

Luton **Assembly**

Empowering the Community

Making Change Happen

How Local people have a voice on local concerns



Report of the

‘Empowering the Community Event’

Held on the 1st July 2010

1000hrs – 1500hrs @ Hightown Sports and Arts Centre

The Event

The Luton Assembly July 1st event 'Empowering the Community' was a joint event held in partnership with the Luton Assembly and Luton Borough Council's (LBC) governance and community engagement officers.

60 -70 individuals from the voluntary and community sector from Luton and South Bedfordshire attended.

Aims of the Day

- For Luton's voluntary and community sector and local residents to understand the role of empowerment networks and other empowerment mechanisms that exist in Luton.
- For all participants to understand how they can make change happen

Speakers

Gavin Shuker - MP Luton South

Councillor Joan Bailey MBE- Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement LBC

Ian Philips - Luton Lead, Safer & Stronger Communities Division, Government Office East,

Peter Adams – Luton Assembly Representative

Marek Lubelski – Neighbourhood Governance Project Manager, Luton Borough Council

Peter Headland – Consultation and Community Engagement Manager, LBC

Nisar Mohammed - Community Development Officer, Luton LINKs

Jenny Spouge – Chairperson of Luton Assembly

John Mardle – Friends of Great Bramingham Park

Karen Fisher – Youth Worker from St Hugh's church

Workshops

Those present were divided into 4 workshops, all of which explored the understanding and the effectiveness of local empowerment within the Voluntary Community Sector and communities. (Detailed questions listed below)

Overview

Exploring how change can happen within local communities – recent empowerment event held by Luton Assembly

A wide medley of ways for ordinary citizens to make change happen within their communities and the town were explored at the recent Empowering the Community – Making Change Happen Event, put on recently by Luton Assembly, in conjunction with Luton Borough Council's neighbourhood governance project and consultation and communities managers at Hightown Sports and Arts Community Centre, Concorde Street, Luton.

The passion for seeing change happen, to continue improving the life of people within Luton, was expressed by Gavin Shuker (MP Luton South) and Councillor Joan Bailey (portfolio holder for Community Engagement).

Searching question and answer sessions followed the presentations on the work of Luton Assembly (VCS), Luton Links (Health issues), Local and Neighbourhood Governance (presently working in Luton North and starting soon in Luton South), together with the Community Involvement Strategy and even the new Government initiative 'Big Society'.

Success stories of how local people had achieved empowerment within their local communities were shared by Friends of Great Bramingham Park that was delivered by John Mardle (who had received support from Groundwork) and the After School club run by the Youth worker Karen Fisher, from St Hugh's, showing what could be achieved through effective use of the empowerment networks.

Following a sumptuous buffet lunch, those present attended the workshops to explore how local empowerment works, the barriers people face and how it could be improved. By the end of the event, all went away feeling that change can happen when you work in co-operation and partnership, supporting each other, share knowledge, use the networks effectively and raise awareness of how to get results.

Please see links on the Luton Assembly website for individual speakers' presentations. (www.lutonassembly.org.uk)

Flipchart notes – Workshop 1

(As written on the day)

Facilitator: David Oakley-Hill

Note taker: Victor Cowell

1

What do you understand by local decision making and influencing?

- Communities and people speaking knowledge of local links and networks training (empowerment)
- Area committee help and more funding and advice tap into local networks people- not just money joining networks for greater empowerment.

2

What are your expectations of being able to influence decision making?

- Having a platform
- Getting support to influence
- More community involvement likely to get better results
- If it is worth it , fight for it
- Being able to talk regularly with decision makers
- Keep in the loop
- Collective working helps
- Gaining confidence

3

What do you see as the barriers to influencing?

- a) If a capacity issue, is it due to
- **Public sector**
 - **Your organisation's capacity**
 - Not enough people involvement
 - Lack of enthusiasm
 - Hurdles (e.g. red tape)

- Lack of skills, knowledge, confidence
- Finance
- Lack of support from local organisations / LBC
- Access to training / info / transport
- Over emphasis of some wards creating division

4

Decide on one thing that could be done to improve influence

- Increased sustainability
- Support people to empower / motivate
- Clearly promoted
- Advice centres > signposting
- Positive reaction / Champions

Flipchart notes – Workshop 2

(As written on the day)

Facilitator: Anwar Haque

Note taker: Noelette Hanley

1

What do you understand by local decision making and influencing?

Knowing what is going on /Awareness of Voluntary group's need

- Decisions is made with reference to financial constraints
- We need partners not contractors

Feeling ongoing residents that they can't change anything

- Influencing Councillors / finance spend
- Too much influence from the political parties not enough from residents.

2

What are your expectations of being able to influence decision making?

- Decision makers to be informed
- Routes to influence exist
- Feedback on decisions made
- Communication –
 - What kind?
 - How?
 - When?
 - Where?

Timely / Relevant

3

What do you see as the barriers to influencing?

b) If a capacity issue, is it due to

- **Public sector**
- **Your organisation's capacity**
- Communications
- Complexity of system
- Decision made before consultation
- Voluntary sector have other agenda which may conflict with statutory bodies agenda.
- Organisational capacity i.e. skills / time etc
- Lack of understanding how the council / public sector works

4

Decide on one thing that could be done to improve influence

Local people Trusted

- People centred
- More information before decision is made
- Give Local Authority the ability to revise 85% of income from local people

- Ward meeting to be held in local area.
- Ward meetings to decide relevant local experience

Flipchart notes – Workshop 3

(As written on the day)

Facilitator: Peter Adams

Note taker: Anthony Jules

1

What do you understand by local decision making and influencing?

- Experience of being involved in local area agreements
- Restricted to government priorities
- Local area agreement – Shorter term
- Frustrating!
- Distance between strategy and grassroots
- Knowledge of community work
- Funders and Assembly Reps should come to visit projects on a continual basis.
- Go to service user and find out
- Needs based

2

What are your expectations of being able to influence decision making?

- Not very high
- Consult with those effected; grassroots
- Bureaucrats rely on paper; the reality is different
- Too much paperwork needed to satisfy officials
- Consultation should be acted on if not possibly report back on why not.
- Diverse needs should be reflected
- Person must be prepared in order to engage
- Continuous channel of communication
- Community should be prepared to listen

3

What do you see as the barriers to influencing?

c) If a capacity issue, is it due to

- **Public sector**
 - **Your organisation's capacity**
-
- Short Term Appointments
 - Changes of policy can affect progress
 - People are sometimes career driven
 - Lack of capacity (3rd sector)
 - Time. 3rd sector and LBC (Chief Executive)
 - Practising areas of need, lack of time / resources to training of people / communities to enable then to engage
 - Cost extra to cover consultation by private companies
 - Lack of support / funding (sustainability)

4

Decide on one thing that could be done to improve influence

- Collective working / partnership negotiation and lobbying mechanisms
- Commitment from Assembly representatives
- Mapping of 3rd sector

Flipchart notes – Workshop 4

(As written on the day)

Facilitator: Jenny Spouge

Note taker: Lawrence Fagbayi

1

What do you understand by local decision making and influencing?

- How local is local? - where resources are available
- Decisions are made by local council in Luton
- Money is an issue concerning decision making
- National policies could affect local decision policy, can create tension
- Views from local communities being heard
- It could be purely local issues (small groups)

2

What are your expectations of being able to influence decision making?

- Responsibilities to make our voice heard
- Neighbourhood governance a good model
- Decision makers to ensure that people are invited

3

What do you see as the barriers to influencing?

d) If a capacity issue, is it due to

- **Public sector**
- **Your organisation's capacity**
- Trimming times of meetings or deadlines
- Venues
- Transport – availability at cost
- Numbers / Sizes
- Expertise / Knowledge – including of the system
- Fear of NOT being taken seriously
- Transparency of decision making processes
- Agenda already set prior to consultation

4

Decide on one thing that could be done to improve influence

Very clear & factual communications at every stage of the decision making process