

# Social capital in action: adding up local connections and networks

A pilot study in London



**Halima Begum**  
*Centre for Civil Society*



December 2003

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### *Project Advisory Group*

Helmut Anheier (CCS), John Bell (Ecotec), Véronique Jochum (NCVO), Karl Wilding (NCVO), Maryanne Kelly (ONS), and Gabriel Chanan (CDF)

### *Project Director*

Nicholas Deakin (CCS)

### *South Poplar and Limehouse Action for Secure Housing*

Abu Sufian

### *London Borough of Newham*

Norma Sparks, Carole Baisden

### *NCVO*

Veronique Jochum, Karl Wilding, Susan Wainwright

### *UCLA School of Public Policy and Research*

## **AUTHOR**

### **Halima Begum**

*Research Associate at the Centre for Civil Society*

Before joining the Centre in 2002, Halima was a policy researcher with Action Aid working on an UNICEF-NGO review of alternative education and civil society movements on basic rights for the World Education Summit in April 2000. She was also a policy analyst on the Runnymede Trust's report on The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (2000). Halima's PhD examined the role that culture and creativity can play in fostering civic engagement.

### **Centre for Civil Society**

The Centre for Civil Society (CCS) at the London School of Economics is an academic centre dedicated to research and teaching in the rapidly growing areas of non-profit, non-governmental and third sector organisations, social economy and philanthropy. A key aim for the Centre is to provide a forum for practitioners, policy-makers and academics to come together so that practice may benefit from the insights of relevant research and to ensure that academic study is informed by practical engagement.

## **FOREWORD**

The recent creation of the Civil Renewal Unit within an expanded Active Communities Directorate at the Home Office highlights the continued interest in and concern for the role of voluntary action in the UK. The continuously evolving debate around social capital informs these developments, and attention is increasingly turning to the role of government and its agencies in sustaining and building healthy communities and a healthy voluntary and community sector.

Policies to promote social capital are not uncontested. Indeed, this independent report highlights some difficult messages for those in government and the voluntary and community sector. Nevertheless, it contributes a body of evidence that should inform policy and practice in this area.

The report is the result of a longstanding working relationship between the Centre for Civil Society and NCVO, and a clear indication of the benefits of closer collaboration between practitioners and the academic community. NCVO would particularly like to thank Halima Begum, the report's author, and the project steering group, who have given their time over the last twelve months. Finally, this report is a summarised version of a longer report that will be available from the Centre for Civil Society.

Both the Centre for Civil Society and NCVO welcome the thoughts and comments of those interested in this report, and we look forward to hearing from you.

**Karl Wilding**  
**Head of Research, NCVO**  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Private versus public good**

Social capital is a classic 'public good' for local communities with positive spillover effects in neighbourhoods. Social capital also exists as a 'private good' or resource which individuals use to promote a narrow set of interests. From the viewpoint of the voluntary sector it is more useful to promote an understanding of social capital as both private and public goods because this has a didactic impact on community building at the local level. The investment of social capital as a private good does not have a trickle down or trickle out effect to wider members of a residential community or an interest based community. We conclude that the value of social capital as a classic public good is needed more in communities with lower levels of human and financial capital. A related finding is that higher levels of social capital (and associated with this, cultural capital) and physical capital are required in these same communities and therefore the link between social and physical capital is far more critical for disadvantaged communities in building human and financial capital overall.

### **Locally specific analysis of micro-politics of social capital**

Our research shows a strong relationship between social capital and the locality; one of the axioms of social capital theory is that it is mostly at the local level that networks of formal and informal sociability flourish (or die). However, social capital can also be created at a distance through new technology, but this is more the case for linking social capital.

Not all differences between localities can be explained by socio-economic characteristics. Both case studies display similar external variables such as relative disadvantage and social cohesion/fragmentation and yet yield dissimilar levels of associational life and social capital. Local variations of social capital may be desirable to the extent that it recognises differences between communities and the issues they face. Government should, in principle, acknowledge the possibility of variations between one neighbourhood and another, and provide an acceptable range of policies to support social capital policies.

### **Social capital is not a panacea for society's failures**

Our research also calls into question the beneficial effect of social capital as a public good in all cases. Social capital works (or doesn't work) in particular local contexts, and whether it works as a public good depends on a number of other factors in each locality. Government needs to endorse the value of some components of social capital such as voluntary activity, regardless of whether this activity meets specific government objectives such as public service delivery. Caution should be maintained in monitoring those components of social capital that are exclusive and reactionary.

### **Investing formal and informal structures of participation**

Social capital occurs in both formal and informal channels and spaces. In areas where the voluntary and community sector displays a relatively weak relationship with the local authority, social capital is more likely to be invested in informal social neighbourhood activity than in endorsing, complementing or challenging the policies of local government. Although such networks are hard to identify and measure, some effort should be made to support these informal structures of sociability, especially for mothers, elders, carers, neighbours in need and so on. Conversely, in areas where

the voluntary and community sector has a healthy relationship with the local authority, social capital is more likely to be invested in formal activity and direct political participation in policies and decision-making of local government, in addition to its basic functions in informal relationships.

### **Capacity building for social capital**

Capacity building for social capital should not focus on merely providing additional resources for voluntary and community groups – other factors are equally important for embedding a culture of participation in the relationship between the state and voluntary and community sector organisations; and between the voluntary sector and its smaller community-based organisations.

Government should build the capacity of both the voluntary and community sector to engage with public policy in an informed way. Resources need to be made available to enable community representatives to network locally and regionally to share experiences and findings with each other. Increasingly local groups are under pressure to work in partnerships to obtain funding, but they stand to gain strength in solidarity and numbers. The availability of knowledge on service providers around a similar issue and community networks for information flow enables groups to identify windows of opportunity for building new relationships and intervening in policy debates.

### **Social capital: an end in itself or a means to an end?**

Government needs to distinguish outcomes of social capital based volunteering – whether active citizenship is an end in itself (to encourage mutuality, civicness and neighbourliness), a means to an end (involvement in service delivery) or both. Organisations are suspicious of too much emphasis on the use of social capital as a service delivery option. Our view is that social capital should be treated as a spontaneous sphere of action, which produces innovation and unpredictable outcomes. Much voluntary action is by its nature undirected and its effects unprogrammable. This runs counter to funding cultures with an emphasis on accountability and low risk.

Government needs to make clear whether support is given to social capital because it is an expression of citizenship or because it helps achieve government objectives. Our view is that social capital as an expression of citizenship is more beneficial than the second goal but these may overlap. It is possible to value both goals but the relationship needs to be clarified, and proper credit needs to be given to both criteria distinctively.

### **Relationships between local government and the voluntary and community sector**

The voluntary and community sector has had mixed experiences in its relationships with local government. A greater level of mutual trust is needed if the voluntary and community sector is to play a larger part in local public service delivery and have opportunities to influence local policies. In the light of the rapid changes – economic, social and physical – affecting many localities, local authorities should review their relationships with the local voluntary and community sector on a regular basis. The Best Value machinery provides one appropriate means for doing this. It may also be desirable to embark on the process of developing a Local Compact between the local authority, the local voluntary and community sector and local health authorities. In

doing so, care needs to be taken not to exclude smaller community-based organisations.

These moves towards partnership offer opportunities for the voluntary and community sector but there are also grounds for caution: in some cases, lack of internal coordination may mean that policies are not as consistent as between different local authority departments; in others there may be opposition on the part of members of local authorities to too close an engagement with representatives of the voluntary and community sector in policy-making. The likely creation of regional government structures may further complicate the situation.

### **Engaging with funders**

Intense competition for funding appears to be overwhelming staff and volunteers. Competition for funding leads to organisations adapting their provision to meet funding criteria in other areas. Core social capital activities get left behind in the perennial search for programmes that attract funding.

### **The role of government**

Social capital belongs to people and communities. Government can provide enabling space for social capital to flourish and support conditions for social capital to sustain itself but the creation of social capital should start with individuals, communities and civil society. Social capital should stand as a policy objective in its right, alongside other related objectives such as community development, civil renewal, and participation.

### **Relationships with government: partnerships**

Representation and accountability are centrally important issues for partnership structures working with local communities. However, it is important to also bear in mind that the language and practice of representation and accountability imply a degree of formality and reporting to structures. It is important to recognise that the need to secure representation and accountability through formal structures may conflict with the informal operations of the voluntary and community sector.

Effective partnership working and community involvement require training and other resources to allow weaker partners to perform on equal terms with other partners. Local resources and facilities are key influences on a neighbourhood's store of social capital. Community groups need to be empowered to obtain resources for undertaking a range of responsibilities linked to building their store of social capital.

Local voluntary and community organisations experience pressures to respond to official agendas even when these pressures distract attention of staff and workers from their own organisational agendas. Local groups need to learn the skills with which to respond to official agendas, and particularly when these conflict with their own.

### **Diversity and social cohesion**

Policy-makers are faced with the challenge of balancing the needs of minority groups with the government need for social cohesion. Yet social cohesion cannot be established without an increased focus on building the capacity of the black and minority ethnic voluntary and community (BME) sector.



There has been a widely acknowledged under-funding and exclusion of black and minority ethnic organisations; yet at the same time, competition for resources at the neighbourhood level leads excluded white groups to resent the take-up of services by BME groups. Dispelling the gaps between reality and perception is a pre-condition for moving away from social fragmentation and closer towards social cohesion.

A key issue for BME groups is the process of moving from bonding social capital that holds a group together, to bridging social capital that enables one community of interest to connect with another, as well as with the mainstream community. Such groups frequently face the difficulty of moving into or using mainstream structures because of the formality and the rules of bureaucracy.

While recognising the value of bonding ties to adaptive and coping strategies in new environments, BME and faith communities must also collaborate with organisations and partnership structures to strengthen their own independence.

### **Faith-based community organisations**

Within the case study communities, faith-based community organisations appear to be the most active civil society organisations at present. The activities of faith-based community groups range from providing a place of worship and social congregation through to social welfare provision. Some appear to be organised, while others are informal and run only by volunteers. What is certain however is that faith-based organisations have closer relationships with grassroots communities and may be better placed responding to the needs of their user groups. Faith appears to provide an important source of identification with the host organisation and guarantees higher levels of commitment from members and representatives.

The involvement of faith-based community organisations in regeneration is firmly recognised as one element of a robust regeneration strategy. Faith-based welfare groups are an element of a multi-sector regeneration strategy. Faith organisations should be encouraged to take part in cross-sector partnerships and multi-faith forums in order to strengthen their independence as autonomous faith organisations.

Organised faith groups can play a pivotal role in bridging activities across communities. Increased funding will also open up faith-based groups to greater accountability and transparency, thereby mitigating anxieties over extremist features of some faith-based groups.

### **Local leadership**

Public bodies need to recognise the changing style of community leadership, which is moving from formal to informal styles of participation and engagement. Formal and collectivist styles of leadership in tenants' organisations are running alongside informal styles of representation to include the tradition of trade union organising and facilitative and workshop-based engagements. This reflects changing demographics of urban localities in Britain, which has given rise to different styles of representation and a greater willingness among policy-makers to allow weak voices to be heard in public spaces.

### **Mobility and access**

Connectiveness is a key feature for debates in neighbourhood renewal and for social capital. Yet issues of mobility and access affecting marginalised sections of the population remain largely under-explored in discussions of social capital. There is a need for an explicit social policy of mobility and access, linked to policies to support social capital.

### **A harmonised approach to work**

While it is still too early to recommend whether social capital should be mainstreamed across government in a similar way to other related concepts such as social exclusion and social cohesion, it is possible for government to take a more joined-up approach to its (small) portfolio of work on social capital.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) funded the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics (LSE) to undertake this one-year long study on social capital and the voluntary sector in London. The Centre is a research and teaching unit within the Department of Social Policy at the LSE. The centre seeks to improve understanding of the set of organisations located between the market, the state and household institutions that are variously referred to as non-governmental, voluntary, non-profit, or third-sector organisations, foundations, and social enterprises. These institutions are part of a wider civil society and form a social economy of private organisations serving public purposes.

Over the last few years discussion on policy concerns around active citizenship, civic engagement, volunteering, participation and civil renewal has given impetus to the value of civil society and its social capital generated through voluntary and community organisations. Discussion of the concept of social capital continues to grow in research and policy circles. However, this unfettered popularity obscures how both terms are used and sometimes mis-used by commentators. This research report hopes to build a bridge between academic, practitioner and policy circles, in an attempt to transport and communicate the operational value of social capital outside academia.

### Aims and methods

This pilot study addressed critical aspects of the relationship between the voluntary sector and social capital:

- *How is social capital generated in and through voluntary sector organisations in local communities?*
- *How 'sensitive' is social capital to policy intervention?*
- *What is the actual and potential impact of policies and programmes on the relationship between social capital and voluntary organisations?*

By examining these aspects in carefully selected local communities, this study makes an important contribution to our understanding of the role the voluntary sector can play in social capital policies by pointing to strengths and limitations as well as opportunities and challenges.

The first section of the report sets out the background to the study of social capital and clarifies the conceptual framework for this study. The second section focuses on the relevance of social capital to the voluntary and community sector. The third section grounds the discussion of social policy in the current policy context highlighting the role of social capital in neighbourhood renewal. The fourth section profiles the two case study communities, followed by the research findings on social capital in East London. The final section draws out the implications of social capital and presents some conclusions and key recommendations for a number of agencies.

## 2. TOWARDS A SOCIAL CAPITAL FRAMEWORK

A recent report by the Office for National Statistics<sup>1</sup> points out that despite significant differences in definitions, an emerging consensus among scholars and policy-makers seems to relate the concept of social capital to social networks and civic norms. The key indicators of social capital include membership of formal and informal groups, including volunteering, trust, social participation and civic engagement. They directly capture the role of voluntary and community organisations, and the way in which social capital is generated through membership, participation and volunteering. Yet despite being of crucial relevance to both researchers and policy-makers the actual nexus between social capital and the voluntary sector has not been systematically explored.

In a wider policy context, social capital is often invoked as an umbrella concept to highlight the role of social factors and institutional processes that lead to the exclusion of low-income communities from mainstream society. Closely linked to measures of deprivation generally, the absence of social capital leads to isolation, and the lack of goodwill, trust, shared values, norms and generalised reciprocity among the population. However, the presence of social capital has a multiplier effect, whereby frequent and effective interactions with other people be it through voluntary organisations, self-help groups or among friends and neighbours, results in increased confidence and trust, which, in turn, encourages future co-operation and collaboration. Together, according to social capital theorists, these features generate a sense of 'community'.

Against this backdrop, the work reported here addresses two aspects of the relationship between the voluntary sector and social capital. First, it looks at *social capital generation* in and through voluntary associations in the context of the wider community of which they are a part; and second, it explores how 'sensitive' social capital is to *policy intervention* and examines the actual and potential impact of policies and programmes on the relationship between social capital and voluntary organisations.

### Local social capital and voluntary associations at the local level

The main value of our report lies in its emphasis on the quality of local social capital and the in-depth investigation of neighbourliness, trustworthiness and community spirit in everyday situations. It is, after all, mostly at the local level that social capital is built, sustained and destroyed.

The London boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets where the study was carried out have by far the biggest concentration of poverty in London. As such the study can contribute to a broader urban neighbourhood and community debate as well as point towards a localised study of social capital. Many of the organisations that we interviewed fall below the monitoring level and as a result the representation of their experiences is rarely captured in research and policy documents. What is more, working at the local, 'micro' level of society enables us to address some questions of how local-scale thinking may interact with sub-regional and national action on social capital, including how and why each presents a different local power play and what broad implications this spells out for a social capital approach to neighbourhood renewal.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of National Statistics, Social Analysis and Reporting Division, *Social Capital: A Review of the Literature*. London, 2002.

The overall pattern of local neighbourhoods included in this study can best be characterised as diversity within diversity – in social class and life style, but also in terms of age-related factors, gender and culture. This diversity within diversity at local levels suggests different policy implications for proceeding with social and community cohesion agendas in contrast to a homogenous understanding of urban diversity that lacks an awareness of different types of inequalities of power.

## Definitions

One of the merits of social capital as a concept is a looseness and fluidity of definition, which allows it to help explain many social problems. However, this looseness can make selecting appropriate policy responses difficult (Forrest and Kearns 2000). There have been a number of definitions of social capital; we are attracted to the following:

**Social capital is a resource, both private and public, inherent in the *structure of relationships* in organisational social networks and interpersonal relationships.**

According to this view, social capital is not a characteristic that can be looked at in isolation; rather, it achieves meaning relative to other forms of capital (physical, financial, human and cultural) and community resources at large (infrastructure, government social spending and public investment, role of private business etc). This insight of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) informs the research design of this proposal in the sense that different structural characteristics of the wider community are closely related to variations in social and economic capital forms. Specifically, as Woolcock (2001) suggests, structural characteristics shape the extent to which social capital becomes bonding, bridging, or linking. Bonding social capital, or exclusive social capital is the sociological super glue of communities and implies strong in-group cohesion and solidarity. Bridging social capital, also called inclusive social capital, is the outward-looking networks with distant friends, associates and colleagues. By contrast, 'linking capital' is generated from ties across different groups, class and political lines where different groups access power and resources across the social strata. Putnam suggests that pure social capital – that is bonding capital – is necessary for 'getting by' and bridging capital is important for 'getting ahead'.

Social capital is only valuable to the extent that community members mutually recognise and sustain its value. Inevitably therefore, social capital can be applied to positive goals (e.g. educational attainment) as well as negative ones (e.g. drug cartels). Social capital can also be understood as both a private (individual) good and a public (group or collective) good as it is an outcome of the relationship between an individual and their participation in an organisation or informal networks.

**Key weaknesses in social capital proposals:**

- The use of social capital as an analytical and explanatory concept is significantly weak.
- Social capital can promote negative goals that militate against the public good.
- Social capital fails to explain basic inequalities in society.
- The transformation of social capital from a value-neutral term to a normatively loaded term weakens its explanatory power.
- The problem of institutionalising generalised trust: the issue of moving from the notion of in-built trust to a generalised forms of trust.
- Social capital approaches muddle cause and effect, and dependent and independent variables, leading to measurement difficulties.
- The weak presence or the absence of the state in social capital proposals puts too much responsibility onto communities.
- Social capital is perceived as a cost-cutting measure to justify a retreat from welfare spending.

### 3. SPOTLIGHT ON THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

The significance of voluntary and community activity as both an expression and a measure of social capital has been widely recognised. The building up of social capital and through it the creation of a stronger civil society is seen as a way to strengthen local communities, reduce social exclusion, increase political participation, foster innovation and work towards ending poverty. The burgeoning literature on social capital (local residents' involvement in clubs, societies, networks, organisations, mutual-aid etc) has given impetus to cultivating and building this sector (Chanan 2002).

Voluntary and community organisations are seen as incubators of value, civic attitudes and styles of organising based on mutual-aid and co-operation<sup>2</sup>. The main advantage of this approach is the dynamic focus on the unanticipated consequences of trust and crosscutting cultural applicability of trust garnered from this. A key disadvantage is that it is unclear on vertical and non-face-to-face cases of trust; and power relations are neglected (Anheier and Kendall 2000). Voluntary organisations assume an activist and instrumental role: they are intended participatory organisations that facilitate social connections and co-operation and by virtue of repeated interactions they engender trust, friendship and mutual-aid among members (Anheier and Kendall 2000). The involvement of volunteers in local organisations plays a key role in boosting civic responsibility and for the individual it contributes to a person's local networks and social contacts beyond friends and neighbours. What is more, membership – a composite indicator of social capital – takes place through voluntary and community organisations.

Interest in social capital also puts the spotlight on the voluntary sector, in so far as the community is now seen as a much more significant force for governance and social welfare provision. The potential for the voluntary sector to play a greater role in governance and service provision has always been present but has required some capacity building and cultivation to play a fuller role.

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<sup>2</sup> Putnam (1993) has elevated the role of voluntary associations to 'distinctive' institutions in their capacity to function as repositories for all the other sources of social capital, aside from trust. They are obligations and expectations, information points, and norms and sanctions (p.89). Defined in this way, voluntary and community organisations are best characterised as incubators of 'civic virtue'.



Our examination of social capital within neighbourhoods must also be seen in the context of the new governance model. In Britain and in other countries, the role of central and local government is in flux: it is not yet clear whether the central, regional or local government should remain a service deliverer or devolve leadership and begin to think about governance that is primarily community driven. At present it is central government that is promoting the voluntary sector's functions. Policy interventions to promote social capital may therefore build on a series of initiatives. The Compact between the Government and the voluntary and community sector, the Local Strategic Partnerships funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, as well as other local government reforms under New Labour are foundations to draw upon. The community governance agenda demands a more active role for the voluntary sector to facilitate opportunities of civic engagement and commitment to common goals. But do local voluntary organisations and the communities they serve have the capacity to engage effectively with local government and health authorities and produce positive outcomes? This question is the focus of this research study.

#### **4. POLICY RELEVANCE, REGENERATION IN ACTION AND NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL**

A number of longer-term developments in social policy have affected the way in which social capital has been taken up in local communities. The first of these changes relates to a change in the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and statutory bodies delivering key services. The changed role of the voluntary sector, moving from the margins to the centre of social policy, with voluntary organisations increasingly taking responsibility for delivering 'mainstream' services which were previously provided by public bodies, has raised the playing field in which residents, as citizens or beneficiaries, can participate and contribute to local development goals. While significant aspects of the state apparatus were rolled back as part of a broader reform of public management structures in the 1980s the voluntary sector was encouraged to diversify its funding sources to include businesses and trusts. Businesses were also keen to respond to new partnership structures with voluntary and community groups as part of their new social responsibility strategies of placing business in local communities and helping local residents to develop their skills and capacities for citizenship. The slogan 'Active Citizenship' coined in the early 1980s and now actively embraced by the Home Office encourages individuals to invest volunteer time in their communities. Parallel to this, later in the early 1990s it became widely recognised that effective community involvement depends on the effective functioning of trust between individuals and public and voluntary sector bodies, as well as a shared understanding of common goals and confidence in their ability to deliver services.

Social capital can be used to promote objectives of participation and community involvement that are key to many government regeneration initiatives. This renewed focus on community involvement is part of systematic efforts to establish greater links between the community and the state. These features all need to be created, built and sustained over time. It is likely that areas with higher stocks of social capital or community strength will have the capacity to respond to the requirements of community involvement. In areas with lower stocks of social capital, community involvement is likely to be a less representative exercise. There are crucial links therefore between social capital, community involvement and community development.

In recent years the government has established several frameworks for the development of regional, local and community driven co-governance structures, which provide an enabling framework under which social capital can flourish. New Labour's modernisation agenda has also heralded a sharper focus on community involvement principles in planning and public decision-making forums. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal lays out a comprehensive 'joined-up' strategy for tackling poverty, by taking stock of earlier lessons in regeneration practice on the ground, laying out floor targets for key services, and recognising the role of voluntary and community groups as active agents of social change. It also states that local people should be in the driving seat, making the decisions about their neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood renewal at the local level is therefore the responsibility of the Local Strategic Partnerships – LSPs (NRU 2001). The Community Empowerment Fund was set up as an additional 'pot' of funding to enable the looser networks of voluntary, community, and faith groups to actively participate in these LSPs. The Community Empowerment Network of the LSP remains an important mechanism by which weaker networks can contribute to what is frequently a 'top-down' process of local regeneration

## **5. PROFILE OF TWO COMMUNITIES IN EAST LONDON**

This section provides contextual information on the locations of each case study communities, and highlights their apparent social capital infrastructure.

The case studies in this study were selected on the basis of their perceived voluntary sector activity<sup>3</sup>, with one set of communities ranking high and the other ranking low in terms of perceived associational density. This critical variable focused on the level of involvement of its inhabitants but most importantly on the density of associational networks. East Ham is characterised by stronger networks and associations, whilst Blackwall reveals weaker networks and until recently remained outside of major regeneration attention which is underway in the western parts of the borough. The case studies represent other critical variables among central characteristics such as levels of policy intervention (e.g. Local Strategic Partnerships) urban population, ethnic diversity and socio-economic status.

The East End of London is frequently examined in sociological literature as part of a bigger portrait of neighbourhood life throughout the UK (Young and Willmot 1957; Mumford and Power 2003). The East Ham and Blackwall wards in East London are home to an ethnically diverse population. The area has seen massive social and economic change over the past two decades. A number of factors have caused a rapid rate of change in the area, including the closure of the docks in East London and the subsequent large-scale loss of employment, population growth and rapid redevelopment and gentrification of residential areas by middle class residents. There is evidence of widespread deprivation in the wards, concentrated on some of the poorest social housing estates in London. East Ham is one of the more affluent wards within Newham and Blackwall is one of the poorer wards in Tower Hamlets. Exclusion from the labour market was a dominant feature in residents' experience of social exclusion in both areas. Smith's account of social capital in Newham for example makes an explicit connection between declining stocks of social capital and the lack of economic opportunities: "it could be argued that a key causal factor in the alleged decline of social capital has been the economic collapse of the area. People

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<sup>3</sup> We have used different data sources to assess this level, among them the Citizenship Survey of the Active Communities Unit (Home Office), NCVO's UK Voluntary Sector Almanac 2002, and relevant ONS sources.

with little or no economic stake in society, with no jobs to go to, and therefore with reduced social contact with others..." (Smith, 1998:54).

The similarities and differences of the two communities are outlined below. A fuller analysis of the community profiles is available as an appendix.

Similarities	Differences
	East Ham is a more affluent ward in Newham while Blackwall is a poorer ward in Tower Hamlets
High multiple deprivation index	Higher rate of business-led gentrification in Blackwall
Urban population	Higher volumes of social housing in Blackwall
Closure of docks and subsequent large-scale redevelopment and restructuring of economy	Lower proportion of home ownership in Blackwall
Rapid residential gentrification	Geographical isolation (Blackwall); the built environment dominated by transport connections
High rates of exclusion from labour market	Centre of retail and shopping hub in Newham (East Ham)
Part of the Thames Gateway Partnership	Depressed retail sector in Blackwall with one high street bank in operation
Qualified for Neighbourhood Renewal status	Active Community Forum (East Ham)
Labour-controlled local authorities	Better socio-economic mix in East Ham
Ethnically diverse populations	Stronger voluntary sector in East Ham; weaker voluntary sector in Blackwall
Religious diversity	Higher numbers of young people (East Ham)
Rapid population growth	Higher numbers of refugee and asylum communities (East Ham)

## 6. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the research findings along with brief commentary on what they tell us in relation to the conceptual framework of social capital identified in the research design. Data was collected and analysed using mainly qualitative methods while relying on available social, economic and demographic data on both communities<sup>4</sup>. In total we contacted and interviewed 30 organisations in East Ham and Blackwall. A full list of questions and indicators are given in the appendix. In the two communities we:

- Mapped the associational infrastructure of the voluntary sector
- Provided the full context of available social and economic information including a demographic profile of the population
- Sampled voluntary organisations for more detailed study

<sup>4</sup> Secondary data was collected at ward-level from local authority sources before the boundary changes in 2001.

- Interviewed voluntary sector and community leaders as well as local government officials
- Conducted focus groups of members and non-members of voluntary associations (youth groups).
- Conducted in-depth interviews with residents, members and service users of organisations.

The findings are presented in the structure of the eight themes we identified as part of our social capital framework: **community composition, connections and networks, community capacity and pro-activity, involvement and participation, capacity to engage in decision-making processes, identity and belonging, trust<sup>5</sup> and satisfaction and quality of life.** These themes were conceived to fit into the government's current frameworks on voluntary action and regeneration.

As participatory organisations, voluntary and community organisations facilitate social connections and co-operation, and by virtue of repeated interactions engender trust, friendship and mutual-aid among members. The structure of social capital takes the form of networks of social interaction, which includes civic engagement. These close networks broaden a person's group identity; nurture a sense of collective responsibility for each other's interests and ultimately improve an individual's life chances. In a vibrant neighbourhood where communities are flourishing we would hope to find individuals and organisations in contact with each other, co-operating over information, advice and networking. We would expect to find both people and organisations better 'connected' to each other; and also operating over a number of spatial scales – local, regional, national, virtual and even global. In a less vibrant sector we would anticipate weaker links and a narrower sense of civic interests and a higher degree of isolation in residents.

## **6.1 Connections and networks**

### ***Density of networks***

Many groups had a good mixture of links with other local and non-local agencies, including links with relevant professional bodies. The links with non-local agencies in some cases required strengthening, partnership working was uneven and patchy and dependent on deliberate attempts by key professionals to facilitate involvement of local groups with each other. The smaller groups were far more isolated and un-connected to wider services and provision.

Some networks are narrowly conceived and others are multi-spatial. This finding illustrated the fact that while residents constructed a narrow territorial identity based on locality/place, their involvement with local groups showed links with external agencies such as the statutory authorities, regional and national networks. In both locations membership and volunteering were connected to a strong sense of place and a desire to get involved in the 'local community'. Other networks were diffuse, spread across localities and interest groups alike. Some people thought that the ward level was an artificial boundary for the measurement of social capital. This points to the limitations for the measurement of social capital within existing performance indicators.

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<sup>5</sup> Trust is usually constructed as a component of norms, values and reciprocity in social capital literature. We have used this as a central topic guide and asked questions around norms, values and reciprocity under trust as most people generally equate trust as a recognisable expression of social capital.

The National Neighbourhood Renewal programme has also brought a dense network to the areas, and encouraged partnership working led by neighbourhood facilitation teams, which has increased contact between local authorities and community and voluntary sectors. In both areas the Community Empowerment Fund (via NRF funding) was seen as a critical source of funding which smaller groups could access.

The connections and networks of voluntary and community groups with other agencies were not dense and over-lapping, suggesting weak bridging social capital between the sectors. In general working relations between the local authority and larger voluntary groups were better than with smaller groups that tended to be more difficult to access, and have fewer infrastructure bodies. As a result these groups also found it hard to engage with the larger voluntary agencies and often viewed them as large bureaucracies, distant and removed from the communities. There is some disenchantment therefore with the increasing bureaucracy of structures and the remoteness of community groups.

Respondents of community organisations believed that the competitive nature of funding has meant that smaller organisations are operating on a thin line of survival. This seems to be destroying social capital in number of ways – by appearing to reward formal action that takes place in professionalised settings and by depressing the spontaneity of people's action in less professionalised settings. At the same time many respondents of small and large organisations expressed concern about their capacity to campaign and influence while accepting funding from the government. To some degree this points to complex and contradictory views amongst smaller organisations.

The views of frustrations among community organisations flow from the current policy landscape in which voluntary and community sector organisations find themselves operating in. It might be useful to note that the sector itself is epitomised by its two distinct types of community contribution to service delivery. Chanan (2003) identified two types of community contribution to service provision that are often confused: (i) the devolving of parts of public services to professionalised voluntary organisations, (ii) the autonomous provision of non-statutory service by community organisations. Often the two roles are mis-understood leading to confusion at the local level.

Mainstream professional organisations – a key component in the ecosystem of voluntary and community groups – are increasingly taking advantage of the government's policy objective of public service delivery through the voluntary and community sector. There is some confusion within the views held by respondents in community organisations on the balance of resources available for service delivery functions and advocacy activities. Often mainstream professional organisations are perceived to be detracting valuable funds away from type (ii) but smaller organisations fail to acknowledge that resources may be following type (i). The criticism of community organisations may be related to government priorities in relation to service delivery. The paradox here is that increased funding to community organisations would raise the issue of independence and could thereby damage the spontaneity of social capital.

To this extent, there is no obvious added value afforded by the involvement of larger voluntary organisations to build social capital directly. The mainstream, professionalised voluntary organisations are better placed to provide enabling services to smaller organisations to build social capital, at an arm's length through type (ii).

Links with corporate and business players were stronger in Blackwall than in East Ham, revealing a healthy awareness of the social responsibility agenda amongst companies in Canary Wharf. The Isle of Dogs Community Foundation, the charity arm of the now disbanded London Docklands Development Corporation, was an active funding body bringing private sector involvement into local communities.

### ***Isolation***

Many groups reported that their user groups express a deep sense of isolation and insecurity in their neighbourhoods. The majority of groups in both East Ham and Blackwall saw themselves as services, which were reducing the isolation of local residents. Groups that are most vulnerable to isolation included mothers, carers and elderly residents. These groups were mostly housebound due to a lack of free and accessible childcare. In particular the role of a volunteer breaks the isolation of mothers and elderly residents; in many cases the volunteers help to raise the self-esteem and confidence of the residents they assist.

### ***Informal ties***

Informal sociability is considered to be an important stock of social capital. There appears to be a greater stress on informal networks in Blackwall owing to a greater reliance on informal ties of sociability and mutual-aid in the absence of local voluntary organisations. Taking part in community events, sports, and meeting people in community centres for social chat and interaction were considered to be the main benefits of participating in voluntary organisations in both Blackwall and East Ham.

### ***Bonding and bridging diversity***

The networks and organisational capacity of different ethnic minority populations revealed different levels of bonding, bridging and linking social capital *in* and *between* ethnic minority communities pointing to diversity within a diverse population.

Black and minority ethnic communities were neither organised nor had any meaningful infrastructure to articulate their needs separately from mainstream services targeting the public. A number of stakeholders reported a failure to engage black and minority ethnic communities, and in particular the Bangladeshi population, in the local voluntary and community sector.

The Bangladeshi groups neither displayed high bonding nor bridging capital<sup>6</sup> and the majority of this population was isolated both from other Bangladeshis in the neighbourhood as well as from residents from other ethnic and social backgrounds. It was not clear whether this was the result of a lack of engagement by mainstream agencies or a process of self-exclusion. A number of voluntary and community practitioners urged Bangladeshi groups to form cultural associations as they considered this kind of bonding activity to be a pre-requisite to wider civic involvement and a precursor to bridging and linking activities.

Vietnamese groups did display strong bonding capital but this was divorced from 'bridging' networks and, lesser still, 'linking' relationships to mainstream agencies and

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<sup>6</sup> The lack of bonding capital runs counter to the limited studies on ethnic diversity which equate higher bonding capital and lower bridging capital with ethnic minority populations. See Knack and Keefer, 1997; World Bank Social Capital Library, and Putnam's work with the Pew Partnership on civic engagement in America, 2000.



organisations. Their circumstances and predicaments were consistent with social capital findings which show strong bonding ties in minority ethnic communities.

In East Ham concern with diversity and social fragmentation was expressed around the settlement of the refugee and asylum seeking population. Many organisations reported cases of discrimination and perceptions of institutional racism affecting refugee and asylum groups. For refugee and asylum groups the need for building bridging social capital was a more pertinent issue and also required additional financial and physical resources.

There was recognition of the importance of building links across differences within organisations. This appears to be truer in Blackwall than in East Ham.

*'On the whole most people seem to be comfortable joining groups where there are people similar to themselves – they find it natural – whether its elderly groups, an Alzheimer's support group or a Vietnamese group. This is good as it builds people's self esteem and confidence in small ways. But alongside these groups we should be making more efforts to link up with other organisations to avoid getting the reputation of being a segregated place. Our staff team are mixed, too, - we have English, Caribbean and Asian workers and it seems to give the impression of being open to all but our projects are attended by people similar to each other, but we also run different projects so that we don't leave anyone out.'*  
(Community Development Coordinator, Blackwall)

## **6.2 Community capacity and pro-activity**

### ***Collective action***

People were pessimistic about each other's willingness to contribute towards collection problems. Many respondents felt that most people held an individualist outlook on the assumption that people are neither reliable nor have the capacity to organise lobby and pressure local authorities. None of the respondents felt that people generally could effectively work together over collective problems that affect their local neighbourhoods.

*'If you want something done, you've got to do it yourself – you can't rely on others.'* (TA volunteer, East Ham)

Respondents mentioned a range of barriers that prevented people from acting together over collective problems – these ranged from language barriers, low literacy levels, and a lack of confidence and self-esteem, which stops people from vocalising their concerns. In both areas the pressure on schools and perceptions of poor quality schooling concerned many parents but few found the confidence to voice their concerns to the school either individually or as a group. As a result of the lack of collective organising capacity, many local groups, such as SPLASH in Blackwall and Homestart in Newham and others, find themselves providing advice and often intervening on behalf of users.

*'A lot of people feel as though they are facing a brick wall. If they don't feel confident and they don't have the capacity to sort out a serious problem what can you expect – we intervene, even when it's not part of our role to do so.'* (Community Development, Officer, Newham)

*'Residents don't find it easy to get involved in local groups. The people who use our services lack the skills. Confidence and social skills are low, so they don't feel confident to approach organisations.'* (Development Officer, Newham)

*'20 or 30 percent of the community is Bangladeshi so there's a massive language barrier. How you overcome this, somebody will have to let us know. Things are turning around and we've got younger people from other communities to come and participate.'* (TA organiser, Blackwall)

It is important to note however, that the poverty and disadvantage of the ward resulted in much of the voluntary and community activity in the area. The voluntary and community sector is therefore seen to be responding to social needs as well as reacting to a gap in service delivery.

*'Our strong voluntary sector activity in the ward can be attributed to the fact that this was a very needy area and people were concerned to see change in their area.'* (Neighbourhood Renewal Facilitator in East Ham)

There are recollections of collective action and mobilisations over a common cause. In Blackwall in particular members articulated a fighting spirit and recalled numerous confrontations with large bureaucracies in recent times, most recently in a campaign to save the Barkantine Clinic from closure and demolition.

*'We get around, we make a lot of noise, sometimes say things that are unpalatable to the local authority and any other statutory body. We have worked with political channels, and taken issues up to the MP, we have good relations with Jim Fitzpatrick (local MP). We go to just about everybody. Our strategy is to improve the quality of people's lives, call it what you will, I think a great man once said, by any means necessary. We took the mandate from the community, where people couldn't get involved we picked up the banner from them.'* (Tenant Participation Coordinator, Tenant Management Group, Blackwall)

### **Community activity**

People's awareness of mutual-aid and co-operation was limited to identifying individuals who were 'good at getting things done' as opposed to effective organisations. This tended to be paid staff, local councillors and church-affiliated individuals. There were a number of well-known pro-active citizens in Blackwall and East Ham, although these individuals are few in number but are over-represented and spread thinly across the wards in different representative structures.

There was a consensus that local community activity has increased over the years and that there are more services operating for local people to benefit from. However, the efficiency of these services is being called into question.

*'It has increased but I don't think that means that people's quality of life has got any better.'* (Chair of Tenants Association, Blackwall)

*'The quality of life is better for people with jobs; there's lots of shops here and things to do. But there's a lot of unemployment here. It's a pretty basic isolated place to be although there are a lot of trendy bars near (Canary Wharf), people can't access that because they haven't actually got any money in their pocket and there's not as*

*much social infrastructure as there should be.* (Community Development Organisation, Blackwall)

The scarcity of funding for community organisations makes it difficult to work together on common concerns, and frequently prevents collaboration. There were also some contradictory views on the roles of voluntary and community organisations in relation to the sector's advocacy and service delivery functions. A number of respondents mentioned that most voluntary and community groups act as pressure groups by playing an activist role but co-opted with the local state and funding dependency was undermining this activist role. Other groups expressed a desire to become a service delivery partner. The diversity of views of smaller organisations on the roles and functions of voluntary and community groups is indicative of the complexity of voices within the sector.

Estate-based networks were often providing services for individuals where statutory services cannot reach or penetrate. This was truer of Blackwall. The work of the housing associations and estate-based projects was seen as contributing critically to the physical and social infrastructure of the neighbourhood:

*People come to our project because we're situated right next door to their homes. The people that go to learning providers like colleges or projects outside the estate are usually the ones with more confidence. But it is generally hard for our clients to approach a second tier organisation like COF (VCS body). So what we do here at this basic level reaches the masses of people in whose names this area gets regeneration funding, that's why projects located in a housing related project really works'. (Project Worker, Blackwall)*

Public buildings are often a scarce resource in cities. As well as community buildings, Blackwall also has a number of listed church buildings with associated facilities for community activities, which given the limited resources, are adapted and opened up to cross-community use. This important resource of faith groups could be used further.

Tenant associations (TAs), were active associations in both Blackwall and Newham. In the past, voluntary action by elderly groups in TAs has produced collective benefits for local communities. A number of respondents and service providers, while acknowledging the activist profile of tenant associations, also mentioned that older 'angry' white males typically dominate such tenant associations and tended to put off newer participants.

*'The problem is that you find the same sort of people attending the LAP (Local Area Partnership) meetings for instance and usually those who attend are not representative of the local population. It's predominantly white and I think that the Bangladeshis and other ethnic groups could be intimidated by some of these other active people, especially these elderly white men from the tenants' groups who are well established and are right in your face really – just blunt and intimidating' (CEO of Voluntary Organisation, Isle of Dogs)*

Many respondents (stakeholder interviews) believed that faith groups are a good source of social capital. The mainly church-based groups and projects and a few other religious associations have been making an important contribution to social welfare and community development in both East Ham and Blackwall. In East Ham it is mainly the Christian-led organisations that are driving third sector activity. Other

faiths appeared to be less organised and structured. In Blackwall the churches are thinly spread but they provide their buildings and other assets for community activity to Christian and secular activities. The mosques are less organised but seem to have close connections with residents – However, they exist as self help groups with no paid staff and lack capacity to participate in wider networks.

Most of the faith groups are informal voluntary sector groups and do not receive any funding – they tend to assume an activist role in what they are doing. However, the faith and community groups are taking over this activist role and they are the ideal types of organisations through which the measurement of social capital should be carried out. The East London Communities Organisation (TELCO), in which volunteers are mostly leaders and representatives of faith organisations, is presently leading a campaign on minimum pay for low paid public and private sector workers. This type of campaign illustrates the way in which organisations can build bridging and linking social capital over social justice issues.

The gender distribution of community activists and volunteers was mixed in East Ham but predominantly female in Blackwall, which contradicted some of the normal patterns of community involvement and volunteering where men have tended to be play a more active role in the past. Social capital has been sustained in Blackwall by increasing participation of women in the community. Local women as paid staff and unpaid volunteers dominate the community sector. In East Ham the gender distribution of social capital builders is unevenly distributed; the leadership of faith organisations is mainly male but women's participation within the lower echelons of the organisation is higher. Male representatives, as indicated above, also dominate tenant associations.

### **6.3 Involvement and participation**

A higher level of participation in civic associations is associated with a stronger generation of social capital in communities. This measure is also useful as an indicator for the openness and inclusiveness of community and voluntary groups. The main finding here is that involvement in local groups helped to break down barriers between different social groups

A number of organisations conceded that although residents' involvement is easy on a superficial level, in practice there are many barriers to genuine involvement. The main barrier is poverty and not a lack of supporting structures for participation.

*'We have here an open door; people don't want to participate because of their own state of affairs. It's okay to participate so long as you have a nice life and you don't have three kids hanging down your legs, you know you got money and stuff like that, but if you're too busy worrying about your pennies or who will pay your electricity bill, or what you're gonna do with your kids, then it's hardly the environment to be getting people to participate.'* (TA group, Blackwall)

Young people's participation from different ethnic communities was also cited as an important source of bridging capital for achieving social cohesion goals as they are less likely to face language and cultural barriers in the same way as older cohorts in BME communities.

## **Volunteering**

There is a considerable amount of volunteering which takes place within local communities through churches, mosques, supplementary schools, mentoring projects, and self-help groups. However, much of this volunteering activity is not documented and appears to be linked to the informal voluntary sector. The informality of volunteering and self-help is also an important avenue of engagement for BME communities.

Volunteering in these communities appears to be needs driven and individuals appear to be responding to gaps in the services or helping out so that projects and initiatives do not fold. There appears to be a lot of volunteering in faith organisations where individuals participate as a way of strengthening their faith and spreading positive messages to others about their religious values. Volunteers are reported to be often critical in sustaining much-needed projects at the grass-roots level but there is a shortage of funds for the training and development of volunteers.

*'We couldn't do a lot of our work without the help of volunteers. We would like to do more to support our volunteers but funding tends to be used for other priorities'. (Director of Community Organisation, Blackwall)*

*'What makes Homestart work is the calibre of the volunteers we have. On the whole they are committed, reliable and we have a cross section of volunteers, though we don't always get the right type of volunteer and we are always short on volunteers.'*  
(Director of Voluntary Organisation, East Ham)

*'It's easy to get involved but so many groups use people but don't really develop their skills so eventually the enthusiasm wears off – if people do not get anything back in the long term they just move on.'*  
(Director of Community Organisation, Blackwall)

### **'Burn-out' of activists**

The role of 'burn-out' of community activists also emerged a number of times. It was widely acknowledged that the community representatives were thinly spread across the ward. The pressures that are put on a small number of individuals (sometimes acting as an individual and not representing an interest group) can become unhealthy. Little is done to encourage other people to become involved in key networks and consultative structures and hence networks are highly vulnerable to fracture from staff turnover or 'drop out'. But more importantly many respondents felt that this process also 'locks out' talented outsiders and 'disempowers the active periphery'.

### **Elite ownership of social capital by professionals**

In Blackwall some respondents were concerned that within the community sector the old guard had the unintended effect of holding back the new and younger community activists. Generally those who commented would like to see the longer established community representatives make room for younger and newer activists, and desired fresh blood to challenge the received wisdom, injecting more energy as well as new ideas.

In East Ham we encountered widespread resentment among community groups about the lack of representation of community groups in local strategic consultation

forums. Strong criticisms were made about the lack of local voluntary sector representatives on the Commission on the Voluntary Sector in Newham, which led to mistrust in the structures altogether. Many respondents felt that there could not be trust in the process without representation. Newham Council has duly acknowledged this.

*'It's not easy for people to act collectively or for us to lobby as much as we'd like to. It's very difficult due to a lack of resourcing, due to politics, putting resources into things that are sexy at the moment. As a result everything else waits and when it gets so bad, issues get picked up and resources shuffled around again. The larger voluntary organisations need to come out here and do some outreach in the neighbourhood, then they would see what role models mean to us and how far community activism goes instead of targeting more money into Connexions or education for university.'*  
(TA representative, Blackwall)

#### **6.4 Capacity to engage in decision-making processes**

The capacity for community representatives to participate in formal decision-making structures is an important indicator of the stocks of bridging and linking social capital in communities. This social capital indicator functions as an internal check on the democratic culture within the voluntary organisation itself and it also allows individuals representing the community and voluntary sector to vet public decisions taken by external agencies.

In both locations, attitudes towards the local authorities ranged from general distrust towards local government, political cynicism and a lack of confidence in the council's commitment towards a working partnership with the local community and voluntary sector. Sometimes this was founded upon disappointments in dealings with the council, other times the council bore the brunt of complaints for all things wrong in the neighbourhood. Many smaller groups also complained that the councils in the two areas cherry-picked which projects to fund and that it is virtually impossible to be awarded small grants unless a local councillor can pull strings to obtain funding. These perceptions demonstrate the dark side of social capital and the potential for groups to lockout groups that were less connected to political structures. The local authorities in both cases were deeply committed at the level of rhetoric at least to inclusive styles of working and to community involvement through the voluntary and community sector. Tower Hamlets Council has embarked on a Third Sector Strategy for its service delivery incorporating principles of participation to cross-sector partnerships. Newham Council set up a commission in 1999 to investigate the local voluntary sector, despite not having a community sector representative on its board.

Young people in both neighbourhoods thought that young people as a constituency are far removed from the seat of power and were of the opinion that given access they could improve both their own situation and that of society and demanded representation.

Voluntary organisations also acknowledged their own limitations in responding to people's opinions and views on service delivery. Respondents felt that they did not wish to engage in influencing work as they were preoccupied with providing basic services to their clients and had very little time to think outside of this role.



*'I don't feel that we can represent everyone's views – there's so many priorities – we have to hear people but cannot always represent every concern they have.'* (Director of Community Group, East Ham)

*'We recognise the value of influencing but we simply don't have the time – I already put 70 hours a week and still cannot stay on top of my workload without taking part in consultation work.'* (Church, East Ham)

These findings concur with research evidence by NCVO, which looked at how organisations view the balance between their roles as service deliverers and as campaigners or influencers. Many respondents in the study believed that their organisations did not have the right balance (Ashbridge/NCVO2002).

## **6.5 Identity, belonging and perceptions of neighbourhood**

Active involvement in local groups increased people's sense of belonging; in cases where community spirit was already high, participation served to boost civic pride of individuals.

*'I have lived here for eight years and never really felt at home – I always think of myself as a Stepney resident but since I have been actively involved in the SPLASH project I feel that there is more of a community spirit now. It didn't just happen, I had to put a lot of time and hard work into volunteering and now I feel like this is my neighbourhood.'* (St Vincent's' resident, Blackwall)

The majority of respondents felt that there is a strong sense of community in their area and they revealed a high degree of pride and attachment to their locality.

*'People think this is a rough area and that nothing is going on here; Stratford is much better because there is a lot of regeneration work going on there.'* (Hartley Community Centre, East Ham)

*'I feel part of the community because this is where I come from, it's where I've grown up all my life and I'm still living and working in East Ham.'* (Residents Group, East Ham)

However, problems with environmental damage, crime and anti-social behaviour led to many feeling that people didn't have enough of a sense of belonging to their neighbourhoods. This was destroying local social capital by depleting levels of trust and neighbourliness between residents.

*'If people cared a bit more this place wouldn't be in such a tip – how is that respecting people if you leave your rubbish around?'* (Harley Community Centre, East Ham)

An increased mobility of people – coming into the area and moving out - meant that older people who had lived in a particular place over a long time had a greater sense of belonging and community spirit. In some cases respondents, mainly white and Caribbean, indicated a sense of old ties breaking down due to the flow of people coming in and out, sometimes this took on racist overtones in relation to perceived preferential treatment towards Asian groups. While it is difficult to tell whether close-knit communities were more imagined than real it is still the case that large-scale change has engendered a loss of security and new frustrations in the working class

populations. But neighbourhood or community spirit appears to be intact, alongside some older tensions:

*'There's a lot of unemployment, there's lots vulnerable people, like a lot of inner city areas but we're quite a strong community here; if you'd asked me whether there was a strong community here five years ago I'd disagree because of the presence of the BNP in the Island. That was a very scary time, not just the Bangladeshis but also the indigenous community was very nervous about the situation and it did cause major divisions at the time. We managed to overcome that; have grown stronger because of that. If you'd asked me whether the BNP would get into power in this area in the future, I don't see it. There's mutual respect between the different communities in the estates, it's encouraging. We're gonna keep Blackwall and Millwall as it is.'* (TA representative, Millwall)

## **6.6 Trust**

Trust has featured prominently in subsequent reworking of social capital; it is central to understanding how social capital operates<sup>7</sup>. In Blackwall and East Ham, levels of trust have changed as a result of residents' involvement and this was linked to residents gaining a sense of ownership over their environment. Transparency and information exchange played a vital role in both communities in building networks of trusts and channels of communication between groups. Confidentiality was seen as being of utmost importance in the context of mediation and counselling groups. Trust was strong between mothers who developed childcare networks across different community centres and friends' houses. While this aspect of social capital is less acknowledged, childcare was deemed to indicate the strongest demonstration of social trust. Trust was most fractured and weak between older residents and younger population groups in both areas.

### **Safety**

Safety in a neighbourhood is positive evidence of social capital, as a neighbourhood that is organised in informal networks can to a degree exercise 'self-policing'. Our findings found safety and security to be lacking, pointing to negative evidence of social capital. Increased participation did not lead to changes in perceptions of safety. The breakdown of trust is demonstrated by the frequency of crime and anti-social behaviour amongst mainly young people.

### **Youth**

Attitudes towards young people in both areas fluctuate between an understanding of the reduced opportunities that are available for young people to invest in their future and also by fear, anxiety and insecurity over young people's apparent propensity for moral degradation, violence and anti-social behaviour. Many people believed that the solution to many of the problems lies in ensuring that young people have and make the best opportunities possible from school and education. It was felt that organisations like Connexions should focus more on targeted action on jobs rather than higher education.

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<sup>7</sup> The measurement of trust as a single component of social capital has led researchers to doubt the value of its instrumental value as a measurement tool. As a result trust is measured in relation to a series of other indicators to derive more use-value for social capital as a policy tool.

The spectre of youth gangs feeds residents' fears and preoccupies policy and social services locally. The conclusions from a recent consultation carried out by a local charity demonstrate how these attitudes have become conflated to produce a prescriptive impact on youth service provision.

*'Young people's services are often targeted towards young people at risk and focusing on addressing key public policy concerns. General preventative and diversionary work for all young people, such as play and youth services, have been easy targets for local authority cutbacks in recent years, especially as this provision is not a legal requirement for statutory provision.'* (Mile End Park Partnership, 2000)

Young people often find it hard to articulate their concerns but generally felt that youth facilities are limited which sometimes has knock-on effects in causing young people to lose focus and stray.

### ***Norms, expectations and reciprocity***

Norms are usually based on a previous history of co-operation and act to promote an expectation of reciprocity. Norms figure as both a necessary condition and an outcome of trust. As such they cannot be imposed on the group but emerge spontaneously between people.

The question here is what people gain from their participation in local groups. This is important given the voluntary nature of people's involvement and so norms, expectations and reciprocity was considered from the point of view of members and residents. People's reasons for involvement included concerns to access information and advice related to housing, education and employment opportunities, but also to build friendships and break up home-based routines of childcare and housework (for mostly women). General motivations for involvement related to a notion of reciprocity either in terms of sharing and learning new experiences from the organisation or a sense of duty to assist people in small ways. Friendship and personal satisfaction from participating in local groups were the main benefits of joining an organisation for many respondents. This was particularly true for women and elderly groups.

Volunteering activities appeared to build and consolidate shared norms, expectations and acts of reciprocity. On the whole respondents found it difficult to articulate what they contributed back to their community. Many found it far easier to express what they gained from participating. Some respondents mentioned how they enjoyed making other people, including friends and neighbours, aware of the many opportunities that were available locally for personal investments. Others mentioned social interaction, events and feeling good about getting people out to do things together as a community. Others mentioned a sense of duty and wanting to 'put something back into the community', 'giving younger generations more hope' and so on.

## **6.7 Satisfaction with life and well-being**

Housing was the main source of friction and frustration in both neighbourhoods. In Blackwall, frustration over housing and employment was expressed in terms of the gentrification of the neighbourhood, the moving in of other poorer groups and an influx of high-income workers.

Only one active community-based organisation – the South Poplar and Limehouse Action for Secure Housing (SPLASH) – serves the large-scale housing estates. More recently the social housing landlord (HARCA) is servicing some areas closely linked to social regeneration of the housing estates. Both these organisations are based around housing needs, thereby demonstrating the relevance of housing as a campaigning issue in the area. Concern over housing is currently complicated by the current plans to transfer the management of social housing to other housing providers.

In general local people exercised little control over the development of their neighbourhood and felt powerless in the face of rapid change in their areas. On the whole this frustration was expressed against ‘outsiders’ mainly Bangladeshis or Asians. A number of respondents in Blackwall also felt that there were insufficient efforts to tackle racism, and that organisations skirted around some of the issues. This has knock-on effects on neighbourhood identity and community spirit.

In East Ham, housing was seen as a pressing concern but this was considered less important than crime and anti-social behaviour. A number of respondents raised the issue of housing allocation and the need to prioritise ‘local people’ which most of the time was a euphemism for working class white people. ‘Insiders’ (local people) and ‘outsiders’ However, were contested terms as many black and Asian families were also born and bred in the same areas and so this confused the issue of ‘who is and isn’t local’. Racial harassment was thought to be less of a problem compared with Blackwall, although respondents failed to recognise hostility targeted towards refugees and asylum seekers as racism.

## **7. SUMMARY OF KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Jargon busting**

Some had little understanding of the term and others found it to be yet another term in the confusing jargon of regeneration circles.

### **The downside of social capital**

The use of social capital terminology brings out a negative reaction from people working in voluntary and community organisations. People are suspicious of the term and frequently viewed discussions on social capital with suspicion and many respondents believed this to be another mechanism for government to deny communities valuable economic resources. There is anxiety that a focus on social capital concentrates attention on deficits in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and this may be used as a tool for coercing small groups into closer alignment with government-led agendas. This relates to one of the chief criticisms from the left on social capital, which is the absence or weak presence of the state in extolling the virtues of social capital. Respondents preferred to see more involvement from the state in terms of putting physical and financial resources alongside social capital proposals.

### **Who mobilises social capital?**

There is a distinction between the activities of groups building formal social capital and the activities of communities and individuals building informal social capital. Faith groups, elderly groups and tenants organisations are the

*formal* groups that nurture social capital. Christian-led faith organisations are the most active voluntary and community organisations. The tenant association sector is the most active champion of civil society, reflecting a link between activism and action for better quality social housing. At the same time it is important for this sector to dispel negative perceptions around its membership. Mostly elderly white males dominate the TA sector and increasingly these organisations are looking for ways to encourage a broader based membership. They frequently lack the capacity to invest in methods and tools for better participation.

Social capital reveals gender specific dynamics. Women are the primary mobilisers of social capital in both case studies. However, their styles of participation and habits of co-operation are revealed in different ways. These organisations are mostly dominated by men at the leadership level but informally women tend to be the primary mobilisers in a community's stock of social capital either lower down in the organisational hierarchy or completely outside of organisational structures as seen in mothers and toddlers groups, and neighbours support groups. In specific BME communities faith-based community organisations are an appropriate means of encouraging the participation of women via gender-segregated spaces.

### **Informal ties and invisible social capital**

Informal sociability and care networks were considered to be an important stock of social capital. Caring responsibilities between neighbours and within the family point to informal networks that constitute high levels of invisible social capital. These informal social networks revealed both gendered and ethnically disaggregated patterns of involvement. Informal volunteering was also reported to be higher in minority ethnic communities where individuals with high human capital were disproportionately supporting their peers in need of help.

Whilst invisible social capital is of the utmost important in pointing to levels of social capital within neighbourhoods, it is difficult to measure or find a currency that demonstrates its value to civic renewal.

### **Diversity**

- Bridging and bonding social capital in ethnically homogenous groups appear to be positively related. There is therefore no foundation for policies that attempt to limit bonding (i.e. trying to prevent people from setting up their own cultural associations) on the grounds that this prevents them from bridging. Instead, bonding social capital is a precursor to bridging as well as occurring alongside it.
- Diversity overall is likely to weaken a sense of belonging in the *short term*, but may change as old and new communities adjust over time and renegotiate identity and belonging. This does not mean that we should be looking at homogenous communities as ideals but rather that the challenge of managing diversity in the short term will be critical to counteracting the negative spillover that is sometimes associated with diversity. There needs to be more links across distinct communities that are strongly bonded internally. For example faith-based groups may participate in the Local Strategic Partnerships or

create alliances with non-faith groups or other faith-based organisations over an issue of mutual concern (such as minimum wage or housing ballots).

- Young people tend to participate better in internally bonded groups (i.e. in peer groups). Within youth projects there are cases of women-only activities, which generate higher levels of participation from young women than mixed activities. A culture of participation in some organisations also enables representatives of young people to take a seat in decision-making structures. These avenues for participation are often through a youth advisory board or a role of trustee on the management board. Overall however, there is little room for young people to express themselves politically or promote their agendas in adult-led decision-making forums. Consequently many young people feel their voices are not heard.
- The increased participation of young people from ethnic minority populations in voluntary and community representative structures is an avenue for increasing social cohesion levels between disconnected white and minority ethnic communities.

### **Faith-based community organisations**

- Organised faith groups can play a pivotal role in bridging activities across communities. Increased funding will also open up faith-based groups to greater accountability and transparency and mitigate anxieties over extremist features of some faith-based groups.

### **The role of the voluntary sector**

- Voluntary and community groups in general are building social capital in communities. Many groups already build capacity and confidence of local people to create and sustain associations and strengthen reciprocal returns based on trust and mutual-aid. Groups recognise that these types of activity build local neighbourhoods. In many cases the social capital argument is something people already believed in: '*we already know this*'. Many organisations and groups already carry out social capital building work but they are not marketed as such. Many groups preferred alternative expressions for social capital – capacity building, 'sweat equity' or plain community development.
- One of the questions this study hoped to answer was the role of the voluntary sector in promoting social capital in local communities. The case studies revealed slightly different variations of the role of voluntary action in/through community and voluntary organisations. Two distinct normative roles for the voluntary sector are identifiable (cf. Lock 1999): the first is that voluntary organisations provide the first stepping stones for individuals to get involved in voluntary action; the second is that voluntary organisations also provide a mechanism and route into power and decision-making structures. While both these roles are mutually reinforcing of each other they also point to differing interpretations of social capital. Is voluntary action motivated by normative values such as shared norms, values and reciprocity around mutual-aid and care or is voluntary action motivated by increasing social polarisation whereby individuals lacking access to power become involved as a means to challenging mainstream values and norms of 'official' agencies? In practice it is possible for functions to exist alongside each other. It is not clear whether

the former role is prevalent in affluent neighbourhoods and the latter role is more common in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. There is some evidence in the literature to suggest that more volunteering takes place within higher income groups (Davis-Smith 1998), and that BME organisations have historically sprung from individuals who have themselves had first hand experience of social polarisation against which their established organisations seek to offer support (CEMVO 2002).

- We emphasise the value of voluntary and community organisations in providing a vehicle for the creation and expression of social capital. The demands on the voluntary and community sector are affected by a number of factors. This means that the role of the sector will change and develop in response to shifting demands. The findings suggest that in both East Ham and Blackwall both roles are operating alongside each other but there are some notable conclusions that can be made in relation to the types of voluntary action prevalent.
- The voluntary sector represents an important source of bridging and linking capital for communities as one of the sector's key features is to connect individuals to other local groups and organisations and most importantly to 'official' decision-making structures. On this social capital indicator both East Ham and Blackwall showed weak results. This is undoubtedly linked to the accumulation of social capital in small number of active residents and volunteers and also to the visibility of male representatives in the faith-based community organisations. This raises questions around the ownership and sustainability of social capital and whether it resides with the individual (private good) or at the organisational level. This has thought provoking implications for both conceptualising and operationalising social capital as a sustainable public good.

### **Linking capital**

- Intermediary organisations and umbrella bodies are more involved in building linking capital for small groups. There is a need for smaller groups to interact with mainstream voluntary organisations in order to build their capacity for lobbying and campaigning work for collective action. The work of the Citizens Organising Foundation is exemplary in building linking social capital by building bottom-up campaigns from numerous representatives and community leaders of grassroots organisations.

### **Capacity building**

- Although research on social capital formation in the voluntary sector is still relatively new, a number of policy directions may be gleaned from mapping the sector and making links across various policy initiatives promoting neighbourhood renewal. The quality of institutions and the openness of institutional channels affect the stock of social capital (Lowndes et al 2002). This points to a need to think through implications of capacity building infrastructures within the voluntary sector, which can enable possibilities for co-operation and collective action.
- The capacity for local organisations to engage with decision-making opportunities afforded from voluntary sector channels is under-developed. From a social capital perspective the real challenge for building stronger

communities is less the choice of particular outputs (such as policy interventions or targeted programmes for social capital formation), than the need to develop new governance models that encourage community involvement, dialogue and active participation. Specific capacity building measures should include:

- An approach that provides a supportive and enabling environment for participation.
- Smaller organisations should be supported at arm's length in rolling out their activities and appropriate ways to monitor their performance should be worked out in dialogue with them.
- The establishment of the terms of people's engagement to reflect shared values and norms of users and public bodies alike in a balanced manner.
- The development of skills and knowledge about how different organisations work.
- Opportunities to access key decision-makers in larger organisations.
- Recognition by larger organisations of the needs, legitimacy, skills and knowledge of smaller organisations.
- Willingness of larger organisations to respond to the agendas of smaller organisations and enhanced ability of smaller organisations to respond to the agenda of larger organisations.
- The establishment processes of interaction e.g. deliberation.
- Physical and financial resources.

### **The role of Government**

- Government should investigate social capital as a policy objective in its right, alongside other related objectives such as community development, civil renewal, and participation.
- Physical and financial resources and the role of the state should not be allowed to escape the 'local lens' of social capital analysis.
- Communities should be given adequate space without being squeezed by a 'hugging syndrome' which is the tendency of decision-makers to devolve too much responsibility towards communities without investing in material resources to capacity build for social capital processes such as participation, collective events and so on.
- The diversity of local government should be recognised as a causal factor in the shape of local service delivery and take-up of provision. In reality, local government is a large bureaucratic machine, a variety of different departments and agencies characterised by a lack of coordination and priorities. Frequently people anticipate consensus and harmonisation on policies and projects on the often mistaken assumption of smooth and consistent governance. Senior decision-makers often work on an individual basis to actively shape policy and practice, which makes a significant difference to how voluntary and community groups are engaged.



## **8. IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Locality and associational structure of social capital in Blackwall and East Ham**

In Blackwall, absolute levels of social capital were lower than in East Ham but bonding capital existed among elderly people and 'old guard' community organisers who had cemented their networks from their collective opposition to the London Docklands Development Corporation in the 1980s. This 'old guard' is still the vanguard of the community and voluntary organisations in Blackwall and wider Isle of Dogs.

The Community Organisations Forum acts as the umbrella body in Tower Hamlets and offers generic capacity building support for local organisations across the borough but the number of staff and the volume of its services are insufficient to meet needs. The infrastructure for the voluntary and community sector in Blackwall was made up of a small number of associations that were relatively well known in the area but whose services and activities were over-stretched to the limit. The communities are better served by a plethora of small organisations that are geographically placed closer than the larger professionalised voluntary organisations. These organisations tend to be a combination of self-help groups, places of worship and tenant associations. They tend to be staffed by mainly volunteers or part time staff. Small numbers of groups dominate the voluntary and community sector, with key individuals and community activists carrying out representative roles across a number of initiatives. On the one hand this activity demonstrated a high level of commitment to community spirit in the neighbourhood; but on the other it illustrated that only a handful of people were driving collective action, causing some concern over the sustainability and diversity of representation.

East Ham revealed a robust voluntary sector where community life is flourishing. East Ham's vibrancy may be explained by its busy town centre with retail and shopping facilities around a high street, alongside the large number of community and voluntary groups operating as part of larger regional and national networks. The central significance of the high street to the ward gives the impression of neighbourhood connectedness. The borough has recently established the Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium to act as a network and support agency to the voluntary sector; and East Ham has a highly active Community Forum. The vibrancy of its associational structures and the appearance of a busy retail sector can create an impression of sociality, connectedness and relative affluence. Many of these groups relate to service provision but many are places for informal networks for friendships, social activities and community festivals. Some are large organisations and others smaller charities. Although there are 'hard-to-reach' communities that fail to participate in many local groups there is strong networking between them to ensure that the benefits of public services are trickling down to social excluded communities, though more improvement would be desirable. The existence of religious associations in East Ham is one of the main reasons for the vibrancy of its civil society.

### **Some policy options**

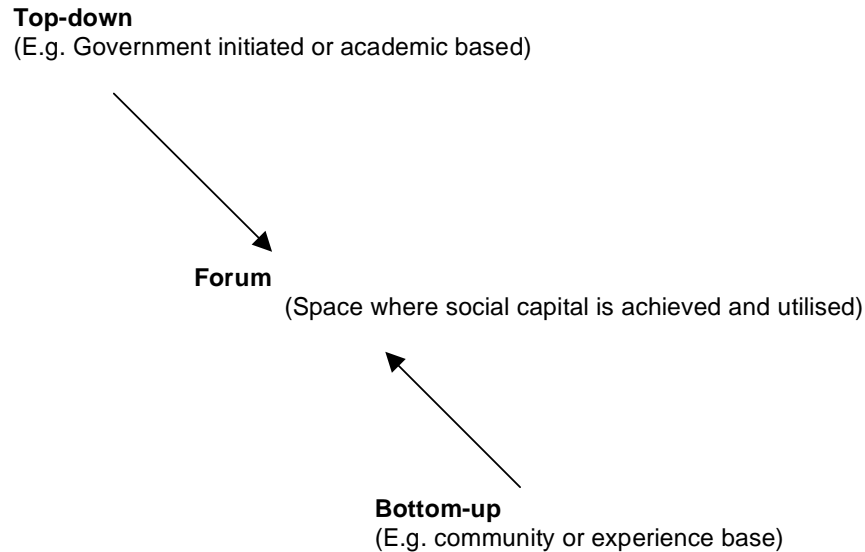
Social capital has risen to prominence in government and policy circles due to a desire to address a policy imbalance between economic growth and social development (seen as leading to a lack of social cohesion). Over the past 20 years governments have invested in developing the potential for economic growth and

social cohesion, and social goals more generally have received lower priority. Promoting social capital appears to address this latter concern by creating a healthy relationship between the two goals. Notably, the spread of social capital ideas has been boosted by a decline in state provision of services to vulnerable groups and consequent growth in voluntary and community activity. The current government policy on the future delivery of welfare services will continue to impact on the expansion of the voluntary sector's direct provision of welfare services. The voluntary and community sector is being co-opted to deliver services mainly because of its strengths concerning its understanding of the needs in the 'community', its ability to increase community involvement, social capital and social cohesion and its ability to generate new practices in service delivery. These changes have produced tensions in the sector's role in relation to advocacy/campaigning versus service delivery.

Several issues come to the fore when considering the role and direction of social capital formation, and the particular role that the government and grassroots actors play in this process. In fact there is significant disagreement among the respondents on this issue. One view held by mainly grassroots community groups is that too much political emphasis is being placed on new concepts such as social capital at the expense of recognising that building social capital is the core development activity of many community actors and groups. The role of government therefore is to continue to provide capacity building support to enable these groups to continue their portfolio of work. Another view held by key informants, including voluntary sector professionals and statutory officers is that the government has virtually no direct role in helping to create social capital. Acceding to this view the building of social capital is acknowledged as a spontaneous civil society activity with minimal government involvement. This view consolidates critical opinions from voluntary and community groups, which argue that government needs to play a greater role in supporting the promotion of social capital. It considers that there is currently an overt-reliance on the social capital of volunteers who possess finite time and resources to build social cohesion and collective working as a public virtue without adequately supporting the development of both the physical and social infrastructure of organisations and neighbourhoods from where these volunteers operate. So, far from retreating from civil society spaces the role of central and local government should be encouraged in social capital proposals. These proposals are based on the desirability of a mixture of policy responses and the necessity of creating a forum or space, irrespective of the origins of development action. This approach is likely to be inclusive of all sectors engaged in the local regeneration process and fits in with our broad-based definition of 'community involvement', which begins with the premise that a desire to involve local communities is not identified with any one sector: instead the term involver(s) is used to describe all those who seek to engage communities. Therefore a key point of policy relevance is not whether policy development is top-down in the sense of being government-initiated or growing from academic thought and policy-making, or bottom-up in the sense of emerging from practical experiences in the community, but whether there is space, or opportunity, to assess the relevance and value of a proposal (Robinson 2002). We found a policy framework from New Zealand, which is useful for navigating through the possibilities of these proposals.

'The issue of top-down or bottom-up in relation to initiating and developing an action may be irrelevant. What is critical is the space where, and the process whereby, interaction occurs and social capital is activated and utilised. That is, the transformation of activities, memory, relationships and resources into use as 'social capital' (2002 Robinson et al).

#### **Types of Policy Proposals**



Source: Robinson, D., (2002)

Based on this framework we have developed a series of conclusions and recommendations for the building of social capital in local communities, laying out the roles and responsibilities of different sectors in bringing about these policy changes.

## 1. Respecting independence

Maintaining the independence of the sector should be a key priority for local and central governments. The Government has already accepted the principle of independence of the sector as part of the Compact between central government and the voluntary and community sector, signed in November 1998 to act as a code of good practice for future relations. The relevant public authorities should apply this principle and understand that independence is a major contributor to the building of social capital in the sector. Innovative practices and schemes informed by local knowledge should be encouraged. Respect for independence should include the recognition of diversity in the voluntary and community sector.

### **Recommendations**

- *Maintaining the independence of the sector should be a priority for local and central governments.*
- *Respect for independence should include the principle and recognition of diversity in the voluntary and community sector.*

## 2. Relationships with government: partnerships

Representation and accountability are centrally important issues for partnership structures, which involve working with local communities. Effective partnership working and community involvement require training and other resources to allow weaker partners to perform on equal terms with other partners. Community groups need to be empowered to obtain resources for undertaking a range of responsibilities linked to building their store of social capital.

Local voluntary and community organisations experience pressures to respond to official agendas even when these have distracted community organisations attention away from their own agendas. Local groups need to learn the skills with which to respond to official agendas, and particularly when these conflict with their own.

Local communities are not single or homogeneous communities, and often compete with each other for funding streams. Conflict between different sections of local communities is always possible. Planners need to take account of this diversity and difference, especially if they are to take into consideration the different needs of black and minority ethnic groups. Public officials at all levels should take on board managing conflict and facilitating consensus amongst large voluntary networks and smaller community groups. There is a role for Government Offices of the Regions (in England) through its Neighbourhood Renewal Advisors on the Local Strategic Partnerships to act as facilitator to mediate in conflicts of interests in the early stages of regeneration partnerships and prevent the process from becoming derailed at a later stage.

The language and practice of representation and accountability imply a degree of formality and reporting structures. It is important to recognise that the need to secure representation and accountability through formal structures may conflict with informal styles of operations in the community settings.

### **Recommendations**

- *At national level, the current arrangements for appointing local Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Co-ordinators is a model that can be applied across other initiatives to achieve consensus between diverse voluntary and community voices in a locality.*

### **3. Sustaining social capital – whose responsibility?**

The active citizenship agenda being promoted by government raises the question of the role of government in building social capital and civil society. While the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, suggests building social capital is a joint endeavour between the state, communities and individuals, the terms of this relationship need to be made more explicit. There is a basic policy choice for government to consider in relation to social capital – does government aid civil society by creating space and opportunities for its development of social capital, or by vacating this space and not leaning too closely on the voluntary and community sector for its public policy objectives?

The answer must lie in the combination of the two positions – government can best aid the development of social capital by vacating some space to civil society. Government can maintain a mediating role in creating social space and in doing so, must avoid a relationship based solely on its own terms.

Another important issue is whether government can create social spaces that reflect the values of others, and which would therefore be sustained on the communities' terms. The government's ability to accept and trust the outcomes and activities generated from these spaces goes to the heart of the government's neighbourhood renewal agenda, which places a certain degree of emphasis on entrusting communities with delivering locally driven projects.

Organisations need to ensure that accumulated social capital is not lost from high turnover of staff, and volunteers.

### **Recommendations**

- *At national level, government departments such as the Active Communities Unit (Home Office) and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) should issue a clear and unambiguous statement on their vision of social capital – is it a free and voluntary expression of citizenship or is it bound up with service provision and key government objectives?*

## **4. A harmonized approach to work**

While it is still too early to recommend that social capital should be mainstreamed across government in a similar way to other related concepts such as social exclusion and social cohesion, it is possible for government to take a more joined approach to its (small) portfolio of work on social capital. Government should aim to give a clear signal to implementation partners on where government currently stands on social capital and which departments are keen to pursue social capital outcomes beyond policy-making and theoretical deliberations.

Department in government where there is scope of joining-up social capital work across different initiatives include ONS's development of a bank of social capital indicators, the Home Office's work on Citizenship and social cohesion, the Audit Commission's work on local performance indicators, the Community Development Foundation's work with local authorities on developing indices of community participation for the Active Communities Unit, the work on community participation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and the DTI's work on assessing the extent of social economy.

### **Recommendations**

- *At local level, local authorities should consider appointing a social capital coordinator to liaise within different local authority departments working on social capital, community involvement and third sector issues.*
- *Base line targets on social capital should be included in neighbourhood renewal plans, alongside existing floor targets and Best Value indicators*
- *Umbrella and intermediary bodies such as CVSs and NCVO should undertake capacity building seminars on social capital to help smaller groups to untangle the various policy messages on social capital, community development and social enterprises.*
- *At national level, there needs to be commitment to a social capital strategy from the 'top', possibly from the Cabinet Office's Strategy Unit. The Unit needs to coordinate work on social capital by government departments that have taken place since its initial report into social capital in 2000.*
- *Government departments should consider cross-fertilising their work on social capital. Specific departments charged with taking action on social capital might include the Home Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.*
- *A good communication of the strategy or commitment on social capital needs to be put in place, both within and outside government.*

## 5. Linking social capital: identifying allies

Voluntary and community groups should look forward to closer working relationships across the sector and with local authorities.

Local groups are under increasing pressure to work in partnerships to obtain funding, but can gain strength in solidarity and numbers from doing so. The availability of knowledge on service providers around a similar issue and community networks for information flow enables groups to identify windows of opportunity for building new relationships and intervening in policy debates.

Government should help local groups by building up their capacity to engage with their partners on public policy issues.

### **Recommendations**

- *Umbrella and intermediary bodies need to make resources available to enable community representatives to network locally and regionally to share experiences and findings.*

## 6. Engaging with funders

Competition for funding leads to organisations adapting their provision to meet funding criteria in other areas of activity. Core social capital activities get left behind in the search for programmes that attract funding. Government needs to match its commitment to building social capital in communities with financial and physical resources without intensifying competition for funding at the regional and local levels.

### **Recommendations**

- *At local level, the local authority should consider designating additional resources to social capital activities, making clear that this does not replace existing funding but is complementary to it.*
- *CVSs and umbrella bodies should lobby government to match its current interest in social capital with specific policy goals on social capital and resources to support these aims. Intermediary bodies should also strengthen their existing capacity building activities with smaller groups.*
- *Foundations and trusts should invest in social capital projects in local communities as a distinct programme component from generic and core community based activities.*
- *At regional and national level, CVSs and umbrella bodies should inform their members on the merits of incorporating social capital development into their work programmes.*

## 7. Relationships with local government

The voluntary and community sector has had mixed experiences in its relationships with local government. A greater level of mutual trust is needed if the voluntary and community organisations are to play a larger part in local service delivery and have opportunities to influence local policies.

In the light of the rapid economic, social and physical changes affecting many localities, local authorities should review their relationships with the local voluntary and community sector on a regular basis. The Best Value machinery provides one appropriate means for doing this. It may also be desirable to embark on the process of developing a local compact between the local authority, the local voluntary and community sector and local health authorities. In doing so, care needs to be taken not to exclude smaller community-based organisations.

Generally, the structure and functioning of local authorities is passing through a period of rapid transformation, as a result of new initiatives launched by central government and the move towards a concept of 'local governance', based on partnership between local authorities and other agencies working in their geographical area.

These moves towards partnership offer opportunities for the voluntary and community sector, but there are grounds for caution: in some cases, lack of internal coordination may mean that policies are not as consistent as between different local authority departments; in others there may be opposition on the part of members of local authorities to too close an engagement with representatives of the voluntary and community sector in policy-making. The likely creation of regional government structures may further complicate the situation.

### **Recommendations**

- *At local level, representatives of the local voluntary and community sector should consider approaching the local authority to suggest measures that will promote a working partnership that respects the independence of the sector, perhaps in the form of a local compact.*
- *At national level, the Local Government Association could be drawn in for advice and help. Advice can also be sought from NCVO as to the form in which partnership can most effectively be pursued.*

## **8. Local leadership**

Public bodies need to recognise different styles of community leadership. Formal and collectivist styles of leadership in tenants' organisations are running alongside informal styles of representation to include the tradition of trade union organising workshop-based engagements. This reflects changing demographics of urban localities in Britain, which has given rise to different styles of representation and a greater willingness amongst policy-makers to allow weak voices to be heard in public spaces.

Government and its local agencies must help to build a wide range of flexible routes into formal structures in local governance, recognise the diversity of leadership styles in local communities and be adept at using both traditional leadership styles as well as newer facilitation models.

### **Recommendations**

- *At local level, tenants associations and registered social landlords should provide informal structures to increase the participation of under-represented groups. There needs to be a full recognition of the diversity of the communities that organisations are seeking to serve and of the importance of tailoring the participation routes and access routes into the organisation to meet the specific requirements of these communities.*
- *At national level, Government may invest in capacity building initiatives for social capital through existing programmes like Community Champions, Time Bank, and Future Builders.*

## **9. Diversity and social cohesion**

Policy-makers are faced with the challenge of balancing the needs of minority groups with the government need for social cohesion. Yet social cohesion cannot be established without an increased focus on building the capacity of the black and minority ethnic voluntary and community sector.

There has been a widely acknowledged under-funding and exclusion of BME organisations among service providers; yet at the same time competition for resources at the neighbourhood level leads to excluded white groups resenting the take-up of resources by BME groups. More investment in social capital capacity building is needed in the ethnic minority communities through needs-based social audits of specific communities.

Faith-based community organisations appear to be the most active civil society organisations at the present moment. The involvement of faith-based community organisations in regeneration is firmly recognised as one element of a robust regeneration strategy. Faith organisations should be encouraged to take part in cross sector partnerships and multi-faith forums in order to strengthen their independence as autonomous faith organisations.

### **Recommendations**

- *At local level, bonding activities of faith and BME organisations should be valued alongside future options on developing their bridging and linking capital.*
- *Statutory, voluntary and community organisations should improve their participation structures for involving young people especially in decision-making processes.*
- *At national level, Government should retain its arm's length relationship with faith groups by not supporting faith activities themselves (as this ensures a healthy respect for their independence) but it should extend its support to the social and welfare activities of such groups.*



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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **SOCIAL CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN BLACKWALL AND EAST HAM**

The East Ham and Blackwall wards in East London are home to an ethnically diverse population. The area has seen massive social and economic change over the past two decades. A number of factors have spurred the rate of change in the area, including the closure of the docks in East London and the subsequent large-scale loss of employment, significant population growth, rapid redevelopment and gentrification of residential areas by middle class residents. There is evidence of widespread deprivation in the wards, concentrated on some of the poorest social housing estates in London. East Ham is one of the more affluent wards within Newham and Blackwall is one of the poorer wards in Tower Hamlets. Exclusion from the labour market was a dominant feature in residents' experience of social exclusion in both areas.

East London has been particularly hard hit by structural changes in the economy between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s. The decline in the industrial economy has had particularly harsh consequences in East London compared with other areas in East London boroughs such as Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham. Male employment rates, often taken as a key poverty indicator in national statistics, are as low as fifty percent. This has created problems of community despair, low morale and physical decay. While not all problems in East London can be put down to economic adjustment it is nevertheless true that chronic poverty was certainly exacerbated by these structural trends. The closure of docks and a dwindling clothing industry in the early 1980s in common with other parts of inner London, saw massive labour reductions in other industries such as gas, water, railways, distribution and other manufacturing.

Some parts of East London's economy have enjoyed a renewed lease of life from the new economy in finance, information services and so on in the Canary Wharf development. In addition, Newham and Tower Hamlets are now part of a bigger territory and the focus of the government supported Thames Gateway London partnership. Our selection of case studies therefore falls within geographical areas marked out for intense regeneration in line with London's regional development frameworks. Both Newham and Tower Hamlets qualified for NRF status and have set up LSP systems for delivering NRF funds. These NRF processes are operating alongside older streams of programmes such as the New Deals for Communities operated by the Home Office. In both areas active public participation is sought on various regeneration partnerships but the capacity to participate, whether in formal electoral politics or informal 'community participation', has been weak. It remains to be seen whether the new infrastructure for supporting active participation in the guise of the Neighbourhood Renewal Plans will strengthen the articulation of local interests.

#### **Blackwall**

Blackwall is an area dominated by transport links to London, the Thames Gateway and the Greenwich Peninsula. Its development as a transport hub and mega-scale development of Canary Wharf financial district nearby has been pursued at the expense of developing the built environment and the quality of life for local residents. Many of the housing estates and buildings in Poplar have been built alongside the mega-scale development of the London Docklands in East London. Poplar is home

to the largest construction site in Europe. The vast Canary Wharf and HSBC Bank towers dominate the skyline of Blackwall.

The connectedness (or lack of it) of local organisations is related to geographical and spatial ordering of Blackwall where transport routes and road works dominate the physical landscape of Blackwall, and affect people's perceptions of neighbourhood. The road works cut across the entire ward leading to highly territorialized boundaries and narrow conceptions of 'community connectedness' between geographical communities. This makes connections and networks difficult to establish and sustain over time. Blackwall's proximity to the Canary Wharf Development generated opportunities for groups like SPLASH (South Poplar and Limehouse Action for Secure Housing) to raise funds from the corporate sector. The availability of this fall back resource from the private sector enables the local authority to sometimes side-step Blackwall.

### **Voluntary and community sector**

Absolute levels of social capital were lower but bonding capital existed among elderly people and 'old guard' community organisers who had cemented their networks from their collective opposition to the London Docklands Development Corporation in the 1980s. This 'old guard' is still the vanguard of the community and voluntary organisations in Blackwall and wider Isle of Dogs generally.

Until recently Blackwall, incorporating Poplar has had little or no community development or support for decades. There are massive problems facing residents ranging from drug taking across all estates, isolation of residents, depression, and unemployment and ill health through a lack of activity. The onset of mega-scale development in the Docklands and the building of the Limehouse Link and the Docklands Light Railway in the late 1980s spurred the residents to form the main pressure group in the locality (i.e. SPLASH). SPLASH was created from a protest movement against the threat of redevelopment; over the years it organised collective opposition to the demolition of local homes to make way for new development. Since the disbanding of the London Docklands Development Corporation the Urban Development Corporations invested in planning controls to by-pass local opposition in the 1980s) SPLASH has lost its protesting prowess. The legacy of the defunct LDDC is the Isle of Dogs Community Foundation, which provides long term funding to small voluntary and community groups. The corporate and statutory sectors have more or less co-opted local voluntary and community sector into a dependent funding relationship. SPLASH still maintains a conflict-ridden relationship to larger powerful bodies but its campaigning focus has shifted. The new battle-lines are between social welfare agencies and their different visions of local development and the new enemies are articulated as social landlords that are buying up large stocks of council homes in a bid to deliver housing services in place of the local state.

### **Community profile**

Blackwall has a variety of communities living in its neighbourhoods in social housing and privately rented sectors. The population is broken into three main categories: the white working class population; the more recently arrived ethnic minority communities, mainly Bangladeshi, to a lesser extent Vietnamese and Somali groups; and finally the most recently arrived and more affluent workers coming in as a result of the prestigious waterside development and/or their work on Canary Wharf. The former two groups are suffering high levels of deprivation and are more likely to be unemployed. More needs to be done to integrate the three population groups.

## **East Ham**

East Ham is a town centre lying within the London Borough of Newham. This was an area of strong working class ('old Labour') politics, linked to the Dockland's manufacturing base. The Borough Council made a transition in the late 1980s to a more accommodating relationship with the London Docklands Development Corporation and central government's business interests in 'wealth creation' and economic development. In this long process of shifting priorities, some of the old priorities (notably housing and support to manufacturing) received less priority compared to new ones. However, in comparison to Stratford nearby where development has been skewed towards business tourism and international transport links, East Ham has received more attention on old priorities; such as decent housing and employment opportunities.

### **Voluntary and community sector**

The voluntary sector in Newham has nominally been mapped in 1999. There is currently no umbrella body that represents and serves voluntary and community groups. It contains two contrasting perspectives: Newham shows a thriving voluntary sector and considerably high community activity *and* also reveals characteristics of numerous and very small voluntary groups with low levels of community involvement within them. Accountability of these groups to local communities is very low (Smith 1998). There are 1,000 organisations for 215,000 people (better ratio than other London boroughs); personal networks are low and household structures are larger than average. The East Ham Community Forum is the one of the most active of eight community forums in Newham.

### **Community Profile**

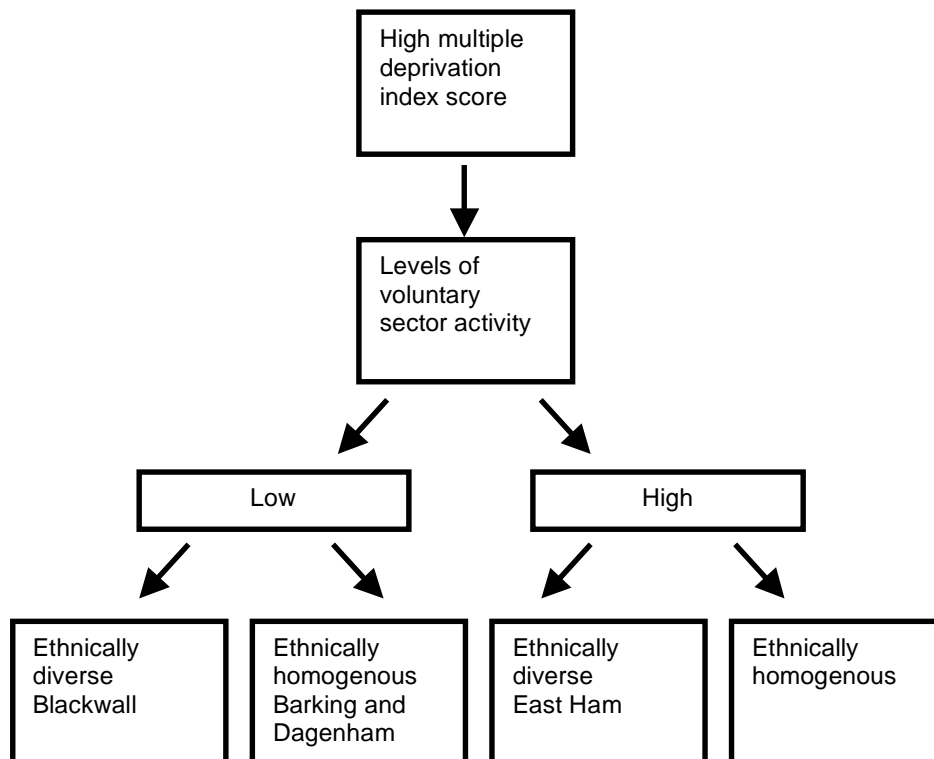
Newham is one of the most deprived boroughs in England; and perhaps the most ethnically diverse. East Ham is a highly mixed area both in terms of socio-economic class, ethnicity and religion. It has a high proportion of transitory populations – the private rental market is large with a high turnover of residents coming in and out of the ward. Newham overall has the higher youth population of any local authority and the youth population is disproportionately higher in East Ham as well. East Ham also has one of the largest populations of refugee and asylum seekers in Newham, which is also a borough with the highest refugee and asylum populations in the country. This undoubtedly puts additional strains on the borough's exhausted services but in addition fuels prejudice against the newcomers. In East Ham, refugees and asylum seekers are seen as 'outsiders' who are (allegedly) 'transitory' and who 'do not put roots down' into the area.

## APPENDIX 2

### SELECTION CRITERIA

The following variables for modelling our case studies were considered:

- Levels of deprivation
- Geographical location in outer/inner/suburbs of London
- Degree of ethnic homogeneity/diversity
- Socio-economically mixed population
- Levels of voluntary sector activity



## APPENDIX 3

### LIST OF ORGANISATIONS

Blackwall

East Ham

The Aberfeldy Project	Hartley Centre
The Linc Community Centre	Well Community Centre
Poplar HARCA	Homestart
Will Crooks Tenants Association	Walker's Group, Vicarage Lane
Fernandos Wharf	St. Paul's Centre
Samuda Tenants and Residents Association	Swathi Namasivayarm
Isle of Dogs Community Foundation	Over 50s Group, Well Community Centre
Neighbours in Poplar	Conflict and Change
St. Matthias Church	Friends Group
Robinhood Gardens Community Centre	St. Barts Church
Leaside Regeneration Agency	Streetwise
Neighbourhood Renewal Team, Tower Hamlets	Newham Bengali Community Trust
Regeneration Dept, Tower Hamlets Council	Fellowship House
Tower Hamlets College Outreach & Regeneration Team	Health 2000 Plus
South Poplar and Limehouse Action for Secure Housing	E.V.E.S. Tenants & Residents Associations
Cedar Centre	Newham Training Network
Docklands Outreach	Newham Academy of Music
Barcantine Social Action for Housing	Alzheimer's Support Group
	East Ham Community Forum
	London Oriental Academy
	First Fruits



## APPENDIX 4

### LIST OF QUESTIONS AND INDICATORS

	<b>Indicators for paid staff</b>	<b>Indicators for residents</b>	<b>Indicators for users</b>
<b>Community composition</b>	How long have you worked in this area? Can you describe the kind of people who live in this area? Is the area better for some residents than others?	How long have you worked in this area? Demographic data Can you describe the kind of people who live in this area?	Demographic data How long have you lived in this area? Can you describe the kind of people who live in this area?  Is the area better for some residents than others?
<b>Connections and networks</b>	Can you briefly describe your organisation? How does your organisation inform residents about local developments? What are the expectations of local people in your organisation? Does your organisation have links with other organisations (local, regional or national network)?	Where do residents go for advice and information on their problems? How can access to advice and information be improved? What sort of community activities would be helpful to people in this area? What do you expect to gain from local organisations?	How can access to advice and information be improved? What sort of community activities would be helpful to people in this area? Nature of affiliation/involvement
<b>Community capacity and pro-activity</b>	Do you know of any local people who are good at getting things done?  Is it easy for residents to become involved in local organisations?  Would you say that people find it easy to resolve problems that affect your community?  What sort of community activities would be helpful to people in this area?  Do you feel community activity has decreased or increased recently?	Do you know of any local people who are good at getting things done? Do you feel part of a community here? Would you say that people find it easy to resolve collective problems together?	Do you know of any local people who are good at getting things done? Would you say that people find it easy to resolve collective problems together? Do you feel your involvement as given you a better understanding of how local developments and decisions affect your area? Do you feel you have a more powerful voice as a result of your involvement?
<b>Involvement and Participation</b>	How does your organisation enable individuals to participate? Are these methods effective?	Do you feel you have a powerful voice? Do you feel organisations listen to your views	For what reasons to you use this organisation? Is this an open organisation where

	<p>Is your organisation part of any local consultation processes?</p> <p>Has your organisation developed any mechanisms for volunteer recruitment?</p>	<p>and adequately represent your views to the local authority?</p> <p>Are you involved in any community-based organisations such as faith groups, voluntary organisations, community groups, trade unions or political groups?</p> <p>Is anyone else in the household affiliated or involved in any community-based organisations?</p> <p>Have you been involved in local organisations in the last three years?</p> <p>Are there different ways to get involved in local organisations? What are they?</p>	<p>members can get involved easily?</p> <p>What kinds of people use this organisation?</p> <p>Do you take part in any consultation activities?</p>
<p><b>Capacity to engage in decision-making processes</b></p>	<p>Has your project influenced power relationships in your community?</p> <p>How does your organisation seek the views and opinions of residents and users on how best to develop services?</p> <p>Would you say your organisation could influence local authorities and health bodies in your locality?</p> <p>Has your organisation stimulated other local developments?</p>	<p>Do you think most people feel they can influence decisions that affect their area?</p>	<p>How do you participate in decision-making in the organisation?</p>
<p><b>Identity, belonging and perceptions of neighbourhood</b></p>	<p>This is a place where people from different backgrounds and communities live together in relative harmony (agree or disagree)</p> <p>How does your organisation respect differences (gender, race, religion, age etc)?</p> <p>Do you think there is a sense of community identity and/or commitment to this area?</p>	<p>Do you think there is a sense of community identity and/or commitment to this area?</p> <p>How to you think others see your/this community or neighbourhood?</p> <p>This is a place where people from different backgrounds and communities live together in relative harmony (agree or disagree)</p>	<p>Has your identification with the local community changed as a result of this involvement?</p>

<p><b>Trust</b></p>	<p>Would you say that members of your organisation trust you enough to seek help with personal problems or leave personal details on record?</p> <p>Would you say that members trust you to accurately represent their views on local decision-making bodies?</p> <p>Would you say that members feel that their views are listened and acted upon?</p>	<p>What particular problems are there in living in this area, apart from housing?</p> <p>Do people feel safe in this neighbourhood? If yes/no, why?</p>	<p>What do you think you contribute to your neighbourhood? What do you get back from your involvement? How has your involvement with this organisation had any impact on residents who do not use the services of this organisation?</p> <p>In what ways does your organisation help groups or individuals to work together towards a common purpose?</p> <p>How has your level of trust in others changed as a result of your involvement? Have your perceptions of safety in the neighbourhood changes as a result of your involvement?</p>
<p><b>Satisfaction with life and well-being</b></p>	<p>What in your community makes people feel well/ill?</p> <p>If you could wave a magic wand and improve one thing in this organisation or area, what would it be?</p>	<p>If you could wave a magic wand and improve one thing in this organisation or area, what would it be?</p>	<p>Do you have a different view of what problems there are with living in this area as a result of your involvement?</p>

**£7.50**

**National Council for  
Voluntary Organisations**

Regent's Wharf

8 All Saints Street

London N1 9RL

Tel: 020 7713 6161

Fax: 020 7713 6300

Textphone: 0800 01 88 111

Email: [ncvo@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:ncvo@ncvo-vol.org.uk)

Websites: [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk)

Need to know? [www.askNCVO.org.uk](http://www.askNCVO.org.uk)

HelpDesk: 0800 2 798 798

or [helpdesk@askncvo.org.uk](mailto:helpdesk@askncvo.org.uk)

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