

# The challenges of citizen engagement:

*Lessons from Transforming Neighbourhoods*

*July 2006*

# Community engagement: Why do it?

- *Stronger communities*
- *People more engaged and empowered*
- *Better services that meet people's needs*
- *Making services work together at local level*
- *Tackling deprivation and disadvantage*
- *Better neighbourhoods to live in*



# Lessons from local work in Camden, Newham, Wiltshire and Lewisham

# Camden & Newham: Community engagement in regeneration programmes

***Camden: Investment in ten neighbourhood renewal partnerships across the borough***

***Lessons from Kings Cross:***

- *thriving community sector with 140+ groups*
- *history of successful partnership work*
- *difficulty establishing the right model for the partnership*
- *difficulty interesting communities*



# Camden: barriers to engagement

## Community Groups

- Previous lack of action  
*“We have had so much consultation and no action, people are sick of it”*
- Already at full capacity
- Lack of understanding of what they can offer
- Will community voice be heard?

## Young people

- Happy to be represented by youth managers  
Want to be consulted on major changes  
*“They should come to us”*



## Services

- Capacity
- Relevance  
*“Will it be relevant to our priorities?”*

## Elected Members

- Understanding of member role
- Capacity  
*“If the meeting schedule is too intensive members will disengage”*

## ***Newham: Engaging residents with the Olympics***

*Extensive regeneration under way  
and planned*

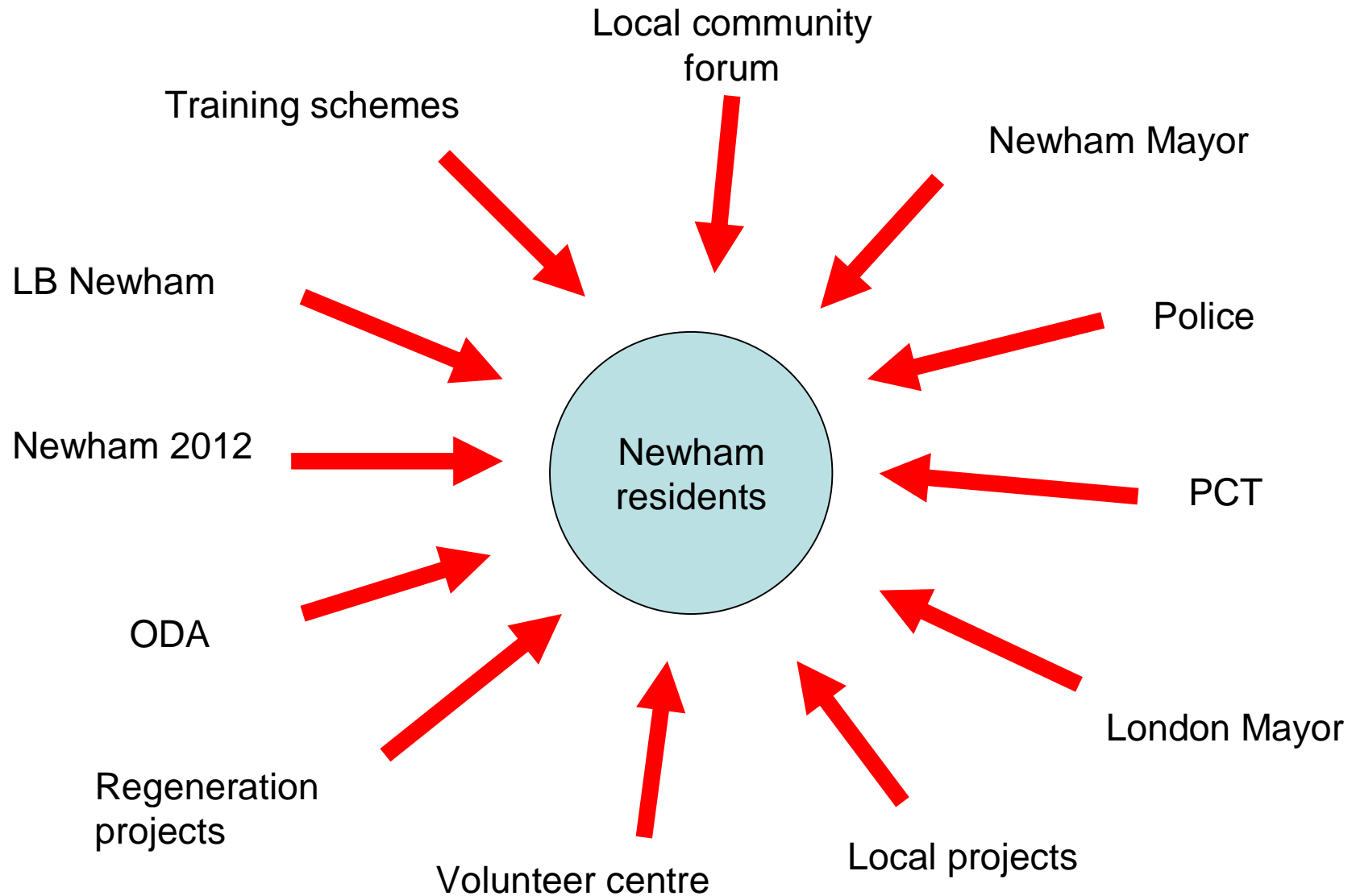
*50,000 plus new homes planned  
for borough*

*Host borough for Olympics in  
2012*

*Project to understand community  
involvement in existing  
engagement structures? How can  
they be used or expanded to  
engage more residents in  
discussions about the Olympics?*

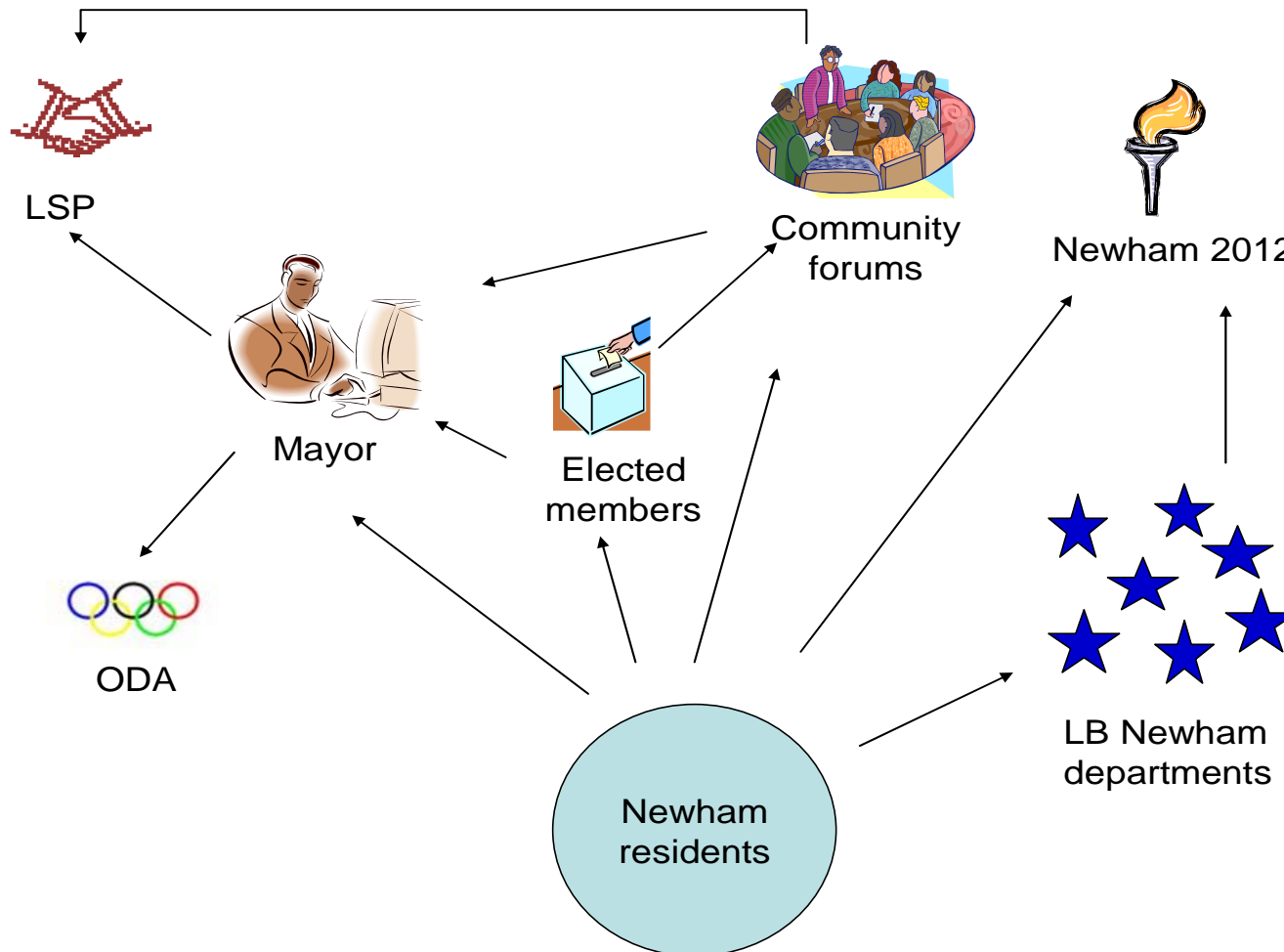


# *Newham: Top-down conversations*





# *Raising an Olympic issue in Newham*



# Challenges of community engagement: councillors' perspectives in Wiltshire and Lewisham

## ***Wiltshire: engaging parish councillors***

*Community planning structure bring together service providers with the three tiers of governance in 18 areas across Wiltshire to map community priorities*

*Project to look at how to extend the powers and influence of parish councillors*

*Exploring challenges for parish councillors – engaging with County structures*



## *Wiltshire: Barriers to engaging parish councillors*

*Parish councillors identified the following issues:*

- *Duplication, not simplification - “Is this just another layer of bureaucracy?”*
- *Legacy of mistrust on service influence - “We’ve been stung before on the consultation around community hospitals”*
- *Lack of capacity to attend - “My diary is already full. All the others around the table are being paid to be there”*
- *Fear of unequal voice and status*
- *Low expectations of action and delivery*
- *Fear boards will lack power and influence - “I would care if I thought people would take notice of it”*

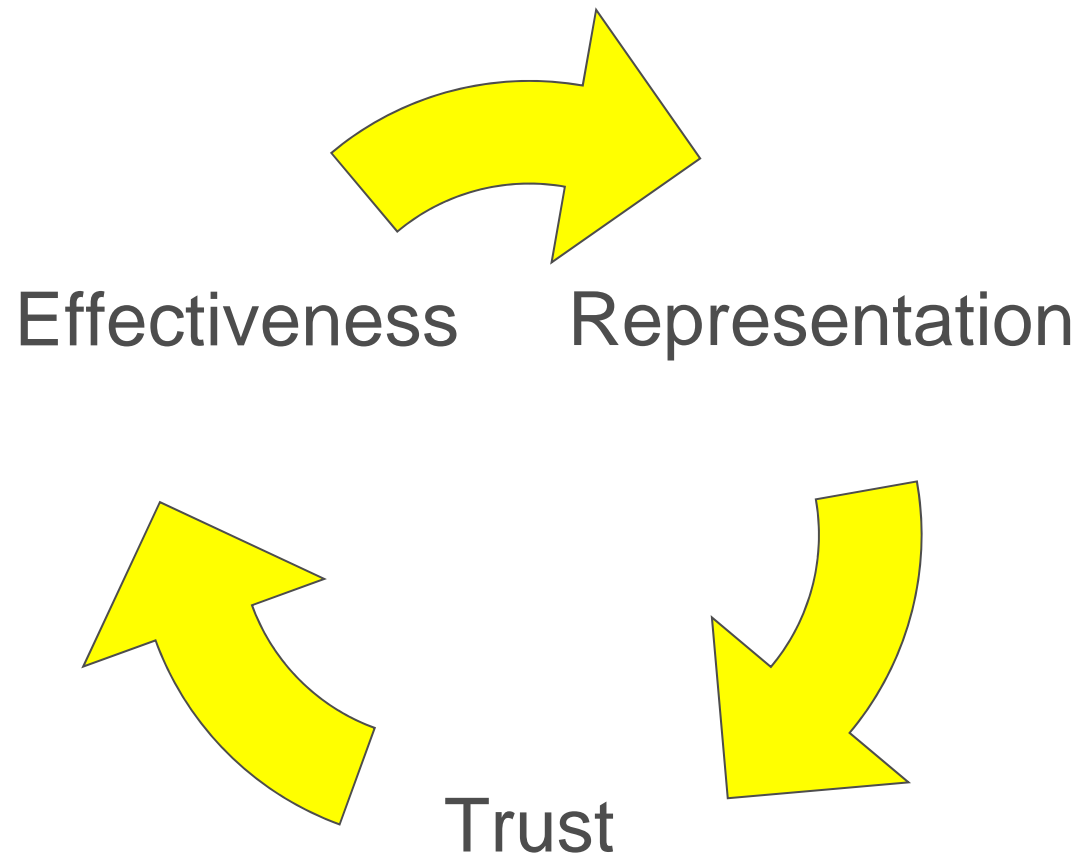


***Lewisham: Re-energising relationships with community activists***

Project involving neighbourhood management areas to look at how to improve relationship between activists and councillors in the borough

Five neighbourhood management partnerships  
Thousands of community groups borough-wide  
Partnerships steered by activists and councillors – but  
conflict and tensions preventing progress

## *Lewisham: Barriers to effective working*



These three concepts were used repeatedly by activists and councillors to describe problems in their relationships at local level. Often these themes formed the basis of crude stereotypes.

## ***Lewisham: Re-energising relationships with activists***

*Clear public messages from local authority recognising importance of neighbourhood working and community activism*

*Reward activists with what is wanted: information, influence, results and respect*

*Give commitment to support structures that people will engage with*

*Make a commitment to value community activism (Awards scheme? Use local media to celebrate local activism?)*

*Council to give clear support members and officers involved in area working and importance of communities*

# Lessons: What makes community engagement work?



## Structures

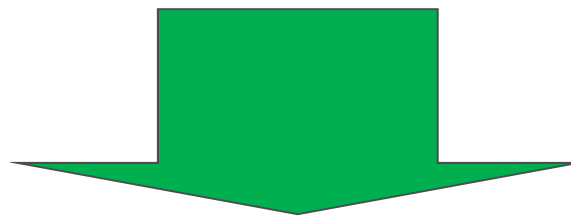
- Extent of the challenge
- Circumstances of areas and their populations
- Need to build on what exists

## People

- Nurturing the people: officers, members and activists
- Developing skills and competencies

## Process

- Planning for life cycles
- Managing change
- Managing risk



### For the community it means:

Value and respect  
Influence

Support from LA  
Information

Results  
Resources

Improved relationships  
Better services

## **About the Young Foundation**

The Young Foundation brings together insight, innovation and entrepreneurship to meet social needs.

We have a 55 year track record of success with ventures such as the Open University, Which?, the School for Social Entrepreneurs and Healthline (the precursor of NHS Direct).

We work across the UK and internationally – carrying out research, influencing policy, creating new organisations and supporting others to do the same, often with imaginative uses of new technology.

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