

Neighbourhood Renewal in Brent – It's not just about housing.

Brent, situated in the north western area of Greater London, is home to a diverse population of over 250,000, of which the majority classify themselves as black and ethnic communities. Over the last ten years, Brent, working with its partners, has taken an area-based approach to neighbourhood renewal, targeting regeneration at those neighbourhoods and estates most in need, but recognising that the problems of these neighbourhoods will only be solved within a wider Brent and London-wide context.

Problems such as poor housing, high crime, poor educational attainment, worklessness, poor health and a poor environment have, more recently, been driving a programme of fully integrated measures. The vision is that "through this holistic approach, it is intended to transform the stability and opportunity of deprived neighbourhoods rather than to merely provide regenerated housing and environments in which the same old problems persist."

The Practice

Central to Brent's successful bid for Beacon Status for the Neighbourhood Renewal theme is its evidence-based approach to decision-making and effective use of local partnerships. Brent has continuously developed and improved on its historic approaches to regeneration. In particular, it has complemented physical regeneration, traditionally based around housing, with packages of social, economic and community regeneration.

The evidence-based approach to identifying neighbourhoods most in need of regeneration includes analysis of an extensive and diverse set of socio-economic and environmental indicators that have come from the council and its partners in the LSP. GIS is used to map this information at ward, neighbourhood and street level.

Brent has recognised that it's investment at the neighbourhood level that makes the difference. Investment at this level comes in different forms and achieves a variety of results. For example, it has an innovative way of consulting its community using Walking Talkers – local people able to undertake qualitative research through existing social networks – further adding to its evidence base. There are also multi-disciplinary neighbourhood based staff that help to develop relationships between the council and its communities.

Brent's extensive efforts at engaging with the community have resulted in the residents believing that the council listens to them. However, this has mainly been achieved by real outcomes. For example, there are successful projects that match re-skill people to match jobs; there is an increased police presence in certain estates; local police are equipped with specially designed high visibility mountain bikes.

The council believes it is still early days to say whether its approach has been a complete success. However, early indications are that their efforts are having the desired impact – in key target wards, unemployment has fallen by over 60%, recorded burglary by 35% and key stage 2 results have improved markedly.

Key features of Brent's approach are that their strategy is supported by actions plans with clear, practical targets and that it's based on a long history of partnership working.

Key lessons

- **'Activity first, funding afterwards'.** Rather than waiting for funding to be secured, Brent's approach is to kick-start activity in the deprived neighbourhoods in order to create strong foundations on which to take advantage of specific funding opportunities.
- **Invest in local people.** Brent recognised the importance of the council directly investing in a cross-discipline Neighbourhood Renewal team to establish local credibility and to maximise the potential for success.
- **Get your evidence, then use it.** To help ensure that actions taken were the most appropriate and effective Brent recognised the importance of developing relevant, up-to-date and comprehensive neighbourhood level evidence bases.
- **Know your community needs and aspirations.** Making sure that strategies and actions were relevant to local people's needs and aspirations the council strove continuously to widen participation within the local community.
- **You need to work in partnership to deliver.** A greater effort given to thematic partnerships helped to overcome some earlier difficulties Brent had in establishing a local strategic partnership. This allowed stronger links to be formed between the council and individual agencies, which then led to a firmer basis for a wider strategic partnership.
- **You need sustainable systems.** A key lesson from previous programmes is the need to develop more sustainable structures and initiatives which are capable of integrating with mainstream services in such a way that their presence is secured beyond the lifetime of a particular funding regime. Brent are working hard to achieve this and there is already some evidence of success.

Further contact



Andrew Donald
 Head of Regeneration
 Policy and Regeneration Unit
 London Borough of Brent
 Town Hall
 Forty Lane
 Wembley
 Middlesex
 HA9 9HD

Email andrew.donald@brent.gov.uk



020 8937 1049