

The London Civic Forum

London Civic Forum is a network of 1300 full member organisations and associate individual members, from the capital's private, public and not-for-profit sectors. In existence since 2000, our overall aim is to increase and improve civic participation in London. For more information visit www.londoncivicforum.org.uk

Contact Us

If you would like to find out more information regarding the National/London Empowerment Partnership and its activities or events, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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London Empowerment Partnership Information Sheet

The Government's Empowerment Agenda

The Local Government White Paper (Oct 2006) embodied a central intention to empower local communities in order to improve public services, local democracy and the capacity of communities to have a greater influence over and involvement in the conditions of their lives; and The Governance of Britain (July 2007) green paper gave further substance to the vision of a truly participative society and the fundamental role of empowerment in achieving a more equal, cohesive and productive society. In October 2007, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill received royal assent, thereby placing a central government requirement on local authorities to involve communities in decisions about health services. This Bill also includes a duty for local authorities to 'inform, consult and involve' local people. The idea that local citizens and communities should be included in decisions affecting their services or local areas is further upheld in the new Community Empowerment White Paper, 'Communities in Control', launched 9 July 2008.

The Aims of the National Empowerment Partnership

The government recognises that there is already a good deal of work on empowerment taking place around the country, but of variable quality, unstable provision and sometimes unclear impact. The Community Empowerment Division therefore asked the Community Development Foundation to set up a National Empowerment Partnership (NEP), spanning the public and third sectors, and potentially the private sector.

The overall mission of the Partnership is to improve the quality and functioning of relationships between citizens and government, in order to increase the ability of people to influence the decisions which affect their lives

The London Empowerment Partnership

The central focus of the NEP work is delivered through a network of regional consortia, supported by CDF and other national agencies. The **London Civic Forum** is the lead body for the London region and will work with a Regional Consortium to deliver an agreed action plan for the region that aims to improve the quality, coordination and evidence of empowerment in order to increase the numbers of people who feel able to influence decisions in their localities.

The London Empowerment Partnership will draw members from key public bodies, voluntary and community sector networks and community development practitioners, and will link with London's Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership, Capital Ambition, to ensure productive dialogue with and support to local authorities and local strategic partnerships, in particular those that have selected NI4 within their Local Area Agreements.

The London Empowerment Partnership (LEP) will not act as a delivery body for empowerment. It will map and set up a framework to enable the statutory sector, third sector and communities at a regional and local level to share and maximise existing skills, expertise, knowledge and networks. It is a strategic initiative aiming to bring additional value to the many activities taking place, and to find ways to measure and then encourage effective empowerment of citizens in public services.



The London Empowerment Partnership's Action Plan Year 1

During the LEP's first year, four core strands of activity were designed to support the building of the Regional Empowerment programme in London. These were:

- **A Regional Platform**

For much of the first year, the LEP utilised the expertise and guidance of its Development Group to take forward its action plan. Additionally, we have developed plans to further support a joined-up regional approach to community empowerment by building a Regional Empowerment Consortium and an active Network of Empowerment Practitioners.

- **A Guide to Activities**

During the first year, the LEP worked towards the development of an involvement map, which focuses on identifying generic mechanisms of engagement such as community and police consultative groups, participatory budgeting and healthcare LINKs, and sources of training and support, particularly as they relate to the empowerment of refugees and asylum seekers and young people.

- **Awareness Raising**

In order to raise the profile of community empowerment across London, information regarding the work of the LEP, its aims and objectives, and any upcoming events or activities was included in London Civic Forum ebulletins, as well as in other Consortium members' bulletins and websites. A series of regional awareness raising/networking events took place, including *Delivering Doorstep Democracy*, a major event held in March 2008 to inspire local authority senior officers and Members to embrace and implement the ideals of community empowerment within their own locality.

- **Quality Assurance**

A fourth focus of the LEP during this year has been on developing a quality assurance framework which enables local authorities and their partners on Local Strategic Partnerships to build empowerment more clearly, visibly and effectively into the Local Area Agreements and the working cultures of their respective agencies; and to ensure coherence and linkage with the relevant indicators in the local government performance framework.



The London Empowerment Partnership's Action Plan Year 2

The following is an outline of the LEP's proposed priorities and activities for 2008 – 11:

- **Building a Regional Platform**

The LEP plans to continue its work on facilitating cross-sector involvement in community empowerment by implementing a Regional Consortium and active Network of Practitioners. These bodies will represent the interests and activities of a wide range of organizations and networks, providing key input and advice to LEP regarding empowerment activities. A separate steering group will be drawn from these bodies to advise on the development and delivery of the LEP programme. Finally, task groups will be established when needed to discuss particular issues or activities.

- **Developing a Picture of Empowerment**

During the second year of activities, the LEP intends to further promote the involvement map as a means of visually advertising the range of empowerment activities throughout London. This map will provide a way for citizens to access information about empowerment activities, as well as creating a means by which local authorities and partners can advertise and showcase their own initiatives and projects and share their experience and ideas. The Training and Support Directory will further support the aims of the involvement map by informing citizens of training and support provision for community involvement.

In general, much of the activity within this heading revolves around the establishment of a baseline of empowerment activity in London. By mapping what is available to citizens, it is also possible to identify the gaps and begin to determine what support and improvements will be necessary to boost empowerment in London. With many boroughs now working to meet NI4 targets, the LEP will utilize this research to assist LSPs to improve their NI4 scores and improve the status of community empowerment in their locality.

- **Improving the Evidence of Empowerment**

In order to enable LSPs and local authorities to effectively promote and improve community empowerment throughout their locality, the LEP will facilitate the collection and dissemination of examples of best practice throughout London. This involves assessing empowerment activities and initiatives, identifying those mechanisms which are particularly effective in empowering particular communities and acknowledging which are less effective, and ensuring that information-sharing is facilitated at all levels. The LEP has a number of different activities planned including:

- Applying the Community Empowerment Evaluation Model to empowerment activities to aid in the selection of best practice examples
- Utilising Empowering Diversity Action Research to identify the best ways of engaging with so-called 'hard to reach' groups
- Provide necessary training for Community Evaluators, enabling them to participate in evaluations of local empowerment activities

- **Collaboration with the Third Sector**

Activities under this theme will aim to explore the role of the Third Sector in promoting and enabling the community empowerment agenda. The LEP hopes to facilitate a greater understanding of how the Third Sector can help deliver outcomes against NI4 targets, as well as NI6 ('participation in regular volunteering') and NI7 ('environment for a thriving third sector'). This learning will be facilitated through a number of activities, including:

- An event exploring the role of the Third Sector
- A series of Action Learning Sets for Third Sector representatives on LSPs

- **Awareness Raising and Disseminating Information**

Many of the activities described previously will contribute towards the LEP's goals of raising the profile of community empowerment, increasing awareness of the ways in which community empowerment can foster a more participative and inclusive society, and disseminating key information pertaining to best practice to all members and local authorities. In addition to the activities already mentioned, the LEP plans to further these goals in the following ways:

- Establishing a bi-monthly LEP e-bulletin focusing on community empowerment
- Establishing and maintaining a website to disseminate information, tools and guidance regarding community empowerment and LEP activities and events
- Holding a series of regional events around particular areas of interest, particularly in regards to meeting NI4 targets. For example, an event on the Community Empowerment White Paper, an event on Participatory Budgeting, and one which highlights the role of the Third Sector.