frail, or has alcohol or drug related problems.

The Carers Centre is aware that Newcastle Primary Care Trust (PCT) has been allocated funding from the Department of Health to invest in direct support for carers. However, for this money to be made available for carers services, a plan needs to be produced. The Carers Centre wanted funding to be allocated to enable unpaid carers to take a break from caring. Having a break is important to reduce the detrimental

effects caring can have on their physical and mental health, and on their ability to continue to care.

At the March event, the group members were able to talk through their ideas with a service provider from the PCT, who confirmed that respite care and support for carers has been identified in the latest PCT five year plan. A group is being set up to look at developing a strategy to take this forward, and they wish to make sure that the Carers Centre and local carers will be involved with this group.

Appendix 3: Case Studies

Case study 1: Knit and Natter Group, Benwell Hall

The Knit and Natter group at Benwell Hall has been running for about five years. It was set up by the Search Project, a charity that works with the over 50s. The group of around thirty women, aged from 55-80 years, meets on Friday afternoons to take part in activities such as knitting, crochet, sewing, making clippie mats, baking and flower arranging. They also have tea, coffee and cakes (usually baked by group members), and offer each other company, chat, help and support with their crafts and other matters. The group is self-sustaining: members sell the crafts they produce at a sale every autumn to raise money, and they also hold a weekly raffle. The group is one of five different Knit and Natter groups in the West End of Newcastle.

The group was involved in the 2008 Woolly West Project which looked at West End residents' experiences of living through regeneration. Members helped to recreate the city's West End, including houses, schools, churches, Benwell Library and Benwell Nature Park, entirely out of wool. Their work has been featured in a short film and exhibited at the Biscuit Factory, the Baltic and Alnwick Garden. They also make blankets, hats and clothes for refugees in war-torn countries and East European orphans, and clothes and toys for prematurely born babies and children in hospital. Members have posted videos on YouTube to help people learn how to knit.

Working with the Citizens Assembly, the Knit and Natter group came up with *Improvement 12: The sustainability of old buildings*. This stemmed from their concern that historic buildings were being pulled down and forgotten, instead of renovating them and giving them a new lease of life. Members pointed out that many older buildings were well designed and built, with large rooms and good layouts, and could also be easily adapted for modern use. They contrasted this with modern buildings, which they thought were often cheaply built, poor quality, ugly, cramped, and did not stand the test of time. They also made the point that it is usually cheaper to refurbish buildings than to knock them down and start again. They highlighted the renovation of Bishops Avenue in the West End – which is now known as 'The Street of Many Colours' - as an example of good practice. They illustrated their ideas with the knitted buildings they created for the Woolly West project.

Around fifteen members of the group went to the Citizens Assembly event in November 2009. They found it enjoyable and interesting, and were impressed by the ideas for improvements that other groups had developed, particularly those that would benefit the most vulnerable people in the City (in the words of one group member, those who *'can't see, can't hear, can't get about'*). Several members thought this sort of improvement should be prioritised.

Group members did not appear to think that their improvement will lead to any particular changes in the way the Council and others operate, although they did hope that this would be the case, and thought it would be a good thing if changes were made. Some thought the current economic climate would prevent any changes happening, as the Council and developers would see it as non-essential.

Update

Members of the groups attended the March event and discussed their improvement with a service provider. Together they decided on a number of follow-up activities for the group: to visit a retrofit of an old Victorian building in Benwell, which has been developed by Bridging NewcastleGateshead and Groundwork; to work with the Elders Council on the issue of access to buildings; to work with the Area Regeneration Team on plans for Scotswood and Benwell; and to get involved in Heritage Open Days.

Case study 2: The Friday Afternoon Group

The Friday Afternoon Group is a drop-in session run by volunteers which meets on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons at Healthworks, at the West End Health Resource Centre. The volunteers provide refreshments – tea, coffee, soup, scones and cakes – for Centre staff and users, and the sessions also provide people with a chance to chat and socialise with friends. The group has been running for about two years, and funds itself by asking people for donations in return for refreshments.

Both volunteers and users took part in the Citizens Assembly initiative. It was a mixed gender group of around twelve people ranging in age from their 40s to their 70s. All of them live in the West End of Newcastle. The group came up with *Improvement 10: Improve public transport by bus*. Group members identified a series of concerns about buses in Newcastle upon Tyne, including: that there are often no buses for ages, then several turn up at once; that there are very few buses on Sundays and they start too late in the morning, even though it is a normal working day for many people; that bus drivers are often inconsiderate, e.g. by setting off before people sit down; that there are lots of buses with only a few passengers on board; fares are expensive; and that some services are duplicated or run in competition with Metro routes.

The group proposed greater flexibility, with smaller buses off peak and larger ones in peak time, as well as more small buses on estates providing hail and ride services. The group also suggested that Sundays should be treated as a working day due to the number of people who rely on public transport to get to work. They felt that these changes could help improve the environment and make services more cost effective.

Group members attended the Citizens Assembly event in November 2009. For most of them, this was the first time they had attended this sort of event; they found it an enjoyable day and thought most of the improvements put forward by other groups were good ideas.

Improvement 10 was forwarded to Nexus, the Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive. Group members say they do not expect Nexus to change the way bus services are run, but they are hoping for ‘*some answers*’, and they would like to know that Nexus is willing to take note of what local people and bus users have to say about bus services. The group members would also be keen to talk directly to Nexus about the improvements they want and their ideas and experiences of bus travel in more detail.

The group enjoyed taking part in the Citizens Assembly and say they would like to continue to be involved, as it is a good way of keeping up with what is going on in the City. They praised the way that the Citizens Assembly has given smaller and more informal groups a voice, rather than just working with bigger groups and networks that are well-established and tend to be more vocal (group members pointed out that such groups are not necessarily representative of all local people). They suggested that the Citizens Assembly should continue to involve a wide range of people and groups, including, for example, asylum seekers.

Update

Members of the group attended the March event, where they confirmed that a decision maker from Nexus is visiting them in April 2010 to discuss their ideas in more detail. One of the volunteers with the group has taken on the task of liaising with Nexus. The same person has also visited a group that the Citizens Assembly has just begun working with in the East End of Newcastle, to tell them about the experiences of the Friday Afternoon group, and has arranged a meeting with the Nexus representative for them too.

Case study 3: Nunsmoor Centre summer play scheme

Newcastle City Council runs a number of drop-in play schemes for children during school holidays, afternoons and weekends. Over forty 5-12 year olds who attended the play scheme at the Nunsmoor Centre in the West End during the 2009 summer holidays took part in the Citizens Assembly, coming up with *Improvement 1: look after our Newcastle*. Taking part was voluntary, but all of the children were involved in some way. A smaller group of around 16 children were particularly interested and did a lot of the work, which took place over three or four separate sessions.

The children were invited to think about what they liked and did not like about the City. They discussed it in groups and drew or wrote about it. They came up with several different ideas around the themes of health and the environment, such as rubbish littering the streets and gardens, chewing gum left on pavements, overflowing bins, recycling and other ways of looking after the earth, and the need for people to eat healthily and exercise. Play scheme staff helped them to make a banner, and they presented their ideas to the whole group of children, so that together they could choose just one idea for their improvement. The children took a vote and decided to focus on making litter bins brighter and more attractive:

'The bins need to be colourful and really really bright, so it looks nice and people will not drop their litter in the street, when they could use such a nice bin'.

They thought it was important that litter bins are emptied and cleaned regularly, so that they are more pleasant to use and people are more likely to get into the habit of putting their litter in the bin.

Next, the children came up with some designs for brighter bins, and these were also transferred onto a big banner. The designs included glow in the dark bins that could be seen more easily at night, rubbish-eating monsters, and messages such as *'feed me with your rubbish'*. Both of the banners were presented at the November Citizens Assembly event by the Play Scheme Manager, on the children's behalf - the children could not attend the event because it was held on a school day. She also described the activities and discussions the children took part in to arrive at their improvement.

Within 20 minutes of the presentation, a Council representative also attending the event approached the Play Scheme Manager to discuss taking the improvement forward using the children's ideas and designs. Progress has since been made, and the current plan is to produce large transfer stickers based on the children's designs, which can be stuck onto existing bins. The Council has allocated a budget of around £2,000 to the scheme, and there is a chance that more money will be available from

other sources, including Ward Committees. The Play Scheme Manager is working with the Council and trying to ensure that the children continue to be involved, for instance by helping to stick the transfers on the bins, and by having their story featured in the local news. The experience has been very positive for the children involved, and the Play Scheme Manager would welcome the chance for children attending the play scheme to be involved in similar work with the Citizens Assembly in the future.

Update

The Play Scheme Manager attended the March event and provided an update. She said that the transfer stickers would be on the bins in the next two weeks, and the local neighbourhood team was planning to monitor them, to see if the bins with stickers on get fuller. If this happens, this suggests that the stickers work, and the scheme may be rolled out across the city as a result.

Case study 4: The Welcome Project

The Welcome Project for adults with learning difficulties meets every week at the Cornerstone Christian Shop Project, a community organisation in Benwell. It offers a range of educational and other activities including literacy, arts and crafts, history, drama workshops, gardening, healthy eating and cooking. Artwork produced by project users has been displayed in public venues including the Cluny. The project also supports and takes part in other activities at the Cornerstone Project and in the wider local community, such as the Benwell Clean Up and Benwell Library's centenary anniversary celebrations. The Welcome Project's activities are funded through a variety of different sources.

A group of five Welcome Project users and their project worker came up with *Improvement 05: Suitable activities for adults with learning disabilities*. The group felt there was a need for more activities for people like them, especially during the holidays when the colleges they attend are closed. The group wanted more opportunities to enjoy activities in small groups at local venues where they can feel safe, enjoy learning and have fun. They were also keen to take part in educational activities, such as getting help and support to practice reading and writing, fill in forms, and use email, both in groups and one-to-one.

A short film of the group was produced on DVD for the Newcastle Citizens Assembly Event in November 2009. Members of the group were interviewed, and also filmed creating a large collage showing their thoughts and feelings about their proposed improvement. The DVD was shown at the event, and two of the project users also spoke about their improvement.

Group members enjoyed taking part in the Citizens Assembly, and attending the event in November. They thought that even if their improvement did not lead to any changes in the provision of adult learning activities, they were glad to have taken part and would be happy to be involved again in future. They were also keen to speak to service providers in order to share their ideas, opinions and experiences as service users, and hoped that they would get the chance to do this at the second Citizens Assembly event in March 2010, at which decision makers would also be present.

Update

Group members attended the March event and discussed their improvement with a service provider. Ideas coming out of the discussions included developing a human resource network, a buddying scheme, a directory of activities, and partnerships of

organisations working in this area. There are already plans for a reading group, English and Maths sessions to take place at the Cornerstone Project on Wednesday afternoons. The service provider told them that resources are available. The Learning Disabilities Champions are now going to meet up with group members to talk about their needs, discuss their ideas further, and see what can be put in place.

Case study 5: Westgate Hill Parents Group, Westgate Hill School

The Westgate Hill Parents group operates from Westgate Hill School, and has been meeting for about 2 to 3 years. The group came about as parents in the school were consulted about what they wanted. The group are very active, and members have lots of ideas and opinions. They meet once or twice a week and are engaged in a range of activities such as ESOL, exercise classes, and silk painting. They are currently getting ready for a new school opening which is due in 2012.

The group found out about the Citizens Assembly through their worker. The Community Networker came along to one of their meetings to talk to them. They had a very informal discussion with her about the community, the local area, what it needed, what it lacked, and talked about lots of things. In particular, the group were concerned about the number of buildings in the West End of Newcastle not being used for anything, such as ROSHNI, and the Durham Street Nursery, and from that the discussions moved on to what the buildings could be used for.

The group had lots of ideas including sewing classes, ESOL, cooking, informal learning. They were particularly interested in informal learning activities that could involve other siblings, parents but also grandparents, where children could learn their mother tongue. The sessions they have as part of being the Parents Group are quite structured, so they were really interested in something more informal.

The Community Networker asked the group if they would like to put forward their idea as an improvement at the Citizens Assembly Event and the group agreed. The Group attended the Citizens Assembly event in November 2009. They nominated their worker to read out their presentation, but they all stood with her with their boards. The event was good, and they enjoyed listening to the other improvements, as they thought some of them were very good, eg recycling idea, and deaflink and the metro signs idea. They were surprised how many people were at the event, and what groups actually existed and they felt that more events like this were needed as it helps to find out what is happening in the area. For example, they didn't know about the knit and natter group, but thought this would be a good group for mums, as well as a good way of getting to know people.

For most of the group it was the first time they had been to the Great North Museum, although there were some issues that they weren't pleased about, such as the crèche being in the next building, having to get a key for the toilet from a male worker, and not being able to all sit together, they did enjoy the event.

Since the Citizens Assembly Event they have taken support forms home and have asked neighbours and family members to vote for their favourite improvement and

have returned these forms back to the Community Networker. They have also had a letter from the Citizens Assembly informing them that their improvement is being considered, as well as some feedback from Newcastle City Council Family learning and the offer to come and do some activities with the group. However, the group feels that this is missing the point, as their improvement was about buildings currently not being used which could be, ie using them in the evening and in weekends.

The group acknowledge that it can be frustrating when things or feedback aren't acted upon, as there are so many consultations and often you don't hear what has happened which can be frustrating, but they were pleased as they have had some feedback about their improvement,

Update

A number of services providers were invited to meet with this group at the feedback event in March. Speaking to a decision maker, they found that there are quite a lot of activities for young people on at the moment, although they need a way to get information about these. They also discussed good practice such as the work of Sunderland Young Asian Voices Project.

Next step: They need support to take their ideas forward, for instance to set up a bank account so they can start planning activities.

Case study 6: Seeds for Growth Gardening Group, West End Women and Girls Project

The Seeds for Growth Gardening group consists of between 10-12 members and the group came about as members used to come into the Project for the Brunch Group and were alerted to an opportunity of having some ground to grow vegetables, this also fitted in with the Healthy Eating work they were involved in through the Brunch Group. They have some land just behind the centre, in the park and they grow vegetables.

The Group first found out about the Citizens Assembly through the Community Networker, as she used to work with the group. She came to see them and told them about the Citizens Assembly. At first they thought the idea was rubbish and not going to work as it just felt like 'jargon', but the more contact they had with the Community Networker and she explained what it was about, it made sense.

Their improvement is focused around having youth activities for boys. The group is concerned about the lack of youth activities for boys and young men, the only activities that are available are through the YIP, and these can only be accessed once young people get into trouble. The improvement is also very personal to some members of the group, who have children who are boys, but who can't access the facilities at WEWGP. The group would like to see activities such as a skate park, or other supervised activities, like the ones they have at WEWGP but which aren't short term or age restricted.

The whole group created the presentation for the Citizens Assembly event in November, in just 4 weeks! The Group were nervous about the presentation, but really enjoyed the event. They commented on the number of people at the event, and how easy it was to mix with people, and how comfortable they felt in the venue, they put this down to the Community Networker who had told them in advance what to expect. The group were also impressed with the other good ideas, such as the bins, deaflink and the metro, and access to toilets. The group also noticed links between some of the improvements and their own improvement.

At the event they were a bit disappointed that some service providers only stayed for about 10 minutes and then left. They also felt that they would have liked much more time inbetween hearing about the improvements and writing feedback comments, and would have liked to have stayed longer, or had more time to read all the comments that had been written. During the event the lights kept going on and off which made it difficult for them to see the screen.

Since the November event, the Community Networker has given the group feedback forms which they have given out to their neighbours and friends. They group are realistic in understanding that something might not happen straight away with their improvement as it was quite a big project, and understood that it is much easier to deliver some of the more smaller improvements that had been suggested. The group were also aware that nothing might actually happen, the Community Network had always said there was no guarantee that something would happen, and infact they are more prepared for nothing happening, but feel it would be a shame as projects are needed to keep boys and young men off the streets.

Update

The group met with the Councils lead specialist for Integrated Youth Services at the March Event. Whilst there is no extra funding available, they did discuss the need for more preventive youth work to go with the targeted work as well as the need for more parent/family support. The group were informed that Community buildings were currently being audited, so there may be some new spaces that can be used. 'Plings' is a local online resource for activities for young people. There are a lot of activities taking place (870 in a week), so there needs to be an assessment of whether things are not being advertised well enough, or if activities are not appropriate. The group, the Council Lead and Citizens Assembly staff will be meeting again to discuss these issues further. 'Plings' information will be promoted in schools and in newsletters.

Case study 7: Rainbow Group, West End Women and Girls Project

The Rainbow Group started in June 2009, brought together by the Project. The group meet 4 or 5 times per week in the morning and are involved in a whole range of activities such as gardening, exercise, breakfast mornings, sewing classes. They first found out about the Citizens Assembly when the Community Networker came to their group. She brought leaflets about the Citizens Assembly and made some posters with the group. After hearing about the Citizens Assembly the group thought it sounded like something interesting, so were keen to get further involved.

The group were interested in finding out more about their bodies and their health and the health of their family. They wanted to be able to recognise the signs of ill health, especially in their children, so that they would know what to do. Their improvement was focused on wanting to find out more information about women's health issues, along with information about specific health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes, as well as general first aid.

The group went along to the first Citizens Assembly event in November. They thought the event was good, there were lots of people there, and they were able to meet new people. They particularly liked going to the Museum, as they had never been there before, in fact some of the group are now going to go with their family. The response to their improvement has been very quick, so they are pleased and would be happy to go along to another event in the future as they think the events are a very good idea.

Since the event the group have returned 21 support forms to the Community Networker. These have been completed by friends, family members and neighbours. They have also had some feedback about their improvement and sessions have been set up from the Health Improvement Team, via the PCT and Haraf for every 2 weeks, with a health check day planned for the future.

Update

Health workers from the PCT have been invited to attend the Feedback event in March, and evaluations and monitoring from the current health sessions will be fed back to the Citizens Assembly Staff. As a result of the health sessions the group are in contact with more statutory bodies to make things more interactive, visually/pictorial for the needs of the group. The group have already passed on the information they have learnt so far, to their children.

Appendix 4: Interview Guides

Case Study Questions

Group Info

- What's your group called
- What's the membership/ how many people are involved
- How did this group start
- Why did you come together
- How often do you meet
- What sort of things do you do

Citizens Assembly

- How did you find out about the CA
- What did you think about it
- How did you come up with the idea for your improvement
- What would you like to happen next
- Have you told any of your friends and family about the CA
- What do you think should happen to the CA in Newcastle

Event

- What did you think about the event on the 12th Nov 2009
- What did you think about other people's ideas
- Would you go to something like this again
- Do you think anything will happen as a result of the event
- What did you like least/best about the event

Staff questions

Your role

How long have you worked on the project?

Can you tell me about your role and duties?

Is the role different from what you were employed to do? Has it changed since you began?

How do the different staff members work together on the CA? Is it an effective team?

Working with groups

What has the response been like across the City when you have been contacting groups and asking them to take part?

What has the procedure been for contacting groups? Is there a standard route you follow, e.g. letter, phone call, email, visit? Do you have set way of working with the groups or do you use a tailored approach? If so, how do you decide how to approach different groups?

Are there certain geographical areas, types of groups, or people that have been hard to reach? Why do you think this has been? Is there any thing you have done or thought of doing to address this?

Have you worked with community workers/community leaders/volunteering co-ordinators or other individuals to find groups or look at ways to approach them?

Have you (or are you thinking of) using any other approaches to consult and work with local citizens?

CA events

How did you feel the November event went?

What did you think the groups' experiences of it were? What sort of feedback have you had (and would you be willing to let us share this feedback for the evaluation)?

Were there any technical or other issues that went wrong?

What have you learned through organising the November event that you will use in organising the next event?

Is there anything you would have done differently for the November event, if you had the chance?

Have you got any plans for how the March event will be run?

Management and partners

What is the management structure for your job?

Do you think it is effective? Do you feel you have adequate support from management?

What sort of help/support/input have you had from:

The CA task group?

Newcastle Partnership?

Newcastle City Council (generally and from Community Engagement section)?

Newcastle CVS?

Other partner agencies?

Do you think partner agencies are committed to taking on the improvements that groups are identifying? If not, can you think of why this would be, and how it could be addressed?

Is there anything you would like to change about the way the CA is managed and supported by its partner agencies?

Achievements and lessons learned

Do you feel that the CA is achieving what it set out to do (i.e. meeting its aims and objectives)? What has worked well in the CA so far?

What has not worked so well? How have you dealt with any problems that have arisen?

What lessons have you learned through your experiences so far with the CA? Is there anything you would do differently if you had the chance?

Did you draw on past experiences, skills or lessons learned from other work you have done to help you in working on the CA? If so, what were these?

In working on the CA, have you looked at other similar projects to get ideas for ways of working/best practice? Would you like to have this sort of info?

What do you think the CA has achieved so far? What do you think it is likely to achieve by the time the current programme of work is completed?

The future

What do you think the CA could achieve in the longer term?

Is there anything that you think needs to be addressed/changed to help it to achieve greater results (e.g. local council structures, commitment of partner agencies etc)?

How long is the current funding for? Do you think there is a chance that Newcastle Partnership (or other sources) will fund it beyond this term?

Stakeholder questions

Your agency

How long have you/your agency been involved with the CA project?

What has your role/your agency's role been?

What type and level of commitment does your agency have for the work of the CA? (e.g. funding, staff time, supportive relationship, champion etc)

Is your agency committed to carrying through any improvements (if appropriate) identified through the CA?

Is the CA helping your agency to fulfil any of its aims/objectives/outputs?

CA Task Group

What is the role and function of the task group?

How long has it been running for?

How long have you been involved in it?

How often does it meet?

How many people are involved?

What sort of issues does it address (e.g. strategic level, operational issues etc)?

Does it manage to fulfil its role and function adequately?

How do the task group members work together?

Do you think there are equal levels of commitment from all agencies?

Do you think the task group has evolved? If so, in what way(s)?

Has the task group changed in the way it functions since it was set up?

Are there any plans to change the way the task group functions?

The CA staff team

How does the Task Group communicate with the CA staff team? Is this a formal or informal relationship?

Are you satisfied with the way the staff team is carrying out the work of the CA?

Do you think there is any way that the staff team could work more effectively?

Do you think the staff team are adequately supported?

CA events

Did you go to the Nov event? Will you go to the March event?

How did you feel the November event went (personally and from your agency's point of view)?

What did you think the general mood was like? What did you think the groups' experiences of it were? What do you think other partner agencies' experiences were?

What have you learned from the November event that can be used in planning the next event?

Is there anything you think should have been done differently for the November event?

Have you got any plans for how the March event will be run?

Achievements and lessons learned

Do you feel that the CA is achieving what it set out to do (i.e. meeting its aims and objectives)? What has worked well in the CA so far?

What has not worked so well? How have you dealt with any problems that have arisen?

What lessons have you learned through your experiences so far with the CA? Is there anything you would do differently if you had the chance?

Did you draw on past experiences or lessons learned from other work you have been involved with to help you with the CA? If so, what were these?

Has the task group carried out any research on similar projects elsewhere, best practice etc. to inform the CA? Is it planning to do this?

What do you think the CA has achieved so far? What do you think it is likely to achieve by the time the current programme of work is completed?

The future

What do you think the CA could achieve in the longer term?

Do you think the CA project should continue over the longer term?

Is there anything that you think needs to be addressed/changed to help it to achieve greater results (e.g. local council structures, commitment of partner agencies etc)?

How long is the current funding for? Do you think there is a chance that Newcastle Partnership (or other sources) will fund it beyond this term? What other potential funding sources do you know of?