

## **in it together: how this proposal was developed**

Between April 2007 and May 2008 a working group of officers from different organisations engaging communities in Dudley Borough met to explore the issues at the heart of community engagement, and to develop **in it together**.

### **Who was involved?**

The Community Engagement Working Group membership changed over time. Members who participated in some of the earlier sessions handed over to colleagues, or withdrew due to other demands on their time. Membership of the group was intentionally kept open and a number of members joined during the year, which enabled the group to continuously reflect the perspectives of officers from key partners in the Dudley Community Partnership – namely Dudley Council, Dudley Primary Care Trust, West Midlands Police and Dosti.

The following are Working Group members who contributed significantly to the development of **in it together** with their knowledge, experiences and reflections.

#### ***Directorate of the Urban Environment, Dudley Council***

Bernie Meade                      Head of Policy and Executive Support Team  
Clare Palmer                      Principal Policy Officer

#### ***Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services, Dudley Council***

Brendan Clifford                Assistant Director of Policy, Performance and Resources  
Shobha Asar-Paul  
Sue McGavin                      Head of Community Renewal

#### ***Chief Executive's Department, Dudley Council***

Leighton Pendry                Senior Research & Intelligence Officer

#### ***Dudley Primary Care Trust***

Kimara Sharpe                 Director of Governance and Community Engagement  
Sam Hill                          Head of Community Engagement

#### ***West Midlands Police***

Linda Bailey                      Inspector

#### ***Bromford Housing***

Ann Sutcliffe                      Innovation Manager

#### ***Community, Voluntary and Faith sector***

Lorna Prescott                 Senior Development Officer, Dosti  
Mike Mason                      Chair, Brierley Hill Community Forum  
Tony Glew                         Manager, Aquarius

The working group also benefited through contributions from Chris Russell from Dudley Council's Children's Services Directorate and Naveen Sharma of Dudley's Community Safety Team. Arko Sen, a Dudley Community Partnership Board member from the University of Wolverhampton, also contributed ideas to the strategy.

**in it together** and the working group benefited hugely from the extensive knowledge and expertise of Sal Hampson and Sue Gorbing from consultancy **changes**, who facilitated the early Working Group sessions and were a constructive 'critical friend' during the writing of **in it together**. Dosti paid for **changes** time towards this work, with funding that they receive from Dudley Community Partnership. (**changes** contact: [www.changesuk.net](http://www.changesuk.net))

The cartoons being used throughout **in it together** documents and consultation resources were commissioned from Tim Harries ([www.timharries.co.uk](http://www.timharries.co.uk)).

The **in it together** documents have been collated by Lorna Prescott at Dosti and are all available at [www.dosti.org.uk/together](http://www.dosti.org.uk/together).

### What the working group did



The working group met 8 times, for half a day at a time. At each session, working group members were given tasks to undertake and report back on to the next session.

Members of the working group have:

- ✓ Thought about and discussed the question 'why engage?';
- ✓ Identified social and policy drivers;
- ✓ Explored language and definitions;
- ✓ Considered how community engagement in Dudley makes the community feel, how it benefits the community, how it makes agencies feel and how it benefits agencies;
- ✓ Shared the issues and challenges of gaining organisational buy-in to community engagement.

Members of the working group undertook a series of tasks back in their organisations which included:

- ✓ Recording and reflecting on a case study of a real engagement activity from their organisation and deciding how empowering the activity was for those engaged;
- ✓ Reading Community Engagement Strategies from other local authority areas, agencies and local strategic partnerships;
- ✓ Interviewing officers from other areas about the implementation of their strategies;
- ✓ Identifying and interviewing officers working in Dudley who undertake engagement activities with community-based groups and organisations.

Through involvement in the working group, officers in Dudley have had their perspectives widened, simply by having the time to explore issues in a multi-agency group and being asked challenging questions. Two key changes in thinking for a number of group members are:

1. Community engagement isn't just something that public sector agencies do, **communities themselves can instigate engagement** – and when they do public sector agencies sometimes aren't sure how to respond!
2. Community engagement can be **empowering** to the communities involved if a **community development** approach is used (see box below).

**Community development** is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives.