

Summary of feedback from the discussion groups at the briefing for voluntary and community organisations held on 26th March 2002.

On 26th March 2002 Bristol City Council Neighbourhood Renewal Team held a briefing event on Neighbourhood Renewal for voluntary and community organisations at the Easton Community Centre. During the second part of the morning participants went into groups to consider local issues and priorities under the 5 neighbourhood renewal themes.

In this section the feedback is summarised for information and further comment. There were 5 groups each with a cross-section of stakeholders representing various sectors and interests; on a number of issues the feedback was quite similar. The views expressed here are those of the participants and should not be taken as representing the views of Bristol City Council.

Crime

Types of crime

There was unanimous agreement from the participants on the types of crime that are prevalent in the two wards these were seen to be: drug related offences, robbery and prostitution.

Domestic violence and racially motivated crime were also identified as issues for the community.

Hotspots (High risk areas)

Several participants identified Stapleton road and the surrounding areas as crime hot spots. The crossings over and under the A4320 and the A420 were also highlighted as areas where there is a high crime risk. As was the cycle track network that passes through the area.

It was felt that facilities such as phone boxes and a disused public toilet at the bottom end of Stapleton Road have been taken over by drug users and dealers.

Prevention

Participants suggested short and longer-term preventative approaches to tackling the crime problems in the area these were:

Closing down the Lawrence Hill underpass, decommissioning notorious telephone booths and the disused public convenience was widely supported in the feedback.

Better street lighting and CCTV particularly in areas that experience high levels of street crime were seen as priority areas. There was general agreement that more police were needed on the street. There were also

suggestions that the Neighbourhood warden scheme should be adopted in Easton and Lawrence Hill.

Longer-term solutions put forward were that more investment was needed in the area to address the socio-economic factors that contribute to high crime levels. It was felt that there needed to be a more effective approach to working with people with problems around drug addiction. Also suggested was a focus on educating people about their responsibilities to the wider community

Policy

A lot of the feedback about crime in the area at the day related to changes within National and local policy.

There was a strong feeling that social housing allocation policies needed to be reviewed to address the situation where high numbers of vulnerable tenant and tenants with a history of anti-social behaviour were concentrated within small communities. The argument was that for communities to be sustainable there needed to be a balanced mix of tenure type, income bracket and family size. It was also felt that the two wards had a higher than average number of hostels and that this adversely affected the general fabric of the community.

Another area of policy that drew significant attention was around drug enforcement. There were opposing views here, some thought that the 'Lambeth Experiment' could be adopted where a more lenient approach was taken by the police on possession cannabis and other 'softer' drugs in order to free up time to address more serious drug crime. On the other hand others felt that this would be a backwards step and that stricter enforcement and sentencing needed to be adopted across the board to deter people from offending.

It was suggested that Social Service could focus more on assisting families to 'parent' their children appropriately thus reducing the occurrence of youth crime and anti social behaviour.

Planning and co-ordination

A great deal of the comments were about the way in which public authorities could plan and co-ordinate their services between themselves, with other providers and with the community.

There were calls for all the agencies with a stake in tackling issues of crime within the area to communicate more effectively and clearly identify where responsibility lies for respective aspects of crime and anti-social behaviour strategy.

It was acknowledged that addressing the local crime problems would involve short, medium and long term strategic thinking and implementation. However,

this was often complicated by having specific funding for specific initiatives, which were not always brought together under one overall strategy.

Links were made between housing, social services and education in respect of tackling the underlying issues that contributed to crime in the area and it was felt that more could be done.

Resources

Many of the participants believed that the police in the area are under-resourced and that this affected the number of visible police on the streets, response times and the quality of the response.

It was noted that Stapleton road had been made a priority policing area, however it was felt that this too needed to be well resourced if it was to have any significant impact.

Education

Concerns

The major concerns highlighted on the day were around the poor educational attainment being achieved in local schools. It was suggested that the under-resourcing of mainstream educational institutions made it impossible for them to address the problems occurring in inner-city schools.

Some of the problems identified were high levels of absenteeism and truancy, bullying, large class sizes, inflexible and inappropriate curricula and a lack of responsiveness to cultural and equalities issues.

A great deal of the feedback also focussed on the limited additional learning support and extra curricula activities available to engage disaffected youths.

The wider role of educational institutions in providing learning opportunities for the community at large was a major area of discussion. It was felt that opportunities were not being maximised to deliver school age and adult learning that addressed areas where there is a skills deficit in the two wards. Some of the areas identified were around social, vocational and personal skills.

The idea of community schools and better community involvement in schools to make them more responsive to the needs of their local neighbourhoods was a popular one.

Transport and access to existing educational institutions was also seen as a problem

Provision of Learning Opportunities

It was suggested that access to pre-school provision needed to be improved so that all sections of the community could benefit.

One to one learning support to tackle under achievement and exclusions from school was put forward as an area that needed attention. There was general agreement that additional, alternative learning opportunities need to be developed for those who, for whatever reason, are not deriving sufficient benefit from the standard curriculum. Extra-curricula activities in general were felt to be scarce and under-resourced.

Most groups broached the subject of adult learning or lifelong learning. Participants fed back that where these existed they were poorly marketed or publicised. It was felt that in order to build skills in the community, existing facilities such as school buildings needed to be utilised far more effectively. An education voucher scheme that allowed individuals to pick and choose what and where they wanted to learn and a family learning approach involving different generations were two ideas suggested to promote lifelong learning. Another priority identified was the need to improve public access to computers.

There was some comment on the quality of educational opportunities available for people with learning difficulties; this was felt to be poor particularly for adults.

Co-ordination and Planning

It was felt that there was scope for improvement around communication between the various organisations involved in education. It was also suggested that more effective relationships between families and service providers within the sector should be developed.

There was agreement that schools had a vital role in neighbourhood renewal and that they should be engaged from the outset.

Employment

Issues

There was not a lot a feedback on employment, however most of it focused on the skills gap in the area and the lack of appropriate and accessible training opportunities within the community.

There was a strong feeling that local jobs did not go to local people and the and that all employers, including the city council needed to support the community by recruiting from within it.

The participants identified a need for opportunities to be developed within the area that matched existing skills and for government agencies to support such activities.

Support for people to find work or to set up small businesses was a key theme and it was felt that enterprise agencies in the area needed to adopt more effective outreach approaches in order to reach to the unemployed.

Issues such as discrimination against specific groups and also against their, home neighbourhoods were raised. Also highlighted were the barriers of childcare provision and the problems of finding work with a criminal record.

Service Provision

The feedback around existing provision and gaps in provision concentrated on skills training and information about employment opportunities. In one group it was felt that the assistance provided by the job centre need to be supported by additional services more sensitive to the local situation. It was argued that services needed to be responsive to the particular local difficulties encountered in finding work.

Co-ordination/Planning

It was identified that the high unemployment rate was linked to issues related to the other four neighbourhood renewal themes and that a co-ordinated approach at addressing associated problems would bring about improvements within employment rates.

The role of planners and the need for them to be aware of the needs of around employment was stressed.

Health

Issues

Problems identified were chiefly those that arise from living within a relatively deprived inner city community. Poor health was linked with poverty, environmental conditions, over-stretched health services and the high incidence of drug abuse.

Stress and mental health problems brought about by poor living conditions and low income featured highly in the feedback. The Bristol Debt Advice Service reported that 60% of their service users reported that their health suffered as a consequence of their problems.

The high incidence of drug usage was seen to have an adverse effect not just on the health of drug users but also on the community at large. This was said to occur because resident particularly those who are vulnerable did not always feel safe enough to leave their homes to access health and recreational

services. Some of the spaces provided for the community to use for recreational purposes were not used due to anti-social behaviour, open drug use and the risk of needle stick injuries.

The effects of run down buildings, illegal rubbish tips, rats and dog fouling were all mentioned as examples of how the environment impacted upon peoples health.

Children living in high-rise buildings with limited suitable play areas were also deemed to be at risk of poor health. Inner city pollution and it's reported links to asthma was raised in a number of groups.

The high incidence of caesarean birth and low rates of breast feeding were put forward as issues

Services

There were calls for services within the health sector to become more pro-active in addressing the issues of poor health in the community. Outreach services were supported as an approach to more accessible health care and health education.

It was felt that the area needed more investment in primary health provision – more GP's, and dentists and that the free prescription entitlement should be further extended. Early screening for health problems such as cancer was also suggested.

The need for alternative therapy and complementary health provision to be made available alongside mainstream services was identified.

Drug treatment and rehabilitation services were seen as vital if the problems in this area are to be dealt with.

Health services were reported to have difficulties in treating and influencing those within the community who do not have English as a first language. As such the need for translation services was identified as being crucial.

The participant called for an improvement in services for the elderly and people with mental health services and a more effective link up with social services.

It was suggested that fresh fruits and bottled water should be provided free of charge in schools. There was a proposal that plans for a birth centre in Easton should be supported.

There was an expressed desire to see the council cleansing services improve and more effectively contribute to a healthier community.

Planning/co-ordination

Better communication between health and social services a major theme of discussion. Also there were calls for the police and the health sector to work together on a co-ordinated drugs strategy.

Housing and the Environment

Issues

The main issues fed back under this section related to areas with poor physical housing conditions, housing management and anti-social behaviour and issues around service delivery.

Many participants highlighted the poor condition of the built and surrounding environment. The area was seen to have an unacceptable number of derelict and boarded up properties. It was suggested that the owners should be more effectively tracked down and that compulsory purchase orders be employed to tackle the problem. Many properties in the area were believed to have serious damp problems and it was suggested that improvements and group repair schemes needed to include all tenures including owner occupied homes.

The state of communal and public spaces also generated a great deal of comment. It was felt that there was not enough ownership of responsibility for the maintenance and improvement of these areas. Cleansing and dealing with abandoned vehicles were two examples given of this. The disused toilet block at the lower end of Stapleton Road was another.

Residents who regularly engaged in anti-social behaviour were also highlighted as a major problem within the area.

There were calls for more affordable decent homes of the right size to be developed and for more choice for those in need of housing, including out of town lettings.

The impact of traffic on was widely discussed. It was noted that the ward of Lawrence Hill was divided by major roads, which was seen to have a detrimental effect on the community and on the environment.

Home zoning was supported as an approach to make the area more conducive to local residents. Home zones are areas where pedestrians are prioritised and traffic is controlled.

Protection of green spaces also featured prominently in the discussions. It was felt that there were not enough green spaces and that there should be a firm commitment not to develop housing in such areas.

Planning/Co-ordination

Participants criticised what they saw as a lack of joined up thinking between the various housing providers. They called for a common lettings policy in order to move towards more sustainable communities.

There were also calls for better co-ordination between agencies involved in dealing with 'problem' residents.