

**REPORT TO
THE LONDON REGIONAL EMPOWERMENT
PARTNERSHIP:
EVALUATION OF THE LEP MAIN
PROGRAMME 2009/10**

JUNE, 2010

**ZAHNO RAO ASSOCIATES LTD
94 STAPLETON HALL ROAD
LONDON
N4 4QA**

**mobile: 07767 811117
e-mail: kamila@zahnorao.co.uk
www.zahnorao.co.uk**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

1. The London Empowerment Partnership (LEP) is one of nine regional empowerment partnerships funded by Communities and Local Government (CLG), and managed by the Community Development Foundation (CDF) to gather and communicate information about community empowerment practice and its impact throughout the SE region. This external evaluation of the LEP's work in 2009/2010 explored the governance of the Partnership as well as the projects it funded.

Regional Coordination

2. The accountable body for the LEP is the London Civic Forum (LCF). The LEP restructured itself this year and now comprises a small Task Force of nine members which is informed by four Thematic Groups: the London Boroughs Community Empowerment Networking Group (LBCENG); the Community Development Network for London: Network of Practitioners (CDNL); the Equalities Scrutiny Committee managed through the HEAR network; and the Third Sector Empowerment Forum. The evaluator interviewed a selection of partners which revealed the following points:
 - Interviewees agreed that the new structure was an improvement on the last, and has more focus and greater clarity. However, they felt on the whole that it tends to be bureaucratic with much of the time spent on discussing how to manage CLG programmes, and less time is devoted to sharing good practice and reflective learning.
 - The thematic groups, some of which exist independently, appeared to be effective for their constituents, sharing and learning about community empowerment. However, interviewees overall did not feel that the groups fed into the work of the LEP. This is a very specific concern of the HEAR network which has an equality scrutiny role.
 - Some interviewees believed that there was little focus on the role of the citizen activist and citizens' groups, and that the focus was almost entirely on supporting boroughs on community engagement and consultation.
 - It was felt that coordination between the different regional empowerment funding streams could be improved.
 - Most people felt that the national empowerment agenda was unclear and there needed to be more of an interface between the regional programmes and the national agenda.
 - A Commissioning Group has been proposed by Capital Ambition with the aim of joining up the regional funding streams, but there was a debate amongst partners, some of whom thought it might duplicate or undermine the role of the Task Force since it only includes certain partners. The role of the Group would be make recommendations to the various funding bodies on spend. After some debate it was agreed that the Commissioning Group would go ahead on a trial basis.

Recommendations

3. The new structure appears to be working better and is more stream-lined, but the following recommendations would improve the way the LEP works:
 - The new Commissioning Group should develop a strategic commissioning framework based on a Community Empowerment Strategy. This Strategy should be informed and discussed by the LEP, and by evidence from the Thematic Groups.

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- The agencies accountable for empowerment funding should consider a joint commissioning approach which enables them to pool money from different strands of empowerment funding.
- To enable more learning and sharing to take place the Task Force meetings should be longer and be held more frequently.
- The LEP should ask CLG to organise an event for all regional REPs which showcases national and regional research.
- The role of community development within the empowerment agenda has proved to be an important one, exemplified in CDNL's work and the work the LEP has done around health. We recommend that one of the LEP meetings and one wider pan-London event should focus on the role of community activists and action groups, and the support the public sector could give them to improve their effectiveness in working on public sector agendas.
- In order to clarify the relationship between the LEP and HEAR we recommend that HEAR continues to attend LEP meetings and that the LEP coordinator attends bi-annual HEAR Steering Group meetings.
- The LEP and HEAR coordinators should meet to work out a formal way for HEAR to scrutinise the work of the LEP and what HEAR should be feeding back to its members.

Developing a picture of empowerment

4. London Civic Forum's Shape Your City empowerment portal has a series of case studies, and an interactive map allowing examples of good practice to be placed on the website. It has also further developed the Community Evaluators programme, piloted in the previous year. We recommend that:

- the new Media and Communications Officer at LCF undertakes a targeted marketing drive to encourage more content to be added to the Empowerment Map
- the Community Development Learning Opportunities Directory should be updated regularly; this could be a role for the CDNL
- the case studies should be placed in a framework (e.g. IDeA's community empowerment framework) so that gaps can be identified and additional case studies commissioned

Empowering Diversity

5. Two initiatives were commissioned designed to demonstrate effective approaches to empowering groups that are typically excluded from mainstream empowerment activity. We recommend that:

- a series of case studies focusing on examples where excluded groups have successfully articulated their own views to policy makers, through focus groups, forums, and campaigning are researched by the London Civic Forum, as accountable body to the LEP, and placed on the website.

Supporting local authorities and their partners in community empowerment

6. A number of learning events were organised on themes such as the IDeA's Framework for an Ideal Empowering Authority and on community assets transfer. The LEP also commissioned a training programme for borough engagement officers on local authority community engagement strategies.
- We recommend that for all events it is important to get the logistics right, to ensure that a diversity of speakers present the topics of the event, and that innovative ways of learning such as knowledge cafes are carefully structured.
 - We also believe that action learning sets are a very effective way to learn, even when participants are at different stages of learning. We therefore recommend that, if any training programme is commissioned by LEP in the coming year, action learning is considered.

Health and community empowerment

7. The LEP selected as its regional priority the promotion of empowerment within the field of health and well being. A key regional policy driver associated with this was the launch of the Mayor's Health Inequalities strategy but the programme also linked to the Well London initiative. The activities delivered under this priority were targeted at councillors and third sector organisations and aimed both to empower and inform the participants themselves and to support them in empowering their constituents, organisations or members to take a more active role in shaping local health issues. We would recommend that:
- the LEP considers commissioning a specific regional activity for LINKs to encourage and support them in working more actively with councillors
 - networking events on health issues commissioned by the LEP should include practical examples of successful projects; these provide inspiration and a concrete demonstration of theory into practice
 - the LEP, through the accountable body, should ensure that events and activities that it commissions have a very clear focus and very clear outcomes for the participants if they are to be able to compete with local demands for time and attention.

Disseminating information and widening input

8. The London Civic Forum's own website and the empowerment portal *Shape Your City* portal are vehicles for the dissemination of information and participation by visitors to the sites. Although the long-term impact of websites is hard to measure, there are some recommendations to be made that might improve access to, and use of, the website:
- London Civic Forum should convene a cross-sector focus group to discuss the *Shape Your City* portal. This would complement the findings from the website survey. The focus group should concentrate on qualitative opinions on access, usability, structure, content and impact.
 - We recommend that London Civic Forum should try to convene a live discussion forum at all times so that people get used to seeing and using these.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The London Empowerment Partnership (LEP), was set up in 2007 along with the eight other regional partnerships, under the aegis of the National Empowerment Partnership (NEP). Zahno Rao Associates was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the impact of the work of its third year of operation 2009/10. The evaluation was undertaken by reading background documentation, observing events and interviewing partners, including those leading the delivery of projects.
- 1.2 The NEP is a partnership of organisations whose remit is to improve the quality, coordination and evidence of community empowerment across England. Funded by Communities and Local Government (CLG), and managed by the Community Development Foundation (CDF), it works with a range of agencies to gather and communicate information about community empowerment practice and its impact.
- 1.3 The accountable body of the LEP is the London Civic Forum (LCF). The programme is managed by a Task Group which is informed by four subgroups. The main aim of the Partnership is to provide a forum through which members will strive to improve the quality, coordination and evidence of empowerment activities in London. Partners will do this by:
- **Promoting** the importance of, and developing a coordinated approach to, community empowerment regionally
 - Developing a **regional evidence base** of case studies and model approaches that can be used to improve the development of high quality empowerment activities
 - **Identifying** and promoting effective ways of measuring the impact of empowerment activities
 - Using intelligence gained to **influence and support** the national community empowerment agenda to meet regional interests
 - Ensuring both statutory and third sector interests as deliverers and beneficiaries of community empowerment are **recognised and represented**
 - **Positioning** the London Empowerment Partnership as the hub for community empowerment in London
 - **Facilitating delivery** – by shaping the delivery of the partnership’s Action Plan, identifying the key principles and outcomes that the activity should deliver, acting like a commissioning body for the Action Plan, monitoring and evaluating the impact of the Action Plan
 - Providing a **space for reflection and exploration** – by supporting research and discussion into themes, and practice, through action learning between the partnership members and to work towards improving quality
- 1.4 The LEP oversees the implementation of the Action Plan which is the subject of this evaluation. The Action Plan covers seven priorities:
- Regional coordination and cross sector involvement
 - Developing a picture of empowerment in the region
 - Empowering diversity: narrowing gaps in participation between different groups
 - Supporting local authorities and their partners to meet targets around NI4, the Duty to Involve and CAA
 - Developing a regional focus: health and community empowerment
 - Disseminating information and widening input

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- Programme management and support
- 1.5 The following chapters report on the effectiveness and impact of the first six of these priorities in the Action Plan (the seventh is not included as a separate chapter as it is about evaluation which is the subject of this report). Conclusions and recommendations are placed at the end of each chapter and are summarised in the executive summary.

2. REGIONAL COORDINATION

Introduction

2.1 This section explores how the LEP is structured, the way that the partners work together in the Partnership and the impact of their work in spreading the message about the benefits of community empowerment across all sectors.

The remit of the LEP

2.2 The purpose of the LEP is to coordinate and improve the quality of community empowerment activity within the region, so that citizens and communities can increase their ability to influence decisions which affect their lives.

2.3 It has two main roles:

- to develop the Action Plan, specify and guide how the actions should be delivered
- to share experiences between the partners, to help shape and improve work at a local level and maximise the effectiveness of the resources available through the partnership

The structure of the LEP

2.4 The LEP evolved from an informal Development Group in 2007/08 to a two tier structure with a small Steering Group and much larger Consortium in 2008/09. Following last year's evaluation which recognised that, although the existence of the Consortium did raise the profile of community empowerment across the region, it is an unwieldy structure, and Consortium members were not clear about its role in relation to LEP activities. This year (2009/10) the LEP restructured to address the concerns raised in the evaluation. The new structure provides partners with a more clearly defined role and also enables the Partnership to absorb information from a range of sectors and networks to inform the development of a strategic improvement programme for community empowerment. The new structure consists of a small Task Force of nine members which is informed by four Thematic Groups. Task Force members comprise representatives from the four Thematic Groups; the LCF as the accountable body; Capital Ambition and the Government Office for London, both of whom hold community empowerment funding programmes; IDeA in its capacity of managing the Network of Empowering Authorities; and the GLA.

The Task Force

2.5 The role of the Task Force is to:

- oversee the development and implementation of the Action Plan, and support the fulfilment of key tasks within it (some activity areas will be delegated to thematic groups)
- evolve and provide the collective voice of the Partnership through delivery of the aims outlined above
- shape and guide the overall strategic direction of the Partnership
- provide a space for discussion and comparison of key issues emerging from thematic groups

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- 2.6 Partners interviewed all agreed that the restructured partnership was a great improvement on the previous structure: *“Before it was a talking shop, and now it is much more focus with greater clarity as to its role, and the roles of the partners”*. With fewer layers it is now a more streamlined partnership, and partners are better able to focus on the business aspect. In theory partners around the table thought they should be more able to influence the direction of the work than previously. In particular, having representatives from the four sub groups was thought to be beneficial as they should be able to feed in views across the various sectors.
- 2.7 However, most of our interviewees said that it tended to be too bureaucratic and too formal: for example, meetings are conducted around a long Board table. Although in theory it should be a workable structure the Partnership is still forming and, in the words of one person: *“the meeting dynamics can be difficult”*. It seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time sorting out the various CLG programmes: Take Part, Targeted Support as well as the core activities. It could be less focused than it should be at times and *“the discussions can seem disjointed”*. It still appears to be *“a collection of individuals”* rather than a Partnership.
- 2.8 The aims of the Partnership, as expressed in the Restructure document, were clear to partners. It should be accountable to the different sectors through the sub groups. It also has a remit to share different perspectives of community empowerment and to come to a common view of what community empowerment is. In doing so it should be positioning the Partnership as the hub for community empowerment in London. It should be shaping delivery of the programmes that come under the aegis of the Partnership. Less clear was its role regionally and nationally. We discuss these issues below to see how far these aims have been fulfilled.

The Thematic Groups

- 2.9 The four Thematic Groups exist to design, develop, oversee and discuss specific activity areas within the LEP's Action Plan. Members come together to discuss community empowerment issues relevant to their sector. There are four Thematic Groups
- The Community Development Network for London: Network of Practitioners (CDNL)
 - The London Boroughs Community Empowerment Networking Group (LBCENG)
 - The Equalities Scrutiny Committee managed through the HEAR network
 - The Third Sector Empowerment Forum
- 2.10 The CDNL collective and the LBCENG exist independently of the LEP. The CDNL exists to build up a network of practitioners and use events to disseminate work on community development and community empowerment. The CDNL collective is funded by LEP to operate a Network of Practitioners through which it advises the LEP of the community development perspective of empowerment. The LBCENG acts as a forum through which members will be supported in improving community empowerment in their borough, to obtain information and to inform current debate on community development and empowerment. The Third Sector Empowerment Forum brings together representatives from generic third sector organisations to debate and reflect on community empowerment issues impacting on the role of the sector. It has similar objectives as the CDNL and LBCENG but was set up specifically to feed in views of the third sector to the LEP. The LEP has engaged the HEAR Network, a third sector equalities network for London, to act as an Equalities Scrutiny Committee to ensure that the LEP's work benefits those who are least empowered and sufficiently addresses inequality in London.

- 2.11 The Thematic Groups should be sharing issues and good practice in community empowerment and evidence on what works, and in the main appear to do this well. LBCENG, for example, hosts presentations and discussions on community empowerment ranging from national issues (such as the IDeA Framework for an Ideal Empowering Authority, how the CAA will explore community empowerment practice in areas, Participatory Budgeting) through good practice exemplified by particular boroughs (e.g. Brent Council's Neighbourhood Working, Lewisham's Area Assemblies) to particular topics (e.g. health and LINKs, members' role in community empowerment). The LBCENG is very well attended. Evidence shows that borough representatives ask for further information from the boroughs presenting good practice. For example, there was interest generated from Newham's Neighbourhood Forum approach where there is a councillor community lead for each of the eight forums who coordinates neighbourhood problems and issues, bringing these to a quarterly meeting attended by officers who plan how to solve the problems. CDNL has held a series of events to promote and disseminate good practice in community development: e.g. the role of community development in health and well being. The Third Sector Forum helps to refine the community empowerment argument and to make the case that public sector community empowerment initiatives should involve third sector organisations. It does this through sharing good practice, for example involvement in a network which shares ideas for improving well-being through community led activities and the development of an anti-discrimination charter for the VCS which will be used to enable the VCS to empower tenants and residents. HEAR's work is not exclusively to do with community empowerment and it tends to report wider issues, such as the work it is doing on the Equalities Bill.
- 2.12 The Thematic Groups should be feeding into the work of the LEP. How well do they do this? Where the work of Thematic Groups exists independently of the LEP it was considered that it did not really inform the LEP's work. Whereas there is a standing item where Chairs of the Thematic Groups gave an account of the work of the Group, there was little discussion and it did not appear to inform the LEP's Action Plan or the debate on community empowerment. For example the work of the CDNL focuses on organising and supporting civil society and informal community networks, but this does not appear to be highlighted in the LEP's work. However, The Third Sector Forum did feel it has influenced the LEP and has fed into the work, mainly it believes because it was set up as a Forum to link with the LEP. For example, it informed the work of the health strand within the LEP Action Plan, particularly around LINKs and the work LEP is doing around the GLA's Community Voices for Health. The Forum is also directly coordinating the delivery of one of the Targeted Support for Empowerment and Participation Improvement Programme (TSEPI) initiatives – the Community Leadership Legacy Programme.
- 2.13 The HEAR Network does not exclusively focus on community empowerment but was funded to scrutinise the work of the LEP from an equalities point of view. There was some dialogue about the work of the LEP within the HEAR network, and the LEP Coordinator attended some meetings to discuss the Action Plan but there did not appear to be a formal structured way for HEAR to scrutinize the work. The organisation hosting the HEAR network changed in October. A member of HEAR attended the LEP meetings for an interim period and appreciated she was able to raise some concerns about the Connecting Communities agenda, and felt that some regional agencies took some interest in these concerns. The HEAR Network was funded by the LEP to undertake research on the relationship between equalities and empowerment. This highlighted the need to ensure that the definition of empowerment included a consideration of empowering diverse communities, as well as a consideration of individual needs and concerns. The research recommended that there needs to be improved communication

to enhance and increase dialogue between HEAR and the LEP, especially with regard to the equalities scrutiny role, a point that we have taken up in our recommendations.

The Task Force: a space for reflection and exploration

- 2.13 Interviewees found some aspects of attendance at the Task Force useful since they were able to obtain an overall picture of the programme and some felt they were able to use the learning to spread good practice. For example, the LBENG invited izwe, one of the TSEPI providers, to the sub group meeting it held on the subject of social networking. There have also been some examples of sharing across sectors. LBCENG had discussed the accreditation for community development workers with the representatives from the CDNL which was felt to be important; this may not have happened otherwise. It also found it useful to learn of the empowerment work done by some of the regional and national third sector organisations such as bassac and Operation Black Vote. It was acknowledged that there was potential mutual benefit to some partners, especially the statutory agencies. However, less clear was the benefit to the voluntary and community sector because they have a wider interpretation of community empowerment.
- 2.14 The reflective/exploration parts of the Task Force meetings did not appear as effective as they could be. Although interviewees felt that the Partnership has a good structure with the sub groups feeding into the Task Force, most were unclear at what happens to the information. The report-backs from the sub groups sometimes raised a discussion, but sometimes just remained a report-back: *“it can feel as if the sub groups feed into a void.”* Another person said: *“Going round saying what we have all done is a bit unstructured and there is no framework for what happens afterwards. It was better when we had a discussion on a particular topic, for example health.”*
- 2.15 Coordination with other related regional programmes has not always happened. For example empowerment work done through the main Connecting Communities programme and the work Capital Ambition is doing on engaging digitally, through its programme Connected London, does not appear to be shared by the LEP, presumably because the funding streams are not within the control of the LEP. This calls into question the wider role of the LEP as a hub for community empowerment in London.
- 2.16 It was felt that there was a lack of a strategic definition of community empowerment and little time to discuss this in the meetings. It appears to mean different things to different partners, depending on the sector they are representing. The emphasis on NI4 has tended to mean that community empowerment is interpreted narrowly as supporting statutory agencies to broaden out their democratic structures – about public participation in the democratic process. In the words of one partner: *“I appreciate the fact that NI4 might be the starting point for directing the work of the LEP but it’s become the boss!”* A number of partners represent sectors that have a much wider interpretation of community empowerment and this has created tensions within the partnership. There does not seem to be a real cross-fertilisation between the sectors in terms of debate and learning. For example there is little debate on collaborative arrangements between public agencies and the community on the co-design of services despite there being some good examples of this empowering work. There seems to be little discussion on the role of citizens doing things for themselves and how that can influence the way public services are designed and delivered. For example, despite the existence of the CDNL, there is a lack of focus within the Partnership on the real role of community development in supporting individuals to empower themselves, and almost no recognition of the role of community activists who come together to influence public decisions and strategies. Ongoing groups such as residents’ associations, ‘Friends of...’, and online

neighbourhood groups, which often have the involvement of ward councillors, can, or could be, very effective at influencing public decisions but there appears to be little focus on supporting them, perhaps because they operate outside of the institutional framework of the public sector. They need practical skills to help to organise at a local level such as setting up an email group or Facebook page, campaign advice, writing press releases, designing effective leaflets. More specialist advice might also be useful such as planning advice. An example of work done in rural regions is the support given to Community Led Planning Steering Groups to help them produce a plan that can influence decisions and actions taken at district and county level.

The core LEP programme

- 2.17 We refer to the core activities of the LEP rather than Take Part or the Targeted Support Programme. Partners felt that they contributed to shaping last year's programme (2009/10 but that the process this year (to inform 2010/11) was rather rushed. Last year they seemed to be involved earlier on in the process in sending in comments and views on possible themes and in discussing ideas. It was this process that enabled the health theme to be incorporated into this year's programme. Although the Project Manager was excellent at keeping everyone in the loop, the deadlines were too tight to really engage in a discussion, and partners did not really feel they influenced this year's programme.
- 2.18 As far as the mix of projects goes partners had an open mind but one said they thought there might be some duplication. There was a view from most interviewees the projects seem rather disparate and unconnected and lack the context of an all-encompassing definition of community empowerment. The programme of activities seems to sit alone and apart from the Partnership as a whole. How did they connect to other empowerment work of partners, for example?

Regional agenda

- 2.19 Although community empowerment in practice tends to be a local agenda, most interviewees agreed that there is a role for regional coordination. This is to support statutory agencies working at the local level to meet their empowerment responsibilities. The remaining part of the evaluation tests the effectiveness of this but the regional agenda is about sharing different ideas and different approaches to empowerment, testing out what works and why, and what needs to be tailored to specific kinds of areas. Capital Ambition raised the point that its Board members had the view that the agenda is localist and cannot be led regionally, and that this had led to tensions between the RIEP and the LEP. However, Capital Ambition did see a regional coordination role in that they suggested that there should be a regional framework to which community empowerment practitioners could come forward with bids.
- 2.20 A few interviewees raised the fact that the LEP could be doing more high profile work to influence the regional agenda. Although the LEP has two activities that are trying to influence the regional agenda (a piece of work around helping the GLA set up a community development forum for health, and a Youth Transport Campaign) these do not appear to be high profile pieces of work.

National agenda

- 2.21 Not many partners had much of an idea what the national community empowerment agenda was, although one thought that there must be some national debate going on about the role of community empowerment and they would like the LEP to be part of this.

There was a feeling that it seemed to be mainly about funding streams, and that these were not very well thought through or managed. In the words of one partner: *"I have a real problem with the ethos of [the Partnership] in a crowded landscape. It looks like a panic button was pressed and money channelled to deliver certain outcomes."* In addition, as at the regional level, there is a lack of joining up different initiatives such as the work done by the Network of Empowering Authorities.

Funding and commissioning

- 2.22 It was thought that the LEP was too focused on spending the three funding streams and there was no strategic attempt at matching these up. Which parts of the main programme connect to Targeted Support, for example? Is there a different focus or not? Some interviewees said that some projects appeared to be covering the same objectives and issues. Furthermore there are other community empowerment related funding streams funded through the GOL and Capital Ambition. Some partners asked whether the Partnership should be about pooling money and spending it according to a strategic commissioning framework?
- 2.23 Capital Ambition has proposed a new tripartite commissioning group comprising itself, GOL and the manager of the LEP on behalf of the LCF. These were the three accountable bodies for spend on community empowerment. This group would answer the need to provide:
- strategic coordination of a number of funding streams: Connecting Communities, Targeted Support, LEP core programme and Capital Ambition's empowerment funding)
 - clarity in the accountability in commissioning activities funded by the different programmes
 - clarity about the relationship between the LEP and Capital Ambition which has a commitment to supporting empowerment, but which needs evidence of improvement and efficiency in order to justify spend to its Board

The role of the commissioning group would be advisory in that it would make recommendations to the various funding bodies on spend. It would be informed by the Task Force which would retain its responsibility for the overview and developing of the LEP Action Plan and for shaping and guiding the overall direction of the Partnership. The Task Force would have two specific roles in supporting the commissioning group:

- to bring together technical support, experience and evidence to guide the commissioning group in making recommendations on the use of the resources
- to suggest areas or issues that might be prioritised in terms of helping to implement the Action Plan and to enhance coordination

The rationale behind this is that each funding body would remain accountable for decisions on funding streams for which they have responsibility. The LEP would remain the accountable body for the LEP as a whole, for day-to-day management and issuing contracts.

- 2.24 Partners fed back responses to this proposal, and the issue was collectively discussed at a Task Force meeting. Concerns were raised by some partners:

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- Fears were that it would duplicate or undermine the role of the Task Force since it only includes certain partners. Since GOL, LCF and Capital Ambition are all partners on the LEP it was not clear why a commissioning group was needed in addition.
- The proposal does not clarify the relationship between the LEP and the proposed commissioning group. The point was raised that if decisions on funding take place outside the LEP, what is the role of the LEP?
- There is no proposed third sector representation.
- It was not appropriate for any group other than the Task Force to have responsibility for the development and overview of the LEP Action Plan.
- It does not address accountability to the CDF.
- It would be useful to have some comparisons with other REPs

However, it was acknowledged that it would be useful for a potential commissioning group to develop a commissioning framework for the LEP and other empowerment funding streams as this would support more efficient, fair and transparent commissioning of services and support. Partners were in support of a commissioning group if it were accountable to the Task Force and had clear terms of reference outlining its decision making process.

2.25 In addressing these points, Capital Ambition responded:

- The proposed commissioning group would sit outside (or alongside??) the LEP and would have a broader remit since it brings together organisations accountable for a range of community empowerment funding streams, not all of which the LEP has responsibility.
- It does not duplicate decisions since the LEP does not have decision making powers over certain empowerment resources (e.g. Connecting Communities and Capital Ambition's empowerment funding). The commissioning group will exist as a voluntary arrangement to develop consistency in the use of these resources. The commissioning group cannot be accountable to the LEP since it would be advising on funding streams that LEP is not accountable for.
- It is willing to have a third sector representative in an advisory capacity.

With this response, the LEP has agreed for the commissioning group to be set up.

2.26 As evaluators of the LEP we believe that there is a case for a group which discusses a strategic approach to all regional community empowerment funding. It should develop a strategic framework for the commissioning of projects within all the empowerment funding streams. This will ensure gaps are filled and activities are not duplicated. Presumably the commissioning of the actual projects will take place within each agency which is accountable for its particular empowerment funding streams; we understand that joint commissioning is not proposed. While we understand this approach we would point out that the RIEP in the Eastern Region put its empowerment funding into the REP in the year 2009/10. The programme has been devised jointly but it is still clear which activities are funded by the RIEP and which by REP core funding. Whatever is decided we feel that commissioning group should sit alongside the LEP and not outside. One of the main roles of the LEP is to develop a coordinated approach to community empowerment in London and should therefore be involved in advising on a strategic framework for the commissioning of empowerment projects.

Recommendations

2.21 The LEP restructured itself following a recommendation from the 2008/09 evaluation. This structure appears to be working better and is more stream-lined. We feel that the following recommendations would improve the way the LEP works.

- We recommend that the new Commissioning Group should develop a strategic commissioning framework based on a Community Empowerment Strategy. This Strategy should be informed and discussed by the LEP and, in particular, evidence from the Thematic Groups.
- We recommend that the agencies accountable for empowerment funding should consider a joint commissioning approach which enables them to pool money from different strands of empowerment funding. This would enable joining up of strands which hitherto have been separately commissioned and will be separately evaluated e.g. the REP's main programme, the TSEPI programme, Take Part and Capital Ambition's empowerment funding strand.
- LEP meetings tend to get swallowed up in the business aspects. We recommend that the meetings should be longer (three hours) and that there should be time for break-out meetings so that more time devoted to learning and sharing amongst the partners and across the sectors. We would recommend that meetings be every two months rather than quarterly.
- We feel that there is not enough sharing of nationally commissioned empowerment research (through the NEP) and regional work. We recommend that the LEP asks CLG to organise an event for all regional REPs which showcases national and regional research.
- The role of community development within the empowerment agenda has proved to be an important one, exemplified in CDNL's work and the work the LEP has done around health. A community development approach needs to be embedded within the public sector's empowerment strategies. Learning from the CDNL needs to be shared with all LEP's partners. We feel in particular that the role of community activists and informal action groups in influencing public sector policy and decisions is an important one. We recommend that one of the LEP meetings should focus on the role of community activists and action groups, and that at least one event be held to look at how the public sector - and local authorities in particular - can provide support to such groups so that they can better work with public agencies to influence policy and decisions.
- There needs to be a clearer relationship between the LEP and HEAR. We recommend that HEAR continues to attend LEP meetings and that the LEP coordinator attends bi-annual HEAR Steering Group meetings.
- The equality scrutiny function needs to be clarified. We recommend that the LEP and HEAR coordinators meet to work out a formal way for HEAR to scrutinise the work of the LEP and what HEAR should be feeding back to its members. This should involve developing a methodology of how to measure both the work programme objectives and the work programme itself from an equalities perspective.

3 DEVELOPING A PICTURE OF EMPOWERMENT

Introduction

- 3.1 The LEP expanded its picture of empowerment across London this year, mainly through the accountable body's new website www.shapeyourcity.org.uk containing increased content and an interactive map. New case studies exemplifying good practice in community empowerment have been, or will be, added to the content this year. This year the Community Evaluators' programme, piloted last year, has been refined and tested, providing a model for other boroughs to evaluate their empowerment activities.

Shape Your City

- 3.2 London Civic Forum has developed an empowerment portal, *Shape Your City*, linked to its main website. It hosts the flagship interactive Empowerment Map enabling Londoners to identify community empowerment activities across the capital. Clicking on a borough enables visitors to identify the geographical location of the activity and obtain contact details, target audience and a short description. There are approximately one hundred activities and training courses covering all the boroughs. Content can be uploaded by organisations or individuals managing the activity. The content is brief, but links are provided for further information to be downloaded separately e.g. longer case studies. The types of activities include last year's youth case studies written for the LEP, Local Involvement Networks covering all boroughs, campaigns, local activists' groups and residents' groups, consultations e.g. on planning and health, local authority citizen panels and neighbourhood forums. Although content of the Empowerment Map is by no means comprehensive the Southwark map is a good example of what it could look like, with 21 activities ranging from local citizen's groups, to a link to a Southern Rail Area Station Manager inviting residents to ask questions, make complaints and add suggestions. This is because content has been added by Southwark Active Citizens' Hub which hosts one of the Take Part pilots in London. The most recent initiative for the website is the option of adding an icon on the websites of local organisations and agencies which would then link to the relevant section of the Empowerment Map. This in itself might encourage more content to be added.
- 3.3 We have a few observations to make regarding the empowerment map:
- Entry to the *Shape Your City* portal from the main LCF site is under the button entitled 'Get Involved'. This is a phrase used by many volunteer charities to give information about volunteering, and someone looking for the Empowerment Map may not automatically think of clicking here.
 - Some activities on the map fall into the category of frontline services rather than empowerment activities e.g. a Saturday school, a community café and an employment back to work centre.
 - The Map has not yet reached its full potential and needs a targeted marketing drive to encourage more people to add content.
- 3.4 Specific content related to learning opportunities for community development workers is being added to the Map. This is a spin-off from LCF's Recognition project which aims to improve the uptake of existing community development learning and qualification programmes and to develop new opportunities for experienced community development practitioners. The Recognition project worker has been tasked to provide information, advice and guidance to existing and potential community development workers – and their employers. By raising the awareness of accredited courses and progression routes,

the status of community development as a profession should be enhanced. Managers should have a better understanding of the profession and the skills used in community development work and this should help them to plan better services. Information about a range of community development learning opportunities is being uploaded to the Empowerment Map. These courses range from the postgraduate and graduate qualifications offered by London Metropolitan University, Goldsmiths College and Birkbeck to Open College Network accredited courses in community development and community involvement.

- 3.5 Although the idea of uploading a list of the complete range of community development courses is a good one, to be of use it is extremely important that this is comprehensive, timely and that there is a system for keeping the information up-to-date so that the full choice is available to those seeking courses. Although we understand this project did not cover the western boroughs, the coverage across the rest of London is patchy, and aside from the degree level courses described, only three other courses have been uploaded (a 6 week course in Greenwich, an OCN accredited course in Newham, and a foundation degree course offered by London Metropolitan University in Tower Hamlets). A further point about accessibility is that it does not appear possible to obtain the complete list of community development learning opportunities across London but one has to look at each borough's offer separately. This is not only time consuming but not very helpful, given that most of the opportunities listed are university courses and are accessible to all Londoners.

Case studies

- 3.6 The LEP commissioned a number of case studies to illustrate good practice around particular topics on which boroughs had relatively little experience. One particularly interesting case study will be used to illustrate a forthcoming Urban Forum publication on the Duty to Involve. The case study illustrates Southwark Council's action research on the needs and wants of Muslims in the borough, the Unmah Report. The research comprised:

- the recruitment of a group of Muslim residents as researchers
- training as volunteer researchers who defined and refined the research questions, undertook focus groups and a survey, and participated in a workshop which drew out the findings of the research
- a report to inform the borough of the needs of Muslims

Not only will the research findings be acted upon, but the council feels that it has justified continuing the funding to support the Muslim Forum. The Council wants to try this approach with other groups since it believes it is an excellent way of getting different communities to define their own needs and making recommendations to the council, and could save money that might otherwise be spent on external consultants. The case study is particularly important since it comments on how well the process of involvement matches with the specific aspects of the Duty to Involve. Southwark believes the case study can be used to promote this way of working nationally, through the Network of Empowering Authorities.

Community Evaluators' programme

- 3.7 Building on a programme piloted last year, the Community Evaluators' programme seeks to empower local residents to design and conduct their own evaluations for community empowerment activities and to feed back to the LSP what worked and what

improvements are needed. It would have benefits for the LSP who would be provided with community-led feedback about what makes an activity empowering or disempowering. A case study of this programme is reported in the linked evaluation of the TSEPI programme.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 3.8 The interactive Empowerment Map is an excellent way of gaining a snapshot of empowerment activities across London, and allowing people to upload material themselves should keep the map up to date. Recommendations to improve the Map are:
- The button to enter the *Shape Your City* portal from the main LCF website should have a more explicit name – perhaps empowerment.
 - The moderator should screen out activities that are about delivering frontline services since if others see these they could upload similar services which could crowd out empowerment activities.
 - A targeted marketing drive would encourage more people to add content. This could be targeted at people known to manage particular initiatives e.g. all community engagement officers in the London boroughs asking them to put content on their citizens panels, area forums etc. This should be a task for the newly recruited Media and Communications officer.
 - The Community Development Learning Opportunities Directory needs to be kept up to date and should be comprehensive. The LEP, through the accountable body, should approach the CDNL to ascertain if it is willing to keep this part of the Map up-to date in future. There should be a facility to allow viewers to search on a London-wide basis, rather than borough by borough, since the degree level courses would attract students from across London, rather than from particular boroughs.
- 3.9 The Southwark Unmah research and the Community Evaluators' programme provide a good complement to each other. Both provide examples of community feedback on council initiatives/services. Taken together they provide a picture of what can be done to actively involve residents to define needs, make recommendations and evaluate initiatives. We recommend that:
- All case studies are placed into a framework of community empowerment (e.g. the national evaluation framework or the IDeA framework) so that gaps can be identified with a view to filling these next year.

4. EMPOWERING DIVERSITY

Introduction

- 4.1 The LEP commissioned two initiatives that were intended to identify effective approaches to empowering groups that are typically excluded from mainstream empowerment activity. Excluded groups may want or need to give their views about public services in different ways. By demonstrating the effectiveness of different models of empowerment, it is hoped that public agencies will learn that they need to broaden out the way they seek to engage and empower diverse communities. One method involved action research to solicit the views of the Roma community in Newham and feed these back to professionals at a conference. The other, a Youth Campaign, was about young people doing things for themselves in order to influence a public agency.

The Roma community in Newham

- 4.2 As part of LEP's work to explore barriers and enablers to the engagement of excluded groups, the Roma Support Group (RSG), a charity based in Newham which has been working with East European Romas since 1998, was commissioned to deliver an Action Research project. The Roma communities have suffered persecution throughout their history, and the long term effect of this has resulted in extreme poverty and social exclusion. The objectives of the research were to raise awareness about the East European Roma community in London and the barriers they face when engaging with mainstream empowerment mechanisms; to enable service providers and the Roma community to overcome those barriers; and to recommend good practice to service providers on how best to engage with marginalised groups.
- 4.3 Using an outreach methodology the RSG organised focus groups to discuss barriers and enablers to participation and to identify models of good empowerment practice. The groups drafted recommendations in order to improve public services and to ensure that empowerment mechanisms would reach the Roma community. The final stage of the project involved the Roma community disseminating their recommendations to statutory providers and organising a conference to share good practice and discuss methods of engagement. This included a powerful theatre performance to get the message across.
- 4.4 The RSG has been acting as a channel through which the Roma community in London engages in public agencies. Through the Action Research project the RSG was able to explore ways of enabling the Roma community to take leadership and control with public agencies. Participants in the research were not familiar with mainstream engagement mechanisms and therefore a prerequisite for successful engagement is that the public sector should engage the community through facilitated sessions organised by grassroots organisations, rather than expecting Roma people to turn up to mainstream consultation exercises.
- 4.5 The barriers faced by the community include lack of information about their rights and restricted access to services and to public life because of lack of know-how on how to engage. There is also a lack of trust in public agencies. One of the reasons for this is that service providers have scant knowledge of the multiple needs of Roma people, and little knowledge on how to engage them. A low self esteem leading to a lack, or a fear of, identification as Roma also lowers the likelihood of Roma people engaging with service providers.

- 4.6 The main recommendations arising from the research were that service providers must understand Roma culture and the barriers they face accessing public services before trying to engage them. The public sector should not consider the Roma community as a problem but as an artistic and cultural resource. Engaging the community through promoting cultural events, and including Roma people in mainstream cultural events, would do much to raise the profile and help to tackle stereotypes. Roma people do want to engage in public life but need to do this through a community development model. This can include supporting grassroots organisations and employing Roma people in public services to act as a bridge between the public sector and the Roma community.
- 4.7 The recommendations are only a start to changing the culture of public agencies to recognise and address the needs of the Roma community. The action research culminated in a high profile event attended by 197 delegates, including 134 public service professionals. The research and the conference has developed, and in some cases, strengthened the relationship between the Roma community and statutory agencies. The speakers from DCSF and the East London NHS Trust are testament to the work the RSG has done already to raise the profile of the Roma community, and this had a positive impact on delegates who could see how committed these agencies were to working with the community. Speakers from the GLA and the Met Police also raised the hope that they would start developing a positive relationship with the Roma community. These speeches gave positive examples to other delegates who expressed a desire to know more about how to engage this excluded community. The impact of the theatre performance was particularly profound as the audience engaged in a first hand emotional experience of the Roma community. There was an impact on the Roma people themselves as they saw that service providers were receptive to their ideas. This has started to create trust.

Youth transport campaign

- 4.8 The Youth Campaign built on the research work that LEP did last year in its Empowering Young London programme which identified barriers and enablers to the empowerment of young people. It piloted a practical approach which would lead to young people attempting to influence a regional policy maker. The LEP wanted to look at a different approach to engaging young people since it has concentrated on looking at youth advisory groups last year. Campaigning was thought to be an approach that might attract young people who might not be interested in a more formal and longer term kind of participation such as a youth advisory forum. The campaign concentrated less on actual impact on the public agency, than on the process so that the policy makers could learn lessons on how to engage and empower young people.
- 4.9 The objectives were three-fold:
- To provide an opportunity for young people to influence regional policy
 - To provide training and skills development opportunities for young people so that they feel confident and able to lead the campaign
 - To pilot the campaign model as a mechanism for young people to influence regional governance bodies on issues important to them.
- 4.10 The LEP engaged Envision, an organisation which builds the skills of young activists to train others. Recruitment was shared between the LEP and Envision, mainly through universities. Out of 20 positive responses a group of 15 attended the initial meeting, and a group of 11 finally formed, with most attending fortnightly from November 2009 to February 2010.

- 4.11 The LEP had specified that the campaign should be about transport and had contacted TfL to discuss the campaign. TfL is setting up its own youth advisory group and was keen to be involved. But the group decided to focus the campaign on promoting the use of environmentally friendly forms of transportation in London. One of the first activities undertaken by the group was to invite representatives from TfL to attend a campaign meeting. The campaigners felt able to ask further questions about the draft Transport Strategy and to challenge existing policies which they felt were inadequate or ineffective. The group has also developed a logo as part of developing its identity as a campaign and also developed its own website.
- 4.12 Building confidence was a core aspect of the campaign but the real impact has been the sense that it has been worth doing, has not been tokenistic, and has lived up to the young people's expectations. Signs are that the participants will take the skills they have learnt on to other settings and join other campaigns. A testament to its success is that the campaign is set to continue beyond the LEP's funding; Envision has offered to help revise documents and with the website. The young people feel that they are leading the campaign and own it and a measure of success will be how long the group continues with its transport campaign without financial support.
- 4.13 The campaigners were provided with significant opportunities to engage with policy and decision makers. Meetings with the TfL have made the group feel that they have been taken seriously; this has motivated the young people to continue. They developed a proposal to submit to the TfL consultation and they also developed a petition to avoid getting stranded at night if the Oyster card has run out. TfL has also given a place to the young campaigners on its youth advisory group.

Key learning points

- 4.14 The two initiatives have the potential to influence practice as they offer learning about what works for different excluded groups.
- 4.15 Action research through a community group will be initially necessary for hidden and excluded groups such as the Roma community. The main reason for the success of this initiative was the fact that it was coordinated by a community group which had longstanding and close links within the Roma community. The RSG was able to recruit people through outreach, and then could facilitate honest and deep discussion in a way that a service provider would be unlikely to do. Through the RSG services it already has links to public agencies and in this way it can provide a bridge between an excluded community and the service providers. However, it is important that the voices of Roma people are heard directly as individual citizens, as well indirectly through their community group. This action research enabled individuals to tell their own stories and to come up with their own solutions and advice to service providers. The community group, as a vehicle for articulating individuals' voices is important, but service providers must take care they do not rely solely on the community group to act as a proxy voice, and ensure they seek the views of the service users directly, albeit this is best done through a community group such as the RSG.
- 4.16 Young people's advisory groups and panels exist in most boroughs in some form, but these may attract a particular type of young person willing to give up time to sit regularly on a panel or forum. Some young people want to organise together in the short term to influence a particular issue about which they feel passionate. The Youth Campaign enabled a group of young people to 'do things for themselves' and organise their own campaign to influence a public body. One of the key lessons to learn for anyone

facilitating such a campaign is that one needs to get to a particular point where the group starts to take ownership. It is only at this point when the campaign takes off and creates its own momentum. It is important to wait until this happens rather than pushing a group to start a campaign, otherwise it is unlikely to be sustainable.

- 4.17 There is a range of ways for policy makers to hear the voices of excluded communities. These two projects have tested different methods. Key learning points are:
- Policy makers need to understand the role of *community development* in accessing excluded communities. This requires outreach and facilitation by community groups who are trusted by that particular community. This can lead to excluded communities developing their own views on services and policy and being able to articulate them to policy makers directly. Eventually a particular community may develop its views on a range of services in an ongoing forum where they represent themselves to policy makers.
 - Facilitating a particular group of people to start a *campaign* can act to give confidence to that group, helping them to develop their views and take ownership of the campaign. Eventually such a campaign can lead the group to influence a public body.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 4.18 Many public agencies are familiar with organising one-off consultation meetings, citizens' panels and local area forums, but are less familiar with eliciting the direct views of the most excluded through third sector organisations – which is different from using the organisation as a proxy voice for consultation purposes. For the most hidden and excluded communities the model of outreach and facilitated discussion groups will work to raise the confidence of those communities to articulate their voice to service providers. For others who want to go directly to a public agency on their own terms, but are uncertain how to do so, learning campaign skills and using a campaign method will teach them skills in direct action that will stand them in good stead for the future.
- 4.19 We recommend that a series of case studies focusing on examples where excluded groups have successfully articulated their own views to policy makers, through focus groups, forums, and campaigning is researched by the London Civic Forum, as accountable body to the LEP, and placed on the website.

5. SUPPORTING LAs AND THEIR PARTNERS IN COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Introduction

- 5.1 The LEP coordinator, working closely with GOL, identified boroughs that might need targeted support around the engagement and empowerment agenda. This was in some cases evidenced by a lower than average NI4 score, but was based on both LEP's and GOL's experience of initiatives in boroughs. This targeted support is discussed in more detail in our linked report on the Targeted Support Programme. The learning opportunities discussed in this chapter were open to all boroughs.

Learning events

- 5.2 Two cross-sector learning events were held, one in April 2009 which launched IDeA's Framework for an Ideal Empowering Authority, and one in March 2010 on the theme of Asset Transfer. The two events complemented each other as one was strategic and one more specialist.

Empowering Communities Event

- 5.3 This event launched IDeA's Framework and also took the opportunity to launch CDF's Duty to Involve Guide. Both documents put community empowerment within a strategic context. Delegates explored the five pillars of the IDeA Framework and also discussed some of the themes within the overall LEP programme, for example Empowering Diversity, community evaluation. Overall satisfaction was good and the keynote speech by Richard Reeves from Demos was rated very highly. Delegates believed they had gained an overview of the legislation, policy, and guidance, but particularly valued learning about the range of the initiatives to promote and deliver community empowerment and when best to use the different approaches. As one delegate said: *"really radical and innovative ideas [were] being discussed – not the same old stuff about local forums."* Unusually for events organised by LEP there were some negative comments about the venue and logistics to take on board.

Community Assets Transfer

- 5.4 This was a specialist event which gave information on what community asset transfer was, its role in community empowerment, and how to identify and manage risks. Community delegates wishing to take over assets were signposted to specialist organisations that could help them e.g. Community Matters and the Development Trusts Association. A series of knowledge cafes on specialist topics (planning, property management, legal insurance and risks, and shared resources within a building) allowed participants to ask specific questions they had come across, or might come across, when taking over assets. To round off the day three case studies of actual asset transfer were presented. The technical nature of the event was appreciated, in particular the context and the case studies. Comments demonstrated that the 'how to' parts of the day were invaluable, as was the fact that delegates were signposted to providers for further technical advice. However, it was acknowledged to be difficult to participate in the knowledge cafes unless one had a specific question to ask. They were more like surgeries than cafes.

Training on community engagement strategies

- 5.5 Involve, a charity working to promote high quality processes in public participation, was commissioned to undertake a training programme for borough engagement officers on local authority community engagement strategies. The community engagement strategy training programme aimed to improve engagement within local authorities and their partners, enhance engagement skills, and create a network of engagement champions.
- 5.6 Comprising three workshops, the programme was intended to support local authorities to develop their community engagement strategies, using a guide written by the Urban Forum. Fifteen boroughs registered and around nine came to each event, although participation was not consistent. Participants were given the option of taking an action learning approach but opted not to, which partly reflected the fact that they were all different stages of producing their strategies. The workshops enabled participants to define the outcomes they wanted from their strategies; to review the contents of a community engagement strategy, and to identify potential stakeholders and their roles in implementing the strategy. Factors that would make a good and bad strategy were also examined. The programme also looked at the role of 'fun' in community engagement and its positive and negative aspects. The programme ended with participants identifying the actions they intended to take in future. Throughout the programme participants were encouraged to think about the objectives of a strategy as much as about content and structure.
- 5.7 Participants valued the interactive style and the opportunity to learn from each other. Some felt they had been usefully challenged in their thinking. They felt that the programme offered them the opportunity to benchmark themselves against other boroughs and that they could discuss specific issues with other participants. They would have liked more practical guidance on writing a strategy and more examples and case studies from elsewhere. In retrospect Involve felt that the programme might have worked better had they asked participants to bring their own strategies for discussion at an earlier stage.
- 5.8 Two of the original objectives were about enhancing actual engagement skills. This may be a potential outcome but it is too early to say as the programme was more about writing strategies than implementing them. However, an immediate outcome was that participants were now more confident to develop their strategies further and that they understood that they could adapt it to suit their own situation. This is timely since the majority of boroughs have now developed community engagement strategies and may be thinking of revising them. Immediate benefits were thought to be the links created with their counterparts in other boroughs. For some the impact had been on the usefulness of the theoretical input and the emphasis on staying focused on strategic outcomes.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 5.9 *Learning events:* In general the LEP is very good at the logistics of events, and in particular delegates always compliment the fact that they are able to take away useful information on a memory stick. While every learning event is different there are some common small points to note:
- It is important to get the logistics right: venue location, acoustics, display screens etc.
 - Innovative ways of learning e.g. knowledge cafes, world cafes etc must be carefully structured and the objectives carefully explained to delegates.

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- A diversity of keynote speakers should be asked to present, without being tokenistic.
 - Guidelines should be drawn up and given to speakers on powerpoint presentations: slides should have minimal wording and should be illustrated with pictures as far as possible.
- 5.10 *Training*: one of the main challenges of the community engagement strategy training was thought to have been the different starting points and expectations of the participants. Some wanted rigorous theoretical content and a framework for the processes and outcomes of their strategies, while others wanted very practical guidance in writing a strategy: a 'how to' guide rather than 'why'. There were benefits apart from the practical learning and materials. The course demonstrated the value of boroughs coming together to share experience and ideas and to reflect on a theoretical framework for a partnership based strategy. This approach would be useful across a range of issues if it can be built into boroughs' planning for developing these processes to ensure that lead officers can allocate the time for their own attendance; the issue of senior engagement was raised by both Involve and participants.
- 5.11 However, we feel that it was a pity that the course did not turn out to be an Action Learning Set which was successfully undertaken last year by the LEP, and does not require everyone to be at the same starting point. An Action Learning Set, which is facilitated by a professional, consists of a small group of people who meet over a period of time to support one another in their learning in order to take action on their work. It is not merely about learning by doing, but about reflecting on one's experience in order to identify exactly what it is you have learned, internalising the lessons and devising an action plan to implement in the future. Individual set members present a problem or 'dilemma', have their thinking provoked by questions of fellow set members, are given time to reflect and go away to take appropriate action. At the next session they present their findings. Using the stimulus of real life problems, the Set works in a supportive environment with others who are also working to develop themselves and are open to being challenged by other members.
- 5.12 We would therefore recommend that Action Learning is promoted more widely by the LEP as it is an excellent technique to promote real reflection and learning from action.

6. DEVELOPING A REGIONAL FOCUS: HEALTH AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Introduction

- 6.1 The LEP selected as its regional priority the promotion of empowerment within the field of health and well being. A key regional policy driver associated with this was the launch of the Mayor's Health Inequalities strategy but the programme also linked to the Well London initiative. The activities delivered under this priority were targeted at councillors and third sector organisations and aimed both to empower and inform the participants themselves and to support them in empowering their constituents, organisations or members to take a more active role in shaping local health issues.

Range of approaches

- 6.2 Although the projects supported under this strand of the programme took a diverse range of approaches which included research, training, promotion of new communication tools and support for disseminating good practice, they shared some common themes. All the projects combined an element of technical input with some form of networking – they aimed to build capacity by developing the skills and knowledge base of participants, whilst also encouraging them to see themselves as part of a wider empowerment community. By supporting a portfolio of projects which reached out to councillors, experienced practitioners and representatives of community groups, this strand aimed to build capacity of all potential players and create an environment in which public agencies are able to work collaboratively with a community which is able to express its views effectively.

Building a knowledge base

- 6.3 London Civic Forum led a piece of research with practitioners in community development work to identify how community development principles could be used in community empowerment work around health and well being. The research sought to collate existing work and to draw out the expertise, experience and insights of established practitioners through a discussion group with a view to producing a report and recommendations primarily aimed at local authorities and health commissioners. The report included a three case studies.
- 6.4 The focus group was a useful opportunity for a small group of practitioners to stand back a little and reflect on what it was within a community development approach which made it a useful empowerment tool. They saw one of its key advantages lying in its basic premise of helping people to help themselves both individually and collectively; this is particularly valuable in the field of health where empowerment can then lead to improved health for the individuals who take part. They felt that community development workers potentially had a role in helping the NHS to listen and consequently to better understand the needs of communities. The focus group was a useful part of the research since it drew on the direct experience of practitioners, gave the participants a chance to reflect on their own practice and provided a forum for sharing experience and insights.
- 6.5 Overall, the research concluded that a community development approach can:
- facilitate engagement with communities to build their capacity to influence personal, day-to-day health decisions. As wider public health messages are also translated through this process, health services are able to be more responsive to local needs and adapt health information accordingly.

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- reach marginalised communities and broaden their choices around health.
 - build upon existing social networks and encourage innovative ways of participating in health decisions
 - promote a social model of well-being and advocates for health and wider societal change
- 6.6 The research offered a number of general recommendations including a renewed commitment to National Occupational Standards in community development work (something that the London Civic Forum is working on through its Recognition project); increased support; management and training for community development workers; and the sharing of good practice. These now need to be incorporated into future work the LEP might do on health issues.
- 6.7 The London Sustainability Exchange (LSX) was commissioned to run a series of events for councillors with an interest in well-being. The events were to be targeted at councillors sitting on health scrutiny committees and ward councillors who work with local health groups as part of another project run by LSX to support voluntary groups delivering health and social care services. The events were intended to offer participants a mix of empowerment theory, examples of practical empowerment projects and an opportunity to network with each other. In the end, it proved to be difficult to engage councillors sufficiently to make more than one event viable. The project then moved instead to developing cases studies as these did not require councillors to travel at a time when their attention was focused on campaigning in their own boroughs.
- 6.8 The single event offered a mix of theory and practical example. Mike Kelly from the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) opened the session with a presentation on the community engagement guidance published by NICE in 2008. The discussion afterwards was useful in identifying the barriers which prevent councillors from engaging with health. These barriers include a sense that the public are unwilling to get involved – and are certainly unwilling to get involved via traditional meetings – and lack the confidence to get involved. However, the greatest barrier was the view by councillors that health is not a matter for them. By the end of the session that view had shifted as those present recognised that traditional council concerns such as housing, neighbours and noise all had a significant impact on health. The session ended with a presentation of work by the Rushey Green Time Bank in Lewisham.
- 6.9 Although the event was thinly attended, those who did take part found it useful. They were inspired by the Rushey Green presentation and resolved to find out more about similar projects which ‘work’ in their own area. The session was also useful at a broader level in identifying quite clearly the barriers which prevent councillors taking an interest in health – and possibly also hold them back from attending events to explore the issue.

Tools for empowerment

- 6.10 Kensington and Chelsea LINK led a project which aimed to develop capacity amongst frontline voluntary groups and within the LINK in using new technology as an empowerment tool. The project also aimed to share good practice across London LINKs and encourage them to network more actively with each other.
- 6.11 The first stage of the project involved updating the Kensington and Chelsea LINK website to ensure it was user friendly and compatible with new technology which would enable users to add content to it through, for example, commenting on blog posts and

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- contributing to an online forum. On 1 November 2009, the LINK coordinator posted the first blog entry explaining the purpose of the blog.
- 6.12 To support the blog, the LINK ran a marketing campaign promoting the blog in a variety of ways to other London LINKs. This comprised:
- the distribution of 500 flyers at LINKs and other health and social care meetings across London
 - an email to all London LINKs and Department of Health LINK contacts telling them about the project – subsequently followed up with reminder emails to London LINK host organisations (the organisations which manage LINKs)
 - the promotion of the blog internally within Hestia (Hestia is a charity providing housing and care services to a range of vulnerable client groups and which also manages the Kensington and Chelsea LINK) to its service users and to the other LINKs it manages (Ealing, Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham).
 - an update of the LINK's Facebook and Twitter pages to advertise the blog to any individual or organisation following them.
- 6.13 The blog has received measurable and increasing traffic (January 2010, 101 page views; March 2010, 243 page views) but it has not been possible to identify individual readers. Comments on posts suggest that the marketing campaign did not succeed in attracting an active readership.
- 6.14 In addition, the LINK ran a series of three training sessions on blogging which were targeted at LINK members; a neighbourhood trust and older individuals to encourage people to start blogging and to contribute to the LINK blog. This training on blogging was well received.
- 6.15 For the LINK staff, encouraging blogging and other online interactions was important because the population profile of the borough showed a high proportion of younger, working people who tend not to attend meetings but who nevertheless have views on the services they need and receive or who may need support with health issues they face.
- For the convenor of a cancer support group, blogging was part of a strategy to find a wider range of ways to disseminate information and to engage a wider constituency in commenting on the issues for cancer survivors. In particular, they felt that there was a group of breast cancer survivors who might be willing to engage with the group on line but not in any other way. The PCT was particularly interested to see whether different issues were highlighted by online participants compared with those who engaged with the group in more traditional ways. The LINK's cancer sub-group is now looking at developing a specific cancer forum. This has attracted interest from national cancer charities because the borough is home to national cancer services provided by the Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals.
 - For the founder of a diabetes support group which had received start up funding from the PCT but was due to go independent from April 2010, blogging and social networking represented a potential means for disseminating information. The founder recognised that building confidence was vital in encouraging participation. She thought that, although many of her members were not very familiar with on line forms of communication, the potential to take small steps to start with might help them to overcome the barriers to participation which she saw as a lack of time; fear; reluctance to take the first step by, for example, attending and speaking at a meeting.

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- For the convenor of another self help group, understanding blogging and social networking was vital because she expected her members to start demanding the facility to link with each other in this way.
 - Another small community group was keen to start reaching out to young people in the area. They felt that a social networking presence was vital to establishing credibility with a group who see these tools as a normal – and central - part of their social lives.
- 6.16 However, groups have been slower to put their new skills into practice – although the LINK’s own cancer sub group is now looking to develop its own sub blog to raise awareness about issues of concern to them. The LINK blog is read – indeed it is the most visited part of the Kensington and Chelsea LINK after the home page - but few readers are prepared to add their own comments. This may be due to LINK members typically being older; younger members use the LINK Facebook page but are less interested in the blog. Other London LINKs, specifically Westminster and Islington, have contributed a guest blog when invited but there is little evidence of their being enthusiastic in developing a virtual community **across London** through this mechanism. For Kensington and Chelsea LINK itself, it has proved to be challenging to chart a course which makes the blog interesting and relevant both to a local readership and to a regional readership. This project has not achieved engagement with LINKs regionally to any significant extent. This seems to be because there is insufficient need amongst London’s LINKs for a forum of this kind. However, the project has been successful in building skills locally to use e-communication more widely and it may be more useful as a model for how to do this than as a regional forum in its own right.

Networking and support

- 6.17 The *Community Voices for Health* event was held as a joint event between the London Civic Forum and the Greater London Authority. It developed out of the empowerment arrangements for the Mayor’s Health Inequalities strategy and was targeted at community groups with an interest in health. It aimed to explore the relationship between health and empowerment and look at forthcoming policies and programmes. The day was also an opportunity to launch the *Community Voices for Health Network* – which will now go on to develop further events in response to the needs of its members.
- 6.18 The event comprised a series of presentations, a plenary panel discussion, the launch of the network and a knowledge cafe. Participants were appreciative of the presentations, the event and the network. Many noted that they found empowerment and health “a very *big*” agenda, confusing to navigate and an area where it can be difficult for front line staff, community development staff or people from small organisations to understand how their work “*fits with the bigger picture*”. Participants said that they valued the opportunity to find out what was going on elsewhere and to tap in to the “*collective store of good practice*” which can be difficult to access. Views from the participants included:
- Potential cuts in public spending are a problem – community engagement needs to be adequately supported over a long period, rather than a stop-start approach depending on funding.
 - There is a contradiction between the encouragement to take action at a very local community level and the need to collaborate and scale up to respond to the commissioning agenda. It is difficult for the VCS to respond to both challenges.

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- Community groups cannot keep up with the constant change in health structures including the engagement structures.
- People on the ground either lack access to information about support or are so bombarded with events, resources etc. that they cannot sort out what is useful and important and what is not.
- There is a difficulty with engagement – ask people what they want and their answer may not be acceptable to commissioners (e.g. they may want alternative medicine/therapies).

Conclusions and recommendations

6.19 Project promoters within this particular strand of work faced a challenging task. Work targeted at councillors was faced with the barrier of health not being seen as a core priority for councillors or councils. This was compounded by external factors including the impending election and the political imperative to maintain a high profile locally. For the voluntary sector empowerment and health work is seen as confusing; there is a degree of retrenchment from it because of the rapid changes in formal engagement structures but also because larger groups are focusing on the commissioning agenda whilst smaller groups lack confidence and understanding of the issues.

6.20 Across the projects there were some clear conclusions:

- Although health is determined by a range of factors which are very much local authority responsibilities, councillors do not see health as a key political issue for them.
- Health empowerment needs to be underpinned by a community development approach.
- Empowerment in health is not a short-term undertaking – there is the need to develop confidence, skills, knowledge and understanding and to ensure that health agencies are able to respond to communities' agendas.
- Many working in the field are keen to have access to clear information and practical support; networking is valued but individual organisations' own targets etc. make it difficult to devote time to sharing good practice with colleagues.
- There is a recognition of the need and enthusiasm for new approaches and new tools to ensure that a diverse community can be involved.
- Although time is in short supply – for councillors, groups and individuals – access to practical examples of 'what works' can still be inspirational.

6.21 We would recommend that:

- The LEP continues to work to support councillors' engagement with health but considers doing this through the LINKs which are already established. A specific regional activity for LINKs to encourage and support them in working more actively with councillors might be more successful than either trying to engage directly with councillors who have many demands on their time or addressing LINKs in a generic, less focused way.

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- Networking events on health issues commissioned by the LEP should include practical examples of successful projects. These provide inspiration and a concrete demonstration of theory into practice – there is clearly a hunger for ‘real life’ examples.
- The LEP, through the accountable body, should ensure that events and activities that it commissions have a very clear focus and very clear outcomes for the participants if they are to be able to compete with local demands for time and attention. It is important to test with potential participants whether any proposed event or activity can command this focus in advance of arranging it.

7. DISSEMINATING INFORMATION AND WIDENING INPUT

Introduction

- 7.1 Both the London Civic Forum website and the *Shape Your City* portal are vehicles for the dissemination of information and participation by visitors to the sites. This section briefly describes and evaluates these mechanisms.

Disseminating information

- 7.2 Six e-bulletins on community empowerment have been sent to almost 3000 recipients on LCF's contact database and it is estimated that a further 5000 receive it from partnership networks such as bassac, LVSC, MiNet, the London Boroughs Community Empowerment Networking Group, CDNL etc. The e-bulletins are informative and up-to-date. The content includes: news and updates on national and London-wide empowerment work; a *Speaker's Corner* which gives space for someone to talk about empowerment work or research; upcoming empowerment events; *Have Your Say* – links to other consultations such as the Mayoral Strategies; *In Your Area* – local consultations; *Did You Know?* – an informative piece focusing on empowerment work or a consultation. The information presented is comprehensive and useful.
- 7.3 Visitors to both the LCF website and *Shape Your City* have the opportunity to provide input by participating in discussion forums, consultations and surveys. These visitors had contributed to the Government's consultation on *Strengthening Local Democracy* which sets out a range of proposals to promote democratic renewal and strengthen the power and responsibility of local government. This in turn had been used by the Community Development Foundation in its response to the consultation. There were no live discussion forums at the time of the evaluation.
- 7.4 There have been over 2,000 visits to the *Shape Your City* portal over the last year with over 11,000 page views. On average people spent four minutes browsing the site. 70% of the visits were new users. Breaking this down, 591 viewed the Empowerment Map and 615 viewed the page where it is possible to upload information onto the Map. Fewer people viewed the resources, discussion forums, consultations and survey (around 200 each). Currently the LCF website is being evaluated through a survey on the website, but that will not yield qualitative detail about the use of content and its impact on the user. However, our research has picked up from partners that the e-bulletin is circulated and that content is appreciated. Furthermore people obviously do hear about events as those are always over-subscribed.

Recommendations

- 7.5 Although the long-term impact of websites is hard to measure, there are some recommendations to be made that might improve access to, and use of, the website:
- London Civic Forum should convene a cross-sector focus group to discuss the *Shape Your City* portal. This would complement the findings from the website survey. The focus group should concentrate on qualitative opinions on access, usability, structure, content and impact.
 - We recommend that London Civic Forum should try to convene a live discussion forum at all times so that people get used to seeing and using these.