Cheltenham Borough Homes: Transforming St Paul’s

Summary

Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) is a "3-star excellent" Arms Length Management Organisation managing approximately 5,000 properties on behalf of Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC). Cheltenham’s public face of wealth hides an equal proportion of deprivation. The St Paul's neighbourhood is a collection of around 300 properties built in the 1930s, situated close to the town centre. In 2004, St Paul's was in the top 10% of the UK's most deprived areas (top 5% in 2007). Characterised by high levels of criminal and anti-social behaviour, low demand for housing, a poor quality environment, and high unemployment, the area had an extremely poor reputation in the town.

As a result of a long-term regeneration project to address these issues, to date we have achieved the following:

- Wide-scale consultation and resident involvement, building trust amongst residents
- Planning permission for 48 new affordable homes and transformational
improvements to over 50 existing properties
- Funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) (£2.58m) and capital funding and a loan from CBC to deliver the above
- A wide-ranging programme of community activities to reduce child poverty, raise children’s aspirations, bring families together, and reduce anti social behaviour
- The establishment of the first residents association for the area.

**What did you set out to achieve?**

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2004, 2007) highlighted child poverty (income), crime, and education, skills and training as particular issues in St Paul’s. In addition to this, there were barriers, tension and mistrust amongst residents, and between residents and CBH and other agencies. The fear of crime was high, and there was a great reluctance to report anti social behaviour due to fear of the consequences. Residents had low aspirations and a low quality of life, and feared any change. CBH recognised that a holistic regeneration approach was required to ensure long-term changes to the area. Attempts to improve the physical appearance of streets and houses would be meaningless without a substantial and coordinated social intervention.

The aims of CBH were:
- To create a sustainable and cohesive community in St Paul’s, a safe and secure place where people want to live, raise their families, know their neighbours and feel at home
- To improve the quality of the living environment (physical regeneration)
- To enable the community to come together and determine their own future (social regeneration).

Examples of some of the specific objectives of the project were to increase the level of participation and cohesion amongst residents, develop and raise the aspirations of residents, and reduce child poverty.

CBH determined that a community-first approach was key to the success of the project. The project was led by CBH, and other partners such as the police, local schools and social support services provided valuable input.

**How were these aims and objectives met?**

**Increased participation:**
- Consulting and informing residents has been a significant part of the project. This happened throughout the option appraisal, demolition, and design process.
- The project began with a ‘Planning for Real’ exercise. Residents responses determined the final proposal, which was to partially redevelop St Paul’s, and make improvements to the remaining houses. Designs for physical regeneration were produced and residents were again consulted.
A Resident Association was established by residents in 2009. This will greatly enhance the area giving support, initiatives and opportunities to all within the St Paul's area.

Social regeneration:
- During the last 5 years, CBH has provided a wide range of activities for all residents, based at the Community House. These include a coffee morning for adults, Junior Wardens (7-11 years), Chill n Chat (12-19 years), health activities for older people (e.g. Sit Fit, walks, healthy eating classes), fun activities for 13-19 year olds (e.g. horse-riding, cinema, outdoor pursuits), and a summer activities programme.
- To support the regeneration project, a Community House was established in the heart of St Paul's (2005).

Physical regeneration:
- Planning permission was granted in 2009 for 48 new affordable homes and a new community centre, and improvements to over 50 existing properties (funded by the HCA and CBC). Work is due to start on site in Autumn 2010.
- Decent Homes works were completed to existing properties in 2007.

Reduced child poverty and raised aspirations:
- Junior Wardens – an exciting and inspiring project for children, encouraging them to think about the way they live, take pride in their local community and explore the neighbourhood. Junior Wardens has been running successfully for 4 years.
- Emotional Support project – provides emotional and counselling support to a total of 29 children and their parents, aiming to end the never-ending spiral of wellbeing inequality by developing self-confidence and raising aspirations.

What challenges did the project face, and what lessons were learned?

The main challenges faced by CBH were:
- Engaging with a community that was mis-trusting, cynical and suspicious
- Dealing with residents who resisted change
- Deciding on the best option for physical regeneration from a choice of several
- Initiating community activities and getting buy-in from residents and other stakeholders.

In learning how to overcome these challenges, CBH discovered 5 key lessons from Transforming St Paul's:

1. Consultation, consultation, consultation - offer many different consultation opportunities for residents and stakeholders who may be affected by changes.

2. Be clear on your offer - be clear about what is up for consultation and what
isn't, and be clear about what you will do with suggestions.

3. Be prepared for different points of view - and have a strategy for how to deal with them.

4. Manage expectations - this will save a lot of time in the long run.

5. Keep pushing forward - long-term projects can easily drift, have a determined project manager who will drive the project forward, even when faced with many obstacles.

How was the success of the project measured?

In order to measure how we have accomplished our goals for this project, we employed a variety of different monitoring and evaluation methods. These include face to face conversations with residents, household surveys, focus groups, resident meetings, local indicator statistics, local crime records, internal performance monitoring, and media coverage.

We also spent time identifying what is important and relevant to measure, and what really matters to our residents. This means that we can keep track of our work and the impact we have, and make changes based on what will make a real difference. For example, every year we ask our residents what activities they would like to see provided at the Community House, and develop services based on their feedback.

Our work in the St Paul's community is currently measured in three ways:

- Outputs - We quantify the direct outputs of our activities, for example we record the number of attendees at every activity we provide, and number and type of training courses arranged.

- Outcomes - We also measure the effects of the activities we undertake, for example we know that our Coffee Mornings have brought older people together and reduced social isolation.

- Impacts - We define impact as the broader, longer-term effects of our activities. For example, our work is contributing to the delivery of the Cheltenham Children and Young People's Partnership Action Plan (specifically child poverty), and to Outcome 15 of the Gloucestershire Local Area Agreement ('improved quality of life for people in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods'). Our impacts are also measured through the STATUS survey and other customer satisfaction surveys, and through local indicators such as a reduction in the level of crime and fear of crime.

What were the key positive outcomes?

CBH have created a sustainable and cohesive community in St Paul’s. The
area is no longer low-demand (all properties are occupied and people choose to live there), residents take pride in being part of the St Paul’s community (involvement in community events is high), and we are beginning to have an impact on child poverty (by breaking cycles of deprivation).

The following key outcomes have been achieved:

- Continual and open communication – by demonstrating our willingness to listen and delivering on promises, we have increased resident’s trust in CBH and other service providers.

- Developing skills – residents have developed strong communication skills, creative thinking, the ability to participate, and financial awareness.

- Emotional development – our more confident and inspired children have better educational achievement and attitude to life. This has also encouraged parents to make changes too.

- Awards – the sheltered housing scheme won a Heart of England in Bloom Neighbourhood Award in 2009.

- Reporting ASB – as trust has grown, we have seen an increase in the reporting of ASB, and recently obtained an Anti Social Behaviour Injunction against a local young person.

- Knowledge and understanding - residents have gained knowledge of consultation processes, statutory requirements, and design development. Through this increased understanding, we have seen a reduction in objections and criticisms to the regeneration work. At first, some residents protested vehemently against the demolition proposals, however when the planning application was submitted in 2009, no objections were received.

- Community engagement – the presence of a committed team available to residents every day has increased trust in CBH. The Community House allows interaction with neighbours, breaks down barriers, and helps them feel involved and aware, part of the community and proud of where they live. It has given opportunities for community involvement that were not available previously, increasing their capacity and raising self-confidence and aspirations.

How did the project demonstrate positive practice in equality and diversity?

We live in an increasing diverse society and need to be able to respond appropriately and sensitively to this diversity. CBH believes that successful implementation of equality and diversity in all aspects of the regeneration project ensured that residents and staff were valued, motivated and treated fairly. There are four main areas with an equality and diversity impact that we addressed during the regeneration project:
1. Low literacy and numeracy

- Communication with residents was predominately verbal. Where written material was sent out, it was followed up with a personal visit to ensure residents understood what was being communicated.

2. Employment status

- A whole range of employment types are seen in St Paul’s – full-time employment, part-time employment, carer, unemployed, shift workers.
- To ensure that all could participate in the consultation process, meetings were arranged over different days and different times. If residents could not attend meetings as a result of employment or caring commitments, they were visited in their own homes.

3. Physical disability

- The Community House is fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, so residents of all abilities can use the facilities offered.
- The house of one resident with a physical disability was found to be unsuitable. As part of the process of decanting residents from houses that were to be demolished, a need for more suitable accommodation was identified, and the resident was moved to a specially adapted bungalow in the area.

4. Language

- During the decanting process, it was discovered that 4 families did not have English as their first language. Interpreters were offered these families (although they were not used as other families members interpreted).

What elements of the project could be replicated by others?

There are 3 main elements of ‘Transforming St Paul’s’ that can be replicated in any regeneration project:

1. Extensive open and honest communication with residents:

- Develop trust with residents
- They are influential and can impact on planning decisions
- The current ethos from government is empowerment of communities and local decision making

2. The consideration of lots of different options:

- Even options that weren’t conceptualised at first can be put on the table
- In this project, the first options were either complete demolition and rebuild,
or complete refurbishment. However the final option was a mixture of new build (with a mixture of social rent and rent to homebuy) and refurbishment.

- The latter option may also be more appropriate for financial models in today’s economic climate.

3. Physical regeneration is not an end on it’s own:

- It is essential to incorporate community regeneration to make a real and long-term difference to a regeneration project.
- Studies have shown that whilst an improvement in the physical environment is important to changing the fortunes of an area, work is required to change the mindset of those living there.
- There are many organisations involved in community regeneration who could share their knowledge and experience.

How has your approach significantly changed the way services are delivered?

“Transforming St Paul’s” is so named because it has completely transformed the area. From a position of being extremely deprived the area is now a model for how communities can change. Although the community regeneration work is ongoing, we believe the project has improved the lives and environment of people locally in the following ways:

- Delivering measurable success – increased skills, reduced unemployment and fully occupied properties
- Individual empowerment – giving people the best possible chance for change through training, mentoring and activities.
- Community networking – valuing our public sector partnerships and working closely with other community organisations to deliver services which reflect local needs.
- Innovation in physical regeneration – new homes will be built to Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 (the first in Cheltenham) and transformational improvements will provide an ‘as new’ look to the existing properties.
- Continuous improvement – CBH and our partners are always looking for ways to improve what we do.
- Staying healthy – We have a number of ongoing projects to promote healthy lifestyles (such as ‘Cook with Friends’ and ‘Activities for St Paul’s Older People’)
- Helping young people to shine – Several projects promote independence and build confidence in young people (such as musical theatre, Junior Wardens and the anti-social behaviour forum).
- Inspirational results – residents have increased their trust in CBH and know they can influence the decisions which affect their lives.
- Community cohesion – building positive relationships between different groups in the regeneration project.
How have you embedded customer focus across the organisation?

CBH understand the ‘7 Key Concepts for a Sustainable Future’ and have integrated them into the ‘Transforming St Paul’s’ project.

1. Interdependence – We understand how people, the environment, the economy are inextricably linked. We have worked to ensure our progress in St Paul’s links in with other regeneration strategies in Cheltenham, and have linked up with all the service providers for St Paul’s.

2. Citizenship and Stewardship – We recognise the importance of taking individual responsibility and action, and have encouraged and empowered residents to do this. For example, we have encouraged the setting up of the Tenants and Residents Association, and provide ongoing support.

3. Needs and Rights of Future Generations – We understand that our residents have their own basic needs, and the implications of actions taken today on the needs of future generations.

4. Diversity – We respect and value human cultural, social and economic diversity, and have ensured we provide a service that treats people equally, and respects and values differences.

5. Quality of Life – We acknowledge that basic needs must be met. We work closely with support services to ensure that the basic needs of residents (such as food, shelter and safety) are met. We understand that without these needs being met, residents will not wish or be able to get involved in the community around them.

6. Sustainable Change – We understand that resources are finite and that this has implications for people’s lifestyles. As a low-income neighbourhood, we know that residents will be restricted from making expensive changes to their life-style (such a buying a car to access work). As a responsible holder of public money, CBH works within its means to deliver a high-quality and value for money service.

7. Uncertainty and Precaution – We acknowledge that there is a range of possible approaches to sustainability and that situations are constantly changing. We have adopted an approach of flexibility and lifelong learning.