Prepared as part of the National Evaluation of Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders

June 2007

MAKING SOCIAL CAPITAL COUNT

AN ACTION LEARNING SET REPORT

What is social capital? And what can it contribute to neighbourhood management and neighbourhood renewal? Although there has been a lot of policy interest in social capital, for most people it is still a vague concept. Between September 2006 and April 2007, agencies and residents in Manton – a neighbourhood in Worksop, North Nottinghamshire – got together to explore what difference an explicit focus on building social capital could make to their work. This paper summarises the lessons from that process.

They developed an approach which used 'conversations' to bring out the positives about living in Manton, working with different parts of the community – schoolchildren, young people, Polish residents, tenants – as well as front-line workers and managers. They found that:

- Both residents and agencies began to think about Manton more positively
- Asking service providers questions about Manton has raised the profile of the neighbourhood and encouraged people to challenge their views and perceptions
- Agencies and residents began to respect each other more:
  - Agencies began to get positive feedback from residents – something they were not used to!
  - Agencies started listening more to residents

The beauty of this approach is that it is simple – even obvious. But too often people do not do the obvious things.

It suggests that:

- Long-term change means focusing on relationships and behaviour and not just delivering projects, but...
- Talk still needs to be translated into action
- Agencies and residents need to be prepared to change their views and perceptions
- Agencies need to be prepared to listen to what people are saying rather than always setting the agenda
- Everyone living and working in a neighbourhood can be involved and contribute to change
- Building more social cohesion, mutual respect and confidence leads to sustainable change

1) INTRODUCTION

Why social capital?

Neighbourhood management is a way of working that gets service providers to work together, engaging with local residents, to meet residents' needs more effectively. But if the quality of life in the neighbourhood is to improve, social capital can also have a big part to play. Research shows that social capital can be linked to improved health, wealth creation, better educational achievement and reduced crime – all things that neighbourhood management seeks to achieve. An emphasis on social capital highlights the importance of building social relationships alongside financial capital, physical improvements and skills. It also stresses the importance of the informal relationships and networks that are needed to build trust and make formal structures work.

Figure 1 provides some definitions of social capital. It also explains the different kinds of social capital, all of which are needed if social capital is to contribute to neighbourhood renewal.

Figure 1: Some definitions of social capital

Features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.
Robert Putnam

At its simplest, social capital can be defined as '*the social ties and networks that give people access to resources and information*'. There are three types of social capital:

Bonding: networks and ties within communities

Bridging: networks and ties between different communities

Linking: networks and ties that cut across status and similarity (e.g. between residents and service providers)

The social glue that helps people, organisations and communities to work together towards shared goals. It comes from everyday contact between people, as a result of their forming social connections and networks based on trust, shared values, and reciprocity (or 'give and take').
North East Social Capital Forum

The North East Social Capital Forum have produced an 'Easy Guide to Social Capital' which is called *Connected and Collective* and this sums up some key features of social capital.

If social capital is to be a way of changing people's lives, it is also useful to think of its networks and ties as a kind of power circuit. Building bonding and bridging social capital can be seen as (re)connecting and bringing back into use circuits that have been in disrepair. But they will have limited power on their own. Building linking social capital connects them into the mains so that power flows more freely.

Social capital and neighbourhood management

Building social capital was not an explicit aim of the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders when they were set up. The emphasis was on changing mainstream public services. But resident involvement and community engagement were seen as key ingredients of this new approach. Indeed, most of the pathfinders were not only involving residents in decision-making but also supporting community activity on the ground – and both these activities can contribute to building social capital. So in 2006, the national evaluation decided to explore this work in more detail and make its potential contribution to social capital more explicit.

- First of all, it carried out case studies in three pathfinder neighbourhoods which were doing relevant work and it has now published an account of this work (details on this report can be found at the end of this paper).
- Then it focused on one Pathfinder – Manton Community Alliance, a neighbourhood in Worksop in Bassetlaw District – setting up an action learning set to explore ways of developing work on social capital. The action learning set brought together a range of agencies and residents and met four times between September 2006 and April 2007.

Manton Community Alliance (MCA) plans to continue its work on social capital. This is a report on where they have got to so far.

2) BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL IN MANTON

The starting point

Manton is a neighbourhood in North Nottinghamshire – part of Worksop. It is an old mining community - the pit closed about 12 years ago after providing both the social and economic hub for Manton and the surrounding area for the best part of 100 years. Many people still refer to it as a pit village. In many ways, it is not short of social capital. Relationships within some parts of the community – bonding social capital - can be very strong and people rely on them to 'get by'. There is a strong community spirit and an active community and voluntary sector. Social landlords say that many tenants refuse offers of rehousing, if these take them outside Manton. But MCA found that there were three problems with this.

The first problem was that these strong internal relationships did not necessarily help residents to 'get on'. Instead, they entrenched low expectations:

"Social capital has always been there but it's been negative."

People spoke about a feeling that people need to know their place and not get above their 'station' – for example, if anyone wanted to go to university, they were seen as getting 'above themselves'. This was not the sort of thing Mantonians did. The bonding social capital also entrenched a negative mindset – a kind of 'siege' mentality which isolated Mantonians from the wider society.

There were some deep rifts in the community too. The strong community spirit was fractured by historical divisions with groups and individuals falling out for very long periods of time – in some cases decades.

"People are still fighting the miners' strike. One person still won't talk to his brother because he went back early."

One effect of this was that people didn't always take responsibility for the area – they blamed others instead.

The second problem was that Manton was heavily stereotyped in the eyes of the outside world. It was seen as a 'no-go' area by many who did not live there. To agencies and potential employers, a Manton address signified failure. Agencies made decisions for the area rather than finding out what residents wanted. Ironically, the investment made in Manton through the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder had in some ways reinforced this isolation, breeding an anti-Manton feeling. Outsiders thought that: 'Manton always gets the money'. Agencies didn't think they needed to invest there.

The third problem was that, although many people wanted to stay in Manton, they were hard pressed to come up with an answer as to why. So rather than this being a positive thing, it was seen more as a lack of ambition.

Building social capital in practice

For the agencies and residents in the action learning set, the key to social capital was that it was about relationships and communication. Neighbourhood renewal has usually been based on projects. But this was not about 'projects'. This difference is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Behaviour not projects

Projects	Relationships
■ Emphasis on money	■ Less dependency
■ Short-term solutions; not long-term change	■ Long-term change
■ Limited influence beyond the project	■ Influence with responsibility
■ Not sustainable	■ Collective action
■ Can create dependency	■ More social cohesion
	■ Customer service approach
	■ Community leadership

However, working on relationships and behaviour is not so visible as working on projects. So the challenge was to turn the idea of social capital into something tangible that meant something real to people.

MCA decided to run a series of conversations to find out what residents thought about Manton. Residents agreed to talk to other residents. The primary school agreed to encourage the children to talk to each other and to staff about how they felt about the area. Other agencies agreed to build the conversations into their day to day contact with residents, and to talk formally and informally with their colleagues. But these were no ordinary conversations. They started with the positives. People were asked first what they liked about living in Manton – they were asked to list three things. Only then were they allowed to say one thing that they would like to change[1].

The aim was to use these conversations to develop a more equal relationship – between generations, between agencies and residents – really listening to what people are saying, without making assumptions or setting the agenda. So, it was important to make sure that this was a conversation - that people were asked to expand on what they meant if it was vague or unclear, and to give examples. The approach of starting with the positives can be used in surveys as well, but it is essential to follow these up with conversations – to get beyond the tick boxes and wishlists.

Although conversations have taken place between residents, the emphasis has mostly been on improving the relationships between service providers and local residents. Figure 3 shows some of the approaches taken. The idea is that a focus on 'linking' social capital will help to break down the stereotyping of the neighbourhood and create a more positive attitude towards working in Manton. But the intention is also that by focusing on the positives of living in Manton residents themselves will feel they can do more to change things.

[1] The idea for this approach came from a programme run by National College for School Leadership in 2006.

Figure 3: What service providers did

Everyone
At the Easter Fun-day, all the people running activities asked people what they liked about their street and their lives. This was linked to a 'respect' theme, with a huge rainbow to look at levels of respect. People were given pictures of the police, people from other countries etc and asked to place these at the appropriate place along the rainbow. There was also a free 'Good Neighbours' prize draw – people were asked what they thought makes for a good neighbour and then asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 5.

The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)
Bassetlaw District Council & Bassetlaw LSP have incorporated the Social Capital Conversation in the district wide consultation exercise on setting/endorsing priorities for Bassetlaw

Housing
Caretakers were encouraged to have the conversations with tenants and residents on estates. If housing staff were visiting someone about a complaint, they would ask people why they stay, despite the fact that they are not happy.

MCA and Housing called in outside mediators to work with residents in a street where there had been problems with one particular family. But no-one turned up to a meeting they held, so they have now moved on to having a series of one-to-one conversations

Education
The local school has run the conversation with its pupils. It has also used the conversation approach at a parents evening. But it believes strongly that the conversations must be seen to lead to action. So, it has taken the top three of the things people said they would like to see improved and integrated them into a development plan.

Community safety
Residents were asked to bring 'good news' stories to the crime and community safety surgery.

Manton Community Alliance
MCA started the conversation at one of its English conversation evenings hosted by English speaking residents for Polish speaking residents and also at a 'cook and eat' session with Polish residents.

What difference has it made?

Starting with the positives is new. What used to happen was that there would be a public meeting, residents would shout at service providers, service providers would get defensive or make promises that they couldn't keep. People learnt to act in a certain way even though it didn't get them what they wanted. And the Manton mantra was: "It's not my fault" – said as much by agencies as residents. Making things better was always someone else's responsibility. What the residents and agencies in the Action Learning Set have found is that:

- Both residents and agencies have begun to think about Manton more positively

- Asking service providers questions about Manton has raised the profile of the neighbourhood and encouraged people to challenge their views and perceptions
- The quality of communication has changed:
  - Agencies have started listening more to residents
  - Residents have stopped shouting at providers, so agency staff now feel safe enough to sit and listen.
- Residents are getting more confident
- Agencies and residents are beginning to respect each other more:
  - Agencies are getting positive feedback from residents – something they were not used to!
  - The positive tone which the conversations have introduced has led to more constructive ongoing discussions

"There's a buzz and a 10% improvement in relation to views on bullying in the school. The language is changing and we are not using so much jargon. Agencies are learning from communities how to communicate."

It is also interesting to set the different responses from different groups alongside each other and encourage people to talk about the similarities and differences, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: From conversation to action: an example from New Manton Primary School

The school conversation found that the top three things that people liked best were:

Pupils	Staff	Parents
Different play zones	The staff as a team	Staff
Teachers	The children	Standard of education
PE/swimming	The school atmosphere	Sporting activities

The top three things people would **change** were:

Pupils	Staff	Parents
Behaviour	Split site	Fabric of building
Banking area (bushes in the school grounds)	Fabric of infant building	Behaviour
Playground including games	Negative comments about the school	Play areas

This format of public consultation gave a very different perspective on the views of parents and children than the standard OFSTED inspection, where feedback generally consisted of percentages of people who agreed, tended to agree or disagreed with broad statements about satisfaction. As a result of this conversation, the school development plan will be changed to include:

- Review of play areas including development of bankings
- Full audit of fabric of building and 5 year maintenance programme put in place
- Review of the behaviour policy by asking what still needs to be tackled
- Positive stories about the school promoted in the community.

Challenges

Working in this way isn't easy. There is still a lot of cynicism to overcome. Negative attitudes are still embedded in the local culture. At a practical level, when residents get in touch with a service provider, they are often preoccupied with the particular problem that has brought them to the agency and may not see the point of having a more positive conversation - they want to use the time to get the negatives out of their system and get the problem solved. For their part, agency staff often didn't realise how much their decisions affected Manton – a typical response was: 'What's it got to do with me?'.

In the school exercise:

- Many parents asked their children what they thought rather than answer themselves
- Some staff found it difficult to think of anything they would change
- A few parents found it hard to stop at one thing to change
- Pupils tended to have similar responses according to their classes.

It was easier to use this approach with children – perhaps they were more open to new ideas. And the conversations still need to be spread further - more local residents need to be involved. But three particular lessons emerged:

- The approach will need time to work.
- Conversations must lead to action and tangible change if they are not just to be a short-term gimmick.
- They also need to be backed up by constant 'publicity' about the good things in Manton and what has already been achieved if negative stereotypes are to be tackled in the long-term.

What next?

In June 2007, Manton Community Alliance held a launch of the Conversation with agencies whose work affected the area. They wanted to find champions for the conversation in all local services – people who have influence. Some 100 people turned up – mostly agency staff but residents from the Steering Group also came along. There was a good attendance from agencies who had not been involved in the Learning Set – particularly the police – and participants were very enthusiastic about the approach. Most said they would try it out over the summer and a feedback meeting is planned in the autumn. Meanwhile, a film crew is coming to the local primary school to record elements of 'social capital in action'. Figure 5 illustrates some of the views expressed at the event.

Figure 5: What people at the launch said about Manton

What we like about Manton	What still needs to be changed
■ Community spirit – warm welcoming people	■ Aspirations need to be higher
■ A wealth of opportunities for young people	■ Residents are still suspicious of agencies
■ The energy and focus that Manton Community Alliance has brought to the area	■ The poor public image
■ Enthusiasm – residents want to make a difference	■ Links with the wider community in Bassetlaw
■ Real honesty	■ Getting more people involved
■ Pride in the changes we have made	■ Improved communication
	■ The attitudes of the 5% who ruin things for the 95% who want to make things better

3) WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PRACTICE?

The key elements of the approach are:

- Listening to what the community wants – making fewer assumptions
- Forcing people to be positive first before moving onto problems
- Looking not just at what is done but how it is done
- Collective action and responsibility – not blaming everything on others
- Agencies and residents need to be prepared to change their views and perceptions
- Being prepared for the long haul to really make a difference
- Having champions in each service with the clout to make it stick.

The beauty of this approach is that it is simple – even obvious. But people do not always do the obvious things. And sometimes it's the little things that count. In particular this approach suggests that paying attention to the detail of day to day communication is as important as having grand plans and formal structures.

4) HOW CAN SUCCESS BE MEASURED?

If building social capital in this way is to be seen to be as important in its own right as achieving other outcomes, then agencies, decision makers and residents need to be convinced of its value. How can it be put on a par with the other 'targets' that neighbourhood managers and service providers have to aim at? The 'soft' outcomes of building social capital are not easy to measure. So, at the end of the action learning set, we asked ourselves how we could make it 'count'. Possible indicators of success would be:

Indicators that the process had been taken on board

- Commitment from all service providers, with their front-line staff engaged in the Conversation
- A wider range of residents involved
- New techniques for engagement
- Residents and agencies understanding the benefits of this approach.
- Approach reflected in performance measures/LAA

Indicators that it was making a difference

- Changes in perceptions and views of Manton – residents and service providers
- Feedback given to residents on actions/response to their issues
- Mutual respect and understanding between residents and service providers
- Residents taking responsibility for actions/setting up their own groups
- Better communication and collaboration between agencies

FURTHER INFORMATION

This paper was prepared by Prof. Marilyn Taylor of the Cities Research Centre, University of the West of England, Bristol. It draws on an action learning set on social capital run in 2006/7 as well as some further follow up work. The work was focused on the Manton Community Alliance, an NM Pathfinder in Bassetlaw, Nottinghamshire. We would like to thank all of the members of the Action Learning Set for their contributions, particularly Richard Edwards, Alister Shaw and Bill Ball from Manton, and Maggie Rust for supporting the process. The work is ongoing; this paper represents a 'work in progress'.

There is also a related Theme Report on Neighbourhood Management and Social Capital that has been prepared by the National Evaluation team and published by Communities and Local Government.

For further details of the national evaluation, and for copies of published reports, please see our website: www.sqw.co.uk/nme/