



**Regional Forum  
Development Paper No. 2**

# A Picture of Performance

A Review of Community Empowerment Network  
Progress across Yorkshire and the Humber

Prepared by Alison Crouch  
Regional Forum

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## Introduction

A requirement of the Community Empowerment Network (CEN) is to complete an annual Performance Management Framework (PMF) assessment. The PMF has two purposes: firstly for CENs to review their progress, assess performance and develop future action plans, secondly the PMF will give the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit a clear view of how the Community Empowerment programme is performing and provide evidence of what works, what doesn't and why.

There are four sections to the PMF:

**Section 1** explores 'How CENs are working' and considers progress in four areas – Communication and Information, Inclusivity, Organisational Capacity and Learning and Representation & Accountability;

**Section 2** considers 'Neighbourhood Level work' development and implementation;

**Section 3** considers 'How CENs are contributing' – in terms of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) context and how CENs are enabling communities to influence the decisions of the LSP in ways that meet the needs of local communities;

**Section 4** is 'Actions for Improvement' and helps CEN to use the outcomes from the previous sections to develop an action plan.

This report highlights 4 aspects of the PMF and provides a regional overview of progress across the 9 CENs in Yorkshire and the Humber. This summary looks at how CENs are performing in terms of:

1. Inclusivity
2. Representation & Accountability
3. The LSP context
4. Influence and Impacts

The aim of the report is to capture progress to date and summarise areas for improvement as identified by CENs themselves.

Data is drawn from the PMF assessment from each of the CENs and the regional PMF and Annual Plan event 'You Know it Makes CENSE' held in February 2005.

## **1. Inclusivity**

CENs have been working hard to engage with a wide range of groups and to be as inclusive as possible. Reaching out to the most marginalised communities has not always been easy. However, the development of various networks and forums has supported and helped CENs link to groups with specific interests and needs. For example many areas now have new faith networks and in some areas the gypsy and traveller communities are beginning to get involved in CEN activity.

CENs have needed to be flexible and responsive to the different needs of many communities and groups. There has been a need to explore a variety of ways to make the programme of work relevant and beneficial; using creative activities has often proved successful. Small grants have also provided a 'hook' and linked smaller, newer groups to the wider CEN activity. Specific events e.g. for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) or faith groups have provided opportunities for building relationships and two-way communication.

Across the region CENs are ensuring their network activities are accessible and are trying to increase involvement at all levels, across all communities.

### **1.1 Progress to Date**

Doncaster CEN has an Action Plan to engage with marginalised groups. It also carries out a quarterly mapping exercise to demonstrate the diversity of the CEN. A dedicated outreach worker has helped neighbourhood and community groups get involved more quickly. A successful event for faith groups has improved links between the faith forum and the CEN. Further links are being made with BME communities, as a representative from the BME Key Strategic Partnership of the LSP is now a member of the CEN Board.

Rotherham CEN has produced a report mapping the communities of interest and thematic networks to analyse diversity and provide an agenda for action and engagement.

Sheffield CEN continues to increase and strengthen its work with faith groups, through events and a database with contacts at a local level. The CEN has also commissioned a video to highlight the contribution of faith groups. BME links are also strengthened with the development of a new BME Women's Forum. These links are providing a platform for strategic action and improvements that are informed by the communities and groups themselves.

Barnsley CEN has a Local Networking Strategy to develop grass roots involvement at both a geographic and neighbourhood level. The CEN has identified key community of interest groups and offers a range of options for participation. There is dedicated financial support for communities of interest and geographic communities. A devolved grant process aimed at improving involvement at a neighbourhood level is reaching out to engage as wide a range of groups as possible.

Hull CEN has a Network Inclusivity Policy. It has a strong diverse group of representatives on the CEN steering group and the LSP. One particular piece of work this year – the ‘Housing in our City’ report – raised housing issues for specific geographical areas and communities of interest. The Outreach and Positive Action Officers have provided a dedicated resource to engage and involve Hull’s most ‘hard to reach’ groups and communities.

Wakefield CEN has a strategic Action Plan to encourage wide-ranging involvement from the voluntary and community sector (VCS). The CEN has recently supported young people, Wakefield Asian Women’s Empowerment project and the Wakefield Asian Community Forum.

Kirklees CEN has integrated its plans for engaging with all communities into the CEN development plan, rather than having a separate policy. Inclusivity is embedded in the CEN ethos and principles. There is active representation from BME, older people, disabled and lesbian, gay and bi-sexual (LGB) groups in the CEN steering group. LSP representatives (reps) and staff team also reflect the diversity of the district.

Bradford CEN has an Inclusivity Strategy and a strong history of working with communities of interest and supporting groups identified as marginalised. A communities of interest worker is employed to progress Neighbourhood Action Plans with under-represented groups. Older People are involved in the CEN through Bradford Older Person’s Alliance. The CEN has recently supported the development of a homeless forum event by helping to organise, promote and facilitate it. Membership of the CEN includes the lesbian, gay and bi-sexual network, women’s forum and the faith forum. The diversity of the district is reflected in the LSP representatives and the executive of the CEN.

## **1.2 Areas for Improvement**

- Whilst many CENs identify elements of inclusion in their work, this does not always translate to involvement that is embedded in the day to day activities of CENs. More needs to be done to create improved, more meaningful relationships that go beyond ‘involvement’ and lead to active engagement.
- Some of the strategic action plans that have been developed still need to be fully implemented. There is a consistent need to monitor the inclusivity of the CEN and review policies and strategies and the actions to engage and involve.
- Many CENs have diverse representation in their membership, but recognise a need to encourage and advocate greater diversity across VCS representatives and the LSP as a whole.
- Improving communication is highlighted by many CENs, particularly around the area of inclusivity. There is a need to tighten the communication loop. Many CENs want to improve their website content and accessibility, review

how they use minority languages and generally deepen the information links and improve two-way communication.

- Some CENs are exploring diversity training for members to develop understanding and awareness.
- In some CENs engaging with young people still appears to be difficult. There is also a lack of engagement with older people in some CENs.

## **2. Representation and Accountability**

A core element of CEN activity is to support VCS representatives on the LSP. Some CENs have dedicated workers to ensure the reps can be as effective as possible in their role. As the CENs have strengthened and developed their structures most have created election and selection procedures to bring forward VCS representatives onto the LSPs. This has changed some former processes where representatives were 'hand picked' and so may have limited accountability to a wider constituency.

Most CENs have in place 'pre-briefing' sessions for reps before the LSP meetings to look through the agenda, decide on points to raise at meetings and agree the VCS perspective.

CENs have worked hard to put in place induction processes for new reps and ongoing arrangements for skills development. Some reps are still in need of basic skills development in areas of confidence building and being effective in meetings. Many CENs are exploring opportunities for mentoring or shadowing.

### **2.1 Progress to date**

Bradford CEN co-ordinates timetabled briefing sessions ahead of the LSP meetings. However the LSP agenda is not received early enough for CEN staff to compile a briefing paper or written summary. This also means there is often no time to consult with the CEN membership to gather views prior to the meeting. Reporting back by reps is done at CEN delegate body meetings and by completing a Reporting Sheet. Bradford CEN has recently reviewed its election procedures and incorporates an interview based on defined skill levels. Bradford CEN is now being approached directly by organisations to help develop community engagement and provide VCS representation to their partnership / organisation.

Kirklees CEN has also recently reviewed its election procedures and now has an open and accessible process for electing representatives to the main LSP Board. Regular briefing meetings for VCS representatives work well, along with one-to-one meetings and telephone support. New opportunities are beginning to emerge for wider representation as a result of the Kirklees Community Strategy consultation.

Leeds CEN involves its entire membership in elections for the CEN management committee from which representatives are selected to the LSP Executive Boards. Elections for the LSP Strategy groups are done from the wider forum membership. The CEN Strategy group provides accountability for LSP reps and further support for representatives comes from the many VCS forums and networks.

Barnsley CEN has a consistent and fair approach to selecting representatives, emphasising the need to be inclusive, with a balance between voluntary, community, community of interest, geographic and 'professional' sector groups. The CEN has a system of briefings and information alerts, regular pre-meetings

take place and representatives are kept up-to-date on areas of specific interest through one-to-one contact with the CEN team. Information is made available in a number of ways including web-based systems. LSP representatives are becoming increasingly more confident in taking forward discussion on key policy and strategy. There is a growing pool of representatives who are willing to take on responsibility and account for their actions.

Rotherham CEN has established a comprehensive 'Member Support Programme' that includes induction, training, development and skills sessions. A fast turn around of representatives has been seen as a strength, as reps have moved onto new jobs and this has given others a chance to undertake the position of rep. Rotherham LSP recognises named deputies from the CEN. VCS reps have brought issues to the LSP agenda.

Sheffield CEN has agreed its protocol with the Sheffield LSP and within that has established a model of recruitment for reps. Sheffield CEN currently supports 38 VCS reps across the Sheffield Family of Partnerships. Pre-meetings with VCS reps prior to LSP formal meetings work well. These provide reps with opportunities to discuss the agenda and decide how best to address particular issues. Community Forum theme events are providing feedback mechanisms, along with features in the CEN newsletter. Cross Partnership events bring together reps from each of the LSP boards to exchange information and offer support. Individual reps are being supported to represent the sector at regional and national conferences and in new initiatives such as Local Area Agreements.

Doncaster CEN has an open and transparent election process. Reps have dedicated support provided by the Representative Support and Information Worker. The reps receive an induction, follow-up training, regular and on-going support and meet together as a group. The CEN organises pre-meeting briefing sessions.

Hull CEN has a high satisfaction rating from its members about its election process. A recent profile of election nominations and results reveal a good diversity of representatives, with a mix of old and new members standing for election. There are briefings for representatives and CEN forum meetings provide opportunities for reps to gain views of the membership e.g. Housing Forum will provide views on housing issues and agenda items on LSP. The 'How Your City Works' course is increasing participation, skills and knowledge amongst the wider CEN membership.

## **2.2 Areas for Improvement**

- CENs need to put in place consistent checks and reviews to ensure election and selection procedures are open, transparent and fair.
- Whilst it is crucial that there is VCS representation on the LSP main boards, there is an increasing realisation that effective representation on the LSP sub-groups or themed partnerships is equally important. CENs need to

embed their presence and ensure effective representation at all levels of the LSP.

- There is still some lack of awareness about who the VCS representatives are in some CEN areas. Work needs to be done to ensure the wider VCS is clear about who 'their' reps are and how to establish two-way communication with them. More could be done to explain to the LSP how VCS reps are chosen.
- Many CENs note difficulties with the large volume of information and papers presented for LSP meetings, and a lack of time to brief reps and engage others on issues raised. Some CENs have a 'reserve pool' of reps and in some cases are considering the usefulness of 'shadow' representatives to cover for absenteeism.
- Improvement to monitoring the impact and influence of VCS reps on the LSP will assist CENs to demonstrate their role and importance as a partner on the LSP.
- A key issue to be addressed is how the diversity of the sector can be represented at LSP meetings.
- Report back from LSP meetings needs to be improved in some CENs, ensuring comprehensive feedback to both the CEN and the wider voluntary and community sector. Reps need particular support to feedback complex discussions to their own networks and others. Finding interesting ways to do this is a challenge for CENs.
- An ongoing skills audit of reps will ensure group and individual training and development needs are met. Training and induction packages need to be comprehensive to equip reps for the role.

### **3. LSP context**

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have been established to prepare and implement a Community Strategy and a Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy for their district. The delivery of these relies on partnership working across the LSP with each of its partners from the public, private and voluntary and community sectors.

CENs have a crucial role to engage with the LSP and its work. In particular by ensuring decision-making processes include VCS representatives and by being involved in the LSP Performance Management Framework (PMF). There is a real commitment amongst partners to build strong meaningful relationships and support work at a neighbourhood level.

#### **3.1 Progress to date**

Doncaster CEN feels that the involvement of the CEN increases the democracy of the LSP and also that influence outside of the LSP meetings is increasing. The agreed protocol helps working practices between the LSP and the CEN. The CEN co-ordinator is a member of the LSP Technical Support Group.

Rotherham CEN has 5 representatives, out of 20, on the LSP Board and their confidence and effectiveness is increasing with time and experience. The CEN was invited to workshops around the development of the Rotherham Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the wider VCS has been involved in the Community Planning process. The CEN / LSP protocol has proved useful and helped to build relationships and understanding between the LSP and the CEN.

Sheffield CEN feels that, on the whole, the VCS contributions are beginning to make a difference and for most Boards there is a gradual change in culture that is making the role of the CEN easier. The CEN has felt most effective around changing exclusive decision-making and demonstrating its role in neighbourhood level work. What often hampers progress and effectiveness is the technical nature of the LSP and the volume of background knowledge needed. VCS reps were fully involved in the LSP review of the City Strategy.

Barnsley CEN has been fully involved in the LSP Performance Management Framework. VCS representation is secured throughout the LSP and the supporting partnerships. The LSP has become increasingly interested in the role of the VCS at a local neighbourhood level and have become more positive in seeking VCS views and input. The LSP secretariat works well with the CEN staff and members.

Hull CEN has two representatives who are the chairs of two of the LSP sub-groups – Cityliving and Cityscape – and are having a real influence. The CEN was involved in the 2004/05 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund commissioning process. The CEN also had some, although limited input into the LSP PMF.

Wakefield CEN is represented on the LSP partnerships and engaged in a range of advisory groups. The CEN is involved in constructing the agenda at LSP Officer and Members Co-ordination groups. An effective, working protocol is in place. The LSP is working with the CEN to improve community participation and there are effective relationships developing between the CEN and the LSP on neighbourhood level work. The CEN participated in the LSP PMF.

Leeds CEN has strong representation across the LSP and is almost always guaranteed places on new decision-making structures that are linked to the LSP. VCS reps bring a different but valuable ethos to meetings and can challenge existing structures and views. VCS reps now feed into the LSP strategy group, which gives a greater feeling of accountability. District partnerships offer a new opportunity for community engagement and commissioning of the VCS.

Kirklees CEN reps make-up a quarter of the LSP board and the CEN has representatives on other partnerships and neighbourhood renewal steering groups. This involvement can be influential. The LSP secretariat provides all new members of the LSP board with an information pack. The CEN has been fully involved in the consultation process for the review of the Community Strategy. This process should increase the impact of the CEN and provide a model for future work. The CEN has been involved with the LSP PMF through the business group that leads on the LSP PMF. The staff teams are working together to develop a joint improvement plan.

Bradford CEN representatives are involved in the LSP board, scrutiny and task groups. The CEN has been involved in the LSP PMF and there is an expectation this will continue to happen. There are strong working relationships with the LSP Neighbourhood Renewal team and the CEN and they are exploring opportunities for co-operative and complementary work. The LSP and the CEN is jointly reviewing the Induction Pack and the training session 'Know you LSP' is delivered by a local training provider. The protocol was signed in December 2004.

### **3.2 Areas for Improvement**

- Many CENs highlighted the protocol as a way of moving forward, but stressed the importance of implementation and monitoring to ensure all partners stick to their 'side of the bargain'. It is important now, for all partners, to use the protocols and Compact to best effect.
- Some CENs have highlighted that there is very little common unity amongst LSP partners – is there a role for the CEN to influence LSP partners and contribute to improvements about what working in partnership could look like? For example, joint work with the LSP and CEN could improve early circulation of LSP agendas and papers.
- CENs need to be more proactive in raising awareness amongst partner agencies about the role and contribution of the VCS.

- All CENs need to continue and get better at being proactive about putting VCS issues onto the LSP agenda.
- Some CENS feel there is a need to address relationships outside of the formal meetings of the LSP with individual partners.
- There is a real need to build on small-scale changes - that may seem very slow in coming - but there is a real need to record progress and promote the value of the CENs involvement.
- CENs need to find useful ways to capture and share good practice.

## **4. Influence and Impacts**

The levels of impact and influence that CENs are having is increasing. Real influence comes when communities exercise greater control, influence and responsibility over decisions made by LSPs in ways that improve their quality of life.

Generally CENs are getting better at raising awareness about their contribution and impact. There are visible improvements as CENs make more connections and have a strategic influence. VCS representatives are increasing the influence of the VCS at a strategic level. The knowledge and experience of VCS reps gives the LSP an insight it might not necessarily have had. As reps are able to contribute more to local decision-making, through the LSP, the impact on the community will increase.

CEN support to neighbourhood partnerships is building community capacity and building confidence so creating stronger influential communities. Involvement in Community Strategy reviews has, in some areas, increased the impact of the CEN and has demonstrated the importance of being able to bring a 'grass root' perspective to strategic issues.

### **4.1 Progress to date**

Bradford CEN has improved working relationships and co-operation with the Local Authority Neighbourhood Renewal team and the Building Communities Partnership. This has increased the level of influence that the CEN has. Continuity of the VCS representatives on the LSP, who are elected for two years, is also helping to develop impact and influence. Reps are now able to contribute more fully, engage with the strategic agenda and debate the issues of the partnership.

Kirklees CEN has contributed to the consultation on the review of the Kirklees Community Strategy. Facilitating workshops with the VCS, generating views and commenting on the draft strategy has made a positive impact to this strategy.

Leeds CEN has formed local VCS networks which have given additional opportunities for involvement. The local forums have been a mechanism to provide nominations for elections. For example the South Leeds BME Forum has directly elected a rep on the South Leeds Partnership. The Local Authority is increasingly recognising the part the CEN plays and accepts the CEN as an equal LSP partner.

Wakefield CEN has developed a Neighbourhood Strategy that is being implemented. This strategy will provide a mechanism for ensuring influence happens at a neighbourhood level. Wakefield CEN is also supporting the development of Neighbourhood Partnerships across the district. These partnerships are providing opportunities for local communities to engage and will be an effective and accurate mechanism for providing feedback and measures of impact. The CEN has developed a neighbourhood support fund linked to the floor

targets. VCS reps have adopted a strategic approach and are felt to be having influence.

Barnsley CEN is using resources from the Single Community Programme to support the progress of the Borough Community Development Strategy. This strategy will begin to show real impact for local communities in Barnsley. The CEN is taking forward a local networking programme. Barnsley LSP and the wider partnership family acknowledge the CEN as an equal partner.

Sheffield CEN has undertaken a detailed review and analysis of what is working well and what needs to happen to strengthen community voice and influence. The CEN is considered to be contributing well to the delivery of floor targets in Sheffield as an equal partner of the LSP. The use of small grants too has shown an important impact on floor targets and delivering neighbourhood renewal across the city. A number of examples from VCS representatives on the LSP show real influence e.g. challenging the Investment Planning Process, influencing the Learning and Work Strategy to inform community take-up and issues around carers – identifying a lack of progress on health inequality.

Rotherham CEN has supported the wider VCS to become more organised and stronger, so better able to make valued contributions, becoming more influential in the Borough. The CEN is starting to see its contributions on the LSP agenda. There is support and encouragement for all the LSP spokes to use the CEN selection process for recruiting reps.

Doncaster CEN has supported some neighbourhood-based partnerships, networks and community forums, which as a result have been successful in developing local influence. The CEN has a strategy for distributing small grants to activities that have a positive impact on neighbourhood renewal floor targets. The CEN is leading on the review of parts of the Borough Strategy and has a quality assurance role over some of the thematic priorities. CEN members were involved in decisions about Neighbourhood Renewal Fund distribution and have begun to raise issues and lead discussions at key strategic partnership meetings.

Hull CEN has used resources to support local communities to organise themselves and build their capacity to become more influential. Targeted outreach work in prioritised areas will support community involvement in Area Partnerships. VCS representatives have adopted a more strategic approach. A survey of LSP members showed that they feel that Hull CEN is making a positive contribution. The small grants given to voluntary and community sector organisations are evaluated on the contribution that the grant will deliver to the Floor Target Action Plan.

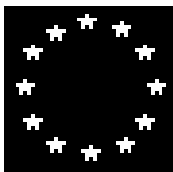
## **4.2 Areas for Improvement**

- There is a strong sense that most CENs have contributed and made a difference to the partnership structure and processes. This is where most CENs made reference to having a significant impact. However, actual

influence over final decisions is questionable. The VCS needs to put their items on the LSP agenda, rather than commenting on others' issues.

- There is a perception amongst some of the wider membership of CENs that the CEN does not have real influence at the LSP. Whereas those more closely linked to the LSP feel they have an increasing influence and this is likely to grow.
- Many feel that it is still early days and the real impact of voluntary and community sector involvement is still to be seen. There is a feeling that there are real opportunities for local people to influence decisions but this takes time and progress is gradual and developmental.
- CENs need to systematically collect evidence of the sector's contribution in terms of impact and influence on neighbourhood renewal and floor targets. However, many are finding this difficult.
- CENs and LSPs need to track decisions taken and follow-up actions to allow changes and progress to be measured and scrutinised. CENs could have a role to monitor and track the impact of decisions on neighbourhoods.
- There is a need to develop further awareness of the VCS as a service provider.
- Some CENs have started to consider creating shadowing opportunities for LSP representatives, so the progress made to date is not lost as experienced VCS members move on and reps finish their three year 'office'.
- CENs need to develop ways to have impact and influence outside of the LSP meetings – in some areas the LSP Board only meets 4 times a year. This is too little to be effective without using other mechanisms. CENs need to become influential on other key strategic partnerships.
- More work to link the contribution of small grants to achieving neighbourhood renewal targets and embedding neighbourhood level work is needed, to further demonstrate the value and impact of the voluntary and community sector.

Supported by



Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum  
Suite D10, Joseph's Well  
Hanover Walk  
Leeds LS3 1AB

Tel: 0113 394 2300  
Fax: 0113 394 2301

Email: [office@regionalforum.org.uk](mailto:office@regionalforum.org.uk)  
[www.regionalforum.org.uk](http://www.regionalforum.org.uk)

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