



Japan Local Government Centre, London

Monthly Report for January 2010 (England) – Community Contracts

Background

A community contract (sometimes known as a neighbourhood or community charter or agreement) is a voluntary agreement signed between residents, service providers and elected representatives aimed at improving the quality of life in a defined area. The Department for Communities and Local Government has since 2005 developed and promoted the use of community contracts (in *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*), with the 2006 Local Government White Paper *Communities in Control* giving full government commitment to the policy. The white paper states:

“Community contracts create a clear set of obligations on the side of communities and the people who deliver their services, and encourage the idea of accountability between people and agencies.”

A typical community contract brings together residents, service providers and elected representatives to agree both priorities for the neighbourhood, such as tackling anti-social behaviour, litter and graffiti, as well as provide mechanisms for complaint if these are not dealt with, ranging from response commitments to even financial compensation. The aim is to both improve quality of life locally and also promote greater community engagement and encourage local citizens to become more active in the community, building trust, respect and confidence between those involved. There is no single format for the contracts, which are left to local discretion to determine their content and provisions.

Evaluation

Between January 2008 and February 2009, the department ran a community contracts pilot programme in 11 local authorities, managed by the National Association for Neighbourhood Management. Six of the pilots were later evaluated by the Institute for Political and Economic Governance at the University of Manchester on behalf of the department, using more in-depth research methods. Outside of the pilot programme, there were estimated to be 30 areas which had also agreed community contracts locally.

The pilot evaluation found that:

- the core idea of community contracts is attractive to all involved in them

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- community contracts offered service accountability
- while reporting of community problems did not increase as awareness of the contracts was low, residents had more effective channels through which to report them
- through more accountability, performance management and local intelligence, service quality was improved in those areas
- through service improvement and better use of resources, councils made efficiency gains
- community contracts had not tackled socio-economic problems locally but this was not their aim; they did however provide a basis to do so in future
- community contracts had enabled those involved to meet existing objectives for democratic renewal, community empowerment and service improvement

In conclusion, the evaluation report recommended:

- that one-size fits all contracts are avoided and local determination remains
- national guidance should state necessary conditions for implementation locally
- that more consideration is given to the 'two-way ask' aspect of contracts
- that the role of local councillors as enforcers and champions is better understood
- that future areas agreeing contracts receive tailored support, available to all

The department also noted three examples of successful contract working:

- in Sunderland, local residents agreed a Clean Green Safer contract between the social landlord which manages their estate and other providers. Since signing the contract, complaints about vandalism and littering have fallen.
- in Oldham a community contract between residents and the local police agreed a better response to reported crime. Residents later reported a better relationship with the police, less fear of crime and increased police visibility in the area.
- in Barnsley residents agreed a contract with the council for tackling vandalism and litter. The council now uses young people to promote the contract and provide feedback and residents now claim there is less vandalism and litter and increased satisfaction with council services.

The government will publish guidance on a national roll-out of community contracts to all areas which wish to have them later in spring.

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