

## **London Resident Participation Workers Conference 16 June 2008**

### **Round table discussion on the London & National networks**

#### **Summary**

Approximately 100 delegates took part in a round table discussion at the above conference on a London & National network for resident participation. Chris Stock, Participation and performance manager, Croydon Council set the scene and provided background information (copy of presentation is appendix A). Delegates were then asked to discuss the following questions:

- What benefits could a London resident involvement network provide for you?
- What benefits could a National resident involvement network provide for you?
- Have you any concerns about this initiative?
- What activities, services & support would you like to see provided by the networks.
- What are your Top 5?

Delegates felt the benefits of setting up both a London and National network outweigh their concerns. Everyone who attended the conference was in favour of setting up a cross tenure (social landlords) regional network for London. The benefits included being about to bench mark, provide value for money by sharing resources and experience, ideas and information exchanges, capacity building along with lots of other suggestions.

Again delegates were in favour with the setting up of a National network and suggestions put forward included its function and some practical tips on how to go about setting it up. Some concerns were raised which included funding, sustainability, logistics and different regional issues.

Delegates were asked what activities they would like the London network to take on board. Suggestions and recommendations put forward included a good practice database, training and development opportunities, involving residents and diversity issues. There were lots of other suggestions and ideas out forward these would need to be looked at and a decision taken on what should be explored by the London network.

The top five suggestions put forward by delegates included (these are not in priority order):

- Regional voice (for Resident Participation workers in London)
- Communication (Face 2 Face, Website & Email)
- Similar conferences
- Good practice exchanges
- Influence national agenda
- Partnership working
- Raise profile and publise the network

All this information will be passed onto what ever structure is set up for the network and used as the basis for future discussions and event planning.

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The following presentation was given by Chris Stock, Performance & Participation Manager, Croydon Council.

What's been done so far?

- Appointment of the nine Regional Champions.
- Setting of Regional agendas.
- Development of National Network.
- Development of web site
- Development of publicity
- Exploring funding options to sustain networks.

Regional Champion Proposals

- Learning exchanges aimed at housing authorities & beyond.
- Support housing authorities to actively engage their tenants in housing provision & strategic planning.
- Enhance the skills of those who are actively engaged in resident involvement work.
- National framework to develop projects to promote best practice.
- Develop an interactive web site [www.resident-involvement.org.uk](http://www.resident-involvement.org.uk)
- Inform Government Department policy through close working with CLG, Tenants Services Authority and the Audit Commission.

What do you want from the networks?

- Networking to share experiences, resources & skills.
- Seminars & Conferences.
- Peer Mentoring/Signposting good practice.
- Information
- Support/Training
- On-line forum/web site
- Themed sub groups
- Links to Government & policy makers
- Links to Tenant Groups
- Profiling

Round table discussions

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The following are amalgamated suggestions put forward from the round table discussions (some suggestions were put forward more than once):

### **What benefits could a London resident involvement network provide for you?**

#### **Bench marking**

- Benchmarking – What works/what is successful
- Will facilitate benchmark standards, performance related monitoring linked to initiatives and networking to determine what these benchmarks should be
- Bench-marking – get residents to set them
- Sharing of new initiatives and best practice

#### **Value for money**

- Will save money – can plan projects based on feedback from previous pilots – assess and learn rather than all make the same mistakes
- Shared costs with partners – eg training, funding
- Keen to work inside London, cost implications
- Pool resources
- Opportunity to look at structuring – Value for Money, monitor expenditure, look at changes, overcoming bureaucracy

#### **Opportunities**

- Opportunity for incentives for residents/raising resident profile – ‘Community Award’?
- Clear guidelines re partnerships of LAs, RSLs etc to provide centralised/holistic and comprehensive service with knowledge and understanding of constraints affecting different partners
- Holistic resident associations – whole community involvement not segmented by tenure but based on neighbourhoods with joint support from all partners in area

#### **Ideas & document exchange**

- Award recognition & recognise good practice
- An ideas exchange
- Document exchange

#### **Capacity building**

- Building relationships
- Capacity building
- Joint working RSL's/Council
- Training opportunity

#### **Other ideas and suggestions**

- Profile information, where their properties are, what services / support they currently provide etc. as well as updated contact information etc.
- Suggested that “themed” agendas are arranged – looking at specific issues like training, diversity, impact assessment etc.

- Signposting useful resources, youth activity / equipment providers
- Mentoring/Peer working
- Website and email contacts
- Conferences/workshops
- Publicity – to raise profile
- Local network – profile of organizations
- Open up to residents to break down barriers
- Avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’
- A support network
- Bring in ‘new blood’
- Face to face, similar issues, accessibility
- Visits
- Once/twice a year – trips out
- Opportunity to mix different tenure groups
- Abridged reports of White Papers etc
- Look at new strategies

**What benefits could a National resident involvement network provide for you?**

**Function**

- Policy/strategic function
- Powerful lobbying forum
- Website & email based
- Use TPAS
- Link to CIH
- How will reps for National network be selected
- Chance to learn from small organizations and other cities
- Provide the opportunity to help small/rural organizations
- May generate ideas for housing management (e.g. around mutual exchanges).
- Website can provide support/networking opportunities and ideas.
- Benchmarking
- National resources – money
- Able to look at issues outside of London
- Training and development - accredited training for residents
- Agreeing an agenda for tenant associations
- Nationally what is happening in the country as a whole/Tenant Services Authority
- Agreed there was need to ensure this type of platform was reserved for promoting / sharing “excellent practice” such as really innovative / ground breaking ideas rather than run of the mill discussions around improvements to service, of which officers are often already well aware.
- Also need to consider more “generic” ideas rather than local schemes for local areas.
- Varying issues between rural and urban towns to be taken into account, i.e. inner London – stabbing, murder –v- broken drain in Hull
- Hold a conference once a year

### **Practical tips**

- Keep it practical
- Identify what works/ what doesn't
- How much time and resources it takes?
- What structure it will take?
- What does it mean?
- Who would lead?
- Timetable
- Who will fund?
- How will they be involved/sell to residents

### **Have you any concerns about this initiative?**

#### **Money**

- Funding
- Funding for future 1 year not enough
- Funding, particularly for smaller organizations if a membership/subscription fee is levied
- Funding after the initial period – partners to help fund?
- Who will fund/organise?

#### **Other issues**

- Website
- Sustainability of network a concern
- Influencing National Agenda
- Housing Management – Influencing
- Refine Outcomes and Impact Assessments
- Impact on particular groups
- Joint training and support
- Partnership working with different landlords
- Logistics – What structure
- Identifying structure
- Officers overwhelmed
- Resident involvement – to what extent
- National – rural vs. urban issues
- Long term sustainability including funding
- communication
- Could be demoralizing/overwhelming for officers who receive little support/resources from own organisation
- Could become a closed network – complacent – with no new innovation or diversity
- Delegates were interested to know more about the Regional agenda – what Government et. al. expect the Network to achieve.
- The momentum of this type of network needs to be maintained – such initiatives regularly start amid a flurry of interest but soon dwindle into just another meeting. Agendas need to be kept fresh and relevant.
- Different regional issues
- How will the regional agenda be formulated?
- Maintaining momentum
- Need to take into account time constraints for individuals

- How do we feedback good practice?
- Possibility of initiative burning out - sustainability

**What activities, services & support would you like to see provided by the networks.**

**General**

- Good practice database
- Look at areas outside London
- Look at other people's initiatives
- Strategic – lobbying Board
- Cost savings
- Increase Partnership working
- Empower Officers
- Opportunity for Policy's
- Develop action plan
- Information/factsheets
- A list of 'speakers' for events, including resident speakers
- Sample compacts
- Forum of officers to set out the agenda
- Influence agree from within
- Discussion board/Website
- It would be useful to use the website to share abridged or annotated versions of Government etc. papers
- Split the Bulletin Board section into a "practitioners" area and a "residents / customers" area.
- Officers would welcome the opportunity of visits to, or exchanges with, other areas / organisations.

**Training and development**

- Training and development
- Understanding how each other work
- Training for staff and residents

**Involving residents**

- Resident have input into benchmarking
- Raising profile of residents
- Residents empowered by training
- Inspire resident representatives
- Opening up at least some activities to both residents and officers would help to break down barriers between the two as well as providing residents a valuable opportunity to see what is available elsewhere and what is potentially possible.

**Diversity issues/suggestions**

- Need to be specific for young people as they can feel intimidated, have no presence at meetings.
- Have more youth panels
- Need to breakdown barriers – offer incentives and have consultation exercises
- Elderly and housebound are often excluded – need to put more thought into overcoming this

- Diversity other than normal BME issues need to be looked at, i.e. young people, elderly, disabled need to be encouraged to come on board
- Diversity important for activities e.g. young people, elderly

### **What are your Top 5?**

- Face to Face networking (London wide) in addition development of Website and email contact group
- Would like similar seminar/conference/workshops
- National network – concern over rural issues not been as prominent as city related issues
- Good practice exchange of information – how would this be achieved
- Need to publicise network – how would profile be raised
- Sharing Good Practice
- Benchmarking between organizations
- Funding (the differences between organizations), particular concerns about small and under funded organisations
- Influence the national agenda
- Generate ideas for Housing Management outside Tenant Participation.
- Partnership working
- Funding
- Benchmarking
- Regional Voice

Table 10 was made up of people who didn't work in London and included two other Champions and TPAS (although she left the room and didn't take part in the conversation). We focussed on:

- How do you obtain contact details of organisations in your area?
- Map of region was requested by Reading
- South Essex is looking to create sub-regional champions. They do not know who they would use at this stage but feel they would have to be motivated and buy into the scheme. They want to find out what the organisations in their region want from them as Champions and will be running three learning exchanges similar to Kirklees.
- Most felt we need to promote the website more.
- Future funding a real issue. There was a long discussion on the benefits of funding and how this will make a real difference and could make or break the project.
- Targets – there was discussion on whether the Champions should have targets and be more accountable to the other organisations in their region and to their funders.
- Want more Peer mentoring within the region and not just the champions carrying this out.

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