

URBAN FORUM

briefing



New Deal for Communities Conference

for Residents,
Community
& Voluntary Groups

Luton
March 2003



INTRODUCTION

Urban Forum organised, with Marsh Farm Community Development Trust, the third national conference for residents involved in New Deal for Communities (NDC). The event was held at the Coulters Building, on Marsh Farm over two days. Over 120 people attended the event from 26 of the 39 NDC areas. Residents from Marsh Farm facilitated all the workshops and chaired the conference.

As with last year's event in Bristol, the conference was not for Central Government, Local Government, NDC staff or consultants but solely for residents involved in this 10 year regeneration programme.

This report sets out the key messages and recommendations from the event for the Residents Network, Urban Forum, NDC Partnerships, and Government. The findings reinforce the issues and concerns of residents raised at last year's conference. Full notes of the workshops can be obtained on request from Marsh Farm (see back page for details).

On day one, workshops were run on alcohol and drugs, black and minority ethnic groups, business involvement, community work, education and learning, green issues, healthy living, open spaces and parks, security and crime, and young people. On day two, paying residents/Benefits regulations/volunteering expenses, residents as managers of services, resident board members, resident as consultants, residents involvement, support and training for residents, and techniques in community involvement.



RESIDENTS NETWORK

The key recommendation from the Bristol conference in 2002 was that residents form a network to allow for ongoing communication. Urban Forum has supported the development of this network over the past year.

Mike Franks and Tony Taitte (NDC residents network) have worked to progress the network, and have secured some funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) for six month's work.

A progress report was given to the conference, and the plenary session used to inform work over the coming months.

At this stage, the network is seeking to:

- Develop a list of people who are interested in making informal contact with other NDC residents;
- Encourage residents to discuss common problems and opportunities;
- Gain the support of the NRU and seek a contribution from all NDCs to continue this work;
- Explore a wide range of communication techniques.

Delegates overwhelmingly supported these aims.



We need to make sure that we network and speak with one voice



You should not be punished for caring about your community



Key Findings

The NDC Conference

The national NDC Conference provides an invaluable means for residents from the NDC areas to come together and discuss issues and find solutions. There is felt to be a lack of networking and sharing of good practice between NDCs. In future, the Residents Network could take responsibility for the conference.

Information for Residents involved in NDC

There is a lack of consistent information and advice on a number of issues that directly affect residents. This includes the implications of rewarding residents financially for their time, particularly those residents receiving Benefit; claiming out-of-pocket expenses; and entitlement to loss of earnings payments.

This leads to confusion, with some residents experiencing difficulty even claiming back expenses, for example for childcare and travel costs. Indeed, residents from one NDC area, who were booked on the conference, were unable to attend due to the restrictively low level of expenses set by the NDC.

There is little sharing of good practice with each NDC applying different rules. Information prepared by Urban Forum on volunteering and benefits for the conference will be placed on the Urban Forum web site.

Rewards for Residents involved with NDC

As at the Bristol conference, delegates were concerned that existing inflexible rules can stop volunteers receiving any reward for their voluntary work, acting as a barrier to community involvement in NDC. This puts an additional strain on those residents who participate.

There are unresolved questions over how people can be rewarded without affecting Benefits payments, with NDCs adopting different approaches. Again, there is little sharing of good practice.

There must be further investigation into attendance allowances for elected members to local authorities and board members of public bodies.

Support and Training for Residents

The NDC programme demands a great deal of time



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and energy from residents, leading to great pressure on those who are actively involved. Many residents consider that too little support and training is given.

Although some NDC areas are supportive and helpful, this is not universal.

Respect and Equal Treatment for Residents

Residents involved in NDC are not always respected or treated as equals by staff members of NDC teams, local authorities and Government. This must change, with the significant contribution of residents to the regeneration programme acknowledged.

Working relationships with Service Providers, Local Authorities and Government Offices

Many NDC areas are experiencing problems with service providers and statutory bodies including local authorities. The agencies are not always delivering, and in some cases are withdrawing services from NDC areas. Where service providers are talking to each other, residents are often excluded.

In many areas, Government Offices are not giving adequate training or advice to partners and agencies about their role in NDC.

A number of residents complained that Government Offices are constantly 'moving the goal posts' with the many requirements and guidelines imposed on NDCs often changing.

Consultants

Residents have skills, knowledge and an understanding of local life. Often external consultants come into an NDC area, and use the huge amount of community knowledge that exists. Generally, the consultants do not pass on their knowledge or train local people.

Employment

Many NDC areas experience high unemployment. Attempts have been made in many areas to employ local people, although these have not always been successful. There must be more opportunities to employ local people.



Currently the NDCs are working disjointedly. We need to be singing from the same hymn sheet, and the network gives us this opportunity. We need to make it work.



Recommendations

1 The NDC Residents Network should be further developed. Proposals to approach each of the 39 NDC areas for a contribution of £2,500 towards the Network were supported. Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) endorsement will be sought for this. Urban Forum will continue to support the Network.

2 The National NDC Conference should be held every year. There should also be regional (and possibly international) events, hosted by different NDC areas.

3 Information must be prepared for all NDCs on Benefits, paying residents, out of pocket expenses (including childcare) and loss of earnings. The NRU should prepare minimum standards. Urban Forum to publish information on volunteering and Benefits on their web site.

4 Ways should be found to reward residents for the time they spend on NDC. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and NRU should look seriously at the 'regeneration allowance' proposed at last year's conference. The Government's response to date has been that this 'would be unfair to those unemployed people in less deprived areas who undertake voluntary work.'

5 Urban Forum to carry out further investigation into attendance allowances for elected members to local authorities and board members of public bodies, and to identify NDCs that have found ways to reward residents. The information will be shared, possibly via a dedicated web page.

6 NDCs must ensure that support and training is given to those residents who are involved in NDC. For example, residents from all 39 NDC areas should be able to come to the Residents Conference, and should be given out of pocket expenses to attend.

7 Where consultants are employed by the NDC, there should be a requirement that local people are able to learn from them. This could be via shadowing and training. There should be jobs for local people.

8 Government Offices need to provide support and training to partners and agencies to ensure involvement in NDC areas.



NDC Residents Conference 2004 -
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A big thank you to everyone at Marsh Farm for a great event.

