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The Government would welcome views on this report. Any comments should be sent, by 30 November, to:

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Ministerial Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this report on community self-help from Policy Action Team 9. Community self-help is at the heart of neighbourhood renewal. As the social Exclusion Unit's 1998 report on deprived neighbourhoods made clear, neighbourhood renewal can only be successful if communities themselves have the power to make things better. This means making sure that communities have the skills, the opportunities, the means and the confidence to help themselves.

The Policy Action Team was asked to consider how to increase the amount of volunteering and community activity in poor neighbourhoods; how to increase the viability of community groups and the services they deliver; and how to encourage the growth of informal mutual support. This report is the result of their work. In putting it together, they have consulted with a wide range of organisations and visited a range of exciting and innovative local projects. I am enormously grateful to all the members of the team, who put a great deal of effort into writing papers, attending meetings and contributing ideas. I should also like to thank the organisations and individuals who contributed ideas or hosted visits by team members.

The report contains many imaginative ideas for encouraging community self-help in our most socially excluded neighbourhoods. Some of these recommendations are targeted at Government. Some propose action for local authorities, for funders and for organisations in the private, voluntary and community sectors.

The Government endorses the report's affirmation of the importance of community self-

help in tackling social exclusion and welcomes the general thrust of the action plan in Chapter 5. Some of the recommendations are already being taken forward across Government. Others will require careful consideration, not least to determine their full implications and to ensure that they are integrated with the findings of the 17 other Policy Action Teams.

This is a challenging agenda, but I believe it will also be immensely rewarding, with the potential to make a huge impact. As the Champion Minister for Policy Action Team 9, I am looking forward to building on the valuable work done by the PAT and to re-establishing communities at the heart of our approach to government.

**Paul Boateng MP,
Home Office Minister of State**

September 1999

Introduction by the Chairman

The Social Exclusion Unit is developing a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal which will aim to close the gap between Britain's poorest neighbourhoods and the national average.

Eighteen Policy Action Teams are contributing to the development the strategy which will have clear measures of success. In all of the poorest neighbourhoods in England, the goals are for lower long term unemployment and worklessness, less crime, improved health, and better qualifications. The Government has already initiated a range of policies and initiatives to help achieve these goals. National policies such as the New Deal and welfare reform will be complemented by specific area programmes such as the New Deal for Communities, Health Action Zones, and the SureStart initiative.

These new policies and programmes will be instrumental in bridging the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. But they will not be enough. If a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal is to succeed, it will need to provide the poorest neighbourhoods with the capacity, the opportunity, and the tools to help themselves.

Our Team - on community self-help - was tasked to look at the barriers to community activity in poor neighbourhoods and draw up an action plan to:

- *raise the numbers involved in volunteering and community activity in poor neighbourhoods;*
- *increase the viability of community groups and services they deliver*

- *encourage the growth of informal mutual support.*

In taking forward this work, we have recognised the need to build on work already underway at local level. Across the country, communities are already helping themselves, many achieving impressive results in the face of considerable obstacles. Our job has been to look at ways to remove the barriers. It has also been to look at what is working at local level and suggest ways in which other communities can be encouraged to draw on this and put it into practice.

The Team has worked hard to produce this report in under six months. My colleagues (listed at Annex A) on the Team have shown enormous energy, commitment, creativity and good humour, without which we could not have hoped to complete such a daunting task in such a short time. I am indebted to them, as we all are to our secretary, Ian Naysmith, for his cheerfulness and organising skills, particularly for our programme of visits (see Annex B).

I hope that the report will prove as useful to all those who work in and with communities as it was stimulating and challenging to put together. But, at the risk of stating the obvious, this is a beginning, not an end.

William Fittall
Chair, Policy Action Team on
Community Self-Help

April 1999

Executive Summary

The Policy Action Team on Community Self-Help is one of eighteen established to take forward the work in the Social Exclusion Unit report *Bringing Britain together*. The work of the eighteen teams will feed into a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal.

2. The Team was tasked to examine the barriers to community activity in poor neighbourhoods and draw up an action plan to:

- *raise the numbers involved in volunteering and community activity in poor neighbourhoods*
- *increase the viability of community groups and services they deliver*
- *encourage the growth of informal mutual support.*

The Team began work in October 1998.

3. **The philosophy of community self-help** is considered in **Chapter 1**. It discusses the importance of community self-help, in terms of the provision of services, the encouragement of communities' self confidence and self sufficiency, and the development of the notion of citizenship within communities (**paragraphs 1.1-1.5**). The chapter notes some of the key lessons from previous work - notably, that self-help is something that must be 'grown' organically from within, rather than imposed from outside; and that self-help is not a cure-all - it is a necessary complement of, not a substitute for, high quality public services. The chapter then considers the meaning of community, and sets out ten characteristics of a 'good community', including its economic strength, physical safety and influence (**1.6-1.14**).

4. **The nature of community self-help, and the barriers to it, are considered in Chapter 2.** It considers and provides examples of:

- *self-help based around family and neighbours*
- *informal activity (such as baby-sitting circles and car-sharing schemes)*
- *more formal community activity (such as organising a holiday play scheme or managing a community centre)*
- *community self-help with a mutual or economic basis (such as credit unions and local exchange trading schemes)*
- *activity based around shared interests (such as faith groups and self-help groups for members of a refugee community)*
- *involvement in formal voluntary organisations active within communities (such as Victim Support, Groundwork and a range of regeneration partnerships) (2.3-2.12).*

5. The chapter goes on to identify twenty-four barriers to **effective community self-help**, under five main headings: **motivational; organisational; institutional; political and cultural; and economic**. Many of these barriers are deep rooted; it is the Team's aim, in its action plan, to reduce substantially the adverse effect of most of them (**2.13-2.19**).

6. **The benefits of community self-help** are considered in **Chapter 3**. These benefits include many which can readily be quantified, including clear improvements in services and the economic value of time given. Others are less tangible but

no less real, including increases in participants' self confidence and engagement with the political system. The chapter also briefly considers research on expected and desirable levels of community involvement (3.1- 3.8).

7. **Benefits** are considered under the headings of **benefits to the individual** (in terms of both better services and personal development); **reduction in poverty** from such activities as food co-operatives and community businesses; the way in which self-help can **fill some of the inevitable gaps in public services**, in such areas as visiting housebound people, organising activities for children, and drug prevention and crime reduction work; **issues of regeneration** (where community involvement is likely to be a crucial element of sustainability); and **the links between community self-help and community political activity**. The chapter concludes that everybody wins through community self-help - the individual, the local community, the providers of formal public services and society as a whole. But it reinforces two of the key messages from Chapter 1: self-help is a complement to, not a substitute for, effective public services; and it must be activity done by local communities, not for or to them (3.9-3.24).

8. Nonetheless, **community self-help is crucially dependent on support from outside the community**. This is the subject of **Chapter 4**. This considers the strengths and weaknesses (and, notably, the patchiness) of existing support structures, statutory and voluntary; and some of the principles which should underlie support to community groups (4.1-4.9). It then considers the role of specialist community development workers, and that of specialist or generalist voluntary organisations based in poor neighbourhoods. It highlights one of the key dilemmas in the development of communities: **one of its aims is a substantial increase in community involvement; but this is also, in most cases, a precondition for successful community development**. It suggests that one

approach to dealing with this dilemma is to carry out an initial audit of community activity, to put together an action plan in partnership with those parts of the community which are most active, and to extend work into the community more generally from there (4.10-4.16).

9. The chapter considers **the vital role of faith organisations** as a key focus for many poor neighbourhoods: as a large and relatively well resourced part of the voluntary and community sector, they may be crucial to this audit and action plan exercise. **The role of ethnic minority organisations** is then considered - in particular, the need to enhance their capacity so that they are both more effective in serving the needs of their communities and are enabled to support the local community sector more generally. The chapter concludes with **seven principles which external agencies might adopt in dealing with communities**, if they wish to ensure that their support is empowering rather than stifling. These include the **need to respect the independence of community groups; to be clear about the terms of relationships; and to disburse resources at the most local level possible** (4.17-4.25).

10. **The Team's action plan for community self-help** is in **Chapter 5**. This includes thirty-three recommendations which are derived from the rest of the report and, in particular, from a set of **principles of community self-help** set out after **paragraph 5.5**. These principles focus on such issues as **the need for community ownership; for people in communities to learn from their peers as well as from outsiders; for those facilitating self-help to build on what is already there rather than to create entirely new structures; for funders to be flexible and less risk-averse than in the past; and for effective community involvement to be treated as an end in itself, as well as a means to an end**.

11. Some of the key recommendations are summarised below, classified according to the

main headings in the chapter: but for context, and to see the recommendations as a whole, it is necessary to read Chapter 5 as it stands. The references below are to recommendation numbers:

(i) Cross-cutting recommendations.

These include:

- (1) The Home Office Active Community Unit (ACU) should 'own' the action plan as a whole and its Head should review and report on progress to lead Ministers in twelve months.
- (3) The government should commit itself both in overarching policy and in specific programmes to support community self-help.
- (4) The ACU should develop with other agencies a validation programme, possibly a Charter or Investors system, to raise the awareness and competence of agencies whose work has an impact on local communities.
- (7)&(8) Funders and other external agencies should work with those in local communities who are best organised and most motivated; in many cases these will be faith groups or minority ethnic organisations.

(ii) Raising the numbers involved in volunteering and community activity. These include:

- (10) The benefits system should work towards eliminating actual or perceived barriers to voluntary and community activity, through changes or clarifications to rules (including the rule that volunteers must be available for paid employment within 48 hours of getting a job) and training for relevant staff.

- (11)-(14) The ACU should work with other departments and agencies to ensure that relevant programmes promote volunteering in poor neighbourhoods (for instance, the Millennium Volunteers and Active Community programmes), or give high priority to community involvement (for instance, the New Deals and the Single Regeneration Budget). In each case benchmarks should be set for the spending of such programmes in these areas of work.

(iii) Increasing the viability of community groups and their services. These include:

- (16)-(18) The ACU should work with departments and agencies to ensure proper co-ordination of the funding of voluntary and community groups and the elimination of unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles to such groups receiving and accounting for grants.
- (19)&(20) Funders should be flexible as to the content as well as form of funding, being prepared to provide long-term strategic funding or one-off funds to meet basic office equipment needs as appropriate.
- (21) As a key element of this flexibility, the ACU should design and seek sources of funding for a Community Resource Fund, to meet the needs of small and emerging community groups. Such a fund could be a development of the National Lottery Awards for All programme.
- (22)-(24) Funders should provide dedicated funding to support the local and regional, as well as national, infrastructure of the black and

- minority ethnic voluntary and community sector. They should also be prepared to fund black and minority ethnic voluntary organisations to deliver training and support services across the sector, not to their own communities alone. And they should make it a condition of funding mainstream infrastructure organisations that their services are available in practice as well as theory to minority ethnic organisations.
- (25) Funders should recognise that faith groups may well be the most suitable voluntary and community organisations to deliver general community objectives, and should be prepared to provide sustained financial support for this.
- (26) The ACU should lead on the development of a programme of community technical assistance vouchers to help provide community groups with easy access to expert assistance with the minimum of bureaucracy and at times and in ways which suit them.
- (27) Business in the Community, and others leading on employer-supported volunteering and related programmes, should ensure that such programmes give a high priority to the poorest neighbourhoods.
- (iv) **Encouraging the growth of informal mutual support.** These include:
- (31)&(32) 'Neighbourhood endowment funds' should be established for communities to allocate as they wish. The ultimate aim should be to have capital endowments established in at least the 3,000 identified poorest neighbourhoods. The process should be to pilot the proposal on a revenue basis, as an integral part of, and funded from, the New Deal for Communities programme.
- (33) Funders should include in funding packages for community groups provision for individuals and organisations to join a peer support network of social entrepreneurs and community leaders, enabling them to learn with and from one another.

Chapter 1: the philosophy of community self-help

Introduction: on networks and their importance

Networks which link local residents to each other are crucial to the effective functioning of communities and thus of society at large. Simply in terms of providing services, such networks are central to:

- *the care of children*
- *support for old, sick, disabled and isolated people*
- *contacts to help people find jobs*
- *access to role models and mentors for young people*
- *opportunities for sharing knowledge and learning*
- *a way of influencing insensitive or recalcitrant authorities and service providers.*

And what makes these networks operate is mutual aid or self-help.

1.1 To put the matter another way: the regeneration of poor neighbourhoods will take more than physical rebuilding; more than the improvement of local services; more even than economic opportunity. Communities of interest - people linked together by shared concerns, place, faith - are also needed. The absence of such communities will make it more difficult to enforce laws about anti-social behaviour, vandalism or keeping the streets clean. The environment will become degraded. Because people do not know each other they will be attended by the feeling of 'stranger danger'. Social decay will go in step with physical decay. The area will become unpopular. People who

can do so will start to leave. Eventually a point of no return may be reached. Community self-help is one of the key ways to deal with this vicious circle.

1.3 But self-help is an end in itself, as well as a means to an end. It is at the core of the empowerment of communities - whether through owning and running assets of their own, or through the acknowledgement of public authorities that local communities may be the best people to judge what is in their best interests. It is about involvement and consultation, but also about moving towards self-sufficiency. It is, in its purest form, about communities shaping their own destiny - doing, not being done to.

1.4 There is also a political element to self-help. It can help make good the so-called 'democratic deficit' of representative government. It is an expression of citizenship and should be recognised as an important element in the strategy to modernise central and local government.

1.5 So it can reasonably be said that community self-help, the subject matter of our Policy Action Team, underpins that of all the other seventeen. Without effective self-help, it is unlikely that any other measures of community regeneration, however well resourced, will provide long term solutions to long term problems.

Lessons from previous work

1.6 The key lessons from a wide array of regeneration work in recent years have not been

entirely helpful to those who seek simple solutions to complex problems. The first lesson is that the most effective approaches have emerged in an organic way: community self-help is not something that can be imposed. This has made it difficult to extract prescriptive lessons, capable of application in diverse locations. Although there is considerable agreement about the main features of effective approaches - notably the need to engage the energy, commitment and leadership potential within the communities affected, and to ensure community ownership of initiatives - policy makers have struggled to turn this into a usable template.

1.7 The second lesson is that some communities seem to have cracked the problem - to have a wide variety of thriving community associations, from the campaigning to the service providing to the cultural - while others, without obvious distinguishing characteristics, are relatively unconnected, with limited community interaction. For the latter, skilled, professional intervention may be necessary.

1.8 The third lesson is that community self-help is not a cure for all ills. It can, for instance, supplement public services, and campaign for better public services; it cannot make up for poor public services. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a healthy community.

The meaning of community

1.9 We have been very aware of these lessons in the course of our work: they have guided our analysis and recommendations. We have also attempted to understand why communities so often find it difficult to work with existing administrative structures, whether of local authorities, health authorities, government agencies or departments of government itself. We must first, however, set out what we mean by community.

1.10 The word community is most often

applied to place. If you go to live in a place for a short time, you are unlikely to develop any great attachment to the place or the people who live there. But stay over a period of years and you will begin to feel that you belong in that place with those people. Stability of residence makes for identity within a community.

1.11 A powerful second element is added if place is linked with family. Children are links to each other and to other parents. At the nursery or the playground parents meet others who have children. Once the parents too have become friends they do not have far to go to see one another, as well as to pick up and deliver children. As children reach school age, the primary school becomes a focus of community networks. Other community buildings can play a similar function, including religious centres.

More than four million people use community buildings of all kinds in England and Wales every week. They can provide a focus for contact between people of all ages and backgrounds.

1.12 Churches can also be the wellspring of organised community activities, outside the church buildings. For example, The Church of God in Christ, a Pentecostal church in North London, has become the nucleus of a thriving credit union involving hundreds of members of the Church and their families, the level of trust and shared obligation creating a sense that money is wisely invested and well-looked after. Many other religious groups have initiated housing associations, care projects by and for disabled people, youth centres and much else besides.

1.13 But there is no single model, or definition, of community - communities are as diverse as their members or residents, which is one of their key strengths. And any one individual may be a member of several communities, based on geography, politics, faith, social interaction, cultural interest, ethnicity. Furthermore, models

of self-help are as diverse as models of community

1.14 So what can safely be said about community self-help? First, that it may be spurred by any or all of the factors mentioned in the previous paragraph. Second, that self-help networks overlap and interact with each other and link people beyond their neighbourhoods to create the potential for a richly textured community life. Our job is to suggest how this potential may be made actual - and how self-help can contribute to the creation of a 'good community'. The table below is at a high level of generality and aspiration. It does not set out to provide measurements or milestones, though these are undoubtedly vital to its achievement. But it does help set a direction both for our team and for others.

WHAT MAKES FOR A GOOD COMMUNITY?

These might be considered the ten key characteristics of a good and well functioning community. It will be:

- (1) *A learning community*, where people and groups gain knowledge, skills and confidence through community activity.
- (2) *A fair and just community*, which upholds civic rights and equality of opportunity, and which recognises and celebrates the distinctive features of its cultures.
- (3) *An active and empowered community*, where people are fully involved and which has strong and varied local organisations and a clear identity and self-confidence.
- (4) *An influential community*, which is consulted and has a strong voice in decisions which affect its interests.
- (5) *An economically strong community*, which creates opportunities for work and which retains a high proportion of its wealth.

(6) *A caring community*, aware of the needs of its members and in which services are of good quality and meet these needs.

(7) *A green community*, with a healthy and pleasant environment, conserving resources and encouraging awareness of environmental responsibility.

(8) *A safe community*, where people do not fear crime, violence or other hazards.

(9) *A welcoming community*, which people like, feel happy about and do not wish to leave.

(10) *A lasting community*, which is well established and likely to survive.

Conclusion

1.15 There is little in this report which is new. But we believe it brings things together in a way which has not happened before. Moreover, we believe that our findings and recommendations have more force because of the diverse nature of our group - academics, practitioners, officials from central and local government, community activists and social entrepreneurs. The last six months have been a fascinating and exciting journey for us. This report cannot do full justice to all our discussions over this period, but we hope that it will stimulate both thought and action.

1.16 The need is great, and so is the prize: truly whole and healthy communities.

Chapter 2: the nature of and barriers to community self-help

Introduction

2.1 Community self-help comes in many shapes and forms. In this chapter, we describe some of them - in effect, though not directly, painting a picture of what difference self-help can make to a community. We go on to examine some of the barriers to effective self-help. Chapter 3 considers the benefits of self-help, and Chapter 4 discusses how the barriers to it may be overcome.

2.2 In examining this range of activity, it is helpful to consider people's motivation for getting involved. It can range from pure self-interest at the one extreme to pure altruism at the other, with every combination in between. Most voluntary and community activity involves receiving as well as giving benefits; and self-help is just as important as altruism in the development of a community.

The range of community and voluntary activity

2.3 (i) **Family and neighbours.** For many people the extended family is vital to the provision of care and support, particularly for the very young and the old and frail. In other cases, however, family networks are weak or non-existent, and informal caring and support must come from neighbours if at all. This can take the form of shopping for a housebound neighbour, looking after a neighbour's children, babysitting, comforting someone who is bereaved or has suffered a burglary, taking in a meal to someone who is ill, or a myriad of other activities. Such action is often spontaneous, and builds on

the informal contact between residents in a neighbourhood.

2.4 (ii) **Informal community action.** Often, what starts as neighbourly support can then take on a more organised collective form. This will still usually be quite informal - for instance, a babysitting circle, a car sharing scheme, parents walking their children to school in a 'crocodile', or a self-help group for bereaved parents. The members of the group agree (sometimes only implicitly) the rules to govern the way the group operates, but it remains unstructured and unofficial.

2.5 Community action at this level can also be seen in the many small scale autonomous activities which involve local people in fun, recreation and also protests and responses to external threats. They are usually spontaneous and short-lived, but they may also act as a starting point for more organised community involvement. Examples include:

- *participatory arts projects, such as festivals, murals and drama*
- *team sports such as football, particularly where no specialist gear is required*
- *responses to a new road scheme, airport extension, or threat to local open space*
- *campaigns for local play facilities, or against damp housing or crime and vandalism.*

2.6 There is also a paradox about much activity of this sort. It is often campaigning in its origin - arising in response to the actions or

inactions of public authorities such as the NHS, planners and central government. In a sense, community self-help is an unwitting by-product of public policy; and, while there are limits to the long-term value of such self-help activity, this may be a particularly effective way of kick-starting community involvement.

Chase Action Group, Nottingham

Chase Action Group grew out of people's realisation that the City Challenge had plans to regenerate their area in unwelcome ways. They carried out a survey of community needs and convinced the Council and City Challenge that a community centre was a priority. A community centre that would meet green criteria brought jobs and training in construction, book-keeping, site supervision and project management to around 30 local people.

The centre houses a community café run entirely by volunteers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, with fresh produce from their own allotment. They lease offices to voluntary organisations, hold art exhibitions, language classes, a dance class, a youth project and discos among other activities. This is the largest self-build project in the country and has large plans for the future.

2.7 (iii) Formal community action. Some groups may decide to become more formal, either because there is money involved which needs to be clearly accounted for, or because they wish to take on commitments incompatible with a loose structure, such as hiring or leasing premises, organising an activity which requires registration, or employing a paid worker. Examples include a pre-school playgroup or holiday playscheme which will probably need to be registered with the local authority social services department, a community association

which takes on the management of a community centre, or a neighbourhood care scheme which employs a part-time co-ordinator. Organisations of this degree of formality, while still controlled by local residents, will need to be formally constituted, and may well seek to register as a charity.

A group of single-parent families on the Croeserw housing estate in West Glamorgan met with the mutual aim of social contact, moved on to setting up coffee mornings and holiday events for the children, then took up craft and cookery classes, and ended up running a youth club.

2.8 (iv) Mutual/economic groups.

Sometimes groups will be established to meet the economic needs of local residents. They may have many of the characteristics of businesses, though established on a mutual or co-operative basis. A credit union might be set up to provide members with low-interest loans, or a food co-operative to enable residents to take advantage of the bulk-buying of food and vegetables. Community cafes and laundries are other examples, and it is common for a bar to be established in a community building, in order both to raise funds and to provide a social facility. Development trusts also fit under this heading; and in recent years, there has been a growth in local exchange trading schemes - LETS - which enable people to barter their time and skills, using a non-monetary unit of exchange.

The village of Wellow, near Bath, was about to lose its general grocery store. Residents combined to take over the shop and it is now being run using volunteers on a self-help basis to keep this vital amenity in the village.

Beckford Community LETS

A LETS scheme with a focus on health was started by one man with a problem over delays in NHS services. It has blossomed into a range of health-based activities which have brought together a mix of people from a wide range of social backgrounds and helped to build a strong sense of community which sustains them. Goods and services are exchanged using local tokens, which enable those without money to value their skills on a level with the abilities of anyone else. It doesn't cost anything to develop a listening ear, or to tell a good story, but that can be the basis of breaking down the walls of isolation that so often separate the mentally ill from the rest.

2.9 (v) Groups based on a community of interest. Most of the examples so far are of groups which operate within a neighbourhood, and are therefore of most relevance for this report. But groups may also be formed by people who share a common need, interest or cause, but who do not live in the same neighbourhood. Examples are faith groups (which may or may not be local), and self-help groups for the sufferers of a particular disease, or for their carers, or for members of a refugee or other ethnic minority community which is widely dispersed. Despite their wider geographical base, they share many of the characteristics of neighbourhood groups.

2.10 (vi) 'Formal' voluntary organisations. All of the above activity can be said to be part of the community sector. But more formal, sometimes national, voluntary organisations are also active in poor neighbourhoods. There are several different types of such organisations:

- *those which provide a range of services to the population, such as the*

WRVS and the Citizens' Advice Bureaux movement

- *those which serve particular groups in the population, such as Age Concern and Victim Support*
- *those which support local voluntary and/or community groups, such as a volunteer bureau, council for voluntary service, settlement or social action centre (organisations such as Groundwork in effect straddle this and the next category)*
- *projects and organisations with an economic element to them, such as community development projects funded or even established by the local authority, development trusts, and regeneration partnerships, involving public, private, voluntary and community sector representatives.*

2.11 Such organisations generally consist of one group of people (paid or unpaid workers) providing a service to another group (users or beneficiaries), overseen by a third group (trustees). The role of these sorts of voluntary organisations in relation to community self-help activity will normally be to resource, support or facilitate it, rather than to be a part of it themselves; but they are no less crucial for that. Ultimately, however, their success depends on their services and support being valued by local people

Jack's Triangle

Jack's Triangle is an area of derelict land adjoining a larger plot originally rented to local people as allotments in Hillingdon in London. Members of the Oak Farm Residents' Association had become concerned that this area was not being used or maintained and negotiated a licence with the local authority to manage the site as part allotments, part wildlife area.

With the help of Groundwork Thames Valley local residents have created a database of more than forty people willing to undertake practical tasks to develop the site as a resource for the community, including new allotments and other food growing areas to promote healthy eating. A wildlife area will also be created to increase the bio-diversity of the area and provide an 'outdoor classroom' for local schools. Local people have so far cleared and re-fenced the site and are working with local schools to create eleven themed gardens.

2.12 This range of involvement, from the most informal to the structured and formally constituted, is central to an understanding of community self help; and it underpins much of the action plan in Chapter 5.

The barriers to community self-help

2.13 There are five main types of barrier to community and voluntary activity on poor estates: motivational, organisational, institutional, political/cultural and economic.

2.14 **Motivational barriers** include:

- *lack of hope among residents who have experienced neglect, poor service, and powerlessness in the face of public authorities in the past*
- *lack of energy due to the personal circumstances of local people*
- *lack of confidence among residents because of low levels of literacy and education, unemployment and a lack of experience of community involvement, committee work and management*
- *lack of trust of neighbours resulting from a mobile community, the presence of known criminals locally, and the adverse effects of local housing policies*

- *lack of trust of external agencies – statutory services and some voluntary organisations - which are perceived to have let residents down, failed to deliver relevant services and not listened to them in the past*
- *resentment at lack of recognition - for instance, when residents have a knowledge of other languages and cultures, a knowledge of the area, or practical skills and experience which are not called on by the authorities.*

2.15 **Organisational barriers** include:

- *lack of resources and support for emerging community activities - for example the absence of basic equipment such as a telephone, photocopier or computer, the lack of a place to hold meetings other than people's houses, and the absence of support that a neighbourhood community worker or peer support network can provide*
- *the inaccessibility of local bureaucracies and consultation processes, and other opportunities for partnership and networking, for example because meetings are held during the working day, or take place in official or other unfamiliar premises, or involve the use of opaque official language, or because timescales are too short to allow volunteers and community groups to participate fully*
- *the need to cope with a multiplicity of uncoordinated demands from local statutory agencies, which makes far more difficult the already challenging task of dealing with authority*
- *the failure of local authorities, other public bodies, and some voluntary organisations, to recognise the distinctive nature, needs and contribution of community groups.*

2.16 Institutional barriers include:

- *issues around the benefits system, including the '48 hour' rule, which may act as a bar to job-seekers taking on significant community self-help commitments; inflexibility in the approach of some Employment Service and Benefits Agency staff; and the Benefits Integrity Project, which treats engagement in volunteering as evidence of fitness for full-time employment, though volunteers may be more able to vary their commitment to match their state of health than an employer can allow*
- *the prohibition on taking employment, paid or unpaid, placed on many foreign entrants to the UK, which is a particular difficulty for asylum seekers wishing to engage in self-help activities, often on the poorest estates*
- *the complex application procedures for many funding programmes, a particular obstacle for community self-help organisations applying for small sums of money*
- *the reluctance of Parliament, Ministers, government departments and public funders to take risks with public money, even where very small sums are involved*
- *the reluctance of funders to take advantage of flexibilities they have been given, for example to delegate decision-making.*

2.17 Political and cultural barriers include:

- *adverse 'labelling' of communities - for example by perceiving groups or areas as a problem ('sink estates', 'the homeless')*
- *the reluctance of agencies and professionals to cede power, thus controlling the agenda and blocking local initiatives*
- *racism and other forms of*

discrimination practised by institutions and individuals both by those charged with providing services and within communities

- *conflict and lack of understanding within and between communities, often exacerbated by competition for resources and influence*
- *issues of accountability and representation - notably doubts about how far particular community groups can be said to represent their neighbourhood, and about the respective roles of such groups and of elected local government.*

2.18 Economic barriers include:

- *the need for people in low paid employment to work long hours simply to make ends meet, leaving less time and energy for voluntary activity*
- *unemployment, with its attendant economic and motivational effects*
- *the costs of volunteering and community self-help activity - travel, childcare and so on*
- *the feeling of exclusion and shame which people may experience if they cannot 'look the part' - being unable to buy a round of drinks, contribute to leaving presents or afford what appears to be the required form of dress.*

Conclusion

2.19 This chapter has described some of the main forms of community self-help and many of the barriers to the achievement of its potential. The action plan in Chapter 5 does not address all of these barriers, many of which are deep rooted; and there is no one-to-one mapping of recommendation to barrier. But if adopted, the action plan will make a considerable impact on most of them, freeing people in poor neighbourhoods to help themselves and their communities.

Chapter 3: the benefits of community self-help

Introduction

3.1 Self-help is not a panacea for the problems of poor neighbourhoods. Creating more jobs, improving the housing stock and tackling shortcomings in public services are central to the challenge of neighbourhood renewal. They require the commitment of central and local government, business and the voluntary and community sector. But self-help has an enormous contribution to make, particularly for disadvantaged communities - precisely because they lack other forms of support. Organising to make the best of their lives, residents can use their own time and skills in a variety of ways. More ambitiously, mutual support can make an economic difference, by reducing the costs of food, credit and housing and by giving money-earning opportunities to local people.

3.2 For many people in disadvantaged areas, it is simply not possible to join more formal voluntary activities: because of caring responsibilities or through disability they may be unable to travel any distance or commit to a regular time of attendance. The looser structures of the self-help movement allow them to dip in and out. Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of community self-help is the way it ebbs and flows, recreating itself with new issues and new generations of participants. This 'organic' nature is a source of great strength; but it makes self-help impossible to classify in tidy bureaucratic categories.

3.3 The benefits to the community of self-help activities can be assessed objectively - we see an effect on the ability of the community to cope with such issues as drug abuse, school

truancy and exclusion and health problems. We can also measure the economic value of volunteer activity, and the money which self-help groups bring into the locality through grant applications and fund-raising. Active self-help is one of the common pre-conditions for sustained regeneration, whether through bringing buildings and sites back into use, providing training or working through such mechanisms as credit unions and development trusts.

3.4 Less easily measurable are the changes in attitude that self-help brings. Organising mutual support increases people's self confidence and their belief that they can affect the circumstances of their own lives. It can also act as a stepping stone to more formal links with the wider society beyond the estate. Requests for transfer drop and resident surveys show a rise in satisfaction with the area. Campaigning activity can increase community interest in the political system. Benefits can be seen also in what might be called 'community self-confidence'.

3.5 This chapter describes and illustrates some of the benefits of community self-help - working outwards from the individual to the local community and then to society as a whole. First, however, we consider very briefly how much community self-help activity there is, and whether there is an 'ideal' level.

Levels of community self-help

3.6 The consensus of research, for instance carried out by Home Office through its local voluntary action surveys and by Konrad Elsdon at the University of Nottingham, is that something in the region of three to six active community

groups per thousand population represents a reasonably healthy level of community activity. Commonly, however, as the Community Development Foundation (CDF) has discovered, the actual figure may be two or lower. At Annex C we have included examples of targets for community consultation and representation, produced by CDF as part of guidance on the community involvement aspects of the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund. This suggests, among other things, that a target of three groups per thousand, rising from two, might be reasonable over a two-year period.

3.7 The same guidance suggests that from a starting point of five per cent involvement in community activity by local people, a reasonable five-year target might be fifteen per cent involvement. A separate study, undertaken by CDF in 1996 for Sandwell District Council suggested involvement in different localities of the district ranged from nine to twenty-two per cent.

3.8 None of these figures is more than generally indicative; but they give a flavour of actual and desirable levels of community activity.

Benefits to the individual

3.9 There are two main types of benefits to the individual from community self-help, and generally both are exemplified in the same activity: people benefit from the results of the activity, and also from simply taking part, in terms of personal development. A community association may initiate or support a range of activities which benefit the community as a whole while also providing opportunities for its volunteers to gain confidence and organisational and political skills which will equip them both for employment and for other social and managerial roles in the community: everyone gains.

3.10 Thus self-help childcare, from babysitting circles to daycare co-operatives, can free

women in particular to enter training or paid employment, while providing the organisers and volunteers with opportunities for working as a team and developing a range of valuable skills. Support groups for those with illnesses such as cancer can make a great difference both to relatives and to the ill person.

3.11 For people who are isolated or lonely, the informal nature of self-help activity is non-threatening, and the fact that they will be asked to help out in their turn makes them feel valued and welcome. Parent and toddler groups are a lifeline for women with post-natal depression and contact with others both enables advice to be given on the spot and provides a bridge into more formal support systems if needed. Often, purely informal social get-togethers can develop into more structured activity which benefits both the direct participants and their community.

A project in East London was set up by a group of women who wished to go back to college. They set up a child-sharing rota, taking turns to study. Demand grew as other women heard about the arrangement and a community co-operative was set up. The local college was so impressed that it gave the group the contract for the college creche.

Reduction in poverty

3.12 People in poorer areas have always helped one another as far as their circumstances have allowed, but as noted in Chapter 2 in recent years the old traditions of co-operatives and mutuals have been revived to great effect. Food co-operatives are bringing cheaper and healthier foods to local people, bulk-buying reduces the cost of basic goods and credit unions dramatically reduce dependence on loan sharks. Local exchange trading schemes (LETS) enable local people to improve their quality of life by exchanging time and skills. The Joseph Rowntree

Foundation has estimated that £15 a week more in disposable income can make the difference between want and sufficiency to poorer people in society. Such forms of economic self-help can go a long way towards providing this extra.

An embroidery group set up for Asian women in Newham, East London, made garments which they began to sell in local shops. In time, they set up a tailoring co-operative and gained contracts from the garment trade.

3.13 Self-help economic activity also helps to keep money in the area. A community-run village shop, for example, stops food cash leaving the area, and community businesses circulate more money locally.

Amman Valley Enterprise, Wales

In 1987 five women from a small village formed the Amman Valley Enterprise (AVE) where education and training courses were held at convenient, flexible times, supported by childcare. AVE now employs 57 local people and involves nearly 40 volunteers. They have helped eight community businesses to set up, providing essential services for the Valley, including a nursery, a catering company, and a company to train long-term unemployed in charcoal burning, coppicing, gardening and woodland management. Around 350 people take part in classes annually with the help of a business advice and training centre and teleworking facilities.

Five years ago AVE's projects were 100% grant funded; 60% of their money is now generated by the services they provide.

Filling the gaps in public services

3.14 People in disadvantaged areas are particularly reliant on good public services, but officially organised services can never meet all needs. Lunch clubs for the elderly, visiting groups for disabled people, reading rotas for those with visual impairment and taking housebound neighbours out in a car to the countryside: these all supplement the systems of formal caring. Such informal caring is recognised as part of a good care package by the Community Care Act. It is difficult to overstate the importance of simple good neighbourliness in poorer neighbourhoods: when public transport is expensive or inadequate, the willingness of those with cars to give lifts is a lifeline.

3.15 Informal self-help not only reduces the cost of public services, by using volunteer time and by bringing in grants in its own right, it also reduces the demands made on public services. Community activity can lead to reductions in vandalism, which means fewer calls on police and council time; an active tenants' association can lead to fewer empty homes and thus less demand on the housing provider.

3.16 Furthermore, public agencies find it difficult to make an impact without the help of informal groups. Effective drug prevention work is impossible if paid professionals, however energetic they may be, are not working in partnership with the local community.

A number of local mothers concerned about levels of drug abuse in Gorton in Manchester formed themselves into a group, received training on drugs issues, and now work with parents' groups and in local schools. They set up a Young People's Forum which in turn went on to undertake drug awareness work with younger children.

3.17 None of this, of course, must in any way let the providers of public services off the hook: there must be no question of any slackening of their efforts on the basis that the community itself is providing for many of its needs. In practice this danger is limited. A community with the self-confidence and energy to work together in this way is likely, also, to work together to ensure that public services are maintained: self-help in terms of service provision often goes hand in hand with effective campaigning. The more substantial problem is that while the poorest neighbourhoods are likely to benefit most from self-help activities, they are just the neighbourhoods in which self-help is most difficult to achieve. Our action plan is intended in part to address this problem.

3.18 Organising activities for children is one of the most common forms of self-help in poorer areas. Parents get together to organise day trips, youth activities, sports and arts events. These can range from the Saturday morning football team to community festivals; such self-help activities may be the best way to reach the children and young people who are reluctant to attend 'official' clubs, may prevent their boredom causing further problems for the community, and may even integrate them into general adult activities.

In London, the Lambeth Tigers Football Club uses local volunteers to run activities to break down barriers across estates and between ethnic groups. In Nottingham, African Caribbean young people are introduced to a mentor from the same social and ethnic background to befriend and support them when they are excluded from the educational system.

3.19 There is no simple relationship between self-help groups and crime reduction, but people coming together to tackle the problem can give

residents control over their own fear of crime; for some residents it is this fear which is keeping them trapped in their own home. An increase in informal activity leads to more street life as people take part, and this in itself reduces fear.

Regeneration of the area and creation of a vibrant community

3.20 When residents are drawn into the regeneration process, provision becomes more relevant, the services provided become more responsive, and over time residents learn to manage sophisticated systems such as development trusts. A high level of self-help activity enables residents to take a full part in the regeneration process. It is vital that strong links be established between self-help and regeneration. If not, self-help tends to focus on minor issues, while programmes of regeneration become ineffective exercises in top-down planning.

A community association in Slaithwaite was concerned about the local school. It mobilised local people to turn it into a well-run community building, with a youth club, an over-subscribed pre-school playgroup, and a nursery school. Annual community festivals are now held in the building.

3.21 The difference between one deprived area and another is often to do with the extent and nature of its community spirit. Evidence from participatory arts projects shows that when people get involved together in one project, they don't want to stop, and go on to join other groups active in the community. The presence of a multiplicity of self-help groups creates a change in the atmosphere of an area, as neighbours knock on doors to get more people active and as the area is made more safe by people coming out of their houses to attend activities. Equally, the more formal community

and voluntary sector relies on such vibrant 'background communities' as a starting point.

Apple Tree Court, Salford

Typical of many rundown inner city housing estates, Apple Tree Court suffered from the poor condition of the buildings, the poverty of many residents and the lack of local facilities - there were no food shops nearby.

A group of residents, fired by the enthusiasm and determination of the tenants' association, negotiated to become a Tenant Managed Company, and promptly dug up the barren green lawn around the tower block. Now they enjoy vegetable plots, fruit and nut trees, a greenhouse, a wildlife area around a pond, a Japanese garden, a 'village' duck pond, a seating area for picnics or basking in the sun, and a small woodland copse. Myriad community projects are in the pipeline, building on what has been achieved.

Professional groups are often organised by subject or client: elderly people, ethnic minorities, refugees, youth. Neighbourhood groups, by contrast, have as a common interest the place where people live. These generalist and informal groups are a valuable way of breaking down barriers of age, race, and gender - and a sense of place, of neighbourhood and community, is often itself a route into the political process.

A project in Bradford set up by elderly Asian men and women grows vegetables, providing a service of cheap organic food greatly valued by the Asian families in the area. This has increased the status of elders who had felt under-valued in UK society.

In Hastings, local people are taking young people leaving care, a very vulnerable group, into their own homes as lodgers, offering support and advice until they can set out on their own. This is a vital safety net for the young people and helps them to adjust to adult life.

Community political activity

3.22 Self-help activity is often organised around such community problems as damp housing and unsafe roads. Local people may be encouraged in this way to make contact with the bureaucracies which affect their lives. These contacts may be confrontational at first, but the experience of calling authority to account is as much an element of democracy as is voting in elections. Indeed, leaders of such campaigns often 'graduate' from them to the formal political system. Current government initiatives, including Best Value, the New Deal for Communities and the voluntary sector Compact will depend for their success, at least in part, on a high degree of structured community involvement.

3.23 There are other ways in which self-help links with the broader political process.

Conclusion

3.24 **Through community self-help, everybody wins - the individual, the local community, the providers of formal public services and society as a whole. But it needs careful and patient cultivation: by definition, this is activity done by local communities, not for or to them. Ill judged, poorly directed or even over-enthusiastic intervention will smother rather than support community involvement. Sensitive, well-judged and supportive assistance will release community potential and repay the investment many times over. This is the key aim of our action plan in Chapter 5.**

Chapter 4: the support structures for community self-help

Introduction

4.1 The benefits of community self-help considered in Chapter 3 will not be realised without intense effort - not only on the part of communities themselves, but also by external agencies. The trick for the latter - far easier to say than to achieve - is to support in a way which fosters independence rather than dependence. It will sometimes seem easier to an outside agency, whether local authority, police service or voluntary organisation, to analyse a situation, identify 'the problem' and then solve it. But the chances are that it won't stay solved. It is more likely that a long and slow process of helping the community identify the issues and deal with them will yield greater long-term benefits.

4.2 This chapter is about such support - who does it, with whom and how. It prefigures and provides essential background to many of the recommendations in the action plan.

Existing support structures - voluntary and statutory sector

4.3 We are not starting with a clean slate. A wide range of support is already available, both from voluntary and community sector infrastructure bodies and from the public sector. Most towns, for instance, have Councils for Voluntary Service (CVSs) - umbrella groupings of local voluntary and community organisations. But they are often, or generally, under-resourced, and their membership tends to be far from comprehensive. It was suggested in Chapter 3 that, very roughly, six groups per thousand population represents a reasonably healthy level of community activity; but it is a rare CVS that

would have in membership more than, say, twenty-five per cent of these groups. The CVSs provide a vital service of training, advice and support to their members but, in general, are not resourced to reach to the most local level.

4.4 The national infrastructure, too, has a role in supporting local organisations, whether generic - for instance, the National Association of CVSs - or more specific - for instance, the National Playbus Association or Community Matters (the support body for those who run community buildings). Again, resource constraints limit their effectiveness.

4.5 Local government is a further key player in terms of supporting community organisations. The only generalisation that can reasonably be made, however, is that its performance is variable. Some local authorities work well with community groups in their area because of a recognition first, that such groups are themselves an important sign of civic engagement and second, that partnership with them ultimately leads to higher quality services. Others are neutral or even negative about local community activity. Working effectively with local community sector is, for local government, an issue of modernisation. And, as recent research commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation discovered (JRF *findings* 419, April 1999): 'Some local authorities have long recognised a need to change and have developed their own process of modernisation. Others see modernisation more as a threat.'

4.6 The key requirements for effective support by local authorities, government agencies and other public bodies are commitment, training,

the will and capacity to work across organisational boundaries - and equally, the will and capacity to cede power to external partnerships. Such central government programmes as New Deal for Communities and New Deal for Young People are signs of the Government's commitment and will; time will tell on the question of capacity.

Approaches to supporting community groups

4.7 Support for community groups must take as its starting point whatever stage of development the groups have reached; and in general should have as its destination their long term viability and self sufficiency, including financial self sufficiency. But it is necessary to unpick just about every element of this over-simple formula.

4.8 Effective approaches include the following main elements:

- *Offering development grants and/or small scale consultancy support to groups which need to become stronger before a suitable application can be funded.*
- *Providing or facilitating informal training in accessible surroundings (in terms of proximity to the group, physical accessibility for disabled people and general appropriateness) and employing techniques like Planning for Real, which provide processes for genuinely involving people in decision-making about local facilities and developments.*
- *Enabling groups to purchase their own training through 'technical assistance vouchers' redeemable for services from any approved provider. This would alter the relationship between smaller groups and more established providers in the voluntary sector, with the latter moving from patronage to service. It is likely to have a double benefit: groups will receive quality advice, training and developmental support, while the process of deciding how to spend 'their' vouchers will in itself build up their confidence.*
- *Facilitating maximum use of existing community buildings, by small scale capital funding (for instance, to ensure that the route to them is safe and well lighted, and that the buildings themselves are accessible to people with disabilities) and by maintenance grants (perhaps out of the community resource fund mentioned below and in the action plan).*
- *Providing or facilitating infrastructure support for community organisations, including office space and equipment, and meeting rooms. Such facilities need not be for the exclusive use of a single group, but might be 'owned' more widely, thus providing a means of supporting individual volunteers as well as community groups. Many faith groups, of all denominations, in some of the poorest neighbourhoods provide such facilities for individuals and groups - which has the additional benefit of ensuring that their buildings are more widely used than would otherwise be the case.*
- **Establishing a community chest over which local residents have decision-making responsibility.** This would represent a major incentive for local people to get involved, a way of binding people together in joint decision-making and a relatively cheap means (in the

context of the government's overall spending on regeneration) of ensuring that funds have an impact at the most local level.

- *Establishing linkages (face to face and electronic) between community groups and organisations in similar circumstances - helping to avoid isolation and parochialism.*
- *Establishing a community resource fund to meet the needs of small and emerging community groups. Small sums of money with simple application procedures and a rapid response could have a substantial beneficial effect on local groups. Decisions should be made as geographically close to the area as possible. The Awards for All programme of the National Lottery distributing bodies might provide a model from which this can be developed.*
- *Involving local businesses in most if not all of the above approaches. Both large and small businesses are increasingly realising that, by contributing directly to the communities in which they operate, they are not merely discharging a responsibility but also acting in their own interest. A community in which self-help thrives is one with lower crime, greater stability, and stronger economic base.*

4.9 The action plan in Chapter 5 picks up every element of this prospectus, and makes recommendations to take it forward.

Developing communities as a whole

4.10 For a community to be strong and able to

work in partnership with other communities and with public authorities, it must ultimately develop its own structures to do so without outside help. But it may be a long, slow route to get there, and a lot of help is needed on the way. The ideas set out above were focused particularly (though not solely) on community groups as beneficiaries; but the community as a whole can equally be helped by skilled intervention using professional staff. Consistent with our philosophy throughout this report, such staff must be brought in with the agreement, and on the terms, of the community itself. (The Scottish model of community education staff helping to support local activities in the most deprived communities is one which might be studied for its potential relevance in England.)

4.11 Effective community development workers can work both 'horizontally' (developing networks within the community) and 'vertically' (helping to build bridges between residents and the authorities). Even without dedicated resources, outreach workers from established local organisations can be used in this way: a relatively small investment will allow community organisations from perhaps just outside the area to take on this role; but more sustained investment will be necessary in the longer term. Volunteering organisations are likely to be key to this process. They can organise and get funding for the sort of wide ranging programmes that bring in the 'non-joiners'; and they can set up exciting events which provide a kick start to more sustained community self-help.

Wrens Nest

The Wrens Nest estate in Dudley suffered from a range of 'joined-up' problems including empty properties, environmental decline, high unemployment and crime levels, inadequate facilities for young people and poor health among residents.

Led by a resident who had lived on the estate all his life, the residents formed themselves into a tenants' association and, with the help of Groundwork Black Country and Dudley MBC, local people drew up a 'shopping list' of improvements and secured funding through the Single Regeneration Budget.

To date:

- *over 5.5 hectares of land have been reclaimed or improved for the benefit of the community*
- *over 400 young people have been involved in projects to promote personal and social development*
- *the Wrens Nest Tools Library has been established: a garden tools lending system developed and run entirely by local people through the tenants' association*

4.12 Long term capacity building will generally be most effective if carried out by organisations based in the community in question and working in long-term partnership with local people. This may be a well-established community centre, a long-term Save the Children project, a centre run by Family Service Units or a development trust. The one essential is that it is resourced to spend the time necessary to this form of support work - which in general is additional to and separate from core project or service delivery work.

An assessment of a long term community development project in Wrexham found that for each hour of professional community work input with local groups fifteen hours of voluntary work could be generated. The project also found that an inner core of actively involved local people could bring in three times that number on a less intensive basis. Beyond these two levels, a very wide

range of local people, fifteen times as many, benefitted from the activities and services set up.

The process of supporting community involvement

4.13 There are three features common to all the approaches described above: first, they all focus on locally identified issues, concerns and opportunities; second, they all require money, though in many cases not a lot; and third, for all of them, money alone is not sufficient. There is, in fact, something of a dilemma here: a healthy and active community is the desired outcome of all this work and money; but without a high level of community involvement in the preparatory work, this outcome may well not be achieved. So **community involvement is both an essential input and a desired outcome. How is this to be achieved?**

4.14 There is no definitive answer to this, perhaps the core problem of community development. But the outline of a way forward might be as follows. First - before the main programme of work - it is necessary to take an audit of the resources, skills and existing activity in the community; second, it is necessary to put together an action plan in partnership with what has been identified in the first stage as the most active elements in the community.

4.15 The third stage is to begin activities based on the action plan. Clear targets for moving towards community led programmes, and effective monitoring and evaluation of progress and development, are essential elements of this. However generous funders are - whether charitable trusts, statutory agencies or private sector organisations - the crucial requirement is that investment is on the basis of a plan owned by the community, not on the basis of the funder's view of what is needed.

4.16 All of these ideas involve partnership between the community itself and external agencies - whether voluntary organisations, specialist community development workers, or local or central government. **But none of these outside agencies can work effectively with communities if they themselves are subject to insecure funding:** they too need a secure financial base.

The role of faith organisations

4.17 Strong community based organisations are a key starting point for any disadvantaged community. In many cases faith groups, of all denominations, will be the strongest around and yet their potential may be overlooked by funders and others engaged in programmes of community development. There can be a tendency not to see beyond the 'faith' label to the community role of these groups. There is also a tendency not to recognise the diversity of faith groups, many of which also have a distinct ethnic and cultural identity.

4.18 Faith groups exist in all areas and at different levels across Britain. Many poor communities in particular have seen a rise in the number of residents of different faiths and cultures as the ethnic composition of these areas has changed. Many faith organisations are highly responsive to the needs of local communities and have over time expanded their role to include community action programmes. This is not to say, of course, that faith organisations are invariably able to reach some of the more intractably excluded groups. Some parts of communities are as disaffected from faith communities as they are from mainstream society, and they may be at odds with the ethical and cultural, as well as religious, principles of such communities. But none of this is to minimise the enormous potential contribution which faith organisations can make to community self-help.

C2m Bradford

C2M is a practical piece of work which encourages local people to participate in sustainable planning for their communities.

The objects of C2M are to relieve poverty, distress and sickness, advance education and otherwise benefit the people of Bradford. The aim is to do this by strengthening the ability of communities and institutions to work together as effective partners in the economic and social regeneration of the area. A series of 'urban hearings' brought together decision makers and local people specifically to provide a forum in which the decision makers could listen to the concerns of local people. Out of this came the report 'Powerful Whispers', which has demonstrated that despite diversity there was a clear common agenda around which the increasingly separated and diverse communities of the area could be reconnected. C2M exists as a framework for that reconnection.

4.19 Black majority churches, mosques, temples, gurudwaras are well represented in faith communities and are particularly strong in identifying and responding to unmet needs in black and minority ethnic communities.

Lifting the Exclusion Zones

This is a partnership project of Divert, three local schools in Nottingham, local black-led Churches and statutory agencies. Its aims are to reduce exclusions of African-Caribbean and mixed race children, to provide support for their families and to improve self-esteem, behaviour and school attainment. The project has recruited and matched fourteen mentors with children, established a multi-

agency advisory group, engaged with schools on case conferences and exclusion panels and won funding from local companies, local authorities and health trusts.

4.20 Faith groups collectively represent a large and relatively well resourced part of the voluntary and community sector in the United Kingdom, having at their disposal networks of mutual aid, service provision, community development activities and community organising capacity. The importance of faith groups should emerge readily during a mapping exercise of the sort outlined above; indeed faith groups might be the focus for constructing such an exercise, in partnership with other groups in the community.

The role of ethnic minority organisations

4.21 The ethnic minority voluntary sector and self-help groups have a major role to play in supporting their communities. Their potential contribution is often not recognised by statutory bodies and umbrella organisations.

4.22 Black and minority ethnic organisations need and deserve to have their capacity developed to undertake strategic as well as practical work in their communities. The key barriers to this work are often lack of sustained funding, lack of recognition, lack of understanding of the way in which they work and lack of appreciation of their diversity. The last point is worth stressing. Ethnic minority communities and voluntary sector are not homogeneous groups; they need to be understood in their cultural, political and social context. The statutory sector should recognise this diversity as part of its funding and development policies - for instance, involving the groups themselves in setting the targets and success measures for particular initiatives.

4.23 One way forward is to enhance the capacity of these organisations so that they are both more effective in serving the needs of their communities and are enabled to support other, smaller, organisations which want to develop key areas of work.

Urban/Rural Mission Action Group

In Birmingham, London, Luton and Bradford there is a unique linking of grassroots community activity that has been brought about in a programme of direct action. The organisation is URMAG: Urban/Rural Mission Action Group. It links local activists with common needs and aims, is committed to action for equality and justice, and is led by members of black and minority ethnic communities.

The project starts with local and shared issues, bringing local people together, both black and white, with particular emphasis on those unable to break through the barriers of poverty and exclusion. In collaboration with other voluntary organisations and networks, general agencies and local authorities, URMAG runs local programmes and projects. Each of these is self-sustaining and led from the grassroots, with a community self-help ethos that gives members the opportunity to contribute their own experience and knowledge.

There are now over 300 small local action groups in local areas around the UK, helping communities to empowerment, and using housing and self-help as a focus for community development, regeneration and employment initiatives.

Conclusion

4.24 Statutory agencies, charitable trusts, the

private sector and enabling voluntary organisations are all external to local communities, but all have a crucial role to play in helping these communities to help themselves. The role is, however, one which requires a form of self-denying ordinance: too prescriptive an approach will smother the emerging community activity which it is designed to foster. We have developed the following set of principles - in effect, the outline of a charter - for involvement by external agencies.

process, no more, in the following action plan. Nonetheless the full adoption of the principles by all who work with communities would of itself effect a huge improvement in relationships, and help create a major increase in the self-confidence and effectiveness of the communities with which they work.

SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

- (1) Participatory democracy through local groups is complementary to representative democracy through local councillors and should be treated as such.*
- (2) Resource-holders should strive to reach the most 'grassroots' level possible when disbursing resources.*
- (3) The starting point for the development of a community should be the aspirations of that community not the plans of external agencies.*
- (4) External agencies should welcome and respect, and not seek to circumscribe, the independence of community groups.*
- (5) The proper balance between providing too little support and too much support will vary from time to time and place to place: it should be the subject of negotiation and agreement.*
- (6) Clarity of relationships is crucial, with a recognition of obligations on both sides.*
- (7) No-one has all the answers: all parties should acknowledge that they can learn from all others.*

4.25 These principles are very general: each of them, if it is to be effective, needs to be broken down into a set of more specific objectives, activities and targets. We make a start on this

Chapter 5: an action plan for community self-help

Introduction

5.1 The previous chapters have been a mixture of description, analysis, diagnosis and prescription. Many possible ways forward arose naturally from discussion of the environment in which communities function, and the barriers they face to full self-expression. It is now time to bring these together in an action plan.

5.2 In *Bringing Britain together*, we were asked to draw up an action plan to:

- “■ *raise the numbers involved in volunteering and community activity in poor neighbourhoods;*
- *increase the viability of community groups and services they deliver;*
- *encourage the growth of informal mutual support.”*

We have chosen to precede the action plan with a section on the principles of self-help, and to begin the plan itself with an initial category of cross cutting recommendations - proposals which cover more than one of the categories.

5.3 In many cases we have specified who should be responsible for implementing the recommendations; in many others, not. **We propose that the new Home Office Active Community Unit should ‘own’ this action plan as a whole, and be responsible for checking progress on recommendations, including those which are not its primary responsibility.** Our first recommendation focuses on this point. Furthermore, the recommendations vary widely in type, some being specific and others far more general - with the latter in many cases aimed not

at a single institution, but at all who work in and with communities.

5.4 We should make an initial point on targets. Where targets can be provided they should be. They not only guard against empty rhetoric; they also enable achievement to be measured and assessed. But unrealistic or meaningless targets are worse than none at all; and community self-help is not an area which particularly lends itself to target setting. Indeed, too single minded a search for targets will lead to a distorting focus on what is recordable - activity at the more formal end of community self-help - and a corresponding and damaging under-emphasis on the less formal and less recordable. So we believe that the following action plan, if implemented, will substantially increase the quantity and improve the quality of community self-help; at the same time we refrain in most areas from setting targets for this.

The principles of community self-help

5.5 The following set of principles represents a distillation of our six months of work, as well as the starting point for the action plan. To the extent that it is possible to summarise our thinking in a page or two, this is that summary.

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY SELF-HELP

(i) General

(1) *There is a ladder or spectrum of community and voluntary activity. The higher rungs of the ladder may include the*

acquisition of premises and direct economic regeneration work. But the crucial step is onto the first rung - the initial involvement.

(2) People need a reason to take that first step: in general, it will relate to their interests, concerns, families - to the circumstances of their lives.

(3) Community plans and strategies should be developed and owned by the community, and should cover the most local area feasible.

(4) People tend to learn more readily from their peers than from outsiders who do not share their conditions of life. Mechanisms for peer support are crucial.

(i) Building on what is there

(5) It is rarely necessary, and even more rarely desirable, to create entirely new structures of community self-help. It is generally far better to build on what is already there - whether that is existing community buildings, faith groups (of any denomination), black and minority ethnic groups or organisations based on common interests.

(6) The gender aspect of community self-help should not be underestimated. The first steps are often taken by women rather than men, motivated by issues which affect their family or immediate environment.

(7) The notion of place is, self evidently, central to community self-help. Although it understates the element of mutuality which is so important a part of self-help, 'Give where you live' is an appropriate slogan for any campaign to promote it.

(ii) Funding

(8) Community ownership of and responsibility for resources are good for both the process and the outcome of resource allocation.

(9) Funders should be flexible, and prepared to take risks, over the relatively small sums of money which will need to be distributed directly to communities to support and promote self-help. Such funding is investment, and much of it is risk capital.

(10) Many community groups, and the support structures for them, both need and merit long term strategic investment. Short term funding may do no more than set them up to fail.

(iii) Policy

(11) Policy makers should work with the grain of communities. It is vital that demands to be 'businesslike' and accountable are not applied so as to inhibit creativity and spontaneity.

(12) Policy makers should treat effective community involvement as an end in itself, as well as a means to an end.

(13) Policies of community involvement and self-help will be effective only if they are integral to the planning of programmes, not added on as an extra.

(i) Cross-cutting recommendations

5.6 This action plan as a whole needs a single 'champion' - preferably a named individual in the most appropriate part of government who has specific responsibility to take forward the recommendations. Accordingly:

(1) **The Head of the new Home Office Active Community Unit (ACU) should be responsible for taking forward, encouraging and monitoring progress on this action plan. He/she should review and report on progress to lead Ministers in twelve months.**

(2) **Given the debate as to what constitutes a sustainable, or desirable, level**

of community activity (see Chapter 3), **the ACU should commission a survey of existing research in this area and if necessary commission fresh research.**

5.7 The Government's support for community self-help depends on more than rhetoric, and on more than good intentions. Ministers and government departments should place a continuing high priority on community participation and involvement *in practice*; and where participation and involvement conflict with the wish for a quick result, it is the former which in general should win out. This approach must be reflected both in specific initiatives and in the creation of an atmosphere and culture in which community involvement is valued. So:

(3) **The government should commit itself both in policy and practice to support community self-help, for instance by:**

- **setting realistic timetables for policy and programme development, which will allow for genuine community involvement** as opposed to mere consultation
- **creating meaningful targets and performance indicators for community involvement and involving communities in the setting of these targets**, as opposed to a tokenistic 'tick box' approach (a model already exists for this, commissioned by the relevant departments in the four parts of the United Kingdom)
- **ensuring that relevant programmes, such as the New Deal for Communities, do not place an undue burden on community groups**, particularly in terms of accountability and financial reporting

- **treating effective community involvement explicitly as a positive outcome in its own right**, rather than solely as a means to an end
- **co-ordinating more effectively its policies on volunteering and community self-help.** The establishment of the ACU provides an ideal opportunity for this. The Unit should take a strategic role in developing and promoting the government's policy and practice on volunteering and community involvement, and provide expert advice to other government departments and outside organisations.

This is an important list, and progress on each item should be monitored; but it is not comprehensive.

- (4) **The ACU should develop with other agencies a validation programme, possibly a Charter or Investors system, to raise the awareness and competence of agencies whose work has an impact on local communities and encourage a cultural change in their approach to them.** Such a system would seek a public commitment to working with communities and enable key institutions to move from statements of intent to practical programmes.
- (5) **The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions should set up programmes of visits for civil servants and others whose work has an impact on neighbourhood renewal and regeneration, to enable them to see at first hand the work of community groups in poor neighbourhoods and the effects on them of centrally determined policies.** The work of PAT 16 (Learning Lessons) on secondment and interchange should include recommendations to take this forward, drawing on the Business

in the Community 'Seeing is Believing' programme as a potential model.

(6) **PAT 16 should also consider joint training for all those involved in community self help.** Community volunteers, community development workers, representatives from faith communities, civil servants, local government officers and local politicians could all gain from training together on issues which affect local communities. An audit should be undertaken of the main training provision in this area, and trainers and trained shown that it would be beneficial to mix people from different backgrounds and disciplines.

5.8 Funders, and all those whose work has an impact on communities and who are seeking to help strengthen communities, need to 'go with the grain' - to work with those in the neighbourhood who are best organised and most motivated, rather than to attempt to set up new structures from scratch. This point leads to cross-cutting recommendations particularly in the areas of faith communities and ethnicity which should be seen as a background to many of the more specific later recommendations.

(7) **Central and local government and other funders should recognise the vital role of faith communities in regeneration and involve them at all levels, from the Inner Cities Religious Council and other national networks, to the work of local organisations.**

(8) Similarly, particularly in areas of high ethnic minority population, black and minority ethnic organisations may be the best organised and most active part of the local community. **Funders, particularly but not solely local government, should be prepared to provide strategic (often long-term) funding, to such minority ethnic organisations. In some cases this should enable these organisations to serve the**

whole community, not a particular ethnic group alone. (More specific recommendations relating to both black and minority ethnic organisations and faith communities are included below.)

(9) It is common, indeed usual, to find that women are on the whole more active in local self-help than men. The reasons for this lie outside our remit, but undoubtedly gender stereotyping plays a part - the belief that issues important to the community such as play, shopping and educational resources are somehow not 'men's business'. It is important to combat such ideas. But in the meantime, **funders should be prepared to focus skills, training and other support particularly on women, if they represent the best organised and most motivated part of the community.**

(ii) **Raising the numbers involved in volunteering and community activity in poor neighbourhoods**

5.9 There are a number of barriers, practical and (more often) attitudinal, within the current benefits system, which prevent volunteering being seen as a viable alternative, or complement to, paid employment. We recommend that:

(10) **The Benefits Agency and Employment Service, plus as appropriate the Department of Social Security and Department for Education and Employment, should work towards eliminating these actual or perceived barriers to volunteering.** In particular:

- **Benefits Agency rules should be modified or clarified so that small advance payments by voluntary organisations, made to cover volunteers' costs such as travel expenses, do not affect benefits**

entitlements. This is not to advantage volunteers financially, but to ensure that they are not out of pocket as a result of volunteering, or deterred from participating because they cannot find the cost of a bus fare.

- **Training for Benefits Agency and Employment Service Staff should cover both the policies governing volunteering and benefit eligibility and the value of many forms of voluntary and community activity as a route to employability and employment. Furthermore, improved and simplified promotional literature should be made widely available in Jobcentres and Benefits Agency offices, outlining the employability benefits and opportunities of volunteering and community involvement.**
- **The '48 hour rule' should be changed where its application impedes community and voluntary activity.** At present volunteers must be available for paid employment within 48 hours of getting a job. This discourages potential volunteers from making a commitment to volunteering; discourages those who use volunteers' services from providing proper training or giving such volunteers positions of responsibility; and generally downgrades the importance of volunteering, by implying that it is activity which can be abandoned at almost no notice. The 48 hour rule no doubt makes perfect sense for the majority of jobseekers; but **we consider that the 48-hour period should be extended to one week for people engaged in community and voluntary activity.**

5.10 Those running government programmes are invariably judged against generally quantitative performance indicators. If community self-help is to flourish - and if it is to achieve its potential as a key contributor to healthy communities - it needs to be incorporated specifically as an element by which the performance of relevant government programmes and public institutions will be judged. Specific benchmarks should be set for this - perhaps in the form that, say, a minimum of twenty per cent of the budget of relevant programmes be spent in areas housing the poorest ten per cent of the population. Thus:

(11) **The ACU should ensure that government programmes aimed at increasing the numbers of volunteers, such as the Millennium Volunteers and Active Community programmes, contain specific mechanisms, with clear performance indicators, to target poor neighbourhoods.**

(12) **The ACU should also work more widely across government to ensure that other relevant major spending programmes, such as the various New Deals and the Single Regeneration Budget, set targets for their spending on community involvement and build in monitoring of the quantity and quality of such involvement.**

(13) The health of public institutions, most notably schools, may be affected crucially by the extent to which they involve local people (including temporary residents, such as students at a local university) in their work. We welcome the fact that the OFSTED Framework for inspection of schools already includes specific reference to extra-curricular provision and community links, and so OFSTED take account of such activity in their inspections. They are due to produce an interim report on this area in December 1999. **Levels of community involvement in schools should be recognised as an**

important indicator of the health both of the school and of the surrounding community. The December report should form the basis of developing work in this area; in the meantime, we commend the subject to PAT 11 ('Schools Plus').

5.11 Few people go straight from a situation of no involvement to one of active engagement with their neighbourhood. Knowingly or not, most are on a 'ladder of involvement', with simple acts of good neighbourliness at one end and a regular commitment with formal voluntary or statutory organisations, or a position of community leadership, at the other. We recommend that:

(14) **Increasing involvement of this sort should be facilitated by the relevant public authorities through the provision of training, other forms of support, and sympathetic application of the benefits rules, so that people are encouraged to 'graduate' to greater engagement with their community. This should not be confined to unpaid work - a community is all the healthier if people can undertake paid work where they live.**

(iii) **Increasing the viability of community groups and the services they deliver**

(a) **Developing local action plans**

5.12 Local community strategies are nothing new. But it is rare for them to pay more than lip service to genuine community involvement. Generally, consultation with the community on the basis of an almost settled draft is considered sufficient to demonstrate partnership. It is not.

(15) The production of community plans under the Modernising Local Government programme should be supplemented by development plans for localities drawn up with local communities. These should go beyond the service delivery orientation of the

Best Value initiative. **The ACU, working with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and the Local Government Association, should prepare guidance for both local authorities and communities on the production of long-term locality plans.** The guidance should cover the following areas among others:

- how, where necessary, to 'kick start' the process (including the need to fund and otherwise support the building of capacity within the community)
- the need to carry out an audit of current community activity and resources
- how to ensure that the concerns of local residents are at the heart of the locality plan
- the need for a key individual or organisation to have responsibility for implementation and checking progress.

(b) **Funding**

5.13 It is increasingly the case that voluntary and community organisations take forward through their work a range of the government's objectives, but do not fit neatly within the aims of any one department. When this happens, there is a danger of each department disclaiming responsibility and of a valuable organisation going to the wall. This must no longer happen.

(16) **Through the Compact between government and the voluntary sector - in particular, the proposed code of practice on funding - and through case by case negotiation, Home Office Ministers and the ACU should seek to ensure that government departments work *together* to produce a funding package where the work of voluntary and community organisations meets the aims of more than one department. Equivalent points apply in relation to local government also, and should be picked up both as part of the**

Modernising Local Government programme, and in the context of the Compact's extension to local government.

(17) **The ACU should work with other funders to develop a single, simple funding application form, particularly for small grants.** Initially it might build on the work in this area of the London Funders' Group. At the minimum, the aim should be for funders to agree *consistent* application forms. There are questions which all funders, statutory or otherwise, will wish to see answered: these should be asked in a common format, minimising unnecessary work by grant applicants.

(18) **Within the limits of accountability for public funds, funders should reach agreement that checks undertaken by one of them into such issues as the financial and managerial stability of an applicant organisation should be regarded as sufficient for others also. The ACU should co-ordinate this.**

5.14 The Compact also recognises that where the activities of a voluntary or community organisation help significantly in the achievement of a funder's strategic goals, the funder should be prepared to provide long term strategic funding for that organisation. This applies just as much to local community self-help as to national voluntary sector service delivery. Accordingly:

(19) **Funders should acknowledge that a long term commitment to strategic funding may be the most efficient and effective means of supporting community self-help; and should be prepared to make this commitment in such cases.**

(20) **On the other hand, many local groups need no more than funds to meet basic office equipment needs - a desk, telephone, fax, computer and so on.**

Funders' programmes should be flexible enough to encompass these needs too. Making small grants to cover such equipment is likely to be, in the literal sense, an investment, leading to a very substantial return in terms of the recipients' activity, output and effectiveness.

(21) **As a key new element of this, the ACU should design and seek sources of funding for a Community Resource Fund, to reach the needs of small and emerging community groups.** Some of the sums of money needed by groups are very small indeed. It might be a couple of hundred pounds for a community festival, a pensioners' trip, some notepaper for a new residents' group or some sports gear. Raising even small sums can divert energy and an easily accessible, quick response fund for such activities would free up local people to get on with the events themselves. **Such a fund could be a development of the National Lottery Awards for All programme, but at a lower level of funding, more in the £50-£300 range. To enable local knowledge of the groups to assist the assessment process, and for a more rapid response, a high degree of delegation will be looked for.**

(22) **The black and minority ethnic voluntary and community sector is weaker even than the 'mainstream' sector; and its particular weakness at national level means that local and regional support structures are relatively more important. Funders should provide dedicated funding to support the local and regional, as well as national infrastructure of this vital part of the voluntary and community sector.**

(23) **Furthermore, funders should make it a condition of funding mainstream infrastructure organisations that their services are made available, in practice as well as theory, to minority ethnic organisations. The recipients of this**

funding should be required to report on their use of it in this respect.

(24) It is common to see mainstream (white) organisations deliver training and support services across the sector as a whole. It is far less usual to see black organisations in such a role; but until this happens, this part of the sector will continue to be marginalised. **Funding bodies should be prepared to fund black and minority ethnic voluntary organisations to deliver training and support services across the sector, not to their own communities alone.**

(25) Faith groups are, in many communities, the most active, best organised and most widely supported part of the voluntary and community sector. **Funders should therefore adopt a pragmatic approach to the funding of faith groups recognising that they may well be the most suitable organisations to deliver general community objectives, and, in appropriate cases, providing sustained financial support for them.**

(c) *Support for community groups*

5.15 Funding is, of course, a key but not the only requirement of emerging community groups.

(26) **ACU should lead on the development of a programme of community technical assistance vouchers (CTAV), to help provide community groups with easy access to technical and managerial assistance with a minimum of bureaucracy and at times and in ways which suit them.** Community groups which meet the eligibility requirements would be entitled to apply for vouchers from local organisers of the programme, and could then use them to pay for technical assistance from a range of approved providers. **Following the National**

Lottery Act 1998, National Lottery distributors are now able to provide vouchers as well as grants. The ACU should explore the potential links between the CTAV proposal and the National Lottery Charities Board's Community Involvement programme.

5.16 The private sector is, or could be, hugely influential in promoting the health of poor neighbourhoods. We have two recommendations to make which are directed specifically at the private sector; but many other of our recommendations are of considerable relevance also.

5.17 Programmes of employer supported volunteering such as UK Cares, and other forms of corporate community involvement, are coming to the fore in a way which has not happened for many years, if ever before. It would be easy for such programmes to focus on 'soft targets' - encouraging employee involvement with established, national voluntary organisations and 'popular' causes. This should be resisted.

(27) **Business in the Community, and others leading on employer supported volunteering and corporate community involvement generally, should ensure that these programmes focus on the communities most in need of their help.**

5.18 More and more companies are recognising the value of community involvement: it is not just a matter of an altruistic putting back into the community which provides the customer and employee base, and thus the profits; it is also good business to promote healthy communities. But such policies and practices are still not as widespread as they should be.

(28) **Corporate leaders in community involvement, who include a large part of the financial services industry, food**

retailing and catering, for instance, could have an immense influence on the practices of other parts of the corporate sector - not least, their 'supply chain'. They should be prepared to use this influence to seek to improve the community involvement practices of the companies with which they work, employing a range of measures ranging from persuasion to incentives for good practice to sanctions for bad practice.

(iv) **Encouraging the growth of informal mutual support**

5.19 Under this final heading are two general and two more specific recommendations.

5.20 Family is in many cases central to community self help. People get involved, more than anything else, through issues which concern them and their families. The welfare of children is perhaps the single most important motivator - whether in relation to play, schooling, drugs, health or the environment. The primary school is, or should be, a hub of self-help activity, with parents becoming involved initially because they perceive benefits for their children's education but often, subsequently, broadening their involvement.

(29) **Accordingly, there will be more self-help activity if there is an initial incentive to encourage involvement. Funders should support organisations which provide such an incentive. These will often be organisations focusing on family welfare - family centres run by children's charities such as Barnado's and NCH, family mediation projects, faith groups and so on.**

5.21 But what happens where family is part of the problem, not part of the solution? Where families do not function effectively, for whatever reason, different mechanisms must be found to engage young people in particular. In such a situation, even 'weak ties' - a single outside role

model - can have a major and beneficial influence.

(30) **Funders should support mentoring and 'buddy' programmes such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters as a way of providing alternative, positive role models for young people; and mentoring and befriending should also be a key element of programmes of employer-supported volunteering** (see Recommendation 27 above).

5.22 Few things are as beneficial to the self-confidence of a community as having resources of its own. Accordingly, we recommend that:

(31) **'Neighbourhood endowment funds' should be established for the community to allocate as it wishes.** Such funds would have two main benefits: first, there would be direct gain through the uses to which the money is put for the good of the community; and second, there would be a substantial gain in community cohesion through the process of setting up and operating a system of funding owned and operated within the community. **The ultimate aim should be to have capital endowments established in at least the three thousand identified poorest neighbourhoods.** (There is a read-across here to recent work on asset-based development as a means of creating self-sufficient neighbourhoods and communities, carried out by such organisations as the Development Trusts Association.)

(32) **The process, however, should be to pilot the proposal on a revenue basis, as an integral part of, and funded from the New Deal for Communities programme.** In other areas, other funders, particularly local authorities and the National Lottery Charities Board, should also seek to pilot such funds, also initially on a revenue rather than

endowment basis. For further details, see Annex D.

5.23 Informal mutual support is a crucial aid to people active in their communities. Without it they can feel isolated and unable to cope; with it, they have a peer network of people who have faced similar issues with whom they can share experience and develop new ideas.

(33) Funders should include in funding packages for community groups provision for individuals and organisations to join an appropriate peer support network of social entrepreneurs and community leaders, enabling them to interact and learn from one another. Such peer networks might work through face-to-face meetings, seminars, IT, visits or learning sets. Community Action Network and Community Matters now offer significant practical experience in this area.

Conclusion

5.24 It is important to emphasise that this action plan represents the beginning rather

than the end of a process. Accordingly, while many of the recommendations are fully thought through and entirely firm, many others are necessarily tentative and will require working up by other Policy Action Teams, or others inside or outside government. The many and varied facets of community self-help require many and varied approaches. That is what makes it so fascinating; but it is another reason why this report and action plan are far from the last word on the subject.

5.25 Our conviction is that if this action plan is implemented where possible and developed where necessary, the result be both a major increase in the quantity and quality of community self-help activity, and a major step forward towards the achievement of healthy, self-confident, self-sufficient and renewed communities.

Annex A: members of the policy action team on community self-help

William Fittall	-	Chair, Home Office
Veena Bahl	-	Department of Health
Phil Barton	-	Groundwork Northwest
Adele Blakebrough	-	Community Action Network
Alan Brown	-	Department of the Environment, Transport & the Regions
Anita Charlesworth	-	HM Treasury
Simon Dale	-	Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council community safety team
Richard Farnell	-	Church Urban Fund and University of Coventry
Mark Gale	-	Neighbourhood Projects Network, Gloucester
Chris Hayes	-	Department of Social Security
Philippa Holland	-	Government Office for the West Midlands
Claudia Kenyatta	-	Social Exclusion Unit
Gerard Lemos	-	Lemos and Crane
Jerry Marston	-	Littlewoods plc
Andy McLellan	-	Department of Culture, Media & Sport
Ronnie Moodley	-	African Refugees Housing Association Group and Refugee and Migrants Development Forum
Geoff Mulgan	-	No.10 Policy Unit
George Nicholson	-	Development Trusts Association
Janice Owens	-	St Martin's Residents' Action Group, Lambeth
Angela Sarkis	-	Church Urban Fund and Social Exclusion Unit
Sharon Scott	-	National Lottery Charities Board
Howard Simmons	-	London Borough of Hounslow
Howard Webber	-	Active Community Unit, Home Office
Anne Weinstock	-	Millennium Volunteers Unit, Department for Education and Employment
Alison West	-	Community Development Foundation
Charles Woodd	-	Community Matters
Ian Naysmith	-	Secretary, Active Community Unit, Home Office
Janet Novak	-	Adviser, Active Community Unit, Home Office

Annex B: visits by members of policy action team 9

9 December 1998:	Kaleidoscope drugs project, Kingston
9 February 1999:	Neighbourhoods Projects Network, Gloucestershire
9 February 1999:	Fair Shares, Gloucestershire
25 February 1999:	Citizens, Black Country
4 March 1999:	Barton Hill Settlement, Bristol
4 March 1999:	Awaz Utaoh, Bristol
8 March 1999:	Attercliffe and Darnall Community Enterprise, Sheffield
8 March 1999:	Manor Development Company, Sheffield
8 March 1999:	Rebuild, Sheffield
8 March 1999:	St Swithin's Church, Sheffield
8 March 1999:	Heeley Development Trust, Sheffield

Annex C: examples of numerical targets for community involvement

Examples of numerical targets for community involvement

(Extracts from community development foundation guidance on community involvement of the single regeneration budget challenge fund)

(i) Examples of numerical targets for strengthening the community sector

Aim

- More residents involved in community groups.

Starting point (benchmark based on community survey)

- 35% aware of 3+ groups
- 20% use 2+ groups
- 5% active in 1+ groups

Targets: 5 years

- 70% aware of 3+ groups
- 40% use 2+ groups
- 15% active in 1+ groups

Milestones: 1 year

- 40% aware of 3+ groups
- 25% use 2+ groups
- 7% active in 1+ groups

Implementation

- Community development

Monitoring

- Repeat benchmark survey and compare

Examples of targets for community consultation and representation

Aims

- High response to consultation
- Effective forum to channel the views of the community sector
- Authorities and professional agencies well attuned to community involvement.

Starting point (benchmark based on community survey)

- 2 community groups per 1,000 population

- 45% of groups respond to consultation request.
- 10% of local population are involved in 1+ groups
- 15% of households respond individually
- 20% of groups are networked into a representative forum
- Public meetings are poorly attended
- Representative forum is poorly resourced for its job
- Professional agencies are ignoring or marginalising community involvement.

Targets: 2 years

- 3 community groups per 1,000 population
- 65% of groups respond to consultation
- 20% of local population involved in 1+ groups
- 25% of households respond individually
- 50% of groups are networked into the representative forum
- Public meetings are well attended
- Representative forum is better resourced for its job
- Professional agencies value and support community involvement.

Implementation

- Community development work
- Resource allocations
- Technical assistance given to representative forum.

Monitoring/milestones

- Repeat benchmark survey and compare.

Annex D: ensuring local ownership: neighbourhood endowment funds

Even the most responsive small grants scheme has to be applied for, and the decisions are not normally made within the community. Grant-giving systems can be damaging to the pride of a local community and to the sense of shared effort that is such an attractive feature of small, local groups.

One way forward is simply to give poorer neighbourhoods some money of their own, through the establishment of 'neighbourhood endowment funds' owned and controlled by the local community. To pilot the practicalities it is suggested that the seventeen Pathfinder New Deal for Communities areas use a (revenue) sum equivalent to £5 to £10 per household per year. This sum would be truly owned by the local community. The process of deciding each year how to spend 'their' money for community benefit will act as a social glue, binding local people together in joint decision making.

Experience of such experiments shows that in the first year rather obvious activities are chosen and that the community becomes more and more sophisticated and structured in its approach as the years go on.

Each neighbourhood would have an organising agency, perhaps a tenants' group, which would invite applications and arrange the voting. It is important that both local individuals and local groups are able to vote. Voting would be restricted to those living in the area. Safeguards should be included to make sure that local cliques do not get the money year after year, and that individuals, however worthy, do not benefit. Because applications would be dealt with by volunteers at local level and recruitment would be based mainly on word of mouth (including electronic community bulletin boards), administrative costs would be low. The voting process would be designed to raise the level of debate in the community about their needs and to be in itself a mechanism for getting non-joiners active at community level.

Annex E: peer support networks

Experience from many quarters shows that the three most important elements in successful community regeneration are the quality of local leadership; the ability to sustain the drive for change; and the right type of external assistance. One approach which binds all three of these elements in the availability of a peer support network. Such networks should be considered an essential feature in any community regeneration plan. They can offer community projects the following:

- (a) support based on experience in similar situations, which can be communicated directly, for example, by visits to the peer project and conversation and mentoring of the most immediate kind;
- (b) support not associated with conditions of funding or any sort of hierarchy; and
- (c) support which will be available indefinitely, long after the end of an externally funded programme, because it arises from the motivation of self-help on the part of the peer group.

Community leaders can experience a serious and damaging sense of isolation. The nature of their community based work tends to require intensive focus inwards to the local community and there has been no obvious way for them to encounter each other and so to learn. Peer support networks can overcome these problems.

Annex F: recommendations

Cross cutting recommendations

- (1) The Head of the Home Office Active Community Unit (ACU) should be responsible for taking forward, encouraging and monitoring progress on this action plan. She should review and report on progress to lead Ministers in twelve months.
- (2) Given the debate as to what constitutes a sustainable, or desirable, level of community activity, the ACU should commission a survey of existing research in this area and if necessary commission fresh research.
- (3) The government should commit itself both in policy and practice to support community self-help, for instance by:
 - setting realistic timetables for policy and programme development, which will allow for genuine community involvement
 - creating meaningful targets and performance indicators for community involvement and involving communities in the setting of these targets,
 - ensuring that relevant programmes, such as the New Deal for Communities, do not place an undue burden on community groups
 - Treating effective community involvement explicitly as a positive outcome in its own right
 - Co-ordinating more effectively its policies on volunteering and community self-help
- (4) The ACU should develop with other agencies a validation programme, possibly a Charter or Investors system, to raise the awareness and competence of agencies whose work has an impact on local communities and encourage a cultural change in their approach to them.
- (5) The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions should set up programmes of visits for civil servants and others whose work has an impact on neighbourhood renewal and regeneration
- (6) PAT16 should consider joint training for all those involved in community self-help.
- (7) Central and local government and other funders should recognise the vital role of faith communities in regeneration.
- (8) Funders, should be prepared to provide strategic funding, to black and minority ethnic organisations.

- (9) Funders should be prepared to focus skills, training and other support particularly on women, if they represent the best organised and most motivated part of the community.

Raising the numbers involved in volunteering and community activity in poor neighbourhoods

- (10) The Benefits Agency and Employment Service, plus as appropriate the Department of Social Security and Department for Education and Employment, should work towards eliminating these actual or perceived barriers to volunteering.
- Benefits Agency rules should be modified or clarified so that small advance payments by voluntary organisations, made to cover volunteers' costs such as travel expenses, do not affect benefits entitlements.
 - Training for Benefits Agency and Employment Service Staff should cover both the policies governing volunteering and benefit eligibility and the value of many forms of voluntary and community activity as a route to employability and employment involvement.
 - The '48 hour rule' should be changed where its application impedes community and voluntary activity. We consider that the 48-hour period should be extended to one week for people engaged in community and voluntary activity.
- (11) The ACU should ensure that government programmes aimed at increasing the numbers of volunteers, such as the Millennium Volunteers and Active Community programmes, contain specific mechanisms, with clear performance indicators, to target poor neighbourhoods.
- (12) The ACU should also work more widely across government to ensure that other relevant major spending programmes, such as the various New Deals and the Single Regeneration Budget, set targets for their spending on community involvement and build in monitoring of the quantity and quality of such involvement.
- (13) Levels of community involvement in schools should be recognised as an important indicator of the health both of the school and of the surrounding community.
- (14) Increasing community involvement should be facilitated by the relevant public authorities through the provision of training, other forms of support, and sympathetic application of the benefit rules.

Increasing the viability of community groups and services they deliver

- (15) The ACU, working with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and the Local Government Association, should prepare guidance for both local authorities and communities on the production of long-term locality plans.
- (16) Through the Compact between government and the voluntary sector - in particular, funding - and through case by case negotiation, Home Office Ministers and the ACU should seek to ensure that government departments work together to produce a funding package where the work of voluntary and community organisations meets the aims of more than one department.

- (17) The ACU should work with other funders to develop a single, simple funding application form, particularly for small grants.
- (18) Within the limits of accountability for public funds, funders should reach agreement that checks undertaken by one of them into such issues as the financial and managerial stability of an applicant organisation should be regarded as sufficient for others also. The ACU should co-ordinate this.
- (19) Funders should acknowledge that a long term commitment to strategic funding may be the most efficient and effective means of supporting community self-help; and should be prepared to make this commitment in such cases.
- (20) Establish a Community Resource Fund (CRF) - available for local groups for one- off grants for example for basic office equipment needs
- (21) As a key new element of the CRF, ACU should design and seek sources of funding for a Community Resource Fund, to reach the needs of small and emerging community groups.
- (22) Funders should provide dedicated funding to support the local and regional, as well as national infrastructure of this vital part of the voluntary and community sector.
- (23) Furthermore, funders should make it a condition of funding mainstream infrastructure organisations that their services are made available, in practice as well as theory, to minority ethnic organisations. The recipients of this funding should be required to report on their use of it in this respect.
- (24) Funding bodies should be prepared to fund black and minority ethnic voluntary organisations to deliver training and support services across the sector, not to their own communities alone.
- (25) Funders should therefore adopt a pragmatic approach to the funding of faith groups recognising that they may well be the most suitable organisations to deliver general community objectives, and, in appropriate cases, providing sustained financial support for them.
- (26) ACU should lead on the development of a programme of Community Technical Assistance Vouchers (CTAV) for community groups to pay for vouchers from local organisers of the programme to pay for technical assistance from a range of approved providers
- (27) Business in the Community, and others leading on employer supported volunteering and corporate community involvement generally, should ensure that these programmes focus on the communities most in need of their help.
- (28) Corporate leaders in community involvement should be prepared to use their influence to seek to improve the community involvement practices of the companies with which they work.

Encouraging the growth of informal mutual support

- (29) There will be more self-help activity if there is an initial incentive to encourage involvement. Funders should support organisations which provide such an incentive.
- (30) Funders should support mentoring and 'buddy' programmes such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters as a way of providing alternative, positive role models for young people; and mentoring and befriending should also be a key element of programmes of employer-supported volunteering (see Recommendation 27 above).
- (31) 'Neighbourhood Endowment Funds' should be established for the community to allocate as it wishes.
- (32) The first stage of the process should be to pilot the Fund on a revenue basis, as an integral part of, and funded from the New Deal for Communities programme.
- (33) Training - establish Training Fund for all those involved in community self-help to gain training from one another.