



Haverhill Area Working Party 10 June 2010

Haverhill Locality Pilot: Evaluation

1. Introduction

1.1 What did we set out to achieve?

1.1.1 The Haverhill Locality pilot had two main objectives:-

- (a) working with St Edmundsbury Borough Council and other local partners to explore whether the established Haverhill Partnership could fulfil the functions of a Community Board in terms of:-
 - (i) using robust community engagement to identify local priorities;
 - (ii) allocating resources to these priorities;
 - (iii) addressing these priorities through joint problem solving with the local community; and
- (b) working with Haverhill Town Council to identify potential opportunities for the devolvement of decisions, services and/or budgets to a more local level and to develop our understanding of the capacity building required to support effective devolvement.

2. Haverhill Partnership

2.1 Community engagement: what we did

2.1.1 The Partnership's priority setting needed to be informed by a programme of consultation and engagement with local residents, communities and businesses. We did not aim to undertake a blanket consultation across Haverhill. The engagement activity involved attending meetings of existing networks and partnerships that bring together communities, either by place (e.g. residents' associations) or through a common interest (e.g. faith groups) or characteristic (e.g. school councils). The engagement method used was tailored to suit the groups we were working with; some preferred to fill in individual questionnaires; some preferred a group discussion; and one particular young people's group undertook a photography project. In addition, the Partnership Forum held a conference to enable us to capture the views of a wide range of individuals and groups working in Haverhill, including local elected members from all three tiers (County Council, Borough Council and Town Council).

2.2 Learning

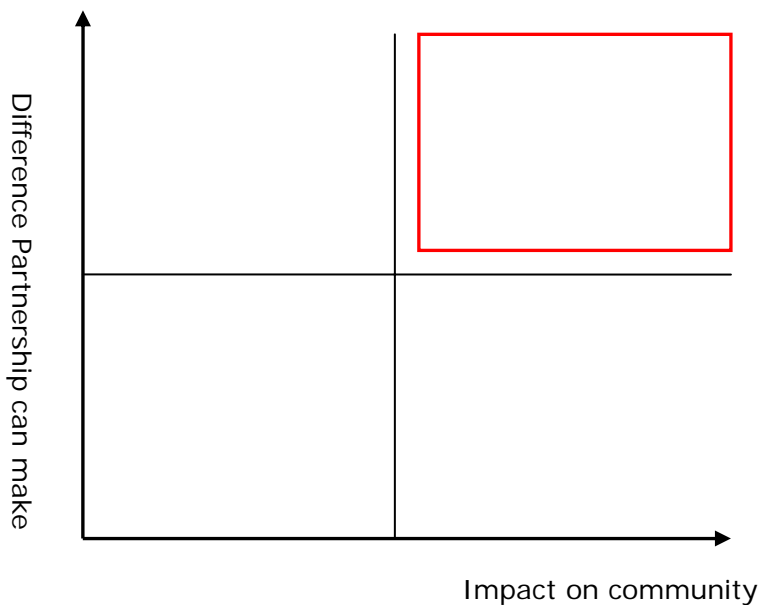
- 2.2.1 The mapping of local groups, networks and partnerships to plan the engagement activity was a useful exercise and the information has subsequently been used for a number of exercises (for example, identifying groups that may need to be consulted as part of the schools organisation review process). Most of the information for the mapping came from Suffolk Infolink and the knowledge of local people, particularly local councillors. As well as being useful for consultation exercises, many new initiatives start with the need to map existing provision and Infolink has been promoted wherever possible as a useful starting point. Awareness of Infolink seems to be relatively low amongst service providers.
- 2.2.2 The groups that engaged in the process did so with enthusiasm and generally took a broad view of the town, going beyond the issues affecting their particular area within the town or issues affecting their particular age group or area of interest. The feedback from the school councils that took part was positive and this type of project fits with the work that schools are doing to become more integrated into and aware of their local communities.
- 2.2.3 It was easier to engage with people using their existing meetings or visiting them in their localities rather than expecting them to attend specially arranged meetings. This approach meant we were able to engage with a wider range of people rather than the ones who traditionally attend public meetings.
- 2.2.4 We were not particularly successful in getting the views of the business community or migrant workers. In terms of the business community we contacted the Chamber of Commerce, Haverhill Enterprise Group and sent questionnaires to the Town Centre Group but response was very low. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the number of migrant workers in the town had decreased significantly and there was no obvious hub where we could meet with them and discuss the project. Given more time a possible approach may have been to liaise with local employers to see whether we could have spoken to people at their workplace, an approach that has been used by the local police team.
- 2.2.5 As with many consultation exercises there were concerns over whether views given were actually 'representative' of the wider community, i.e. were people giving their own views or had they actually canvassed the opinions of the group they were representing?

3. **Prioritisation: what we did**

- 3.1 The community engagement findings and the outcomes from the conference were considered alongside other local intelligence and data in order to identify which issues the Partnership would take forward as priorities. The West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (WSLSP) and Local Area Agreement Delivery Partnership (DP) leads were contacted and asked to feed in any relevant local data and intelligence they felt the Partnership should consider alongside the community engagement findings. The reasons for this were:-
- (a) to provide context. For example, public perception may be that anti-social behaviour (ASB) is a problem but the data may suggest that incidents of ASB in Haverhill are relatively low; and

- (b) specific inequalities in Haverhill may not come up through the community engagement activity but the relevant DP or WSLSP may be aware of data which suggests something that could or should be a local priority. For example, in terms of health inequalities Haverhill may have higher than average incidences of teenage pregnancy, diabetes etc and the Partnership may want to take this into account when deciding its priorities.

3.2 The issues were plotted on a graph, as set out below, which mapped the difference the Partnership could make against the impact on the community. The issues mapped to the top right hand quadrant (within the red square) would be the ones the group felt the Partnership could make the most difference and would have the biggest impact on the community. There were many other issues that were acknowledged as important but were outside the remit of the Partnership to address, for example, the demand for special education provision in the town.



3.3 Once the priorities were agreed, they were grouped into 4 broad themes and a member of the Executive agreed to lead on each one. The 5 themes were:-

- (a) Welfare of Older People;
- (b) Activities and Things to Do;
- (c) Environmental;
- (d) Facilities and Places to Go; and
- (e) Feelings of Safety/More Visible Policing.

3.4 The theme leads explored the themes in a bit more detail, looking specifically at what the key issues were, what was already going on, where there were gaps (and where there was duplication). Members of the Partnership Forum were invited to share their knowledge of these issues and inform the theme leads of any relevant planned activity. The information from this process was used to evaluate the subsequent funding bids.

3.5 **Learning**

- 3.5.1 The Executive debated how we balanced the views of a group or organisation against the views of an individual. We took a practical view and took all the views expressed into account and used them alongside the local knowledge of the members of the Executive Group in order to identify priorities.
- 3.5.2 The WSLSP and the Delivery Partnerships were not able to provide a great deal of information on Haverhill. In many cases they did not seem to have a local geographical focus for their priorities. However, we were able to get local data on health, crime figures and employment.
- 3.5.3 Using the method as described above helped the Partnership to focus on issues where they could make the most difference. Those issues that did not get picked up through this process were shared with relevant agencies/partnerships (for example, many people had highlighted road maintenance issues in specific locations and these were shared with the relevant Highways Officer at Suffolk County Council).

4. **Resource Allocation: what we did**

- 4.1 The Partnership used the local press, the Forum network and other local contacts to promote the funding opportunity as widely as possible. In addition, all those who had responded to the consultation and wanted to be kept informed were sent details. The aim was to get the wider community involved in coming up with solutions to the issues they had helped to identify.
- 4.2 It was felt that only the 'usual suspects' would be in a position to apply for funding (as had been the experience in the Mid Suffolk pilot), thus missing one of the key objectives of the pilot which was to get the wider community involved in coming up with ideas and delivering solutions. It was agreed that if we were looking for new and innovative ideas from the community we would have to offer people more support in developing their project ideas. As a result, people were first asked to submit an expression of interest, outlining their idea in 100 words. All those submitting an idea were then invited to attend an open day where members of the Forum would be available to help them develop their idea into a project plan and act as mentors. In total we received 21 expressions of interest. In the vast majority of cases the applicants were experienced in funding application processes and did not need the additional support on offer. As a result the opening day was cancelled.
- 4.3 We received 18 completed application forms which the Executive Group members considered prior to a specially arranged meeting. At the meeting the applications were considered by exception; rather than go through each one in detail members of the Group were asked to specify which one(s) they had concerns over and these were the ones that were discussed. The role of the Executive Group was to evaluate which of the applications met the criteria and would address the agreed priorities. All the projects that got through this stage would then be subject to a participatory budgeting process where the wider community would be involved in the final decision regarding which projects got funded.

4.4 In order to test an alternative participatory budgeting approach to those tested in Mid Suffolk it was agreed we would use the local press to run a public vote to decide which projects got funded. Although the local press were supportive of the idea and initial discussions were held, the value of the successful projects did not exceed the £75,000 we had available and therefore a public vote was not required.

4.5 **Learning**

4.5.1 Despite the efforts to offer additional support in the funding application process we did not succeed in getting many ideas from the wider community; the majority of applications came from established groups and organisations already providing services in the town. People were willing to take part in the earlier stages of the project but were not as interested in getting involved in identifying and delivering solutions. There may be scope for some capacity building here.

4.5.2 Although we did not end up testing participatory budgeting in Haverhill there was a lot of scepticism about the principles. Although it has its weaknesses, it was felt that the public vote via the local media would encourage more people to get involved in the decision rather than a 'decision day' where there were concerns over how the make up of those attending could be controlled to be representative of the town.

4.5.3 The money for the locality pilot was put forward by Suffolk County Council. Other organisations represented at the Partnership did not put forward any resources.

5. **Overall Role of the Haverhill Partnership in the Locality Pilot**

5.1 **What has been positive?**

5.1.1 The local knowledge of members of the Partnership has been crucial at all stages of the pilot, in particular the mapping of local groups and networks to inform the engagement activity. Their knowledge of what was likely to work and not work in Haverhill helped to tailor the approach to give the pilot the maximum chance of working. The members of the Executive Group in particular have been heavily involved in all aspects of the pilot and worked effectively together outside of the meetings to help the pilot progress. For example, the work of the theme leads in scoping the detail under each of the broad headings.

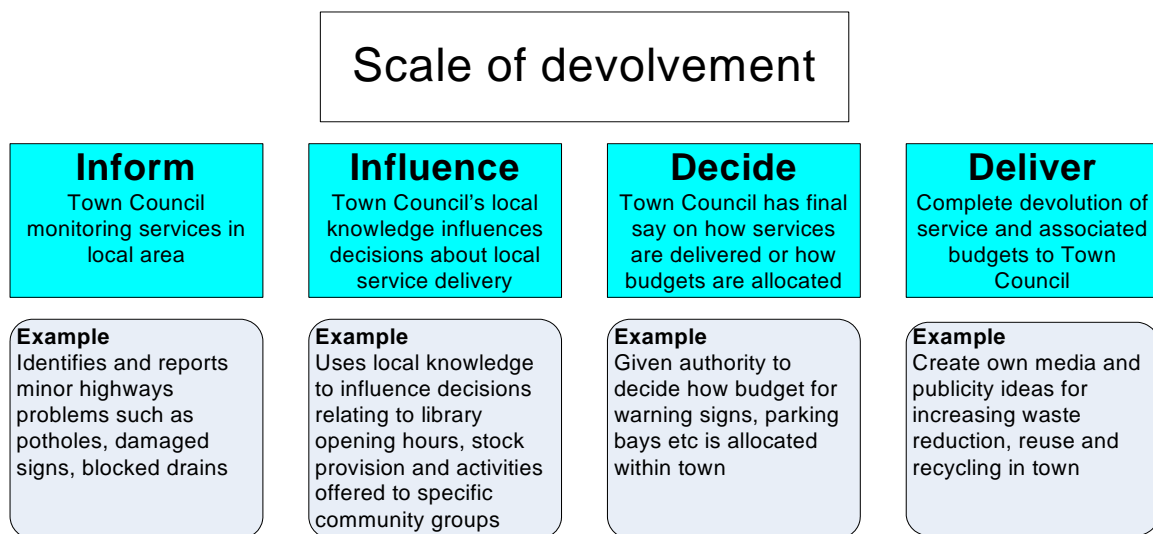
5.2 **What could have worked better?**

5.2.1 The input from the members of the wider forum has not been significant. Although they were kept updated as the pilot progressed and asked to contribute at key stages, the input of many members has been minimal and this raises the issue of how widely the work of the Partnership is communicated beyond the people attending the Forum meetings.

6. Devolvement

- 6.1 Progress on this strand of the pilot has been slow. There are a number of suggested reasons for this:-
- 6.1.1 The Town Council is cautious about taking on additional responsibilities without a full understanding of the implications, particularly in terms of any funding. This needs to be considered within the context of its uncertainty about their overall financial position and the implications when the grant from the Borough Council for the Arts Centre is no longer available. It wanted to discuss devolvement within the wider context of their future direction. For a large proportion of the pilot they did not feel in a position to make any long term plans until the outcome of the local government review was clearer.
- 6.1.2 Suffolk County Council's (SCC) menu of possible services to be devolved (from the One Suffolk submission) did not match the areas the Town Council expressed an interest in (youth provision, support for older people, management of community facilities). Their areas of interest are mainly due to them being a 'new' Town Council with different areas of responsibility than most Town Councils in Suffolk (ie arts and leisure focussed rather than the traditional town council responsibilities for churchyards, allotments etc).
- 6.1.3 The Town Clerk in Haverhill was keen for the Town Council to take advantage of the opportunity the locality pilot had presented to take on more responsibilities but this view was not necessarily shared by the councillors, some of whom seemed to prefer a 'no change' approach. Among other concerns from councillors were that they want to take devolved functions on only where there was a clear benefit, sufficient support to them (financial, training, information and skills, officer support etc) and where they could see that they could perform the function better (as they feel they have with the Haverhill Arts Centre).
- 6.2 **Other factors/learning**
- 6.2.1 Where relationships/systems between the Town Council and County Council already exist, there is concern that formalising processes will lead to slower response times and increased paperwork and bureaucracy.
- 6.2.2 Any devolvement has got to be a benefit to local residents. For example, if the Town Council took on responsibility for the cemetery, how would this benefit local residents?
- 6.2.3 We need to take into account strategic procurement and the fact that services still need to be delivered within a strategic framework. There are areas where the County Council will still need to maintain control (for example where there are quality and health and safety standards we have to ensure are met). In some cases where we are the statutory authority we are not able to delegate. We would not want to devolve some things due to the risk to corporate values and ethos.
- 6.2.4 We also need to balance the national agenda with any local agenda. For example, in terms of waste, national focus/targets are related to household waste so there is no incentive to focus on commercial waste which may be a local concern.

- 6.2.5 Could the Town Council evidence that their views and recommendations are based on robust community engagement and that they represent the views of the community? In some cases this would be a condition of devolvement. We may need to support them in enhanced engagement activity. We would need to balance the views of the Town Council with the views of service users. For example in Kesgrave, the Town Council (as budget holders) decided they wanted to fund additional library opening hours from their precept. However, they offered service users a range of options so they had a say in the final opening hours.
- 6.3 A number of internal SCC meetings took place to discuss in more detail the types of decisions and/or services that may potentially be devolved to a more local level. It has been recognised that we need to be clear about what we mean by devolvement and that there is in effect a scale of devolvement:



Key principles

Funding will follow function

No requirement for local councils to raise their precept

Outcomes

Greater local influence

Enhanced level of service (e.g. responsiveness, cost effectiveness)

7. Overall learning

- 7.1 Positive response to SCC to having a corporate presence in Haverhill. Locality Officer was able to act as a facilitator, for example taking issues back to County Council or arranging specialist officers to attend meetings.
- 7.2 Takes time to understand a locality and establish relationships. This is difficult to measure when trying to evaluate outcomes.
- 7.3 Many people attend the same meetings where similar issues are discussed. Is there an opportunity to streamline so that people are spending less time in meetings? The Haverhill Partnership are due to review their role and this issue will be considered as part of this process.

8. Recommendation

8.1 The Working Party is requested to **NOTE** the content of this report.

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