



Social inclusion in Birmingham

Prevention, early intervention,
area-based approaches and
citizen participation

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Introduction

Birmingham city council has significant experience with implementing active inclusion measures. However in recent years, it has faced additional challenges related to the financial, economic and social crisis. Firstly, social exclusion in Birmingham has increased as employment opportunities have shrunk due to the economic downturn. Secondly, the city faces significant budget cuts due to grant reduction from the national government. In this context, the city of Birmingham is implementing a range of innovative solutions to respond to these challenges.

This report is a summary of a study visit that took place in Birmingham between the 4 and 6 September 2013 in the framework of the EURO CITIES Cities for Active Inclusion partnership¹. The visit focused on two topics:

- 1) Homelessness and the Supporting People Programme
- 2) Neighbourhood /area-based approaches.

The projects in the area of homelessness were examples of preventative and early intervention approaches and also demonstrated methods on how to include the vulnerable population in the labour market through social economy. These are described in Part 1 of this report.

The neighbourhood/area-based approaches focused on increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of social interventions by building local partnerships, community budgeting and promoting citizen involvement. These are described in Part 2 of this report.

The study visit provided the participating cities with:

- an in-depth knowledge of Birmingham's active inclusion work
- mutual learning on active inclusion solutions
- site visits to see policies in action and assess their benefits
- the chance to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the projects
- the opportunity to provide feedback and comments to the host city.

This report summarises how the city of Birmingham combats poverty and exclusion in partnership with public, private and third sector service providers. The study visit also showed how, in view of current economic circumstances, the city continuously innovates, reviews and improves its practices.

¹Cities for Active Inclusion is a dynamic partnership of nine European cities - Barcelona, Birmingham, Bologna, Brno, Copenhagen, Lille- Metropole Roubaix, Rotterdam, Sofia and Stockholm. Each has established a local observatory in their administration. They share information, promote mutual learning and carry out research on the implementation of the active inclusion strategies at the local level.

Socio-economic context

Birmingham is a diverse city at the heart of England's West Midlands. It has just over one million citizens, and more than half of the population is under the age of 35. Birmingham is the largest UK city outside London, and one of the youngest cities in Europe.

Yet, Birmingham is also a city of great inequality. Deep-seated, long-term deprivation has persisted in some areas of the city for a number of decades, even during periods of economic growth. Figures show that:

- Birmingham ranks as the ninth most deprived local authority in the UK, and significant parts of the city are among the UK's top 1% of most deprived areas
- the life expectancy gap between different areas within Birmingham is greater than 10 years
- unemployment rates are twice the national average and over 12% of the population claim unemployment benefits
- nearly one-third of inhabitants earn less than half the average household income in Birmingham

Many people in Birmingham are at risk of exclusion from the labour market and society. The city has always been very active in terms of social intervention; yet circumstances over the past few years have pushed the local administration to rethink its social policies and services provision. This is for two main reasons:

- Birmingham city council is experiencing significant budgetary pressures: a grant reduction from the central government combined with an increase in local costs² resulted in a need to find nearly 50% savings in expenditure.
- There have been a number of policy and legislative developments on the national level. For example, the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 included, for the first time, a legal requirement on all public bodies in England and Wales to consider how the services they commission and procure improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of an area.

These two elements have put the administration under pressure to deliver effective social policies with limited resources. This means finding new, innovative and efficient ways to tackle the complex social issues of the city while maximising the impact of the council's spending.

2. Birmingham City Council's unavoidable local cost increases are expected to amount to an additional €370m (£315m) by the end of 2016/17: these increases are due to inflation, increasing needs, changes in legislation, and increased financing costs.

Part 1: Combating and preventing homelessness

Birmingham has a significant homelessness problem and accounts for 9% of the national homelessness figure. In 2012-13, Birmingham city council received 6,332 applications for temporary housing and there are 29,100 people on the council's housing waiting list. Currently 1,184 citizens live in temporary accommodation. To face this challenge, Birmingham aims to maximise the return on investment by providing high quality preventative services, to minimise homelessness and stop the escalation of needs and persistent labour market exclusion. This is done through the Supporting People Programme (see page 9). The participants visited three sites under this programme:

- The St. Basils project is dedicated specifically to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Snow Hill is an apartment building owned by Midland Heart, which provides re-housing opportunities to homeless adults, using a unique 'mixed-community' model.
- Snow & Frost is a social economy enterprise, incorporated within the Snow Hill premises, which provides formerly homeless people with apprenticeship and work opportunities.

Site visit 1: St. Basils

St. Basils is a youth agency that works across the West Midlands region with young people aged 16-25, providing support to over 4,500 people each year. The organisation's activities focus on:

- preventing youth homelessness
Returning to live with family is the first choice in St. Basils' philosophy. The family situation is assessed and if it is safe for a young person to return home, St. Basils provides mediation services to make it possible. If moving back with immediate family is not an option, St. Basils tries to find another relative with whom the young person could live.
- providing housing and support to those young people who become homeless
For those young people who are unable to return to the family home or who are already homeless, St. Basils provides a range of accommodation options. These range from direct-access emergency, to supported and semi-independent accommodation. St. Basils also works to prevent repeat homelessness by providing 'floating support' to young people living with family or independently in privately-rented or social housing.

Participants visited one of St. Basils' direct-access facilities where young people can stay from two weeks up to three months. A number of support workers stay in close contact with the young residents offering advice, guidance and support that enables them to move to accommodation that suits their individual needs. The support also focuses on rebuilding self-esteem and self-belief, and improving life skills.

The centre provides young people with a room with an en-suite bathroom. There is a shared kitchen, an IT centre and a small gym. The activities in the shared facilities, such as cooking, counselling on jobs, educational activities or sports, are attended by the young residents on a voluntary basis. Many participants in the study visit were surprised by the high standard of the facilities and questioned whether young people may be demotivated to move out, since more than likely they would not be able to afford accommodation of similar standard on the open housing market.

The philosophy behind this approach was explained to the participating cities by the staff at St. Basils: providing good quality accommodation is a way to show young people that they are valued and to build up their self esteem. Even if a young person later moves to lower quality accommodation (e.g. when they rent on the open housing market), the standard they have experienced in St. Basils' facilities will act as a benchmark, maintain their sense of self worth and motivate them to improve their lives.

The participants were also introduced to two other innovative aspects of St. Basils' philosophy for providing services (which apply to both the facility visited and to other St. Basils' sites):

- Support services are envisaged as a participatory process. The aim is to enable a young person to take responsibility for their lives. Young people's aspirations are at the centre of the support provided, and so support workers work with and not for young people.
- Governance of the facilities and services is carried out jointly with the young people. Users of St. Basils' services elect 15 residents to become members of the Youth Advisory Board (YAB). YAB members are advisors to St. Basils' board of directors and senior management team. The YAB members are involved in internal quality assurance inspections, policy and strategy.

The young clients of St. Basils can also take an accredited life skills course, which helps them to develop the skills they need to live independently in the future. The courses cover topics directly relevant to young people's lives such as cooking, budgeting, contributing to the community and sexual health. Since the course credits are formally recognised and graduations celebrated, this provides young people with a sense of accomplishment and improves their confidence.

In addition, St. Basils is managing a two-year pilot project called Youth Hub, which brings several service providers under one roof. They include public agencies for housing, child

services and homelessness and various non-governmental organisations. A highly innovative element of this project is that it gives young people a choice of service provider rather than offering only one option.

Site visit 2: Snow Hill (Midland Heart)

Midland Heart is a housing association and support organisation. Its work involves supporting those who need help to live independently, assisting in regenerating communities and helping individuals to discover their own abilities. Midland Heart provides and maintains homes for more than 70,000 people. The organisation puts a strong emphasis on maximum user involvement.

The participants visited the Midland Heart's property 'Snow Hill'. Snow Hill is a four storey building with 92 apartments with decent-quality furnishings, comprised of an open plan kitchen and living-room, bedroom (or bedroom annex) and a bathroom.

Snow Hill operates on a unique 'mixed-community' model. Forty-six of Snow Hill's apartments are designated for people who have experienced homelessness and need support. They receive stable accommodation for at least six months. The other forty-six apartments are rented on the open housing market to people with no history of homelessness. The price is slightly preferential: a similar apartment would cost around £700-750 per calendar month on the open housing market in Birmingham, whilst at Snow Hill it is approximately £590.

With the exception of respecting the 50/50 division, the Snow Hill management does not make any other differentiation between the apartments and their inhabitants - rooms are rented as they become available. There are no designated floors or areas for any of the two groups and the inhabitants are treated equally.

This model serves two purposes. Firstly, it allows people with experience of homelessness to reintegrate into the community through daily interaction with neighbours who do not have a history of homelessness. A greater sense of self worth can be achieved by living in good quality accommodation as it has a de-stigmatisation function and can also inspire people to work on improving their life situation. Secondly, the mixed model breaks down the stereotypes related to homelessness for those who have no such history.

Snow Hill operates on a fully participatory basis. It holds a residents' panel, open to all. The panel is the main channel of communication with the management of the building. The 'you said - we did' announcements on TV screens in the lounge communicate back to the residents what actions the management took to follow-up the panel discussions.

Midland Heart reinvests its profits into maintaining and developing more housing. The city provides funding for social and support workers under the 'Supporting People Programme' (see page 9).

During the visit, the managers of Midland Heart also introduced the participants to the history of homelessness services in the UK and explained the gradual shift in the philosophy of service provision (see box 1).

Box 1: The evolution of homelessness and housing service provision in the UK

While public authorities provided funding and accommodation to prevent rough sleeping in the 1980s and 90s, they mostly provided shelters and hostels. Those facilities often comprised of large rooms with several beds and shared bathrooms, which allowed little or no privacy. Hardly any support was offered to residents to break away from patterns of exclusion and move on with their lives. Many people remained in this type of accommodation for years.

With the gradual rise in awareness throughout the 90s, Birmingham has moved away from the shelter and hostel models. Experience demonstrated that it is necessary provide people with a stable home as soon as possible. Meeting this basic need allows a person to feel secure and settled, thus allowing them to focus on taking further steps to improve their situation.

It is now recognised that stable, dignified housing, combined with quality, client-centred support are the best ways to assist people out of homelessness. Homelessness services maintain a small number of emergency beds, where people are expected to stay on a short term basis, before they receive accommodation. The earlier style of shelters no longer exists in Birmingham.

Site visit 3: Frost & Snow

A social economy enterprise called Frost & Snow operates within the Snow Hill premises. Frost & Snow runs a cosy cafe open to the public. It also has a cupcake factory, which is located at the back of the cafe. Both initiatives create jobs and training opportunities to help previously homeless people learn new skills through on-the-job experience. Frost & Snow has trained over 70 formerly homeless people as bakers or baristas, who later got full-time jobs in either Frost & Snow or other enterprises in Birmingham.

The cupcake factory gradually expanded its network of clients, not only supplying its own café, but also providing services to weddings and other hospitality events. As the network of Frost & Snow's clients expands, so does the number of full or part-time permanent positions at the factory.

Frost & Snow's start-up was subsidised by Midland Heart, but it aims to become a self-financing enterprise. A number of volunteers support Frost & Snow by helping with larger orders or running selling points at various markets across the city.

Other initiatives run by Midland Heart are the 'Back on Track' programme for young people and former service users to become support workers. The organisation has also recently launched an innovative project called 'Ideas Factory' that allows people to apply for start-up loans if they want to launch their own business.

Supporting People Programme (SPP) in Birmingham

St. Basils and Midland Heart are part of a larger initiative called the Supporting People Programme (SPP). The programme works to prevent homelessness. It is a national programme but local authorities such as Birmingham city council are responsible for deciding how and where the SPP resources are used in their cities.

In Birmingham, SPP provides high-quality housing-related services to minimise the risk of vulnerable citizens losing their housing tenancy and becoming homeless. SPP is based on an 'invest to save' principle: preventative support services avoid more costly acute intervention when people become homeless.

The SPP includes a range of integrated support services, such as sheltered and extra-care housing, support for people living in the community, domestic abuse refuges, community-based service hubs, community alarms and access to training and employment. The services are offered to groups such as older people and people with disabilities needing support to live independently in their own home, young adults who have been thrown out of home, victims of domestic violence, people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction and ex-offenders.

The Whole System Approach toolkit

The SPP is facing significant budget cuts due to the austerity measures implemented by the national government. Therefore proving the preventative benefits of the programme has become more critical than ever.

Although a range of measures were already being used to demonstrate the success of the SPP, it became clear that these needed to be integrated into a single toolkit, in order to provide a more robust picture of the programme's achievements. In 2011 to ensure that Birmingham city council was able to demonstrate clearly the financial as well as the benefits to individual cases of the SPP the council developed a 'Whole System Approach'³ toolkit.

The toolkit brings together information that includes:

3. <http://bit.ly/XODa9W>.

- quantitative data such as key performance indicators
- data on local outcomes being achieved by SPP service users
- data on national outcomes being achieved by SPP service users
- figures from the 'Cap Gemini' financial model⁴ which was developed nationally to measure financial savings
- local cost-benefit modelling which focuses on potential savings achieved by early intervention or prevention activities for different client groups, as well as collective savings brought about by the programme
- individual client stories to illustrate the financial benefits at different points of the client experience, as well as the personal social benefits which are not as easy to attach a monetary figure to. These social benefits can include achievements such as building up self-confidence, feeling free from exploitation and overcoming isolation.

This information is then brought together to work out the overall results of the programme, including the savings generated for the city and for public funds. In summary, the 'whole system approach' measures how the programme is performing, the benefits to individuals, and the costs saved or avoided by investing in housing-related support services. It also provides evidence that can act as a basis for better commissioning in the future.

4. In 2009, the national Communities and Local Government department commissioned a report from management consultancy Cap Gemini, which provided a national financial toolkit, or model, to measure the financial benefits of the Supporting People programme. This Cap Gemini financial toolkit can be applied at the local level: <http://bit.ly/18P2uVP>.

Part 2: Deprived neighbourhoods

There are a number of deprived areas in Birmingham where levels of earnings, employment and educational attainment are low, and where health, social problems and crime are more widespread than anywhere else in the city. Despite continuous investment, the situation in these neighbourhoods has not improved. To address the growing demand by local people to have a greater say in their city, it was decided to test innovative approaches.

The Community Budget experimentation

The city administration introduced the 'Community Budget' methodology, to promote a stronger dialogue with the residents. By responding to people's perceived needs and priorities, promoting their participation and making them feel empowered, the council hopes to resolve some of the deeply entrenched issues of the neighbourhoods. In 2011, three neighbourhoods in Birmingham were selected for the national 'Neighbourhood Community Budgets' pilot programme, alongside nine other neighbourhoods across the UK. The aim of these programmes is to identify district resources that can be managed at neighbourhood level, giving local residents greater influence over local spending. Following the initial pilot phase in Birmingham, the initiative was renamed 'Our Place!'.

The participants had a chance to visit two of the districts under this programme: Shard End and Balsall Heath. Both neighbourhoods had different characteristics and so the methods and actions undertaken had to be adapted to the local needs (for socio-economic background of both areas see appendix 1). The detailed presentations of the process in each neighbourhood demonstrated how the local government can respond with flexibility to the issues and needs not only at the city but also at the neighbourhood level.

Community Involvement

In order to implement the 'Community Budget' experiment, a local residents' organisation needed to be in place, to collaborate on the project with the council. The two neighbourhoods are very different in this regard. Balsall Heath already had a 'local forum', which had been created by the residents to respond to the deteriorating situation in the area and had significant experience in engaging with the community. Thus the 'local forum' became a reference structure for implementing a 'Community Budget' and to assess the needs and priorities of the community.

On the contrary, Shard End had no pre-existing representative structures to serve as a starting point for involving the community in planning local spending. Therefore the council undertook a number of initiatives to facilitate building those. This included 'communities that care' information and training sessions and a 'community organisers' project to build community capacity and form a number of local residents groups.

Since the 'Community Budget' approach requires continuous engagement of residents, the council plans to build more formal local structures in both neighbourhoods, for instance a local management board made up of residents and a community council at Shard End.

Priorities of spending

So far, a range of consultations were carried out to better understand the resident's priorities, using methodologies suitable to the level of the existing community involvement in each area⁵. The council was able to establish that the priority issues for Shard End residents were education and economic well-being and having better and more accessible services. For the residents of Balsall Heath, safety and a pleasant environment were the main concerns. This allowed the council to develop corresponding strategies, structures and prioritise investment to better match the needs of the residents in each neighbourhood.

Planning and governance

1. Shard End

In response to the priorities identified in Shard End, the 'Community Budget' operational plan was created. The spending will be focused in two areas: (1) supporting children and young people through developing more leisure activities in the area, and improving health of young people, including sexual health and reducing teenage pregnancy; (2) addressing high youth unemployment through providing education, training and enterprise opportunities.

Since the residents have expressed a clear need for better and more easily accessible services, two initiatives were established to ensure that services work together to improve efficiency:

- Healthy Village

The Healthy Village establishes collaboration between a range of service providers to guarantee uninterrupted provision of health and social care to everybody in need. To achieve this, service providers together analyse the journey that each individual makes through different services (for example from hospital admission, discharge, to moving back home and using community based-services). This allows them to identify potential service gaps on one hand and avoid duplications on the other. The experience has demonstrated the importance of giving specific people the responsibility of promoting multi-agency collaboration for the process to be effective.

⁵ For example, since in Shard End, there was no existing residents' organisation, the Council invited the community to allocate 'virtual' money to different topics, during local events.

- 'Skills for Life' bus

Since the traditional job centre in Shard End is in a remote location and not easily accessible for many residents, the local authority, in partnership with relevant agencies is planning to set up a 'Skills for Life' bus. The bus will travel around the neighbourhood and will park 3 days a week in designated locations. Not only will this bring the services directly to the residents, but it will also bring various services under one roof. The bus will have statutory⁶ unemployment services, training and education advice, computer and internet access, and provide guidance to people wanting to set up their own businesses.

2. Balsall Heath

To respond to the needs expressed by the Balsall Heath residents, the 'Clean and Green' strategy was set up, with a focus on environmental respect, care of public space and community safety. The objective is to create a renovated neighbourhood that starts from a well-kept and pleasant environment as a way to reinforce people's attachment to their neighbourhood and promote a culture of attention and respect.

The 'local forum' works to raise awareness among the residents that an attitude shift is necessary to create a lasting change in the neighbourhood. The forum encourages the residents to become less tolerant of anti-social behaviour and take more responsibility for their environment. The 'local forum' is developing the 'Respect Our Neighbourhood' (RON) website and mobile phone app, to provide the residents with a tool to inform service providers of problems as they arise (see box 2). These actions should allow for early intervention to problematic situations and build a resilient community.

Going forward, the 'Clean and Green' strategy is to create an integrated model of service delivery in the neighbourhood. The city authorities are leading the development of the 'Neighbourhood Operating Model' (NOM), in collaboration with all parties concerned, including, the police, the Balsall Heath forum, Streetwatch, faith groups, residents' groups, schools, businesses, visitors and the National Health Service (NHS).

The objective of NOM is to create a more effective and efficient model focused on prevention, education and building a positive attitude among the residents. The model aims to move away from the situation where each service responds to problems in a singular way - which is usually reactive and can lead to overlaps or gaps in service delivery, and is thus less efficient. Mutual learning exchanges are envisaged so that both the service providers and residents have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and the linkages between each service. Services will contribute to a common budget for financing joint actions.

⁶ Statutory services are services that are required to exist by law, e.g. social services and the National Health Service. All local authorities are obliged by statute to provide these services. Statutory services tend to be those considered essential to modern life their universal provision should be guaranteed.

Box 2: RON –Respect Our Neighbourhood

'RON' (Respect Our Neighbourhood) is one of the innovative instruments used by the 'Clean and Green' strategy. It consists of a website, now also available as a mobile phone app, created to provide Balsall Heath residents with a tool to engage in the process of revitalising their neighbourhood. It was developed by the 'local forum', in cooperation with the city council and some IT experts, and its aim is to help the authorities keep the community safe.

How the app works

Users create an account on the website or using the app, and they can post a notification on the neighbourhood map about any kind of misbehaviour or misuse of structures (e.g. antisocial behaviour, violence, vandalism, graffiti, rubbish). The information is forwarded to the police department or relevant organisations and they intervene and post a photo or comment regarding the follow-up to the notification.

Users are informed of the status of the action taken (e.g. 'solved', 'on-going'). All reports are stored in the database and the system can produce summaries. Users can also blog to discuss the reported issues more extensively. This creates an open platform and allows the local authority to better understand the social problems of the area and the citizens' perspective.

For the moment, the app is in the pilot phase. It is being tested within a restricted circle of users (police, city authorities, a number of representatives of the 'local forum'), but the goal is to give access to everyone living in the neighbourhood.

Conclusions

Birmingham's innovative approaches

The study visit allowed participants to explore some innovative approaches to combat and prevent homelessness, and area-based interventions focused on promoting citizen participation. The study visit demonstrated that:

- prevention and early intervention are the most effective and efficient ways of promoting social inclusion, as they avoid escalation of needs which create higher social and financial costs in the future
- housing-led strategies are highly efficient approaches to homelessness, both from the human and financial perspectives. Meeting this basic need i.e. providing dignified, stable accommodation, can give a sense of security and builds up self-esteem, enabling people to change their lives
- community engagement and political commitment are central to creating a lasting change and improving the effectiveness of social interventions
- partnerships between public, private and the third sector, multi-agency collaboration and involving citizens are all important to improving efficiency and effectiveness of services and ensuring nobody is left behind.

Key points from participants' feedback session

The study visit also included a feedback session, which allowed participating cities to share their impressions of what they had seen. Participants agreed that:

- The services and accommodation provided to people who are homeless are of exceptionally high quality, making Birmingham a pioneer of new, more effective approaches.
- Birmingham's focus on prevention and a high level of user, citizen and community involvement is a positive and efficient way to promote social inclusion.
- The use of modern technology such as mobile applications is an inventive way to engage citizens in service design and delivery.
- Birmingham's strategic planning is commendable and clearly plays a key role in reaching desired results and objectives.
- Birmingham city council is demonstrating how a city must constantly innovate, challenging the way things are done and taking risks, even in a context of economic crisis and reduced budgets. The council's internal push to keep improving its services highlights its dedication to providing well-being to all city residents.

Appendix 1: socio-economic context of neighbourhoods, provided to the participants during the visits.

1. Shard End

Shard End is a neighbourhood on the eastern edge of the city. It is largely residential, including several large council estates and is predominantly populated by white British citizens. It is a deprived area within the city. The unemployment rate is 25.7% compared to 17.2% in the city as a whole, and the level of youth unemployment is almost double the city average. Educational attainment for children is lower than in other neighbourhoods. It has also been observed that residents' aspirations are low and many families have developed multiple, interrelated problems.

2. Balsall Heath

Balsall Heath falls within the Sparkbrook inner city ward in the southeast of Birmingham. It has a very diverse population of approximately 15,000 people, a third of whom are British-Asian and 56% of whom are Muslim. The area has a higher density than the rest of the city and a younger profile.

The neighbourhood has a long history of economic deprivation and social problems including street prostitution, robberies and drug dealing. By the 1980s, many of Balsall Heath's houses were in a dilapidated state; the local council considered demolishing these properties, but eventually chose to refurbish them to compliment the housing stock of the area with more modern social housing. Both kinds of housing were very cheap, thus attracting poorer and more problematic households, so living conditions kept deteriorating and episodes of violence escalated.

By the mid-90s the situation in the area was particularly bad. Weapons and drugs were easily accessible, gangs were intimidating the residents, shootings related to drug crimes took place in the streets and shops, and episodes of violence were increasing. Inhabitants felt unsafe in their own homes.

By the late 90s some of the neighbourhood residents began to organise street patrols to improve safety of the neighbourhood. However the patrolling measures were criticised by some members of the community as a rather extreme approach. In response, the group changed their focus into organising residents to work on rehabilitation of the area. A 'local forum' was created with representatives from the community, holding community-led elections and meetings. Systematic work was carried out to involve people and change their behaviour and to foster positive action to benefit the area.