

CHAIRING COMMUNITY FIRST PANELS:

Introduction

In my experience Chairing a Community First panel involves a wide range of skills. It is a bit like running a micro-business, while managing key relationships, meeting deadlines, analysing funding bids and co-ordinating processes leading to decisions affecting volunteers, local non-profit organisations and the community at large.

I was also struck by Alison Seabrooke's comments late in 2012, about the potential for the programme to deliver real change locally. Writing as the chief executive of The Community Development Foundation (central Government's delivery partner) Alison hoped that Community First panels would be 'seen as a model' for involving local people in decisions on how money is spent in their area.

I am very grateful to volunteer panel members, councillors, Community Engagement plus Safeguarding officials, Voluntary Action Waltham Forest and 2012-13 funded projects for their efforts to learn about Community First from scratch, make the model work, and produce great results for the ward in the process.

The following comments are written from the perspective of a panel chair whose goal was 'supporting and empowering the community by allocating Community First funding to projects in line with local priorities, in a fair and timely way'. There are a few checklist questions to answer as well.

Good Luck in your role as Chair! - Roger Dennison - Hoe Street First panel chair 2012/13.

NB Views expressed are the author's own. The material presented here is for your / your panel's information. You will know the scope of your work and the specific technical, or other, advice you need to obtain. The author is not liable for any loss resulting from groups, or individuals, viewing or acting on this material.

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Resolving Problems

1. Welcome to the third in a series of presentations offering a view on Community First Panel leadership.
2. The first information sheet you looked at concerned Goals. A clear set of Goals are central to a panel's success and go well together with your leadership vision. The second considered how your leadership values help deliver panel goals. The sheet you are looking at presents some thinking that will allow you to resolve problems by seeing what is happening under the surface of the panel's key relationships, those between you and Mr A, Ms B, and Mrs C. That 'X ray vision' can help you improve panel performance.
3. In my experience even the best run team or panel will sometimes see a dip in performance. As the panel do much of their work offline dips in performance can be hard to spot and harder to deal with. As panels are led by volunteers it might also feel uncomfortable for the chair to deal with the issue. However taking no action will produce poorer results for the community.
4. The questions below can help you with your action planning, to respond to the problems performance dips can cause. You will need to look beyond the surface of the panel's work and the relationships with volunteers in order to resolve the problem. This will be like x-raying the panel's structure, spotting the underlying weakness and tackling it. Here are some thoughts to build on.

Your Checklist

- How will you know that performance problems are occurring within the panel?
- How will you communicate with panel members about your concerns?
- How can individual volunteer panel members share their confidential concerns with you?
- What will you say to Mr A if – for instance - he is not contributing to the panel as he agreed to do initially?
- Which non-panel members will you be able to count on to help resolve the problem?
- How will you ensure the problem does not recur, once you have resolved it?