

Locality Working Report: Interviews with Stakeholders

Submitted to
Peter Smith
Community Development Manager
Tamworth Borough Council

Submitted by
Social Research Associates
www.sraltd.co.uk



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Locality Working Report: Interviews with Stakeholders

1 Introduction

This report is part of a wider mid-term review of locality working (LW) in Tamworth. 26 stakeholders, representing a spread of different services and organisations were interviewed about their understanding, experience and overall assessment of LW. (A list is shown in Appendix B) The interviews, which varied in length between half an hour and two hours, were face to face and informal, although following a flexible topic schedule (see Appendix A). The interviews were carried out in July and August 2011 by independent researchers namely Kris Beuret OBE and Dr Nick Mills of Social Research Associates.

In the summary below, individual confidentiality has been respected. It should also be borne in mind that many of the views expressed are based on perceptions rather than hard facts. However, it is perceptions that often determine actions so it is important to include such views.

2 Understanding of the Concept of Locality Working

There was little mention of formal training or organised reading about the concept of LW – most people felt that they had quickly understood the concept. There was also agreement that its ready acceptance was facilitated by support from the Council, especially the political and corporate leadership.

“There is no doubt that the Members and senior officers have backed the idea.”

However, some stakeholders were a little cynical about whether it was really anything very different.

“It’s actually just another in a long line of area based policies such as neighbourhood working, SRB, and the latest ‘total place’.”

“Doesn’t it go back to the original concept of the parish?”

When asked to define the concept, there was universal agreement that LW involved a geographically defined area where a multi agency approach and better partnership working would improve service delivery and reduce costs in areas with high levels of deprivation. However, as discussed in more detail in later sections, the community engagement aspect of LW was less well understood.

It was also agreed by all that the four areas of Tamworth selected were the right ones, being based on sound data supplied by a unbiased source – in particular the Staffordshire Observatory. Nevertheless, there was some debate about the exact nature of geographical boundaries and the preferred degree of permeability required (see Section 6.1 below).

3 Consultation versus engagement and community cohesion

As mentioned above, in contrast to this general agreement about definitions of LW , there was a lot less understanding of the role of community involvement and empowerment in reducing deprivation. To the extent that participation was sought it was often seen as a source of providing information about problems leading to better service delivery. To a lesser extent, the role of participation in establishing community priorities was also seen as part of LW but capacity building and community empowerment was rarely included in the definition or objectives.

“LW helps us to keep in closer contact with ‘hard to reach groups’, to know what is going on and identify the most urgent problems.”

“We can’t provide as good a service as we once did so LW is a good way of reducing costs by partnership working.”

“The participatory budget exercise was a good way of helping people understand that prioritising is an essential part of the Council’s work.”

However, there were exceptions. For example, the wardens and police were clear that community cohesion was the sustainable long term means of reducing minor crime.

“Most of the things people prioritise such as litter, graffiti, vandalism and petty theft can only be controlled by pressure from the community themselves. We can support them but in the end it’s the neighbour tapping on the window which will make a difference.”

In addition, many felt that they were moving towards improved engagement with the local communities and that this was in part due to improved community capacity which in turn was associated with the past two years of ‘bedding in’ the LW approach.

“I admit we haven’t engaged very well in the past but that was in the context of no community groups or residents associations. Now there are some groups we can go to – in part due to the hard work of the CDOs.”

4 The nature of involvement with Locality Working

Everyone interviewed had experienced some involvement with LW but some had incorporated it into their work more than others and the main categories (not mutually exclusive) are described below. Many of these projects were ongoing and there was agreement by many stakeholders that partnership and multi-agency working had increased as a result of LW.

Summary of types of activity

Community self help	Supporting the community to carry out specific tasks was a highly regarded activity. Examples included estate clean up days, ground improvement works, walkabouts and working on community land. Most of these were one off events but some, for example the Hodge Lane community nature reserve, was sustained on an ongoing basis by local volunteers.
Festivals, fetes	These events, although requiring a lot of time to organise, were seen as a way of bringing the community together to have fun but in so doing get messages over about local services and healthy living. The ideal was to team up with other groups and organisations to create critical mass and there had been some good examples of this approach.
Support for isolated and vulnerable people	LW was seen as an opportunity to involve people who would otherwise be socially or physically isolated. Examples were art sessions for people with mental illness or just holding drop in sessions at local venues.
Service provision	Some activities focused on improving the physical quality of the LW areas – for example street audits, community street plans backed by highway maintenance (planned but not executed) and programmes to identify and target the most needy elderly people or their carers for extra help and support or drug counselling.
Multi agency and Partnership working	This was often quoted as a benefit of the LW concept and there were some good examples to demonstrate it. However, in practice there was less evidence of it actually happening allegedly on the practical grounds of lack of resources, in order to reduce duplication or in some cases outright opposition.
Encouraging community participation in decision making	Participation and consultation was recognised as an essential part of the LW approach and some organisations had individual targets to meet to achieve this. Examples were tenants meetings, community groups based at the ARCHs, user groups at GP surgeries and community safety groups. There were also examples of deliberative voting such as participatory budgeting, neighbourhood surveys, citizens juries and most recently a 'planning for real' type exercise designed to develop an area plan.
Solving social problems	It was accepted that there was a higher proportion of social problems in the LW area than elsewhere in Tamworth so much LW focused on offering services to solve or mitigate these. Various organisations provided specialist advice and help including in relation to alcohol, drugs, domestic violence, sexual disease, unwanted pregnancy and support for vulnerable families.

5 Multi agency and partnership working

This was seen as an important aim of LW and there were many examples from health, housing and especially policing and minor crime reduction. The point was made strongly, for example by the police and health services that this was the only way of meeting public expectations.

“Our satisfaction surveys show high ratings for our record on serious crime but less on minor crime such as graffiti and vandalism. Yet we can’t really do anything about these things, they are largely up to other services so partnership working is essential.”

“We used the ARCH for self referral for attendance at eating disorder support sessions – it allowed us to get away from the health centres where people felt embarrassed and perceived their problem as part of the ‘sick’ model.”

“The anti social behavioural group works very well – for example evidence was gathered about an off licence selling alcohol to under aged young people leading to the shop’s licence being revoked.”

“Locality working has enabled us to start working in partnership with the PCT and youth service – we didn’t do that before.”

However, there were also many comments about the difficulties of partnership working, including the need for a strong co-ordination role, conflicting priorities and the extra time required.

Thus one of the problems with partnership working is that there are extra risks due to the impact of conflicting agendas. A good example was the plan based on consultation with local people to develop community street plans including maintenance schedules. The plans were never carried out because the work was cancelled due to a political decision at County level setting different priorities.

“We worked with the community development workers and local people to identify community street plans and priorities for the highway gang but it never happened.”

Similarly not all TBC internal departments were equally committed.

“The housing service tend to do their own thing – admittedly they do have different remits but it does confuse people when their newsletter and activities go on at the same time as ours.”

“LW leads to duplication – we should be left to do what we do best based on long experience.”

Nevertheless, it was widely agreed that in Tamworth there was a commitment by the political leadership to LW.

“It needs a strong leader to make it happen – someone to liaise and put people in touch with each other from different services or even tiers of the local authority. The role of the County Partnership Officer is excellent as a support but others even within the same Council are not so good.”

It was also agreed that it was ‘early days’ for LW and that it would take time before the culture changed and trust built up.

“Partnership working pays off in the long run but it takes more time and resources at the beginning and to be frank we don’t have the staff to cover the extra meetings and travel.”

“LW was always planned as a long-term response. Short term projects have been the method for many years and this is why LW is different and not like other areas based policies. It will take time, investment and a change in the way some people do things to have the impact that is envisaged.”

6 Elements of Locality Working

6.1 Focus on the neighbourhood

Although there was some sympathy for the neighbourhood as a focus for LW, there were also problems in relation to defining the neighbourhood. The administrative boundaries within which people worked differed – for example the police areas were different from the NHS and again the ward boundaries and housing estates. In addition the designated boundaries of the LW areas themselves cut across what many saw as ‘natural communities’.

“I live in Stonydelph but not in the LW designated area. This creates divisions within neighbourhoods with people asking ‘why are they getting these resources and not us?’. In reality it is impossible to keep people out and we wouldn’t turn people away.”

There was also a wider problem related to community capacity by fixing boundaries around deprived areas.

“Excluding the more affluent sections in the surrounding area means that some of the ‘natural’ community leaders live outside the LW.”

In contrast, although others made the point that better engagement and participation would identify and nurture community leaders within the disadvantaged communities.

“There’s some amazing talent out there based on experience rather than formal qualifications but people need their confidence built up after years of feeling they are failures. I could point to many examples of people who have turned their lives round and gone on to help others.”

Fixing boundaries is always a difficult issue – it was agreed that there has to be lines on maps somewhere. This had been considered at the planning stage when the LW areas were defined through discussion with key Partners and followed LSOA and

neighbourhood policing boundaries for which that data is available. It was also agreed at the time that they would not follow ward boundaries as these sometimes cut across local neighbourhoods.

The general view was that in reality most people were flexible about boundaries and there was a certain amount of ignoring strict delineation.

“Our supporters come from both inside and outside the LW area but we think that’s a good thing – it encourages permeability and can bring in skills to pass on to those who lack these skills in the LW area.”

6.2 The town centre versus the neighbourhood

Some of the stakeholders had found that people from the locality areas preferred to visit the town centre for services. There were a number of reasons for this; in particular the convenience of combining such contact with jobs and shopping or on the grounds of confidentiality and avoiding stigma.

“The last thing people want is for other local people to know they are attending addiction support sessions.”

“Tamworth is a small town and it’s easy to get into the town centre – some of our clients prefer to visit our town centre office which is open any time rather than wait for a specific day when we are in the locality.”

“It’s not at all clear what they are trying to achieve in the four localities – they should have had to show demand for the ARCHs prior to the investment.”

However, there were others who strongly disagreed on the grounds that some people in the LW areas were isolated in terms of their ability to access the town centre either due to disability, time or cost constraints. Other local people did not know that services exist and LW was an opportunity for Partners to take part in raising awareness of what was available.

“LW is the key to the quality of life in deprived areas. People can’t afford the bus fares or can’t get on the bus easily. Others work long hours and don’t have time to get into the town centre especially during working hours.”

“People with real problems in these areas are never going to go to a central office – it takes time to build up local trust and having an accessible local service is the essential first step.”

“I don’t agree that people don’t want to access services locally – the idea of the Hub is that with lots going on there no one would know why people were visiting – whether for a playgroup or drug advice – even sometimes both - so there would be no question of stigma.”

In addition apart from such practical considerations, there was a view by some that providing facilities and encouraging events in the locality was essential to encourage community cohesion.

“We would probably save money by everyone coming into the Council office, but surely the whole point of locality working is to encourage local people to relate to each other on a neighbourhood basis and thus reduce problems in the first place.”

6.3 Better use of resources

There were mixed views about this issue. A key point made in favour of LW was that it made better use of resources. Examples were quoted where LW had led to reduced costs including joint events such as fetes where different organisations combined for publicity and event costs. However, a more commonly mentioned benefit was better intelligence and the ability to drive home messages more powerfully via joint working. It was also acknowledged that the convenience and lower cost of visiting a local office for information and advice was a benefit to those with low mobility and incomes.

“To me the whole idea is having a local venue which local people start to see as the key one stop shop to all public sector services. That means that their problems can be seen in the round rather than separated out between different departments.”

“The total is more than the sum of the parts – if we all tried to put on individual events, you wouldn’t get that buzz of critical mass and anyway it emphasises the fact that all these streams of work are part of the community and its dynamics.”

The timescale was also relevant to the calculation of resource use.

“LW is not a short-term project but may have implications on resources in the short-term that can have a long-term benefit of establishing joint work in the future. Most of the resource for contribution is through staff time and time spent developing activities that make real change over time which can have long-term savings.”

In contrast, other stakeholders disagreed and thought that LW was more expensive compared to centralised services in the town centre both in terms of financial costs and staff resources.

“The need to be in different physical locations is at odds with the Council’s drive to increase the use of electronic services.”

“We just don’t have enough people to send out to the LW areas, especially as we work on an appointment system and it was impossible to match client needs with the optimum use of staff time.”

Another aspect of opposition to LW was a fear that if LW was successful in the long term it would lead to increased demand and hence pressure on resources.

“My concern with LW is that it creates additional demand for services – in fact the better LW works the more demand is created and we just don’t have the resources to meet this demand not to mention that people living in other areas would quite rightly in my view get jealous.”

But here again there was an opposing view.

“If there is an increased demand for services it is, in the majority of cases, because there is a need for those services. The alternative may be that issues are not addressed and there will be a cost for someone further down the line. Surely Partners’ role is to address not control need?”

6.4 Shared use of community buildings

Some stakeholders gave examples of their use of the ARCH venues or ‘hubs’ as they were more often referred to.

“The hubs are good because they allow people to get away from health centres which are part of the ‘sick’ model.”

“We’ve found the hubs useful as a place for people to meet outside their homes, which can be quite stressful places for our clients.”

“The hubs were carefully chosen to avoid any ‘agenda’ with religion or charities with a specific purpose.”

In spite of such examples, there was a widespread view that although the hubs were ‘nice to have in an ideal world’, in reality they were difficult to maintain as sufficiently vibrant places to give confidence to local people to visit. This was partly due to the difficulties (as described above of maintaining a regular visiting slot) but also because they were perceived to be sometimes shut both in the day and especially in the evening. In addition it was felt that there were alternative venues which could be made better use of.

“Because of crime, the shutters have to be down even when the ARCH is open so it looks shut.”

“The pamphlets there are often out of date – I have to admit we don’t check our own often enough.”

“We tried to use the hub for an evening event but were told it couldn’t be booked in the evenings.”

“I don’t think it’s worth it – we mainly visit people in their own homes and if we do have an event we prefer to have the choice of venue in terms of place and size.”

“The new community fire station is a better venue in terms of the ‘hub’ concept.”

6.5 The role of the Community Development Officer

In contrast to these reservations about the building, there was widespread support for the Community Development Officer (CDO) role which was seen as separate from the actual physical hubs in which the CDOs were currently based.

However, in practice there were a number of different views about exactly what this role should be which can be divided into a number of different perspectives.

In line with the corporate view of LW, some stakeholders saw the CDO role as encouraging multi agency working and building community capacity and many examples were given of work which was judged to have achieved this.

“There are a very wide range of activities which would not otherwise have occurred – examples are training for volunteering, murals and art projects with local youths, advice sessions, community tidy ups.”

“People are getting to know each other better these days and it’s clear that CDOs have played an important part in facilitating that.”

“They are the eyes and ears of the community.”

“The CDO was a key player in helping us make contact with unattached youths who were hanging out and upsetting local people – we developed a good programme from this.”

“The LW concept especially the work of the CD worker is very useful in being proactive and breaking down barriers to communication.”

“The CD role is helpful to us in supporting and directing volunteers to our central office and even on occasion making appointments.”

Others had an equally positive perspective on the CDO role but had found themselves too busy to liaise with the CDO.

“We know the CDOs have been working to encourage community participation, which was lacking in the past and we’ve been meaning to get in touch with them to plan something around outreach work, but things have been a bit difficult lately with losing some of our staff.”

There were also a minority who did not support the CDO concept on the grounds that it duplicated their own work and that of others. This view was particularly likely to be voiced by some front line workers who were not used to multi agency working and were reluctant to risk exceeding their authority or go beyond their job description. This varied between services with the police and fire services being more supportive than some others.

“To be frank, LW is another layer of bureaucracy – we know our customers – we’re trained professionals and can show evidence of good progress in the locality areas. When we need other specialist services we know who to go to so we don’t need input from a generalist.”

However, overall, most interviewees felt that the role of the CDO was essential for successful LW albeit in the challenging situation of working across departmental and organisation boundaries in a context where there was still a lot of ‘silo’ working going on.

6.6 Community Engagement

The role of LW in encouraging community engagement and hence building local community capacity was not foremost in the mind of many stakeholders who rather saw consultation as a way of improving service delivery and also demonstrating good practice in meeting targets such as satisfaction levels. This was disappointing to others who felt that the work done to date around cohesion and the availability of the Stronger Together Community Engagement Framework should have resulted in a broader understanding of the difference between engagement and consultation.

“We have our targets to meet and improvements in customer satisfaction to demonstrate – that’s our main focus.”

“It’s essential to involve the public to tell us what their problems are.”

“We can’t go too far down the road of local people making decisions because in the end it’s the politicians who decide.”

Some stakeholders expressed concern that there was too much duplication of consultation and that consultation fatigue was an explanation for relatively low levels of community participation.

“There’s lots of different consultations going on – different newsletters, surveys, articles in the local paper. It’s very confusing for people.”

“We do have a statutory duty to consult so we have to do our independent surveys.”

“The tenants participation groups should be subsumed in the community development work – there’s no need for them to be separate – it’s duplication.”

“The LW work should be including in the tenant programme. They carry out a wide range of activities such as estate audits, mystery shopping, repair working groups, communal area cleaning, customer satisfaction services – there is a deal of overlap activities and anyway we can’t exclude residents or leaseholders for many of the more general area activities.”

However, there were others who did see LW as a key to improving the capacity of the areas and examples of engagement included self management of nature reserves, clean up campaigns with a focus of reducing litter and vandalism and involvement in deciding priorities for spending.

“The participatory budgeting exercise involved several hundred people allocating £20,000.”

“Creating pride in the area and giving local people a sense of empowerment has been a key aim of the work done at the ARCH and really important for getting people involved.”

It was also accepted by all stakeholders that more needed to be done to involve young people who were generally absent from community engagement. One way forward was seen as providing more targeted activities especially in the evening.

7 Conclusion

There is no doubt that LW represents a fundamental cultural change for many stakeholders and that it is early days to expect universal 'sign up' to the concept. Nevertheless there are signs that LW is becoming accepted and that it is changing working practices.

Evidence of progress

There are plenty of examples of successful LW projects.

There is support for multi agency working although in practice not all service areas actually do work on this basis. Reasons are resource constraints including lack of staff, departmental specific targets and in a few cases outright unwillingness to change.

It is widely accepted that the role of the CDO is crucial in providing intelligence and links with the locality. Even those who advocate the provision of services in central Tamworth rather than the locality, support the role of the CDOs in referring and encouraging people in the LW areas to access services.

Moving forward

Stakeholders understand and support the service delivery aspect of LW and agree that the four areas selected are appropriate in the light of levels of greatest deprivation. This is in itself a success but there is further to go to develop an awareness of the strategic importance of LW since there is still a significant proportion of stakeholders who see LW as largely a mechanism for service delivery and are less aware of the community capacity objectives.

Closely associated with this limitation is a lack of understanding of the important distinction between consultation and engagement with the community. Thus the incorporation of building community capacity as an essential element of public engagement is often missing from consultation activities carried out by Partners. Hence very few stakeholders referred to the "Stronger Together Community Engagement Framework" and there is clearly a need to publicise this along with a continued strong corporate message of commitment. Clearly there is also a training need involved in helping Partners to make this transition. It is apparent from the interviews that with notable exceptions, there is limited knowledge of practical techniques for public engagement. One idea to support this lack is for TBC to develop a toolkit to accompany the Engagement Framework. Another suggestion is to revisit job descriptions to check that the commitment to LW is incorporated.

There is acceptance that the ARCH venues are useful but not essential to deliver the LW vision. Indeed there are already discussions taking place to adopt a more flexible model for the use of premises especially in relation to new building and changes of use which have occurred since LW was first set up.

The overall verdict

There is no doubt that awareness of the strategic aspect of LW is growing and that the legacy of the past two years of LW is beginning to ‘bed in’ with an increasing number of stakeholders now agreeing that there are more opportunities to engage with the public.

More fundamentally there is a growing understanding that doing so is of both practical and strategic importance if the deep seated problems of the LW areas are to be solved on a long term and sustainable basis. In the future, examples to illustrate this point should be evaluated, supported and publicised by TBC at senior and corporate level. This will in turn encourage others to work in this different way and to expend the time and resources necessary for success.

8 SWOT summary – Locality working

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good track record of multi agency working and some significant achievements • Corporate ‘sign in’ for the concept • Strong majority support for the role of the CDOs • A growing number of community groups and a sense of ‘neighbourliness’ 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding of the community capacity aspect of LW with an associated need for training • Budgetary constraints and a view that (at least initially) LW is more time consuming and resource intensive • Fear of change – ‘silo’ working • Demoralisation due to perceived lack of support by other stakeholders for those engaged in LW working
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement that the four LW areas are well chosen as the most deprived and meriting special attention • Some good examples of LW in building community capacity which could be evaluated to demonstrate positive outcomes. • Government support for the concept linking with ‘The Big Society’ and other community opportunities as set out in the Localism Bill 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support from one key service area • Consultation duplication leading to fatigue • The effect of the recession in increasing social problems in the LW areas

APPENDIX A

Schedule for Stakeholder Interviews – Locality Working

Introduction: 4 years ago Tamworth committed to locality working – namely a multi agency approach to increase community involvement and improve service delivery. First via a pilot project in Amington and then rolled out to other disadvantaged areas. These areas had a central building (ARCH – Advice, Resource and Community Hub) and a full time Community Development Officer to co-ordinate and facilitate. We are independent consultants (SRA) employed by TBC to interview stakeholders about their views and experiences of Locality Working so far.

1. How did you become aware of locality working – what do you see as the key elements?
2. When it started, was there support from your organisation in general for getting involved?
3. In the event what has been your and your organisation’s involvement in locality working in Tamworth?
3.1 The nature of involvement
3.2 Has it changed the way you deliver services in the area?
3.3 Example of any contribution to a partnership event or project
3.4 Ongoing work in the locality?
4. What elements of locality working fit with your broader work?
4.1 Neighbourhood focus
4.2 Joint multi-agency working
4.3 Better use of resources
4.4 Community engagement
4.5 Shared use of community buildings
4.6 Raised awareness of issues in the locality
4.7 Raised awareness of activity by other organisations in the area
4.8 Raised awareness of activity by your own organisation/team in the area
4.9 Making links to partner organisations in other sectors
5. The role of the community development officer
5.1 Co-ordination activity within premises
5.2 Building links with residents
5.3 Leading in community projects
5.4 Co-ordinating joint projects
6. Overall views on Locality Working
6.1 Is it working?
6.2 What works best?
6.3 How could it be improved?
6.4 What elements do you think has the best potential to have an impact from your contribution?
7. Any final comments?

Appendix B

Stakeholder Interviewees

1. Tim Leese, County Partnership Officer, SCC
2. Graham Peake, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
3. Lalitha Webb, Head of District Partnerships, TBC
4. Julia Gibbs, Housing Officer, TBC
5. Diane Hughes, Tenant Participation, TBC
6. Helen Gill, Service Delivery Lead, Social Care and Health, Staffs CC
7. Ellen Gibson, Service Manager Addiction
8. Nicky Burns, CEO, CVS
9. Chief Inspector Ian Coxhead, Area Commander, Staffordshire Police
10. Mark Wallchester (Tamworth Fire and Rescue)
11. Dawn Candy, Homestart
12. Stuart Etheridge CDO Glascote, TBC
13. Yassar Din CDO Amington, TBC
14. Rob Barnes Deputy Housing and Health Director, TBC
15. Dave Fern, Community Safety Manager, TBC
16. Fiona McPhee, Resident and Volunteer
17. Peter Layton, Head Street Warden, TBC
18. Leanne Allwood, Tenant participation manager, TBC
19. Cllr Danny Cook, Leader TBC
20. Rev Ian Murray
21. Neena Heath, Learning and Skills Co-ordinator
22. Sam Dodds, Tamworth Community Centre
23. Robert Mitchell, Deputy Director, Partnerships, TBC
24. Neil Mushrow, CDO Stoneydelph TBC
25. Mark Aston, CDO Belgrave. TBC
26. Matthew Bowers, Head of Strategic Planning and Development, TBC