Communities
and Local Government

Communications
Some lessons from the New Deal for Communities Programme

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The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Contents

1. Introduction

Background

1.1   In 1998 the Government launched The New Deal for Communities (NDC) Programme, a flagship component in their National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR). The NDC Programme is a significant Area Based Initiative (ABI) in that it is:

- implemented by dedicated NDC Partnerships charged with transforming 39 deprived English localities over ten years

- designed to achieve change in six key outcome areas: education, health, crime, worklessness, housing and the physical environment, and liveability

- driven through strategic plans drawn up by NDC Partnerships in cooperation with existing delivery agencies

- premised on the assumption that the 'community is at the heart' of neighbourhood renewal.

1.2   The need for the programme to develop partnerships that not only deliver change but do so by working in co-operation with existing delivery agencies and, most importantly, with the local community means that effective communication is central to their success.

Purpose of the report

1.3   The purpose of this report is to 'show and tell' how NDC Partnerships have communicated their messages to different audiences by taking lessons from what a sample of NDCs have learnt about communication and presenting them in a form that is of use to other neighbourhood based regeneration initiatives and regeneration practitioners. The report is not, however, a comprehensive exploration of all that NDCs have done in terms of communication.

1.4   The report answers three broad research questions:

- How have NDC Partnerships spread messages about what they have done, and achieved, to different stakeholders and audiences?

- What type of messages have NDC Partnerships communicated?

- What works well in communicating with different stakeholders and audiences?

    - How do communications strategies address diversity and equalities issues?

– How do communications strategies interact with community development strategies?

– How do NDC Partnership Boards link with communications activity?

– How do communications activities link to and coordinate with mainstream providers?

– How do communications strategies relate to succession planning?

1.5 The report looks at communication in it broadest sense and includes all forms of marketing, promotion and public relations whether it be planned or unplanned; tactical or reactionary; formal or informal.

1.6 The report primarily draws on the experiences of four case study areas as well as wider knowledge of the NDC programme and other literature. The four case study areas are:

• Hathershaw and Fitton Hill NDC in Oldham. An area with approximately 9,000 residents, made up of the two distinct neighbourhoods of Hathershaw and Fitton Hill.

• eb4U in East Brighton (as of April 2007 eb4U is now called the East Brighton New Deal for Communities Partnership). An area with a population of around 17,500 people covering six separate and distinct estates.

• Coventry NDC (Wood End, Henley Green, Manor Farm and Deedmore). An area with around 7,000 residents covering four residential estates.

• South Kilburn NDC. An area with approximately 7,500 residents across a group of estates.

1.7 The research in each of these areas involved reviews of documents (communication strategies, annual reports, newsletters, press releases, evaluation reports) and local media (press cuttings) as well as interviews and focus groups with a wide variety of people involved in different ways with the NDC Partnership including staff, local residents, key stakeholders and mainstream service providers. We would like to thank the participating NDC Partnerships for their co-operation in helping us to undertake this work.

2. How do NDC Partnerships communicate?

2.1   A key element in transforming an area, and a local community, is to inform and communicate to a wide a variety of stakeholders and audiences what has been done and achieved. This chapter considers the way in which NDCs have tackled the following:

- the development of their approach to communications
- categorisation of their key audiences
- communication with different audiences and the tools to be used
- management of communications activities within the NDCs.

Strategic approach

2.2   It is evident from all four of the case study areas that communication does not just happen and that it is important to develop a strategic approach. The NDCs have addressed this by committing time and resources, through project funding, to develop communications strategies.

2.3   In general, communications strategies have outlined the aims and objectives of communications activity, detailing the different audiences the NDC needs to communicate with, the different messages it wants to convey and the tools it will use to do this.

2.4   These strategies have also been clearly separate and distinct from community development strategies. Although, because of the commonality of aims around the need to raise awareness of the NDC and engage people in the activities of the NDC there has inevitably been some cross over between the work of the communications team and the community development team (an issue that is explored in more detail in Chapter 4).

Key audiences

2.5   Identifying and agreeing the key audiences are central to any form of communication activity. A comprehensive understanding of who the NDCs are trying to communicate with is the first step in the process of developing communication tools (see below) and beginning to communicate key messages (see next section).

2.6   The inherent nature of NDCs requires Partnerships to develop strategies and activities that not only work closely with key mainstream service providers, but also involve the local community in both activity and programme delivery.

As a result NDC Partnerships have a wide variety of key audiences. Audiences that between them have starkly different experiences, knowledge, interests and (perhaps most importantly) agendas.

2.7   Box 2-1 sets out how each of the four case study Partnerships categorises their different audiences.

Box 2-1: Categorisation of Audiences

South Kilburn saw their audiences in terms of 'key targets' for communications materials and as a result identified the following groups:

- Board members and staff
- Residents of South Kilburn and the London Borough of Brent
- Partnership organisations and other interested parties
- Relevant government officials
- Local MPs, MEP's and councillors
- Other local authorities (in particular the surrounding Boroughs of Harrow, Ealing, Camden and Westminster)
- Local businesses
- Local voluntary organisations
- Local activists
- Excluded groups (to be identified by the Widening Participation Group)
- Local institutions such as colleges, schools, community centre's and emergency services
- Faith groups
- Young and old
- Families

Hathershaw and Fitton Hill felt that their target audience were all those that 'had a stake' in the area and could 'influence its future', and therefore identified the following groups:

- The local community
- The NDC board and resident board members
- NDC employees
- Project providers
- Investors, funders and partner organisations
- Other NDCs
- Local media
- Key influencers and gatekeepers

eb4U focused on five key audience groups:

- Residents
- Staff/projects
- Partners (organisations hosting and managing NDC funded projects)
- National and regional opinion formers
- Wider city (including the community and voluntary and business sectors)

Coventry had a different approach and viewed their audiences at three different levels:

- Primary – which included the NDC community/residents; the Partnership Board; and Internal Staff
- Secondary – which included Partner Organisations; local agencies; local businesses; local organisations; the media; and local/national opinion formers
- Tertiary – the wider Coventry Community.

2.8 Whilst each NDC has a broadly similar range of audiences and stakeholders, they group or categorise them in different ways. These fall in to seven broad groups that are key to all NDC partnerships – groups that would no doubt be common amongst most if not all neighbourhood based regeneration initiatives:

- **The Local Community** – all residents including all the associated sub-groups: families, BME groups, older and younger people, disabled people, the long term unemployed and other community groups or resident associations.

- **Partnership Board members** – including resident members, agency members and those who are members through other responsibilities such as being a local councillor or MP (see Box 2-2 below).

- **Staff and project providers** – all those involved in commissioning, managing or delivering project activity.

- **Local Investors, Funders and Partner Organisations** – including the local authority, the Government Office, the Police, the Primary Care Trust (PCT), local primary and secondary Schools, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE) institutions, social services, housing associations, Job Centre Plus, community and voluntary sector (CVS) organisations and the private sector (including local businesses).

- **National and Regional Opinion Formers** – including local and national MPs, Councillors, the Regional Development Agency (RDA), other local authorities and celebrities or personalities with links to the areas.

- **The Media** – including local press, radio and television as well as national 'trade' press.

- **People in the Wider Area** – all those resident in the areas surrounding the regeneration area.
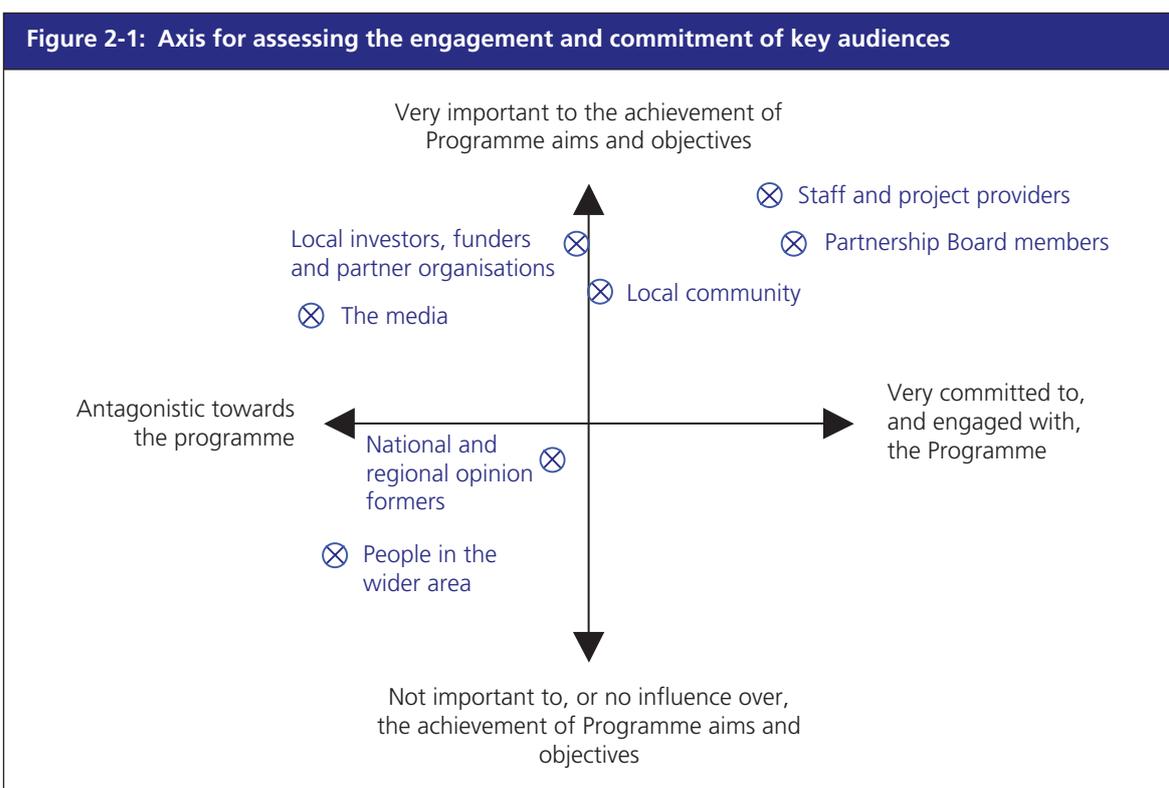

Box 2-2: The Partnership Board

Each NDC has a Partnership Board in place which provides strategic direction for the organisation and is usually the structure through which programme spend receives final approval. There are a number of different models that have been adopted by NDCs in relation to the legal structure of the organisation, e.g. some NDCs have established themselves as companies limited by guarantee whereby Board members are Directors of the company. In such cases the NDC is subject to Memorandum and Articles of association which clearly govern the structure of the organisation and set out the rules and procedures for making decisions.

Whilst there are variations between the legal structures of NDCs and their Boards, there is broad commonality with respect to the composition of Partnership Boards. Each NDC Board is typically made up of 12–20 people. These are made up of elected local residents (usually in the majority) and other stakeholders relating to each of the NDC's key themes. This usually comprises representation from the Police, Jobcentre Plus, the Primary Care Trust, local business community, voluntary sector, schools sector and the local authority. Other Board members might include other relevant stakeholder groups with an interest in the area, e.g. local Councillors or an MP.

2.9   Each different audience also has different communication requirements, a factor that all of the case study areas formally acknowledges. This means a 'one size fits all' approach is not possible. Each group, and even the sub-groups within them, will often need to be communicated with in a different way. For instance, the Partnership Board require detailed information about finance, projects' progress and performance management, where as the local community does not need such detail but rather the headline information about progress and performance.

2.10   It is not just the form of communication that differs between different groups but also the actual purpose of communication: some forms of communication will be designed to engage, others to inform and others to influence. For instance it is important that communication to the local community encourages them to engage with the Partnership whereas it is important that communication to the local media positively influences its (often) negative portrayal of the area.

2.11   These differences in requirement and purpose mean that it is also possible, and sensible, to categorise audiences further. Firstly they could be categorised according to the influence they exercise over the achievement of aims and objectives: who **shapes** the 'environment' and context of the work; who **influences** the goals; who is relevant to achieving the goals but **follows** the shapers and influencers; and who will observe but not participate – the **bystanders**.

2.12   Secondly, and linked to the first, it is important to understand the level of commitment and engagement that exists amongst the different audiences and whether communications need to focus on increasing the engagement and commitment of a particular audience.

2.13   Figure 2-1 is an example of how partners/audiences might be viewed in terms of their role within and commitment to the Programme. This could be used to assess where partners are in relation to where the Programme needs them to be. The communications strategy could then be developed – along with other activities – to help move people to where they need to be, in order for the Programme to succeed. For example, moving the media from being antagonistic to at least being neutral about the Programme.

2.14   None of the case studies used the model in an explicit form, however, some of their activity can be understood in relation to the model

Figure 2-1: Axis for assessing the engagement and commitment of key audiences

Communication tools

2.15   Like the different audiences the communication tools and methods used to spread the messages about the NDC vary between partnerships. However, it was apparent from the four case study NDCs that there is a large degree of commonality between the Partnerships – many of which are 'tried and tested' means of communicating. The key communication tools can therefore by summarised as follows:

Newsletters are seen as a key tool for communicating and promoting the work of the NDC to the local community (see Annex A for larger versions of the Newsletters)

- **Literature** – NDCs publish a wide variety of literature aimed at communicating with different groups including newsletters, annual reports, project directories and brochures. The primary product is the Newsletter which all four case study areas produced, in a 'glossy' and attractive format, on either a monthly or bi-monthly basis. The Newsletter is seen as the key tool for communicating with the local community and through short, colourful and interesting articles aims to promote the work of the NDC Partnership.

- **e-communications** – The website is often the key 'portal' into the NDC for both residents and other audiences providing a wide variety of information in a relatively easy and accessible form. Emails and e-bulletins also provide an effective way of getting information out to a wide audience. They are often the key means for communicating with partner organisations and project providers.

- **Board meetings** – Are a means for the staff to communicate with Board members about performance and delivery issues across the programme. In turn Board members representing local residents, key agencies and other stakeholders are able to disseminate this information within the wider community and amongst mainstream service providers.

- **Press releases** – In a proactive attempt to address local negative press coverage and spread the messages about the work of the NDC Partnership all four case study areas use regular press releases. The production of press releases provides a very effective means to communicate the key activities, good news stories and upcoming events or issues occurring within the NDC Partnership. The four case study areas produce between three and eight press releases a month with between 50 and 80 per cent subsequently reported on in the local press.

- **Events** – The use of large events or fun days, often around a particular theme, takes place throughout the year. These events provide a good opportunity to bring together the local community and enable them to interact with project and Partnership staff to raise the profile of the NDC Partnership.

- **Branding** – The use of a wide variety of different products with the NDC logo on, all aimed at raising the awareness of the NDC amongst both the community and other stakeholders. The case study areas all use a wide range of different products from the small: pens, mouse-mats, calendars and T-shirts. To the big: bins and lamp-post banners. The Partnerships also ensure that their logo is displayed by any project they fund.

- **Campaigns** – In order to publicise and communicate information about a specific event or meeting a number of posters and fliers are produced and distributed throughout the area.

- **Word of mouth** – Using direct face to face communication. This occurs either formally through meetings or groups such as 'Walker Talkers' (Box 2-3) or informally as the different people involved simply 'chat' to one another. This means of communication is key to all of the different NDC audiences whether they are local residents, key service providers or the media.

Box 2-3: Walker Talkers

Both **eb4U** and **South Kilburn** have developed 'Walker Talker' projects or groups as a means of formalising and encouraging word of mouth communication.

eb4U has set up Walker Talkers to act as a two way communication channel for issues and information. Outreach focused projects, including community development projects and neighbourhood wardens, are responsible for talking with residents to promote eb4U and agreed key messages and also to get feedback and identify any particular issues that exist within the community on a three weekly cycle.

South Kilburn's Walker Talkers was started by a group of three residents involved in the NDC Partnership. These residents would go around the area and talk to other local residents, telling them about NDC projects, handing out leaflets, undertaking survey work and getting general feedback from the community, acting as a conduit for information sharing between the NDC and residents.

Management and delivery

2.16   The processes used and responsibility for management and delivery of communications varies. It can be managed 'in-house' by the NDC Partnership outsourced to a specialist PR and media firm, or it can be a combination of the two.

2.17   All four of the case study areas used a different approach to management and delivery. These different approaches are illustrated in Boxes 2.4 to 2.7.

Box 2-4: eb4U (East Brighton)

eb4U's management and delivery of communications has varied significantly over the lifetime of the NDC Partnership. The communications team was first established as a project in 2002 as a team of four – a manager, two assistants and an administrator – responsible for the management and delivery of all of eb4U's communication. However, at the end of the project funding in July 2005 the Board took a decision to stop funding the communications project and eb4U's communication is now managed by the 'Customer Relations Manager' with PR and production of the newsletter outsourced to a local PR and media firm. A local social enterprise, 'East Communications', developed out of the old communications project and is included in commercial tenders for services such as production of publications – primarily because of their strong knowledge of the Programme.

Box 2-5: Hathershaw and Fitton Hill (Oldham)

All of **Hathershaw and Fitton Hill's** communication is managed through the communications team – a Manager and an assistant - which was established in 2005. Up until that point there had been no strategy or programme in place. The team is responsible for all elements of communication and are currently putting together a new project bid for more funding so that as well as continuing the existing work they can run more events and develop multi-media campaigns.

Box 2-6: Coventry

For the first three years of **Coventry's** NDC programme the communications activity was carried out through an external PR and marketing company. This was changed in 2005 with the appointment of a Communications Manager (and assistant) and the development of a communications project which brought the management and delivery of communications 'in house'. The Communications Team was also strengthened in 2006 with the addition of a Web and Graphics Officer to the team to develop the NDC website and e-communications.

Box 2-7: South Kilburn

Communications activity in **South Kilburn** has been delivered in-house by a Communications Manager and Project Officer. The Communications Manager joined in September 2002 and her first job was to put together the communications project in order to release funding. Prior to this communications activity had focused on the setting up of a small scale NDC newsletter. The first communications project was developed through a steering group of 7-8 Board members. They agreed the aims and objectives for communication activity. A communications strategy was established as part of the first communication project, and has been developed and refined in the subsequent two communications projects. To date, communications activity has been funded as three NDC projects which have run back-to-back, and has been delivered by a team of 2 (Communications Manager and Communications Officer).

3. What type of messages have NDC Partnerships communicated?

3.1 Effectively communicating key messages is fundamental to the success of NDC Partnerships and as can be expected, there is a clear link between the messages communicated and the process of growth and development experienced by the NDC Partnership. Therefore, as the focus of the programme changes and the NDC matures so do the messages that need to be communicated.

3.2 It is apparent from the four case study areas that there are three basic stages in the 'lifecycle' of NDC Partnerships, each of which requires different messages to be communicated (Table 3-1):

- **Raising awareness and increasing involvement** – As new organisations, in some of the most deprived areas in the country, they faced significant challenges in terms of communication as they not only needed to inform people of their 'existence' as an organisation but also why they existed, how they wanted to work and what they sought to achieve.

- **Programme and project development, progress and success** – As they developed and grew as organisations the messages that needed to be communicated changed, beginning to focus more on what was being done and what had been achieved and less on profile and awareness raising.

- **Sustainability and the legacy of the programme** – Finally, as NDCs enter the final stages of delivery, the messages that need to be communicated have changed again; focusing on the tricky issues of what is happening to the programme, what will remain and continue after the NDC funding has ceased and what legacy has been left, in relation to community capacity, mainstream commitments and long term social, economic or housing benefits.

Table 3-1: The NDC lifecycle and the messages that need to be communicated			
Phase	**Phase 1 – Start Up**	**Phase 2 – Delivery**	**Phase 3 – Succession and Exit**
Key Messages	• Awareness • Involvement	• Development • Progress • Successes	• Next steps • Legacy
Key Audiences	• Local community • Local investors, funders and partner organisations	• Local community • Local investors, funders and partner organisations • National and regional opinion formers • The media	• Local community • Partnership Board members • Local investors, funders and partner organisations • National and regional opinion formers • The media
Key Tools	• Literature e.g. newsletters • Events • Branding • Campaigns • Word of mouth	• Literature e.g. newsletters • Press releases • Branding • Word of mouth	• Literature e.g. newsletters • Board meetings • Campaigns • Word of mouth

Source: SQW

3.3 In addition to the messages that sit alongside the development of the programme there are also those issues that require effective communication throughout the lifetime of the NDC programme. From the four case study areas two broad issues are particularly apparent:

- communication of **specific issues and 'hot-topics'**, such as particular issues of anti-social behaviour and actions to be taken

- the **rebuttal and management of bad publicity**, such as, local media coverage of delays in achieving outcomes.

3.4 Communication on these different messages would have been difficult in most circumstances, but they have been further complicated by the fact that they had to be communicated against a backdrop of high, and invariably long-term, deprivation; negative perceptions of the area amongst residents, stakeholders and the local media; and a general dissatisfaction amongst those who lived in the area with 'the government', 'the council' and other public services.

3.5 The remainder of this chapter looks in more detail these different messages, thinking particularly about: what the message was and how it was constructed; who the target audiences were and how they were identified; what means of communication were used; and what impact they had.

Raising awareness and increasing involvement

3.6 One of the first messages that NDCs have sought to communicate is their existence. In order to succeed it was fundamental that the NDCs established themselves as organisations that were central to the future regeneration of the area. Therefore, one of the key communication aims has been to raise people's awareness: awareness that the NDC exists as an organisation and awareness of what they are seeking to achieve and how they want to do it. It is a priority that has remained central to their communication throughout the lifetime of the programme.

3.7 However, the aim is not just to ensure that people have 'heard' about the NDC but to translate this awareness into involvement. Therefore, the message communicated does not just end at 'this is who we are' or 'this is what we do' but continues with 'this is what you can do', 'this is how you can get involved' or 'this is what role you can play'.

3.8 In communicating this message the NDC has two target audiences. The first is the local community, those people who lived within the NDC area. In order for NDCs to succeed as both a programme and as a means of intervention, the local community has to be aware of them and has to be involved in the process. In the early stages, the NDCs needed to recruit residents to be on the partnership board, understand residents' needs and desires for the area and to engage residents in the different projects developed in order to impact positively upon their lives.

3.9 The second target audience is local and regional mainstream public service providers and stakeholders including the local authority, the police, the PCT, the LSC, local schools and Jobcentre plus. Many of these organisations were involved at the 'bidding stage' of the NDC process, but it was important from the outset of the programme that these organisations and their employees (at differing seniority levels) knew what the NDC was doing and how their work could link to it, in order to ensure the greatest impact and benefit.

3.10 In order to engage these two different audiences and raise awareness of and involvement in the NDC, a wide variety of communication methods were used including different forms of literature, poster and flier campaigns, corporate branding through different products, area-wide events and face to face meetings and consultations. The aim was to simply 'get the message out' to as large an audience as possible in as many different ways as possible.

Different events provide an effective means of raising the awareness of the NDC and engaging the local community

Recognisable logos, that can also be used to 'brand' different products, help to raise awareness of the NDC

3.11   The focus on raising local awareness of the NDC has had a measurable
        positive impact, with the Ipsos-MORI Household surveys generally showing
        progressive increases in the numbers who were 'aware' of the NDC (Table
        3-2). The levels of awareness and willingness to be involved amongst the
        local community has also been reflected by stable, if not increasing, numbers
        involved in different NDC projects and a continual, if small, stream of
        residents who are willing to be part of the Partnership board or members of
        different theme/steering groups.

Table 3-2: Proportion of residents aware of NDC 2002–2006				
NDC	2002	2004	2006	Change 02–06
All NDCs	63%	79%	80%	17%
Coventry	21%	67%	81%	60%
eb4U (Brighton)	52%	75%	79%	27%
Hathershaw and Fitton Hill (Oldham)	69%	86%	90%	21%
South Kilburn	55%	70%	76%	21%

Source: Ipsos-MORI

3.12 The communication of this message has also helped to maintain the involvement of a wide variety of local stakeholders and agencies particularly by ensuring that new members of agency staff have the appropriate background information and knowledge of the NDC.

Programme and project development, progress and success

3.13 During the early years of the programme the NDC Partnerships faced a significant challenge as often both the area and the Partnership were viewed negatively by a range of different audiences including residents, key stakeholders and the local media who all seemed to be questioning what difference the money was making. Therefore, a key need was to highlight the things that were developing, that changes were being made and that the area was improving.

3.14 It was vital that the NDCs communicated their progress and their successes to a range of audiences particularly those dissatisfied with the work of the NDCs to date. This work tended to focus on residents and the local media but did include some other stakeholders and partners as well as regional opinion formers. The communication of positive messages was closely linked to engagement and involvement, as NDCs thought there was a positive correlation between the level to which people were involved and the perceptions that people had about both the NDC area and the NDC Partnership: the more they were involved the more positive they felt, the more changes they saw and the more they felt that a difference was being made.

3.15 In order to communicate this the NDC used a variety of different tools:

- **Newsletters** – were a key tool for all four of the case study areas in showcasing successful projects, reporting positive changes and highlighting the wide scope of activity that was being undertaken by the NDC. As the newsletters were delivered to every household in the NDC areas they provided an effective means of communicating success and impact to all local residents.

- **Press releases** – provided a good means of informing a very wide range of audiences, because of the wide circulation of the local press, about the work and impact of the NDC. There was also a sense that their publication in the press gave them extra kudos amongst local residents. The use of 'personal' good news stories also provided an effective means of showing that the NDC does impact at a personal and individual level.

- **Branding** – particularly placing corporate logos on physical developments and project locations provided a good way of highlighting to those living or working in the area that work was happening and, especially in the case of physical developments, that positive improvements were being made.

- **Word of mouth** – was perhaps the most effective method of communicating success particularly amongst residents and mainstream providers. Whether it occurred formally or informally getting people to tell others about and share their positive experiences of the NDC and its projects, provided one of the most effective means of spreading 'good news', especially as people were more likely to 'trust' the views of their peers and colleagues than they might written articles and reports.

Placing corporate logos on physical developments and project locations provides a good way of highlighting to those living or working in the area that work is happening

3.16   Whilst there are many different factors that can and do affect the popularity of and satisfaction with an area, effective communication – especially about how the area is improving and the changes that are occurring – can contribute to increased satisfaction. There is a sense that the different forms of communication have had a positive impact on how people view and perceive their NDC area and Partnership. This is perhaps illustrated by the higher satisfaction levels found in the Ipsos-MORI household survey (Table 3-3). The consultations also showed that partner organisations and stakeholders now have a much more positive view of the NDC and the work that it does than they did when they first got involved. Other indicators of improved perceptions of the area, such as increases in house prices and the numbers of people moving into the area have also generally increased.

Table 3-3: Proportion of residents very/fairly satisfied with the NDC area 2002–2006				
NDC	2002	2004	2006	Change 02–06
All NDCs	60%	66%	71%	11%
Coventry	58%	63%	63%	5%
eb4U (Brighton)	71%	74%	77%	6%
Hathershaw and Fitton Hill (Oldham)	55%	63%	65%	10%
South Kilburn	66%	68%	82%	16%

Source: Ipsos-MORI

Sustainability and the legacy of the programme

3.17   NDC Partnerships have now moved into their final stage of delivery and the focus of the programme is now on sustainability and the legacy that will be left behind. At this final stage there are a number of important messages that need to be communicated to a variety of different audiences.

3.18   The main messages that need to be communicated by the NDCs relate to what will happen in the future. It is important that all of the different audiences understand, firstly, that the NDC funding will cease, and that secondly – as a result – there will be changes to how the NDC Partnership operates (if they continue to operate at all) and what activity occurs in the area. The exact change will vary between NDC Partnerships but all Partnerships need to communicate (often far-reaching and radical) change clearly.

3.19   Within the general communications about the future there are a number of specific messages that need to be communicated to different audiences. These include:

- The need to communicate to the **local community** that there will not be as much activity and that some of the different projects they currently benefit from will stop. Good communications can play a key role in not only preparing residents and users for this event but in signposting them to other similar mainstream activities.

- There is also the need to communicate to the **local community** any new structure/organisation that is being developed, especially if it requires community involvement and membership. The success of these new structures, like the NDC Partnerships themselves, will rely in part on their ability to engage with the local community. Therefore, it is important that the community is aware of the new structure/organisation that is proposed and the specific role that members of the community can play in it.

- The need to ensure that **project providers and community groups** are aware that they will need to find other funding sources once the NDC funding ceases. It is important that this message is communicated early so that these providers and groups begin looking at different sustainability options sooner rather than later.

- Highlighting to **mainstream providers and funders** those successful projects that need mainstream funding to continue. It is important that this communication focuses on the impact and difference made by the individual projects. Integrated communication strategies are necessary to ensure that staff at all levels, and particularly those in regular contact with service providers, are supported with evidence and advice on key messages to clearly demonstrate where mainstream provision is needed to fill those gaps left by the completion of NDC funding of projects.

3.20   Communicating about the sustainability and legacy of the programme requires a variety of tools including different forms of literature, specific campaigns and word of mouth. The challenge, regardless of the tool employed, is to ensure that all the different audiences understand what is going to happen and how it might affect them.

3.21   Despite this change in the focus of the programme, there does not yet appear (at the time of writing) to be the appropriate change in messages from the NDCs. The case study areas provided only limited examples where they had sought to communicate about their plans for sustainability (Box 3-1).

> ### Box 3-1: Communicating plans for sustainability
>
> **eb4U** has established a community development trust and neighbourhood management arrangements to take some of its work forward. It involved Board members – residents and partner agencies – in the process and communicated options to them via a focused Board meeting, which was preceded by some one-to-one consultations.
>
> The Board Briefing was supported by a presentation, which took Board members through: triggers for change, changes in the policy environment, the life cycle of the programme, issues raised by succession, options and costs for taking the NDC's work forward, the timetable, governance issues and costs.
>
> Following the Board briefing, a newsletter was published that focused on the 'way forward' for eb4U and provided details on the new arrangements the residents who would be on the Trust's board. This was followed by a press release, published in the regeneration press, detailing the new arrangements.
>
> **Coventry NDC** has established the Moat House Community Trust as the successor body for the NDC. The Trust is currently working towards gaining charitable status and hopes to have this in place by the time the NDC programme ends. In these early stages the NDC has sought to communicate the work and vision of the Moat House Community Trust through briefings and presentations to local stakeholders and mainstream providers as well as including information about the Trust in the NDC 'news bulletins'.

3.22   This apparent 'gap' in communication and the reasons why it has developed are explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Specific issues and 'hot topics'

3.23   One of the common themes that has remained throughout the programme is the need for and importance of communications related to specific issues or 'hot-topics' in the local area. While these issues or topics varied between the different areas, they tended to focus on issues that were relevant and pertinent to local residents – 'personal significance' – or issues where there was particular uneasiness or worry amongst local residents – 'public concern'. The issues included certain crimes blighting an area, public health issues affecting an area or large scale housing redevelopment plans or stock transfers that involved the rebuilding and redesign for significant parts of the area and major changes to people's lives (Box 3-2).

Box 3-2: Communicating a specific issue or 'hot topic'

In **Hathershaw and Fitton Hill** a comprehensive programme was developed to communicate to residents the Hathershaw and Fitton Hill Spatial Masterplan, "an ambitious and exciting long term vision to transform and modernise the area". This communication programme included: initial consultation with residents about their ideas and preferences for the area; detailed newsletters outlining the masterplan process, the preferred options and diagrams about the development; media briefings to the local press about the plans; letters and the offer of a one to one interview to those residents directly affected in terms of their house being rebuilt; and 'road shows' and events providing further opportunities to comment and ask questions. (A similar process has also occurred in Coventry and South Kilburn where similar large redevelopment and masterplanning programmes are occurring).

In **Coventry** an issue of the Newsletter focused on the problem of troublesome motorbikes and dangerous driving. The front page of the Newsletter used a dramatic photo of motorcycles being crushed under the headline of "CRUSHING ISSUE" "'Your Shout' [the Newsletter] gets to the bottom of problem bikes". Inside there was then a double page spread detailing the facts as well as identifying, with pictures, the four bikes that were still causing trouble in the area along with a number to call to report owners in complete confidence. Immediately after the article the police received calls from a number of different residents. Following this good response the Police, in partnership with the NDC, then produced a leaflet that specifically targeted the bike problem along with further details on how to report problem bikes.

3.24   The primary aim of communicating about these different issues is to inform the local community and either to provide the 'facts' about something that is happening or to raise the awareness about a particular issue and what the NDC is doing to address it.

3.25   In order to communicate these different messages to the local community a number of different communication tools are used. Firstly, information is often communicated through existing routes such as the Newsletter where the issue or topic in question would be the 'theme' of an issue and, therefore, addressed in a number of articles. Secondly, information is communicated through new and special routes, for example, where larger housing and masterplanning issues had to be addressed (an issue in three of the four case study areas).

3.26   In the case studies with major housing and master planning issues a variety of different methods of communication were used, including:

- specific literature that detailed the schemes and what was happening – providing information about timings and phasing, offering opportunities for consultation and quashing rumours by highlighting and answering some of the 'myths' that were developing within the community

- specific events that allowed residents to ask questions, see architects' models and plans, feed ideas into the process and raise any other concerns that they had

- door-knocking throughout the whole area so that every resident knew what was happening (had they ignored the other information), could ask questions and were aware of the implications to them personally – a fact that was particularly pertinent for those residents who would have to move home.

3.27   The communications on issues of 'personal significance' or 'public concern' had a notably greater impact than communication around other lesser or more general programme issues. For example, communications around specific issues and 'hot topics' attracted more people to events, got greater responses to consultation requests and engaged more people in the work of the NDC.

3.28   In terms of housing redevelopment issues, the involvement of the NDC also greatly assisted the work of those partners leading the redevelopment and masterplanning process, as the NDCs provided: 'ready-made' and often strong links to the local community; existing structures and methods for communicating with local residents and for getting information out to them; and a respected avenue through which to provide the 'facts' and quash rumours associated with major redevelopments and, therefore, minimise residents' fears.

3.29   Effective communication of housing redevelopment or masterplanning issues is also extremely important because the redevelopment scheme will invariably form a significant part of the legacy left by the NDC Partnership. Therefore, it is key that the NDC not only communicates its role in the process but that the local community feels positive about and are generally supportive of the scheme.

Rebuttal and management of bad publicity

3.30   Negative press coverage can severely damage any organisation's reputation and this was especially the case with NDC Partnerships in their early years of the programme. The difficulty of setting up a new organisation coupled with the high profile the NDC programme had at a national level and the wide-spread awareness that that the areas were receiving 'significant' amounts of funding, quickly resulted in negative coverage in the local press. It seemed that there was an unrealistic expectation amongst the local community and media that the funding would begin to change the area 'over-night'. Therefore when this did not happen there were a number of negative stories about the failure of the organisation itself, about the failure to involve residents and give them their 'say' and about how money was being wasted. In some areas there was some degree of truth in the negative coverage, and the need on the part of the local media to get a 'good story' sometimes led

to an exaggeration of problems resulting in more negative coverage than was necessary.

3.31   This negative coverage was extremely damaging for two broad reasons. Firstly, the fact that it was in local or regional press meant that it was read by a far greater audience of both residents and stakeholders than the NDC's own communication, and for many it was their only source of information about the NDC. Secondly, it undermined positive stories or progress reported by the NDC, so much so that positive coverage was often simply regarded as 'spin'.

3.32   Therefore the challenge for the NDC Partnerships was to develop an approach and messages that enabled them not only to rebut negative press but address the negative views and opinions held by many of the journalists involved in reporting on the area. To do this, NDC partnerships adopted a two pronged approach. The first was to improve their ability to communicate programme and project development, success and progress (see above) both directly to the local community but also to the local press particularly through the regular production of press releases (Box 3-3).

Box 3-3: Press Releases

Press releases provide an effective means of informing the local media about what is happening in the area. All of the case study areas aimed to produce a number of different positive press releases each month.

The press releases would publicise events and projects; highlight a particular achievement (such as a drop in burglary figures) or area of success; promote the launch of new initiatives (such as the creation of a new Job Shop); provide information on capital projects or masterplan processes; and anything else that is deemed newsworthy. Press releases were also produced in reaction to negative or untrue stories as they provided a good opportunity to outline the facts.

The press releases outlined very clearly what was happening in the area with specific dates, times and venues (if appropriate). They also always included: a clear reference, often in the first or second paragraph, to the NDC Partnership and the NDC area; quotations from the key people involved, at least one of which would be a local resident; and details of other funders and partner organisations involved.

3.33   The second prong was to develop personal relationships with key journalists through members of the communication team meeting them and giving them tours around the area, so that they could see what was and is happening. These relationships not only helped to change the journalists' perceptions of the area but they also meant that articles would generally not be published without checking the facts with (or looking for 'comment' from) the NDC.

3.34   This approach has certainly had a positive impact on the press coverage received by the case study NDC Partnerships, as now the majority of coverage in the local press is about 'good news' stories, successful projects and the ways in which the area has improved. This change is of course partly due to the maturity of the NDC Partnerships and the fact that they have developed as organisations, created strong relationships with the local community and delivered a wide range of activities. However, the role of press releases and one to one relationships with key journalists in getting this information out should not be underestimated. The one-to-one relationships have also helped to reduce the number of, and the impact of, negative articles, as the local press has someone to go to, in order to correct 'false stories' or to comment on 'bad news reported accurately'.

4. What works well in communicating with different stakeholders and audiences?

4.1   It is clear that NDCs have used different approaches and tools to communicate a variety of different messages. The key question, therefore, is how successful have the different approaches and tools been? It is a question that this chapter seeks to answer by firstly examining how success was measured and then looking not just at what has worked well, but also at:

- how communications have addressed the key issues of equalities and diversity
- how communications interact with community development strategies
- how Partnership Boards link with communications activity
- how communications impact on the relationships with mainstream providers and stakeholders
- how communications strategies relate to succession planning.

How was success measured?

4.2   NDC Partnerships have found evaluating the success of different communication approaches and tools difficult. So many different communication methods are used that it is often hard to differentiate between the impact of one particular method. A further complexity is the fact that for a number of tools such as the newsletters or poster/flier campaigns it is very difficult to know how many people are actually reading and benefiting from them.

4.3   The Ipsos-MORI Household Survey, which occurs every two years, does provide a number of indicators to which communication activities are one of a number of different contributing factors. For example, communications activities will directly help to raise resident 'awareness of the NDC' and to inform residents that the 'NDC area has improved'. They will also indirectly help to raise resident 'involvement in NDC activity' through the regular promotion of NDC activities and the provision of information on how to get involved, and raise the number of residents who 'feel they can influence decisions' by informing them about how they can influence decisions and providing feedback on the influence that their involvement has had (Table 4-1). However, whilst these are helpful indicators and proxies for the success of communications activity, it should be noted that they do not

provide the detailed information required to know which tools are more successful than others, what methods work best with which audiences, or what different messages need to be communicated.

Table 4-1: Proportion of residents: aware of the NDC, involved in NDC activity; feel they can influence decisions; and feel that the NDC has improved the area a great deal/fair amount 2002–2006												
NDC	Aware of the NDC (%)			Involved in NDC Activity (%)			Feel they can influence decisions (%)			Feel that the NDC has improved the area a great deal/fair amount (%)		
2002–2006	'02	'04	'06	'02	'04	'06	'02	'04	'06	'02	'04	'06
All NDCs	63	79	80	16	19	22	23	24	25	33	51	57
Coventry	21	67	81	26	22	24	17	16	22	27	36	46
eb4U (Brighton)	52	75	79	18	26	26	20	23	23	37	46	45
Hathershaw and Fitton Hill (Oldham)	69	86	90	13	16	22	15	11	26	13	32	54
South Kilburn	55	70	76	15	27	35	27	29	23	31	53	60

Source: Ipsos-MORI

4.4   In addition to the household survey a number of different measures have also been developed and used by the case study areas to evaluate success (Box 4-1).

4.5   It is clear therefore, that in measuring success the focus is very much on communication with the local community – there is little measurement of how successful communication methods and tools have been with other audiences.

Box 4-1: Methods for measuring success

South Kilburn and **eb4U** have both included 'reader surveys' as part of their newsletters. The survey asked people for feedback on both the different communications methods used by the NDC and the NDC in general. The positive of this method is that it enables direct feedback from residents although the drawback is the generally low response rate.

South Kilburn's survey found that: 70% of respondents always read the magazine and that 30% would like to get more involved with the work of the NDC but it also found the 59% of respondents have never visited the NDC website and the 74% had never used an NDC project.

South Kilburn set up an interactive forum where 100 residents were invited and simultaneously answered questions about the NDC including its communications using interactive pads. This method was successful and proved to by a really quick, open, transparent and popular way of getting feedback.

eb4U commissioned an independent company to conduct an analysis of media coverage. This review looked at the volume of coverage and 'name checks'; positive versus negative coverage; the proportion of coverage related to each theme; and the level of coverage in each media category.

The analysis found that in 2003 there was a total of 48,736 words in the Argus [local paper] and national and specialist press compared to 30,850 in 2002. There were also 1.31 million "opportunities to see" positive articles in 2003 compared to 0.05 million in 2002.

Both **Coventry** and **Hathershaw and Fitton Hill** have set up Communications Groups as a means of not only guiding the communications work but in order to regularly get feedback and comments on different communication methods and tools. In Coventry the group meets monthly and consists of between 15 and 20 residents. Whereas in Hathershaw and Fitton Hill the group meets bi-monthly and consists of NDC theme managers, a resident board member, partner organisations and project staff.

Several of the case study areas also analysed website 'hits' which enabled them to assess how many people used the website as well as which pages were most popular.

What worked well?

4.6   The difficulty of evaluating success coupled with the fact that often a combination of methods is required to communicate, as well as the fact that different communications methods work better not just with different 'audiences' but with different individuals, does make it difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions about what tools or methods work better

than others. However, it is possible to draw out from the four case studies those areas of communication that have worked well or proved particularly effective. It is also clear that effective communication does require a range of products.

Word of mouth or one to one communication

4.7   From the different focus groups and interviews it was clear that word of mouth and/or one to one personal communication was considered to be the most popular and effective means of communication amongst all audiences: residents, project partners, mainstream providers and other local stakeholders.

4.8   For residents it tended to occur either 'formally', through projects or outreach workers, or 'informally' through conversations between friends – both of which could deliver successful results. The formal methods worked because it made the work of the NDC seem 'real' and they helped to build relationships between the NDC and the community and engage them in NDC activity. Whereas the informal methods worked because they not only spread messages around the community far quicker than any formal communication but there was also a higher degree of trust about what was being communicated because it was coming from a friend.

4.9   For project partners, mainstream service providers and other local stakeholders the key benefit of one to one communication was the development of a strong working relationship with the NDC: a relationship that enabled regular contact through meetings, emails and telephone calls. This regular contact and professional understanding meant that an effective two-way relationship developed whereby any information that was required could be easily obtained from the NDC whilst the NDC could communicate, through the same structures, any messages that they wanted to send out. These working relationships were then often enhanced and strengthened through the co-location of staff (Box 4-2).

4.10   It appears that word of mouth and one to one communications was popular and effective, perhaps more so than other communication tools, because people preferred and responded better to the personal interaction than written or printed material.

Box 4-2: Co-location of staff as an effective means of enhancing communication

In **Hathershaw and Fitton Hill**, Oldham College seconded some of its staff to work in the NDC area and to be based in the NDC offices. This co-location of staff provided the College with significantly more information than they had previously. Through close working with the NDC Theme Manager the College were now more acutely aware of the different issues that the NDC faced as well as the different opportunities for joint working that existed in the area. The close working relationship also helped facilitate and improve communication through all levels of staff at both the College and the NDC.

Sussex Police felt that they benefited from having Police Officers based in **eb4U's** offices as the co-location not only helped improve working relationships between key staff in the police and the NDC and greatly aid information transfer, but it also enabled the Police to develop effective working relationships with other projects and mainstream providers in the NDC area. A further benefit of being located in the area was that it also enhanced the relationship that the police had with the local community.

In **Coventry** the NDC has adopted a slightly different approach and created a Multi Agency Task Team (MATT) consisting of an officer from the NDC, the police, the fire service, the housing association and the council. The team meets weekly and is committed to quickly tackling the 'current' problems in the area. By having a 'fixed' team the different organisations are able to communicate and work together to fast track specific issues without having to go through the channels and procedures that would usually delay a multi agency response.

Communication around specific issues or 'hot-topics'

4.11   Communication on those issues that were of most concern to local residents had, as was noted in the previous chapter, a notably greater impact in galvanising the public interest and prompting a response amongst residents. The use of 'one-off' communication tools or existing tools to focus on specific issues proved an effective means of communicating to local residents.

4.12   The two examples in the previous chapter (Box 3-2) show that despite being at very different scales in terms of catching people's interest, what matters is not so much what the issue is but rather whether it affects local residents – although obviously the bigger the issues, like the masterplanning process, the greater the engagement and interest.

Relationships with the local press

4.13   The local press, because of the influence it holds and the large audience it has, can be extremely destructive – a fact that was experienced by three of the case study areas – significantly damaging the reputation of the NDC Partnership. Therefore, the focus on improving communication to and building relationships with the local press (highlighted in Chapter 2) through

regular press releases, tours of the area and one to one contact has been particularly effective and beneficial. As a result of this communication local press coverage is now not just fairer but much more positive and actually influential, because of its wide circulation, in raising the profile of the NDC in the wider area.

The Newsletter, website and branding

4.14   It was clear from the four case study areas that their newsletters, websites and branding, whilst not being groundbreaking in terms of communication tools, did all have an important role to play.

4.15   The newsletters provided a very effective means of informing the community about what the NDC was doing across all of its themes. It was also seen by project partners and mainstream service providers as a good tool for communicating with the local community about their respective projects or services (Box 4-3).

Box 4-3: Newsletters as an effective means of informing the community

The Police in Oldham regularly used **Hathershaw and Fitton Hill's** newsletter to pass police messages out to the community because it helped to overcome the fact that the community generally avoid or ignore direct communication from the police.

4.16   Whilst, the newsletters provided an effective means of informing the community it was the website that proved more useful to partners, stakeholders and other interested parties as it was invariably their first port of call for a wide variety of information – a source that would be missed had it not existed and a source that helped 'mainstreaming' in unexpected ways.

4.17   Finally, the ability of the NDC Partnership to 'brand' those projects that it was partnering or funding was an important means of highlighting its activity in the area as well as raising the awareness of the community that they existed.

How do communications strategies address diversity and equalities issues?

4.18   Ethnically diverse communities do present a specific challenge to communications especially where there are very low levels of spoken and written English. Box 4-4 presents some of the different ways in which the case study areas have sought to address these challenges.

Box 4-4: Addressing diversity issues

South Kilburn used a variety of different methods to communicate with their BME population. These included tailoring events and activities to specific ethnic groups; translation services for the six most frequently spoken languages covering the key content of the newsletters, board elections and the website.

Hathershaw and Fitton Hill devote one page in the Newsletter to Urdu – providing an overview of the articles in the newsletter

For **Coventry** the need to address diversity issues is relatively new as the minority ethnic community in the area has grown significantly over the past year (from 4% of the population to 20%). In order to address this issue the communications team are currently speaking with a variety of different organisations who have contact with this population, including the Housing Association and local Job Shop, to try and get a better understanding of what nationalities and languages exist in the area so that they can develop specific tools to communicate with these different groups.

4.19   In terms of other equalities issues, such as sight impairment, newsletters were often available in brail or on tape. However, perhaps the biggest communication challenge exists because of the low literacy rates and limited reading ability and language skills that are common in many deprived areas. In order to address these issues NDC Partnerships have made a concerted effort to ensure that not all communication occurs through literature but that when it does key publications for the community, such as the Newsletter, are written in a simple, easy to understand form, do not use jargon and are accompanied by a large number of pictures. The combination of which is hoped to make the Newsletter more appealing and less intimidating.

How do communications strategies interact with community development strategies?

4.20   If NDC Partnerships are to succeed, they need to make people aware of the NDC and they need to actually engage them in the work of the NDC. Therefore, because of these two inseparable aims there is naturally a large degree of cross over between the work of the communications team and the community development team. This cross over is exploited to the best effect when both teams see the importance of the other and acknowledge the distinct roles they have to play and as a result support each other: communications is in part about 'attracting' residents whilst community development is about 'involving' them. It is a working relationship that can also really help to develop word of mouth communications. However, the problem arises – as was the case in some of the case study areas – when the cross over results in duplication, both teams aiming for the same goal and not necessarily knowing what the other is doing.

How do NDC Partnership Boards link with communications activity?

4.21   NDC Partnership Boards have a major role to play in overseeing the strategic direction of the programme, and in approving programme delivery and spend. As described earlier, the Board will usually comprise a mix of locally elected residents, representatives of mainstream service providers, and other relevant stakeholders. As decision makers, Board members must be able to communicate how and why decisions have been made. Resident Board members are usually elected representatives of the local community and as such have a role to play in communicating the work of the NDC. Agency Board members have a key role in conveying to their organisations, the work of the NDC and the implications of this for service delivery and joint working.

4.22   It is generally acknowledged that all Board members have a role to play in positively promoting the NDC and its work. In a number of NDCs media training has been provided for Board members. This has helped to equip Board members with the skills to handle enquiries from the press, including having the confidence not to feel they have to comment directly if this is not appropriate, and to refer the query onto the NDC delivery team. A number of NDCs have been the subject to negative publicity and giving Board members the skills to deal with press enquiries is important.

4.23   Linked to the above is the need for the NDC delivery team to ensure that they communicate effectively with members of the Board. It is impossible for Board members to have detailed knowledge of every element of the NDC's activity, however, they do need to be aware of key issues as they arise and to have a strong grasp of how and why the NDC's strategy has developed and evolved.

4.24   In our consultations with Board members a number of factors were identified in ensuring good communication between the NDC delivery team and the Partnership Board:

- **Board induction** – members of the Board do change over time. It is essential that new members are effectively inducted so they can understand the organisation, and what is expected of them in their role as a Board member

- **Timely and succinct communication** – ensuring that Board members receive relevant papers and agendas well in advance of meetings so they have the time to digest information. The need to ensure that information was relevant was also identified, i.e. information should not just be circulated for the sake of it.

- **Media training** – a useful tool to develop Board members' confidence in dealing with press enquiries

- **Managing significant problems and the related communications issues** – ensuring that when major incidents occur that Board members are communicated with and know how these are being dealt with and

addressed, as soon as possible. Sometimes issues need to be raised and communicated outside of the formal Board meeting, if they are critical to the organisation, and the perception of the organisation and Board members need to feel confident in 'spreading the word'.

How do communications activities link to and coordinate with mainstream service providers?

4.25   Successfully working in partnership with mainstream service providers is fundamental to the success of NDC Partnerships. It is therefore very important that they are closely involved in, and communicated with about both NDC activity and NDC operations. As has already been noted above this communication occurs best through the development of strong working relationships that combine both informal regular contact via emails or telephone calls and formal contact through meetings (often involving a number of different service providers). It is important this communication also occurs at a variety of different seniority levels so that information can be passed efficiently between the two organisations and decisions can be made quickly.

4.26   The NDC have also regularly worked together with mainstream providers to communicate 'joint' messages. This joint working has been beneficial in not only raising awareness of the issue but in highlighting to the local community that both the NDC and the service provider are working to address the problem. This has proved particularly advantageous when the communication is around a key issue or 'hot topic'.

4.27   Joint working has also benefited mainstream service providers by:

- Providing them with 'access' to and a portal into the local community through the different communication tools and routes that the NDC have already developed, such as the Newsletter (see Box 4-3 above) or events.

- Reducing the level of suspicion or doubt amongst the community that often surrounds communication and messages from service providers – often joint communication is seen as more 'trustworthy' than it would be if it was from the service provider alone, a real issue for the Police and the Local Authority.

4.28   In addition to this, NDC communications have also helped to join up the work of different service providers. By raising awareness of the different issues facing the area and by engaging different service providers NDC communications have helped to create links and improve communication between different service providers.

How do communications strategies relate to succession planning?

4.29   As the NDC Programme draws to a close, NDC partnerships have begun to think about the future, about the legacy they will leave and about how they will sustain some activity beyond the lifetime of the programme. The level of communication on these issues varies across the case study areas – in part linked to how far the partnership has gone down the road of implementing its succession strategy. Some steps have been taken to persuade mainstream providers to carry on funding different activities; however, the focus in some areas is still on communicating the success of the programme, rather than making the case for the future.

4.30   The four case study areas highlighted two broad reasons why the messages around sustainability and the legacy of the programme were not yet the main focus of communication. It was either because the succession strategy for the whole programme was still being developed and therefore there was no 'message' to communicate. Or, it was the result of a combination of both a slow start to the programme and failure to develop a communications strategy from the start, both of which meant that there is risk that a 'lag' has developed between what is happening 'on the ground' and the messages that are being communicated: when NDCs should have been raising awareness they were not communicating; when they should have been communicating progress and success they were raising awareness; and now when they should be communicating about succession they are communicating about progress and success.

4.31   The communication of future plans is a notable challenge for NDC Partnerships. For some, like eb4U and Coventry, they need to communicate a complete change in organisation and structure whilst for others it is simply a matter of communicating that the NDC will not exist beyond a certain point – neither of which is easy.

4.32   The failure to communicate early enough about succession and legacies has a number of implications:

- Firstly, as the funding draws to a close and projects finish there is a danger that, without proper communication, this will be seen negatively as the NDC 'letting the community down' – severely damaging the good reputation that has been built up during the previous years.

- Secondly, the NDC needs to ensure that its most successful projects are sustained beyond the lifetime of the Programme by mainstream providers. However, by not communicating this message early enough the NDC runs the risk that good projects will have to finish because no alternative funding sources have been identified.

- Thirdly, in order to build on the successful community engagement that has occurred already it is important that the community are aware of the role they can play in any new structure as well as actively engaged

in its development. Without a good level of community engagement the success of any new structure will be hindered.

- Fourthly, mainstream providers, projects, stakeholders, community groups and other funders not only need to be aware of the changes occurring but prepared to play a role in and (more importantly) fund different elements of the future activity. Without enough preparation, budgets and resources will not be available thereby making sustainability more difficult.

5. Conclusions and key messages

5.1 The following two sections set out the key findings from the study on the basis of critical success factors and barriers to success with recommendations for partnerships under each of the factors.

Critical success factors

5.2 Having looked in detail at the communication strategies, tools and messages of the four case study areas it is possible to identify a number of common factors that are critical to developing and delivering effective communications – factors that would be relevant and important to any neighbourhood based regeneration initiative. They are:

- A variety of different communication methods and tools are employed by the NDC, as a one size fits all approach is not possible for diverse audiences.

  – Partnerships should develop a suite of tools to meet the needs of different audiences and address different communication issues.

- Ensure that the impact had (and the difference made) is communicated clearly and from the earliest possible point. It is this evidence of change that will raise the profile of the NDC Partnership and help engage residents and stakeholders in the work of the NDC.

  – Partnerships need to be aware of the importance of timing – they need to get stories out quickly.

- Programmes change and develop and successful communications are in line with the phase of the overall programme.

  – Partnerships should make sure that they understand the phase of the programme they are in and ensure their communications reflect this.

- An adequately resourced team is in place from the start of the programme. Without it communication will always 'lag' behind what is happening with the programme.

  – Partnerships need to treat 'communications' as an integral part of the programme and not a separate project, which is subject to the vicissitudes of the programme.

- The development of positive word of mouth networks provides a strong base of awareness and a means of identifying and addressing problems. Word of mouth communication between residents is one of, if not the most effective means of communication and encouraging resident engagement.

  – Some word of mouth communication will occur naturally as the programme develops however there is a need to facilitate its progress by encouraging all residents to share their experiences with their friends

and by training a group of dedicated residents to act as 'ambassadors' – people who will get messages out to the community, answer questions and quash rumours.

Barriers to success and how to tackle them

5.3   However, it was also possible to identify a number of common barriers to success. These included:

- The damaging effect of negative press coverage. Local press has a big influence over public opinion and one negative story can 'un-do' a significant amount of work in building a good reputation for the NDC.

    – Communications need to address bad coverage, but for the long term the team needs to cultivate links to the local press so that it is aware of the Programme and will allow an NDC to comment on a story.

- Residents tend to engage with and relate to projects and not the programme itself thus making communication about the programme more difficult.

    – Communication aimed at engaging the public needs to focus on issues of concern or specific projects.

- The community can often be very wary of new public sector partnerships. They still see them as 'the council' or 'the government' and as a result there is both a negativity and apathy towards getting involved and listening to the messages coming out.

    – Communication at the outset of the programme needs to highlight those elements of the programme that are different to the usual council or government run schemes, for instance: that the community is at the heart of the programme; that they are a key partner in delivery; and that this is a real opportunity for them to influence the future regeneration of their area.

- For all the importance of word of mouth communication, local activists with negative opinions can be very damaging – word of mouth communication can also be negative.

    – Communication strategies need to be prepared to counter negative 'word of mouth' – by picking up local intelligence and ensuring local champions counter unfair negative commentary.

- Low literacy levels or a high proportion of residents with English as a second language can make communication very difficult as so much of it is based around some form of written words.

    – Communication strategies need to take account of the different abilities of the audience members. They need to provide a variety of channels of communication with different audience members and they need to keep messages simple and to the point.

- Other pressures on mainstream partners such as budget constraints, limited resources or organisational restructuring can have a negative impact on the effectiveness of NDC communication as their focus is on internal rather than external issues.

  – A good knowledge of key partners' circumstances is important, as it will affect both how much time they give to hearing the message and their capacity for responding to it.

Annex A: NDC Newsletters

*Your***SHOUT**

COVENTRY
NEW DEAL FOR
COMMUNITIES

WINTER 2006

FREE INSIDE
Help with the washing up -
NDC T-Towel
Your 2007 Calendar

Kid's christmas crafts
Page 18

Inside this issue...

- C.O.V Special
- Boys, cars and brakes
- Xmas dinner under the spotlight
- New Police Inspector
- Tree-mendous success
- Puzzle Page

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NDC *Community News*

growing into a brighter future
Hathershaw + Fitton Hill New Deal for Communities

September 2006

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NDC
CUTEST PET
COMPETITION WINNER

CONGRATULATIONS RACHEL & ROXY

Thank you to all those residents who entered our cutest pet competition. After several hours of difficult deliberation, our judges eventually chose a winner.

Congratulations to Rachel and her pet Roxy, who won a £50 voucher to spend in Spindles Shopping Centre and a £25 voucher kindly donated by Pet Care Oldham (198 Ashton Road). Our winner was chosen by the Mayor of Oldham and NDC's own Chief Executive, *Gordon Roscoe.*

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Spotlight

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NEW DEAL FOR COMMUNITIES
creating a desirable place
to live, learn and work

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