

**Community Enterprise:  
Creating Sustainable Communities**  
Report from a Community Enterprise Think Tank



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## **About the Housing Plus Academy**

The Housing Plus Academy is a partnership between 16 leading social housing providers, the National Housing Federation, the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Communities Resource Centre at Trafford Hall, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the London School of Economics. It has been developed to promote knowledge exchange and participative learning among frontline staff and tenants of social landlords. The Academy tackles burning issues affecting both housing associations and local authority landlords today, particularly welfare reform, financial pressure, energy saving, work and skills, community enterprise and resilience.

The Housing Plus Academy at Trafford Hall arose from a knowledge exchange programme run by LSE Housing and Communities between 2012 and 2015. Over 150 social landlords and around 500 practitioners, policy makers, community representatives, industry experts, and social housing tenants participated in residential think tanks at Trafford Hall, and breakfast briefings at the London School of Economics to swap know-how between social housing staff at all levels, specialists, researchers and government, to help social landlords respond positively to austerity.

## **Acknowledgments**

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For more information about the Housing Plus Academy visit <http://www.traffordhall.com/housing-plus-academy/> or contact Philippa Meehan at [p.meehan@traffordhall.com](mailto:p.meehan@traffordhall.com)

The Housing Plus Academy reflects the diversity of social housing among our staff, tenants and customers because we believe that diversity gives us access to better ideas, innovation and solutions. Recognising the benefits of diversity means that we would like to invite more people from a wide variety of backgrounds to join us. So, for example, if you have a different thinking style, are from an ethnic minority background, are younger, or perhaps you have a disability, your experience will be invaluable in keeping us current and relevant, and will be welcome.

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## 1. Executive Summary

This report is based on findings from the *Community Enterprise: Creating Sustainable Communities* Think Tank, which was held at Trafford Hall on 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016. The Think Tank was attended by 40 delegates from across the country, and was an opportunity for tenant activists, community volunteers and community workers to share ideas and experiences on community enterprise.

The Think Tank allowed us to answer the following questions:

### **What is community enterprise and why is it important?**

Community enterprise is defined as a community-led initiative to tackle local problems for the benefit of the local community. It is heavily reliant on the work of volunteers and may or may not have a budget. It comes in different shapes and sizes, and can be anything from a play scheme run by local mums on a voluntary basis to a community gym with several employees. Community enterprise is a valuable resource within communities and can tackle several problems such as isolation and loneliness; low self-esteem and lack of skills; the existence of social and intergenerational barriers; lack of access to services or resources. Community enterprise is placed in a unique position to help, because of its reliance on committed and motivated volunteers, and the opportunity to access niche funding streams.

### **What can community enterprise offer?**

Communities have huge resources which can be used for the purpose of setting up a community enterprise. First of all, committed community members can volunteer their time and put their skills and expertise in service for the community enterprise, getting things running at low to virtually no costs. Secondly, local people have the local knowledge needed to design efficient solutions to local problems. Thirdly, communities have facilities, spaces and local amenities which can be put into use as meeting points to (re)build or strengthen the community spirit. Finally, community enterprises offer a non-judgmental, friendly and informal environment where people can feel welcomed and accepted.

### **What do community enterprises need?**

Alongside the many assets communities have and can offer, there are also many things communities need in order to set up and successfully run community enterprises. The first thing is having access to a 'base', a physical meeting point from where to run events and activities. The second most important thing is to recruit and retain volunteers, who are the backbone of community enterprise. Thirdly, communities need support from, and networking with, other community groups and local service providers. Other important needs include access to expertise and know-how, access to training opportunities and access to funding.

### **What are the biggest challenges to overcome?**

The hardest challenges to overcome for community groups are recruiting and retaining volunteers, accessing funding and galvanising support from other local organisations. It is not easy to get people interested and involved. Disengagement, disillusionment and lack of interest all contribute to make volunteer recruitment difficult. Retention of volunteers is also an issue.

### **What funding constraints exist and what are potential ways around them?**

In the current climate of tight budgets and shrinking resources, more and more community enterprises find themselves competing for a smaller pot of funding. With external funding opportunities being curtailed, community enterprises need to find ways to raise funds themselves. They need to be flexible and creative, trying out different approaches such as crowd-funding, donations and charging those who can afford to pay. Diversifying their business and relying more on volunteers for their day-to-day operations can be a way forward for larger, more established community enterprises struggling to remain viable.

### **How can community enterprises retain volunteers?**

Volunteering can be a life-saver for many. It can give long-term unemployed people the chance to upskill and gain valuable work experience while getting their confidence back and meeting new people. Volunteering can be a demanding experience and it is important to avoid or minimise the risk of volunteer burn-out by making sure people feel valued and appreciated; celebrating success; offering them ongoing support and coordination; giving them the opportunity to access training courses and make steps forward on their personal development trajectory; putting practical arrangements in place to make sure they are in a position to be able to volunteer; including them more in the decision-making process; and finally, making sure they feel part of a team. Another crucial is to guard against the risk of a few people becoming domineering or taking everything onto themselves, discouraging other people from getting involved.

Community enterprises offer a huge potential in low-income communities. They can fill gaps in service provision, encourage community cohesion and equip people with valuable work experience. Community enterprises face many challenges: getting the funding they need to get started and to expand their activities, recruiting and retaining volunteers, finding a base and galvanising support from local organisations. However, the Think Tank showed that communities have the strength, creativity and resources to overcome many of these obstacles. Also, it highlighted that sharing know-how and experience, and networking with other like-minded groups and individuals, can prove invaluable to avoid 'reinventing the wheel' and find solutions to impasses.

## 2. The Think Tank

In June 2016 the Housing Plus Academy ran a 24-hour residential Community Enterprise Think Tank at Trafford Hall. The event was open to community volunteers, community activists and support workers. The topic was how community enterprise can help communities become more sustainable, the key ingredients to success, and how it is possible to overcome funding and other constraints to get a community enterprise off the ground and thriving.

### a) Who participated

The Think Tank was attended by 40 people in total, excluding the LSE and Trafford Hall facilitators, and two representatives from John Laings who had sponsored Trafford Hall training activities in the past and came to listen to some of the presenters who had attended the courses that Laings had sponsored.

The Think Tank was attended by a wide range of people, from community volunteers to members of committees and panels, to chief executives of well-established social enterprises. Eleven participants were members of staff with a community engagement or business development role, while one was a housing consultant. The remaining participants were involved tenants, volunteers or staff of community enterprises and social landlords. A wide range of social landlords were represented from various regions of England and Wales, including local authorities, housing associations and Arm's Length Management Organisations (ALMOs). All tenants and staff were supported by their landlords or organisations to attend.

There was a good gender mix and a wide age range, with people as young as 26. None of the participants had a disability which impaired their mobility or required documents to be provided in larger print. The majority of the attendees were White British while ten attendees were from an ethnic minority background.

### b) How the Think Tank was organised

The Think Tanks comprised of five main sessions:

- Why is community enterprise the big idea?
- What does your community need?
- How to escape major cuts in funding as a community enterprise?
- What are the signs of a successful enterprise?
- For Sale/To Buy – an exercise that encouraged people to think about what their community had to offer and what they needed.

In each session there was a mix of:

- Presentations;
- Collective tasks such as table discussions;
- Large group debates and feedback to plenary of the outcome of the table discussions, with round-up of top ideas;
- Individual tasks, such as writing down ideas and experiences on the 'experience sheets'. Throughout the events, attendees were invited to write down on 'experience sheets' anything that they wanted to share about community enterprise. They were also invited to draw or write down their life stories;
- A 'drop the egg' challenge session in the evening to stimulate problem-solving and team-building in a playful and relaxed atmosphere.



*Figure 1: Participants at the 'drop the egg' challenge session on the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The challenge for the group was to drop an egg from the first floor of one of the Trafford Hall buildings without breaking it.*



*Figure 2: Problem-solving for the 'drop the egg' challenge session*

Representatives from successful community enterprises across the country, small and large, were invited to introduce each session. They each spoke for a few minutes and gave PowerPoint presentations to inspire the audience, and at the end answered any questions people might have.

The attendees were grouped around tables of seven or eight. Each table had a helper who had been briefed beforehand to take notes of what was discussed, writing down quotes and interesting experiences, while leaving participants to lead the table discussions.

In the last session participants were asked to write down individually what they thought their community had to offer ('for sale'); what it needed ('to buy'); and what actions they had been inspired to take once back home.

The peer-to-peer participatory environment which characterises Housing Plus Academy Think Tanks allowed everyone to contribute experiences and ideas to what was a very interesting and stimulating debate around the potentials and challenges for community enterprise. Dinner, breakfast, lunch, and tea breaks throughout the day were also opportunities for people to socialise in an informal setting.

A free 'resource pack' on community enterprise, collated by LSE, was distributed to participants on the second day. It provided them with some helpful resources on community enterprise, including useful toolkits, case study examples, and contacts for advice or help.



*Figure 3: Individual activities*



*Figure 4: Group activities*

### 3. Findings

The findings that follow result from the collection and analysis of individual stories, experience sheets, flipcharts written by each group as part of the table discussions, round-up flipcharts written by the facilitator, presentations by participants, note-taking of all plenary discussions and note-taking by helpers at each table.

The boxes throughout this report incorporate the participants own experiences and words. They are drawn from the experience sheets handed out at the beginning of the event.

#### a) What is community enterprise?

Community enterprise differs from social enterprise as it has a much smaller and more geographically defined focus. However, the ethos behind the two, as well as their main aims, are the same. Community enterprises come in many different shapes and sizes, and they are involved in different activities, but they have four things in common:

- They exist to help the local community;
- They cover a small, fairly well defined area;
- They are organised by local residents or involve them heavily in their organisation;
- They provide a useful service or tackle an important problem that people unite around.

In most cases community enterprises are very small, do not have paid workers (or only a few) and rely heavily on volunteers. They could be anything from a play scheme, community café, youth club, community garden or allotment, baby-sitting circle, swap shop, senior citizens club, playgroup, community nursery, community gym, to many other small local initiatives and projects.

Some community enterprises are seriously ambitious, such as tenant co-operatives, community land trusts, multi-purpose community centres, community shops, and employ paid staff although they still rely on volunteers for running their day-to-day activities. Cooperative housing projects are particularly difficult to organise and get off the ground as they involve a lot of money and time, but they are worth the effort as they bring several benefits to the communities where they are set up.

##### *Box 1: Case study – Brownfield Community Association*

*In Leyland the Brownfield Community Association is partnering with the Leyland Project (TLP), which is Lottery funded, to run children activities, youth clubs, college courses, job club etc. We also run a youth forum, which is a group of young people who come together and talk about the things that are important to them in the community. The age range is 8 to 16 and their ideas are put forward at all meetings. They are in charge of what's important to them.*

##### *Box 2: Case study – Community Land Trusts*

*A Community Land Trust (CLTS) is a community-led organisation providing land and building (housing, farms, pubs, workspaces) to meet the long term needs of the community– in perpetuity. It came out of the civil rights movement in the UK. At the time of Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders in UK cities, CLTs were seen as an alternative to demolition. I have supported community groups since 2002 in Liverpool, Manchester, Middlesborough etc. One interesting story is what happened in the Granby triangle, in Liverpool. It was a neighbourhood awaiting demolition, with 11,000 voids - paradoxical with 22,000 families on the housing waiting list. The same was happening in other cities – thousands of houses waiting to be demolished. Another example: in Gresham, the Communities Under Threat group formed a CLT; or in Toxteth, the Granby Resident Association formed a CLT in 2011/12 – and won the Turner Price for tackling urban dereliction. There is funding available for community groups willing to set up a CLT – funding to go and visit other established CLTs.*

#### b) Why is community enterprise the big idea?

One thing that came out strongly from the Think Tank is that community enterprise is an **incredibly valuable resource** in communities, especially in times of austerity, shrinking budgets and service cuts.

Setting up a community enterprise may well be considered ‘the big idea’ of our time, making the most of the sometimes hidden and often neglected **social capital** which can be found in communities, to tackle social problems and create new forms of co-production. Community enterprise empowers local people to make a difference in their communities, using their local knowledge and investing their free time in a joint venture to improve quality of life for all.

*Box 3: Examples of community enterprise initiatives*

*I hold the keys to the centre and we put craft days and numerous other events on at the centre – lots of courses – and hopefully we help lots of people be who they want to be and be where they want to be in life.*

*Following training with Trafford Hall I have been able to set up an adult craft club inspired by the “Busy Hands, Healthy Minds” course and have recently set up a lifestyle and walking group. This is to help people learn how to have a health/balanced lifestyle – healthy diet, mind, encourage regular exercise, positive thinking and family time. Trafford Hall enabled me to do this after taking part in “Building Confidence” and “Healthy Diets and Nutrition” courses.*

Local councils, government and other service agencies like housing associations increasingly rely on communities to **do more to help themselves**. Official bodies can play an important support and advice role as can local councils of voluntary organisations. They can also help with registration, accounts, training, health and safety etc. Community enterprises are part of a much bigger picture. The idea of **co-production in particular** is gaining momentum - whereby a local authority, housing association or other established organisation works with residents to set up and run something for the benefit of the community.

### **c) What type of problems can community enterprise tackle?**

Community enterprise allows communities to unleash their creativity and inventiveness to create **solutions to local problems**, such as poverty and debt, digital exclusion, worklessness, health and wellbeing, anti-social behaviour and youth loitering, childcare costs, and even housing shortages and poor estate maintenance standards. Community enterprise can fill in gaps in local service provision or guarantee local people access to **more affordable service provision**.

All participants agreed that community enterprises make a unique contribution to the communities where they operate. Joining a community enterprise as a volunteer is a great opportunity for people to get involved in something meaningful while **combating social isolation**. It can tackle feelings of powerlessness, loneliness, and low self-esteem all in one go. Involvement in a community enterprise or tenant engagement initiative can literally turn people’s life around. Volunteers have the opportunity to meet, socialise and bond with fellow community members and neighbours, **improve their confidence** and gain **useful life skills** that can then be spent elsewhere.

*Box 4: Combating social isolation*

*I moved to Norris Green 8 years ago due to family breakdown. Me and my two children didn’t know anyone. [...] I then got involved with Norris Green Community Alliance, where I did a First Aid, Food Hygiene and Face-Painting courses. After that I was asked to volunteer at the Summer Play scheme, where I was set to help out with face-painting and arts and crafts. I was not confident but the more I did it the more confident I become. [...] This has all been achieved due to the Alliance helping me help them.*

*My journey as a volunteer started when I was in a really bad place in life. I was in a volatile and extremely difficult relationship with my children’s father. Didn’t mix well and didn’t have many friends left, was in a very familiar place but very isolated. I came across a lady in the street one day who invited me into the community centre. I went along and there my life changed. I’m now*

*chairperson of the Associations. I have had the courage to depart from my violent partner. I am a health champion, a digital champion and fully CAB trained.*

Intergeneration and multicultural projects can help **break down barriers to social integration** and foster good relations across different ages and cultures. A community enterprise venture has the power to create a sense of community where there was none, uniting people around a common cause.

*Box 5: Breaking down barriers*

*We had a 'Thanks for the memory' session organised by the Open Shop in York – sharing and cross-matching skills across different age groups. Lots of elderly people are unnecessarily scared of young people.*

*We run an intergenerational project. The kids wanted to grow seeds, so planted them with help from people from the care scheme. The kids' parents also got involved. When the project got vandalised the kids found out together who was responsible for it – they took ownership.*

*A young residents set up a knitting scheme, now we are hoping to put her in touch with a supported housing scheme who might be interested. It could be an opportunity to fundraise for the local hospital!*

Community enterprise can also give people the chance to **share skills and goods** in times in which many find it difficult to access resources and satisfy their needs and wants on the market. Community kitchens and food clubs can provide food for the elderly and low-income families; community car swaps can help people with mobility issues or those living in rural communities with lack of transport; clothes swap and furniture recycling projects can help community members save money and stay away from debt.

*Box 6: Sharing resources*

*Millbrook Village is a small village of 500 houses. Community transport is getting reduced and the timing is not great. 'Sharing the lift' is trying to connect people willing to share lifts. The project has started to work! And now the local councillor is looking to help set up an extra bus stop.*

*After I went to Trafford Hall for a gardening course I partnered with a lady to set up soup/lunch community kitchen, which is now moving towards a community café. We also started a social night where everyone brings something to eat.*

#### **d) How can community enterprise help?**

Community enterprise is placed in a **unique position** to be able to effectively tackle community problems. Participants identified two main ways in which community enterprise can help solve local problems.

First of all, community enterprises rely on the work of **unpaid volunteers**. They are committed individuals willing to offer their free time to the common good for no monetary return, therefore allowing community enterprises to keep running costs down and have widespread access to the local community via informal networks.

Box 7: You can't do it without volunteers!

*Community engagement is key to a successful community enterprise – you can't do it without them! They have the local knowledge, innovative ideas for solutions and the passion to make a difference. Magenta Living have worked with a group of residents from one of our estates to turn an old derelict garage site into a community allotment. We provided a skip and some kit but the volunteers did all the hard work. Once the site was clear they started to grow flowers to sell to other community gardening projects. Since then they have flourished and got support from Merseyside Police through equipment that had been seized from cannabis farms. The small project by a residents group to tackle a grot spot is evolving into a successful community enterprise with only a small amount of input/support from us and other funders because they had the passion and commitment to make the difference.*

Secondly, due to their non-for-profit locally defined nature, community enterprises can access **niche funding streams** which would not be accessible to other more mainstream service providers.

Box 8: Norris Green Community Alliance

*Thanks to a start-up grant from Trafford Hall of around £1,000, the Norris Green Community Alliance has set up a roller disco in the community. The grant allowed us to pay for the room hire and to buy over 100 skates. We started off once a fortnight and we are now running it twice a week. 1200 people have signed up throughout. We now have 12 volunteers helping out. The Roller Disco is now Lottery funded with £60,000 – we are now into the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the Lottery grant.*

## e) What can your community offer?

One of the sessions invited participants to reflect on and discuss at tables about what local communities have to offer to the big community enterprise idea. The main things local communities and local people can contribute are:

- **Volunteers with time, skills and expertise**

Digging into the skills and expertise of local people can uncover hidden treasures. DIY, managerial, IT, technical, teaching, financial, bid writing, fundraising, design and all sort of skills and expertise in different fields can come handy when it comes to setting up and running a community enterprise. There is literally no one without a useful skill, even those who think they have none. Because community enterprises mainly rely on the work of unpaid volunteers, they can keep running costs down and offer low cost service provision to the local community.

Box 9: Skills 'to sell'

- ✓ Gardening skills
- ✓ DIY skills
- ✓ Life skills
- ✓ Organisational skills
- ✓ Time management skills
- ✓ Design skills
- ✓ Communication skills
- ✓ IT skills
- ✓ Fundraising skills

- **People with passion, motivation, commitment and determination**

The passion and determination to get things done is something that characterises community enterprises with their strong social ethos and non-for-profit nature.

- **Local knowledge and local intelligence**

They are key to designing and implementing successful solutions to local problems.

*Box 10: Local knowledge, local solutions*

*I moved to a small village with a new born to find there were no facilities for families. So I got together with a couple of other mums and opened a weekly mums and toddlers group. I have ran this for about 6 years. [...] As the family got older I started to look at my village a whole and realised I did not know my neighbours – there was no community spirit. Then pubs were closing down/nothing to do/derelict park. I joined the local Resident Association [...] and we raised money to install picnic benches/basketball hoops/hopsotch/plant flowers/oak tree/remembrance plaque in local park. The group now holds community events, Christmas events, planting days, a lunch club. We are trying to get a Community Garden going and a Youth Club. We work with local junior and secondary schools re planting in village.*

- **Facilities, spaces and local amenities**

Communities are geographical entities, and they can offer spaces and facilities as well as volunteers. It could be anything from a community hall, a square, a park, a street – any space can be turned into a gathering point. Disused and sometimes neglected buildings can be transformed and utilised as community assets.

*Box 11: Case study - Granby street market and winter garden*

*Granby 4 Streets is a Community Land Trust covering a wide area of terraced houses. The Housing Market Renewal plan had identified it as a zone for redevelopment and all properties were due for demolition. When we moved into the area in 2009, 45 families were still living there. Residents were planting up streets and holding a monthly community market to show they loved the neighbourhood.[...] We have now created a Winter Garden – a greenhouse in the middle of the street with space for community living, set up in place of two derelict houses which were too expensive to be brought back to life. [...] We have also revamped the Granby Street market in the hope that it will help repopulate the neighbourhood.*

*Box 12: Case study – The Open Shop*

*The Open Shop was a well-designed, 'beautiful' modern space in a disused post office, set up in partnership between the residents and the housing association, to increase participation and create a more equal relationship between the housing association and the local community. It was conceived as a platform for ideas, a 'shop' for ideas – including people at the level that they are at, even if it starts with a cuppa and a chat.*

- **A safe, warm and friendly environment where people feel listened to**

Fostering good community relations is at the heart of what a community enterprise is. Services provided for the community by the community offer peer-to-peer support delivered with a non-judgmental attitude, which can make a huge difference in the way people perceive the help they receive and their willingness to get involved further.

What small community groups can offer is obviously very different from what social landlords can offer. With their huge asset base and stronger financial position, social landlords can offer funding, highly qualified personnel with project management and organisational skills, resources, information and advice, signposting and networking with other organisations, and training opportunities, thereby potentially playing a major role in supporting smaller newly established community enterprises.

## **f) What does your community need?**

Participants were asked to identify the most pressing needs in terms of setting up and running a community enterprise. They top needs they acknowledged are:

- **Access to a 'base'**

It is important to rely on a physical space as a 'base' to bring people together. Although local communities do not lack parks and other public spaces where they can temporarily host their activities, in the long term it is crucial to secure a 'base' where to run activities and hold events.

*Box 13: 'What comes first, the chicken or the egg?'*

*I have been chair of ISHA Residents Forum for over four years [...]. Now I have turned my attention to my own community – a block of 40 flats with 8 one-bedrooms and the rest studio flats. Mainly single people over age of 50 and some much older. [...] We had a meeting room that has not been used for a number of years I have to convince the housing association to give us the use. I think we need it in offer to build community support. Residents have not been involved [so far]. "What comes first, the chicken or the egg?"*

Some community enterprises end up owning buildings, land and houses by going down the asset transfer route. Locality, the umbrella organisation that supports Community Land Trusts and social and community enterprises, can give helpful advice to community groups when it comes to asset transfers. Others get by in premises they rent or borrow thanks to reliance on external funding or raising funds through income-generating activities such as community shops, community gyms etc.

- **Volunteers recruitment and retention**

Volunteers are the backbone of community enterprise, and yet community enterprises sometimes struggle to recruit and retain committed and reliable volunteers.

- **Support from and networking with other community groups and local partners**

Community enterprise needs allies in the community to join forces, get advice and help, and practical and financial support if needed.

- **Access to expertise and know-how on how to set up and run a community enterprise**

Setting up and running a community enterprise might not be always straightforward. The chance of getting advice from 'experts' in the field on how to do things more efficiently or overcome some obstacles can make a big difference in getting a community enterprise off the ground.

- **Access to training opportunities**

Access to training opportunities was identified as an important need to be met to make sure volunteers further advance their skills for the benefit of the community enterprise and also to meet their personal and career development goals.

- **Access to funding**

Finally, access to funding is a major need for community groups involved in enterprise ventures. As much as volunteering and a DIY attitude contribute to keeping the running costs low, starting a community enterprise requires money. There is plenty of help and support available to community groups, especially in terms of start-up funding and advice, although smaller, truly grassroots groups often struggle to access this support or know where to begin when applying for funding. Some community enterprises attending were backed by Lottery funding or the Big Local. Others had a lot of support from their landlords. Some landlords offer targeted support to individual tenants or groups who want to set up community or social enterprises, together with generous start-up and development funding.

*Box 14: Lack of funding*

*I run a bingo every Tuesday on my estate. It's the only one. It's been running about 12 weeks. It's £45 to rent the church hall but I pay that out of my own money as I have trouble finding funding. I saved up to buy the machine and the books and I get satisfaction at seeing young and old winning money.*

*Box 15: Support from landlords is invaluable*

*I lead an enterprise programme, who have created over 24 new businesses including commercial and social enterprises. We have commissioned some of these projects and innovation locally. We work on developing long term sustainability through 1218 capacity building and micro-finance initiatives. The future is focused around capability building our business to grow and impact on a*

*wider scale and apply for tender opportunities. The empowerment of local entrepreneurs can change the environment through training, capacity building and micro-finance initiatives.*

*Being [...] in the role of coordinator for a health and wellbeing project it was my responsibility to support local people to put their ideas for community projects in action [...]. I helped a local mum draft her funding application [...] for a food coop fruit and veg stall in the community centre on the estate to give local people easier and cheaper access to support and promote healthy eating. The project was successful [...] and this opportunity allowed the local mum to develop confidence and self-esteem as well as employability skills which motivated her to apply to the centre to take over the café and also run parent and child cooking clubs.*

Access to funding, especially in these days, has become increasingly an issue, and community enterprises have to face the challenge of becoming more creative in the way they raise funds and diversify their income streams. This topic will be discussed in further length in Section H: 'How to survive funding cuts'.

### **g) The hardest challenges to overcome**

Participants identified three main challenges community enterprises usually face and need to overcome in order to thrive:

- **Recruiting and retaining volunteers**

One of the biggest challenges for community enterprises is to get more people involved. As discussed in Section E: 'What does your community need', volunteers are the backbone of community enterprise. Yet community enterprises sometimes struggle to recruit and retain committed and reliable volunteers.

One reason why it may be hard to recruit volunteers is that people are sometimes disillusioned and do not get involved in their community because they do not believe they can make a difference. Changing attitudes, turning feelings of powerlessness around, and breaking the cycle of inertia and disempowerment, is therefore another struggle facing community enterprises who are hoping to grow in size and strength. Volunteer burn-out is also another problem facing community enterprise. The issue of retaining volunteers will be discussed in further length in Section I: 'Volunteering is the biggest resource'.

#### *Box 16: Big Challenge One - recruiting and retaining volunteers*

- *More people to come on board and help*
- *Gaining community interest and volunteers*
- *Getting people involved*
- *Volunteer burn-out – some people do everything*
- *Create a strong network of volunteers – well supported, trained etc.*
- *Keeping people motivated/involved due to short term tenancies*
- *Limited time, less motivation – most of the tenants are busy or working*
- *People not wanting to be involved – got no time – not interested*
- *Getting people involved including younger people*
- *Recruitment of volunteers with relevant skill sets or aspiration*
- *Engaging people/volunteers.*
- *Finding volunteers*
- *Inertia – people not willing to come out of their homes*
- *Lack of confidence/belief they can make a difference*
- *Lack of motivation from both the community and young people*
- *People to listen, sit down and talk and for them to say they need help*
- *Finding volunteers*

- *Finding qualified volunteer*
- *Getting and keeping volunteers*
- *Face to face communication due to long distance, financial restraints and lack of interests*
- *Getting people out of their homes*
- *Reliable volunteers*

- **Accessing sources of funding**

Access to funding is also a big challenge facing community enterprises.

*Box 17: Big Challenge Two - Getting funding*

- *Funding – lots of bids but not much giving*
- *Funding – large amount – where to look?*
- *So many people/organisations are wanting funding that the pot is getting less and less*
- *Resources/funding*
- *Less funding and more output/outcome focused*
- *Where to obtain funding?*
- *Funding for core functions and growth*
- *Lack of money! Lots can be done with a little money but some things need proper infrastructure investment*
- *For us it means finding funding for community enterprise advisor (20 hrs a week) to assure 'sustainability'*
- *Funding – getting and keeping*
- *Getting funding to meet the needs*
- *Funding, resources – self-sustaining*
- *Lack of resources and sustainability*
- *Financial baking*
- *Resources and finance*

- **Networking with local organisations**

Networking with local partners and getting them on board to offer support is a third important challenge. Local organisations range from other small community enterprises to bigger more influential partners such as housing associations and councils. They can offer different degrees of support, from reaching out to more people in the community, to getting access to expertise, funding and practical help in dealing with specific issues.

*Box 18: Big Challenge Three - Gaining support from local partners*

- *Political/institutional opposition to community aims/desires – need to make friends with influence*
- *Unwillingness to devolve power*
- *Need a bigger variety of opportunities and a better way to promote them to people that are unaware. Can find these through other local organisations/networks – share contacts*
- *Support from organisation – partnership with agencies*
- *Getting local business/councils involved – networking*
- *Significant buy-in from local partnerships/LAs*
- *Getting support from housing association*
- *Getting the support from those who control/in authority – get them on side with your vision. Knowledge – finding people who have had success, learning from other examples, networking. Build relationships from across the country through internet and social media.*
- *Partnership working*
- *Get decision makers on board*
- *Sourcing the correct people in various agencies/organisations to support the communities' needs*

## h) How to survive funding cuts

**Funding** has increasingly become a problem for community enterprise, and as a result it is a **constant struggle to make ends meet**. This is true for all community enterprises regardless of their size. As little as £200 could make a difference to start-up or develop a project, but it has become increasingly difficult to get even that little help, as more and more community groups are competing for a shrinking pot of funding. Some important funding streams have been discontinued, such as Trafford Hall's **small grant programme** following training, to whom many participants referred to as something that helped kick-start their projects. Despite a more competitive environment, applying for whatever funding is available is still worth pursuing, and a constant repackaging exercise might be needed depending on the funder approached.

In this funding climate, community groups who cannot access external funding need to find creative and innovative ways to raise funds. Participants discussed different ways in which they can achieve that, such as:

- Crowd-funding;
- Donation-based 'pay as you feel' approach;
- Charging those who can afford to pay to cross-subsidise service for those who cannot, although there is sometimes a **tension between** running a community enterprise **helping** a low-income community and **charging** enough for particular services to cover the cost.

### Box 19: Case study - Anfield Community Association

*Anfield CA is based in Anfield Community Centre. We do arts, drama, carnivals, parades, holistic therapies etc. There was nothing for the kids to do so 18 years ago we set up a playground and play scheme. We now have a team of 300 13+ kids, running 5 days a week for 5 weeks over the summer. The Anfield Community Centre is a lovely centre which was built as part of the regeneration plans – it is worth £1.7m but we didn't get any money. [...] We have learnt the lesson that small pots of money matters. Pennies make pounds, and pounds make massive difference to communities. We don't have enough external funding and we simply can't deliver services without resources. So we've trialled the 'Pay As You Feel' approach, a donation-based approach based on what people feel they can pay.*

The key thing to survive times of hardship is to be flexible and open to change. Larger, more established community enterprises might need to review their business plans, adopt new marketing strategies, diversify their business to cater for emerging community needs, or rely more on volunteers at the expense of paid staff.

### Box 20: Case study - Zest

*Zest is a healthy living centre based in a converted Victorian building in Sheffield. It is a charity, a social enterprise and a community enterprise. When it was established 20 years ago it was the first community-managed building in the UK. We have a community café, a community-led library, two gyms, an employment support service and a Victorian swimming pool. It is all driven, managed and owned by the community. We employ 60 staff now including part-time. In the mid-2000s there were lots of funding streams available. But 2-3 years ago things abruptly changed, austerity hit hard and the North was hit the hardest. Our service is now quite vulnerable. 50% of our funding is gone, don't know where we will be by next year. So what we did to make sure we remained viable? It became really hard to retain staff and there were challenges around service delivery. So we had to rely more on volunteers – we now have as many as 100 volunteers a year. [...] We had to implement 'performance-based pay-by-result contracts' although it doesn't sit comfortably with us. The payment by result contracts generated a surplus which we used to fund the library etc. We've had to take a performance management approach – We are now putting small charges on the things we do – those who can afford it pay, those who can't don't.*

## i) Volunteering is the biggest resource

One of the sessions was devoted to the topic of volunteering. All participants unanimously stressed how consistent and reliable **volunteers are vital** to the survival of most community enterprises. Any contribution, however small, is valuable.

One of the main findings that came out of the sessions was that volunteering is mutually beneficial to both the community enterprise and the people who are as actively involved as volunteers. As discussed in section C of this report, volunteering can help people **grow their confidence and self-esteem**, gain new life and **employability skills** and **connect with others**, developing meaningful and fulfilling relationships.

### *Box 21: Stories of empowerment through volunteering*

*I myself was a young person in need of help only a year ago. I dropped out of university to try and find a job instead. Being young and in London with no support is daunting but I had managed to find the organisation I now work for. They helped supply me with training and opportunities which developed me as a person. A year later now I do the same thing for other young people as I can relate to their situation of feeling helpless.*

*A turning point for me was when all my children were in full time education and I felt redundant. I become very depressed and reclusive. After a long period of time feeling this way I received a leaflet asking for new members for our local residents committee. It was the best thing I ever did: a lifeline for me really. I have grown in confidence and have made some real positive changes to my life and other.*

*While I was recovering from injury my friend called to see me and told me about our community centre 'The Base' and what was going on there daily/weekly. I had been housebound and quite isolated so was glad she did. I am now actively involved at 'The Base' and do various things along with our housing association. Hopefully I am/will be gaining enough knowledge/experience to help me gain full time employment as well as carrying on with 'The Base' which has been a great encouragement for myself and my wellbeing. I have regained confidence as well as make new friends and gained lots of experience regarding volunteering as well as social housing/community issues.*

*I started off at the Alliance as a volunteer after bad experiences with my children's father, so I could gain confidence and to help me keep skills up in admin to help get me back to work. The Alliance helped me gain confidence and enabled me not just help out in office but to help at events making tea and coffee. After volunteering for a year and half I was fortunate that the Administrator left and a paid position secured for 3 years become available. As my confidence grew my title changed from administrator to Community Administrator [...]. I know even organise my own events and take the lead on other projects and apply for small pots of funding.*

**Getting people involved** as volunteers is becoming more and more difficult, and retaining volunteers is also an issue. Volunteer burn-out is also a problem. Participants identified several ways in which it can be avoided or minimised:

- Stress the fact that **every minute counts** and that no amount of spare time dedicated to volunteering is too little;
- Making them feel **valued and appreciated**, saying thank you, celebrating success and giving them rewards;
- Offering them **ongoing support, co-ordination and supervision**;
- Giving them the opportunity to **attend training courses** and fulfil their personal development goals;
- 'Make it easy' for people to volunteer by **addressing practical issues**, for instance paying expenses to make sure they are never out of pocket, or set up a crèche so they can bring their children along;

- Give them a voice so that they feel **included in decision-making** and allow them to have more responsibility;
- Set aside time for **team-building** activities and to touch base as a group.

*Box 22: Top Tip - Say 'thank you!' and address practical issues*

*Getting volunteers is a challenge but keeping them involved is difficult! Top tip: say thank you and celebrate success. We are the only family-oriented group so all volunteers bring their kids along. No need to get baby-sitters. So it's important to make it easy for them by addressing practical issues.*

**Training for community volunteers** and for those setting up a community enterprise was considered to be especially important. Accessing training and getting qualified in what they do – e.g. Health and Safety certificates for instance, can be a strong incentive for people willing to get back into work, offering employability skills and valuable work experience. Several groups referred to **Trafford Hall's own training programmes** as being an invaluable resource and mentioned the small seed-funding programme Trafford Hall have implemented up until last year as having been particularly helpful in getting their community enterprise idea off the ground.

Participants also stressed the importance of watching out for people over-doing it ('super-volunteers') as they can easily get burnt-out or become too domineering, distorting the non-hierarchical nature of community enterprise.

## j) Top tips for success

The presenters mentioned a series of useful and inspiring top tips for success:

- *Asking for help is important – you can find someone who can help you, persuade churches, libraries, landlords, also local authorities.*
- *You need someone with expertise - there are people out there who want to help.*
- *You need the right informed, preferably well connected, support.*
- *Don't be sniffy about community/social enterprise 'purity'. Rich people like to do good.*
- *If you try an idea that doesn't work you have to accept that it wasn't right, Don't feel bad, find another way of doing it – if you really believe in it keep fighting but don't feel too bad about certain failures.*
- *You can change social relations by getting people together.*
- *Your local environment matters – even the smallest thing matter and can be turned into something useful.*

Box 23: Case study – Lambeth Business Advisory

*I have been very active since I was a teenager. There was nothing for young people to do in Brixton, so I formed a youth club in the 1960s, attended by 2,000 kids. When the demolition plans for Brixton were announced in the 1970s, we fought the regeneration plans and won, the developers disappeared and left the area. But the area was still very depressed, there were not even shops there. The kids had nothing to do, so they were burning down things. So we put together a workable plan to regenerate the area. The turnover in the properties was very high, it was quite difficult to manage. But we kept trying to set up a governance structure to tackle social and economic development together. We started by training kids for work – turning derelict homes into habitable places and putting them back into use. We persuaded the council to give us a piece of land – and so the Lambeth Business Advisory was born. We are now a Community Interest Company with 2,000 shareholders and this year is our 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary. We devised a plan together with the people living there. The company is meant to generate new entrepreneurs. We are not funded by external sources – my philosophy is 'do not depend on anyone else, just do what you can do'. We have plans to become an art school where kids can learn arts and crafts. We also want to become a hospitality school and a housing co-op run by residents themselves.*

- *You need to have a common goal and a clear action plan.*
- *The key to all of this is people – having people with great determination who will spot opportunities as they arise.*
- *Showing a positive vision for the future is what matters – not just fighting back the regeneration plans.*
- *Neglect can be an opportunity and problems act as big motivators.*
- *It's all about negotiation: keep knocking on doors, be persistent.*
- *Fake it till you make it!*

- *Sufficient initial full-on activity will create a tipping point which then ensures sustainability.*
- *What is needed is a rallying point capable of getting people together so it is important to make sure that people buy into that vision. Building up support in the area can be done with very visible local activities, e.g. community barbecue, street markets, cake stalls, Christmas parties, family events, which will create momentum behind an idea.*
- *Door knocking is a very effective way of getting people interested in what a community enterprise is doing.*

## Appendix

### Programme

#### Day One

2pm	Registration. Tea and coffee will be available.
2.30 – 3.15pm	Introduction and tour of Trafford Hall with Gary Dutton, Philippa Meehan (Trafford Hall) and Poppy Potter
<b>3.15 – 5.30pm</b>	<b>Session 1: Why community enterprise is the big idea?</b>
3.15 – 3.45pm	<i>Introduced by Anne Power – Trafford Hall</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Self-help is instinctive</li><li>– Problem solving is part of human survival</li><li>– Communities can pull off big gains</li></ul>
3.45 – 5.00pm	Table discussions on ‘What can your community offer?’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– What can your community offer?</li><li>– What type of problems can community enterprises tackle?</li><li>– <u>How</u> can community enterprises help tackle these problems?</li></ul> Prioritise top three points
5.00 – 5.30pm	Tables feedback to whole group on top three points
5.30 – 6.15pm	Free time and networking
6.15 – 7.15pm	Dinner in ballroom
7.15 – 8.00pm	Egg drop challenge – Poppy Potter
8.00pm-	Free time and networking

#### Day Two

8.00 – 9.00am	Breakfast
<b>9.00 – 11.00am</b>	<b>Session 2: What does your community need?</b>
9.00 – 9.20am	<i>Introduced by Marianne Heaslip Terrace 21 Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Getting round the cuts</li><li>– Money, skills, spaces, volunteers, experts</li><li>– Finding the right people, place, advice</li></ul>
9.30 – 10.15am	Table discussions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– What are the hardest challenges to overcome?</li><li>– What help do we need? Where will we find it?</li><li>– What are the biggest pressures on community enterprises?</li></ul> Prioritise top three pressures Suggest one bright problem-solving idea
10.15 – 10.45am	Tables feedback to whole group on top three points
10.45 – 11.15am	Refreshment break
<b>11.15 – 1.00pm</b>	<b>Session 3: How to escape major cuts in funding as a community enterprise?</b>
11.15 – 11.45a	The harsh reality of losing contracts and grants Finding new ways of working
11.45 – 12.30pm	Table discussions on volunteering <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– How much can volunteers contribute?</li><li>– What training do they need?</li></ul>

12.30 – 1.00pm	– How do we keep people motivated and active? Prioritise top three challenges around volunteering
1.00 – 1.45pm	Tables feedback to whole group on top three points Lunch
<b>1.45 – 2.15pm</b>	<b>Session 4: What are the signs of a successful enterprise?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What are the basic ingredients? Where do you find them?</li> <li>– What drives you to start with?</li> <li>– Why are problems strong motivators?</li> <li>- Think of examples of successful community enterprises in your area. What makes them work?</li> <li>- What would success look like for a community enterprise?</li> </ul> List the key ingredients for a successful community enterprise
<b>2.15 – 2.45pm</b>	<b>Session 5: For Sale / To Buy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What does your community have “for sale”?</li> <li>– What would community like “to buy” from others who can help?</li> </ul> This is an action planning task involving all participants. We will feedback what people want to ‘buy and sell’ after the event.
<b>2.45 – 3.00pm</b>	<b>Round-up and end</b>

## Delegate list

Organisation	Type	Region
Ellergreen TARA	Resident Association	North West
Broadfield Community Association	Resident Association	South East
Broadfield Community Association	Resident Association	South East
Howard Cottage Housing Association	Housing association	East
Genesis Housing Association	Housing association	London
Poplar HARCA	Housing association	London
Nottingham City Homes	ALMO	East Midlands
Zest Centre	CIC	North West
Howard Cottage Housing Association	Housing association	East
Peabody	Housing association	London
York Housing Association	Housing association	Yorkshire and the Humber
Lansdown Housing Consultancy	Consultancy	
Mid Devon District Council	Local authority	South West
Millbrook Village Residents Association	Resident Association	South West
Terrace 21 Granby Four Streets CLT	Community Land Trust	North West
City of Lincoln Council	Local authority	East Midlands
City of Lincoln Council	Local authority	East Midlands
Cartefi Conwy	Housing association	Wales
Magenta Living	Housing association	North West
Anfield Community Arts	Resident Association	North West
Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust	Housing association	Yorkshire and the Humber
Genesis Housing Association	Housing association	London
London and Quadrant	Housing association	London
North Stanmore Residents Association	Resident Association	London
Open Shop JRHT	Housing association	North West
Big Local Partnership Board	Partnership Board	London
Bancroft Gym	Private company	West Midlands
Leaders in Community	Charity	London
Martin Luther King Adventure Playground	Charity	London
Cartefi Conwy	Housing association	Wales
Millbrook Village Residents Association	Resident Association	South West
Norris Green Community Alliance	Resident Association	North West
Lambeth Business Advisory	Local authority	London
Hull Churches Housing Association	Housing association	Yorkshire and the Humber
Hull Churches Housing Association	Housing association	Yorkshire and the Humber
Islington Housing Association	Housing association	London
Genesis Housing Association	Housing association	London
Anfield Community Arts	Resident Association	North West
York Housing Association	Housing association	Yorkshire and the Humber
Right Communities CIC	CIC	