

The National Assembly for Wales

Housing Research Summary

An Interim Evaluation of People in Communities

There is now widespread recognition that 'top down' approaches to community regeneration often fail to achieve sustainable change, because they fail to engage sufficiently with the needs and desires of local people and do little to improve the way that mainstream services, which deprived communities rely so heavily upon, are delivered. In the summer of 1998 the Welsh Office announced a new approach to area regeneration, the People in Communities (PiC) programme, in eight deprived localities. This would try to overcome these deficiencies by actively involving local people in developing an action plan for their area, by maximising the benefit they receive from government and other sources of funding and by improving the way that local services are delivered.

The National Assembly commissioned Cambridge Policy Consultants in October 2000 to undertake the interim evaluation of PiC. The evaluation explored in detail not only how the programme was implemented in each of the eight areas and the impacts it had had so far, but also its design, the support structures in place and the monitoring arrangements. The report makes a number of key recommendations. Overall, the consultants found that:

- The objectives of PiC were appropriate, in that they looked beyond the limited design of traditional regeneration programmes, by seeking to affect the delivery of mainstream services and levels of community involvement.
- However, a number of key elements of the programme – the bidding process and guidance issued, the contractual arrangements and the support and management structures within the National Assembly – did not adequately support this new approach, and in some cases actively encouraged a return to project based activity that does little to change processes, procedures and attitudes beyond the immediate lifetime of the programme.
- Despite these shortcomings, there have been major successes for PiC across the areas, such as catalysing a learning process for local authority officers and others, enabling those already moving in this direction to go further, bringing people together for the first time, especially senior people on local Boards, attracting substantial amounts of European and other funding and supporting activities that have begun to engage with local residents.
- In conclusion, the consultants recommend a number of changes to future community regeneration approaches (particularly for Communities First) to ensure that all of the stated principles are more likely to be put into practice.



Background

People in Communities (PiC) was launched in eight areas across Wales in Summer 1998. It was designed to "demonstrate ways in which disadvantaged communities can achieve positive change:

- Through co-ordinated action based on a strategic plan developed and agreed with the involvement of the community;
- By utilising and maximising the benefit they receive from central and local government funding and funding from other sources;
- And by influencing the provision of existing services in and to the area."

The primary mechanism was a co-ordinator, funded by the National Assembly for the first year and by the local authority for (at least) one more year. Each co-ordinator was supported by funds tied to specified projects and by a Social Inclusion Champion appointed within the local authority to provide senior back-up and advice. It was a requirement that a Partnership Board be established (made up of representatives of the local community, key agencies, departments and organisations) and an Action Plan be drawn up for the regeneration of the area over the following three to five years.

The National Assembly commissioned Cambridge Policy Consultants to undertake six elements of the evaluation framework which had been designed for PiC. These were:

- Focus groups with local residents of the PiC areas;
- Community Panel questionnaire;
- Detailed interviews with the specially convened 'Professional Panel', five key professionals working in the community;
- Evaluation of each PiC's 'Community Story';

- Collation and exploration of Indicators of Social Exclusion for each community;
- Evaluation of organisational and policy change in terms of how PiC's strategic approach is being put into effect in each locality and centrally within the Assembly.

In addition, co-ordinators' and social inclusion champions' reports have fed into the research findings.

Findings

The primary finding is that there has been a gap between the aims and objectives of PiC, and the impact it has so far managed to have 'on the ground'.

The aims and objectives of PiC acknowledged correctly that traditional regeneration programmes, which fund activities for a time limited period, are inadequate – especially as the funds they involve represent a very small proportion of the total amount of public money being spent in an area, the vast majority of which comes through mainstream providers. The concept of PiC recognised that what is needed is a mechanism that can change how the mainstream (e.g. health, education, police and housing) provides services over the long term. In particular, such service providers need to involve their users much more in the design and delivery of services and they need to work much more closely with each other. However, the mechanisms put in place were not sufficient to ensure that these principles were put into practice. In particular, PiC's implementation was undermined by:

- the format through which bids were invited and selected – only local authorities were invited, which are often candidates for process change themselves; given the short time available, many responded as if to a more traditional regeneration programme (project not process led).

- the guidance for those implementing PiC at a local level – this reinforced the impression that PiC was (just) about projects: it was too vague when talking about how PiC's objectives might be turned into practice but too prescriptive about the structures that would be responsible; in addition, at no stage was experimentation encouraged.
- the contractual arrangements – these were based on specified projects and as such, further encouraged focus on them at the expense of focus on the process change that PiC was originally about.
- the support and learning structures – Social Inclusion Champions were rarely proactive; nor was the National Assembly closely involved enough to support PiCs as they confronted obstacles or to learn lessons: in particular, the implementation of the evaluation framework did not match the design.

Despite these design flaws, PiCs have begun to have an impact. Firstly, many of the projects that PiC has supported are reckoned to have had a beneficial impact, although the lack of day-to-day monitoring has meant that there are no data other than spend available by which to judge them. Many PiCs have established 'community houses' which potentially provide a resource beyond the lifetime of PiC by which to engage and empower local people. Other successful projects have focused on mothers and babies, diversionary activities for young people and training. Those projects that are informal and activity-based have been particularly successful in promoting engagement, breaking down boundaries of territory and changing attitudes.

Secondly, the process of bringing together a partnership board, which for several PiCs was the first time key partners had formally come together, has encouraged service providers to think critically about how and with whom they deliver their services.

Thirdly, many PiCs have been successful in levering in outside funds, particularly from Europe, to boost the resources available in the area.

On the downside, the levels of community involvement have not been as high as hoped. Many of those who participated in projects and consultation exercises are 'the usual suspects' – those few who always take up opportunities to get involved. This is partially as a result of the relatively low profile of PiC within each area. Those who do know about the programme, however, have often felt that what PiC can achieve has been overstated, which has led to disappointed expectations. In particular, achieving significant changes to core mainstream provision relating to crime, housing and education has been beyond the scope of PiC funded projects.

Lessons for the future

PiC was itself an experimental programme. While its successes have been largely offset by shortcomings, the programme and this evaluation have revealed a large number of important lessons for subsequent initiatives, in particular Communities First. If these lessons are learned, then PiC will have been a success. These lessons are:

- the focus within regeneration should be on PiC type programmes, i.e. those that aim to change the way mainstream services are delivered (rather than funding top-up activities) on the one hand, and on the other, building local capacity through the development of trust, networks and positive norms.
- however, that focus must work at all levels of the programme, including the bidding and guidance, the contracts and the monitoring and evaluation. This requires:

- making the objectives explicitly recognise the need to change attitudes, structures of delivery and organisational cultures;
 - emphasising the need to demonstrate effectiveness by experimental and pilot activities, stressing taking risks and learning lessons, removing the stigma of failure; and
 - measuring the short term impact over the Initiative's life in terms of lessons which are appropriate to the Initiative's objectives, such as identifying barriers, perverse incentives and good practice solutions rather than outcomes for deprivation indicators.
 - the co-ordinator should develop a local network of frontline professionals to deepen cross-cutting understanding of issues and potential solutions.
- behind the work of the co-ordinator (or equivalent) 'on the ground', the role of the Social Inclusion Champion should be broadened to develop proactively networks of senior management including local authority departments and other agencies.
 - an ongoing monitoring framework should be established that is supported by written guidance, focused on process change and learning lessons and embedded by involving the designated schemes in its design.
 - across all aspects, the National Assembly needs to be fully involved if the programme is to be supported effectively and if lessons are to be learned – to achieve this, more resources will need to be made available within the National Assembly.

The report [People in Communities: an interim evaluation](#) and further copies of this summary can be obtained from:

Sarah Ballard

Housing Directorate
The National Assembly for Wales
Cathays Park
Cardiff CF10 3NQ

Tel: (029) 2082 3353

E-mail: Sarah.Ballard@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright 2001

October 2001