

Improving social cohesion through community initiatives: Placecheck

Why use this method

Placecheck is about finding out the qualities of a place: what is good, what is bad, and what improvements are needed. It can cover a street, a neighbourhood, a town centre or a whole district. Placecheck focuses on getting people together to create ideas and energy to make improvements and protect things of value and is a way of looking at a neighbourhood in a new light.

During the last five years the population dynamics of many cities and rural areas have changed and become home to many different communities. This has at times created social tensions in some small areas in the UK.

Boston Borough Council turned this issue into one of their corporate priorities to help new and existing communities get to know and better understand each other. The council acknowledged that as a small rural local authority with limited knowledge and experience of dealing with rapid international migration, it could not bring about this change within existing resources or through working alone. The council aimed to work intelligently, collaboratively and efficiently, making full use of the resources available, and with a strong focus on partnership working at the neighbourhood, district, regional and national levels.

Placecheck can start small; with half a dozen people round a kitchen table, a small group meeting on a street corner or a larger affair, involving a programme of walkabouts and workshops contributing to a local authority's plans and strategies. In all instances residents are the *drivers for change*.

Placecheck is a budgeting tool that is inclusive of the area targeted for improvement. It has been used by Boston Borough Council to not only improve the environment of deprived areas, but to address poor social cohesion between different communities.



“Boston Placecheck is a great example of localism and is very much in tune with the Big Society agenda by giving individuals and communities more control over their destinies.”

Robin Holmes
Locality and Business
Manager for
Northamptonshire and
Lincolnshire Government
Office for the East Midlands

How to use this method: Example

Boston Borough Council is delivering the Placecheck project in partnership with South Lincolnshire CVS. A project steering group has been formed to enable the council to work alongside a range of other statutory, community and voluntary organisations.

Boston had the lowest social cohesion score (Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 2006/2007). As a result the Boston Placecheck project was established to improve cohesion between existing and emerging ethnically diverse communities.

A successful £100,000 funding bid enabled Boston Borough Council to initiate the Placecheck project following a pilot in one of its neighbourhoods. The strategic aim, overseen by a partner steering group of both statutory and non statutory agencies, was to deliver intensive neighbourhood engagement work in five areas of the town that had been subject to rapid population change in recent years. Work is currently progressing in two neighbourhoods.

An important element of the project was residents having the opportunity to influence the delivery of Improvements to their area through a £10,000 budget, available to each neighbourhood as part of the funding secured from the Health and Well-Being programme.

Resident survey results

A commitment to partnership and project work with residents contributed to successful survey results, which revealed that the Community Cohesion indicator (2008/09 Place Survey) increased from 17% to 55%, one of the biggest improvements in the country.

The Placecheck project brought many different parts of the community together to look at their needs and the common issues that affect the town as a whole.

Over £60,000 was invested into the pilot neighbourhood to fund CCTV installation, the introduction of a one-way system, further highway improvements, a new pathway to the riverbank and graffiti clean up. In addition, the street cleansing routine for the area has also been changed.

The first neighbourhood funded through the Health and Well-Being programme (High Street South area) had its participatory budgeting event in January 2010. From a £10,000 budget, seven projects are to be funded based on the votes of the local residents. In addition, £26,000 of highway improvements have been carried out in the High Street South area.

The Placecheck project is continuing to expand, with work for three more neighbourhoods during 2010/ 11.

Further information

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