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UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introducing our research

Over the last four years, the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) has been working on a research work stream exploring the resilience of place. For CLES, effective, successful and resilient places are those which have the ability to respond to and bounce back from economic, social and environmental shocks. The ability to be resilient is predicated by the relationships and the quality of relationships within place between the public, commercial and social spheres of the economy. Highly effective working across spheres fosters change and resilience within place.

CLES' action focused research in localities across the United Kingdom and internationally has led to the development of a model and methodology for measuring place resilience. The model is not a crude and quantitative economic assessment of resilience; far from it. It is a systems based qualitative model which explores the function of place, assesses resilience, and importantly seeks to foster change and innovation in the way in which places operate in economic and social terms. We are interested in thinking differently about how places do economic development and regeneration.

1.2 Why bother?

Our thinking around place resilience started with the global fellowship awarded to our Chief Executive in 2008, to undertake research in six places across the world around how places do economic development differently. From visits to amongst others: Portland in the United States; Culiacan in Mexico; and Gdansk in Poland, it became apparent that the UK's approach to local economic development was becoming outdated. Emphasis placed upon inward investment, the knowledge economy, and private sector delivery may well have been achieving economic growth, but it certainly was not creating socially inclusive places, with compatible and collaborative public, commercial and social sectors.

The way in which the UK was undertaking economic development and delivery was not conducive to the operating climate of the global economy, in a period of recession and change. Strategy was prosaic and lacking in innovation; it was also heavily focused upon physical and economic capital, attracting investment and developing physical space. Partnership working in its loosest sense was leading to the over emphasis placed upon either the commercial or public sectors to drive growth, but often with little collaboration; and delivery of economic development activity was exacerbating inequalities and being undertaken without sufficient consideration of social capital.

CLES' pilot studies in: South Staffordshire; Cherwell in Oxfordshire; Ashfield and Mansfield; Manchester; Cambridgeshire and Suffolk; Northumberland; Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Cheltenham; and Blackburn with Darwen, put in place our theory and model to measure resilience and importantly think through how places could adapt and change. Some of the pilot areas were resilient with: sound relationships across the public, commercial and social sectors; progressive procurement policies in place; an emphasis placed upon social action in economic development; and an understanding of the influence of the environment upon place. However, other places were characterised by: silo focused operating and partnership structures; unaccountable leadership and relationships; and a minimal consideration of issues of social and community concern.

The research studies in each of the areas described above concluded with recommendations around how place could become more resilient to economic, social and environmental change. These include: changing the structure of partnerships, particularly the engagement of the social sector in decision making processes; developing new ways of interaction between the commercial and social sectors that go beyond corporate social responsibility; and adopting new means of securing citizen involvement in service planning and delivery through co-production.

1.3 Towards community resilience

Having undertaken place resilience work at predominantly local authority and sub-regional geographical levels, CLES has developed a strong strategic understanding of the factors which make places resilient and how authorities can respond. What was missing was a conceptual understanding of whether the same set of factors was applicable at a neighbourhood or community level; or whether different factors influenced resilience.

For example, is there a greater emphasis placed upon the social sector as shapers of local economies and community development; has the local business sector got a greater affinity to place; are neighbourhoods linked effectively into wider policy; are incidences of social capital development more prevalent; and are communities more entwined into the design and delivery of services.

Using the principles of the place resilience model, CLES has therefore sought to undertake research that explores the resilience of a particular community or neighbourhood. These are relatively loose terms and can include: Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs); electoral wards; and natural neighbourhoods which communities have an affinity to, and collections of the above.

The Barrow Cadbury Trust, an organisation with a research focus upon social inclusion, equality and community development, provided a grant for CLES to undertake research around community resilience. The core stipulation of the grant was that the work had to be undertaken in the West Midlands. After a period of partnership development and relationship building with the Walsall Partnership, it was decided that the 'neighbourhood' of focus for the community resilience research would be North Walsall, an area comprising four contrasting and diverse wards.

1.4 About this publication

This publication draws upon both our previous place resilience research across the United Kingdom and internationally, and the specific research in the West Midlands, to present new thinking upon how local government, the wider public sector, the commercial sector, and the social sector respond to challenges in order to create more economically, socially and environmentally resilient places. As such, there are a number of sections to the publication:

- **Section 2** – discusses the CLES resilience model in more depth and the theory behind systems based approaches to understanding place;
- **Section 3** – details some of the key themes and findings from our place resilience research across the UK and internationally, coupled with case study findings;

- **Section 4** – explores in more depth the shift from place resilience towards community resilience and in particular the theoretical factors which make communities resilient to economic, social and environmental change;
- **Section 5** – presents the descriptive findings and analysis from the community resilience study in North Walsall, and specific recommendations. It also details how these recommendations have been taken forward over a six month period;
- **Section 6** – details the lessons learnt from North Walsall and approaches to community resilience and regeneration in the future.

2 THE CLES RESILIENCE MODEL

Previous CLES research *'Towards a new wave of local economic activism: the future for economic strategies'* and *'Productive local economies: creating resilient places'* sets out our principles for more resilient places and our model of understanding the resilience of place. Our research is based upon two considerations: a need to challenge the economic orthodoxy; and the need to shape place policy around a systems based approach.

2.1 Challenging the economic orthodoxy

The current political and economic climate is an opportune moment to challenge the way in which economic development practitioners think about place and communities. The recession, which first reared its head in 2008, continues apace; there is a new government committed to achieving economic growth at all costs and with little emphasis upon the social consequences; and the agendas of localism and big society are suggesting a greater local responsibility for the function and economic destiny of place and communities. As such, there are a number of reasons to challenge the orthodoxy of the way economic development has been historically undertaken.

2.1.1 The shift from boom to crisis means a new economic approach

The so-called 'boom years' from 1993-2008 saw a significant period of physical and fiscal development in the towns and cities of the UK. Whilst much change was derived, problems of worklessness, failing economies and poor housing persisted; suggesting an ill-conceived approach to economic development which appeared to favour wealth creation over tackling inequality. Now, as our communities face huge pressures as a result of recession, public sector funding cuts and an uncertain economic outlook, and a future where peak oil and climate change will bring unprecedented challenges, we need to think differently about economic strategy. If prosaic and inward investment focused strategies did not work in the boom times, are they going to work in a period of austerity?

2.1.2 Economic growth is not for everyone

Over the course of the last forty years, places have had to adapt as the economy restructured away from a narrow focus upon primary industry and manufacturing to more of a focus upon services and the financial sector. The challenge with this is that places have become dependent upon a single economic activity to nurture growth and/or have focused upon economic activities which are not reflective of the skills of their population or the local place architecture. This has restricted the ability of places to bounce back from economic restructuring, and in some places actually restricted as opposed to fostered economic growth. With the challenges of recession, environmental change, and demographic shift, can we really expect all places to grow?

2.1.3 Economic policy must be twinned with place policy

The approach of the previous government and that of the current government to economic policy is to focus upon growth; developing the productivity of business and the output of the workforce. At the regional level, this was reflected in economic development strategy and delivery through Regional Development Agencies, and at the local level through local authority economic development departments. The notion of growth was based upon the premise that the benefits would 'trickle down' to communities, ensuring fairness and quality of life. The challenge however is that economic growth does not necessarily equal social growth and place based growth. How can economic policy be more effectively twinned with place policy to ensure growth encompasses that of the economic, human, social and environmental form?

2.1.4 Economic development needs to be less one dimensional

The form and function of economic development has been pretty one dimensional over the last ten years. There has been too much focus upon ‘hard’ economics – small business start-ups, inward investment, availability of land and premises for business – rather than ‘softer’ aspects of place, such as neighbourhood renewal, environmental sustainability, and levels of community empowerment and participation. This emphasis has neglected the influential secondary factors that determine economic strength and resilience; in particular, the interacting roles of the public, social and commercial economies, together with wider factors such as transport links, health, aspiration and environment. How can some of the ‘softer’ aspects of place be integrated into more resilient approaches to economic development policy and delivery?

2.1.5 Networked governance is important in shaping place

Economies are not simply an isolated silo of private sector activity that can be encouraged and shaped; they are made up of a network of social, public and commercial economic activity. These aspects are interconnected and dependent on one another. In short, our places are dependent upon connectivity and networks which, if too opaque, too unknown, or too dependent on long and complex connections, are very vulnerable to small disturbances. How can we ensure our economic policymaking is reflective of networks and partnerships, both formal and informal, and reflective of place?

2.2 Adopting a systems based approach to economic and place policy

For CLES, the response to the economic orthodoxy outlined above and the questions posed, is to adopt a system based approach to understanding place and economic and place based policymaking. The following discusses key elements of the systems approach to policymaking.

2.2.1 The whole is greater than the sum of its parts

A key component of thinking strategically is that issues do not occur in isolation. This is why we are increasingly beginning to rethink our places as systems – of people and organisations. Systems based approaches are about thinking through how different things influence one another. In nature, an example is a typical ecosystem – including air, water, animals and plants – and how they work together within a system. In an organisation and across different places, this constitutes different people, structures and processes, which lead to either efficient or inefficient ways of working, depending on the strength of the system.

CLES has been thinking of places as systems for a number of years now – defined by how systems are able to change, respond and adapt their places to new challenges, whether these are economic, social or environmental. Those systems which are able to exude these qualities are those which are generally the most resilient.

2.2.2 Developing strong systems

Systems within a locality are often characterised in two ways: there are those with a small number of key actors who play a major role within the system, making the key decisions that affect people and institutions (a ‘top heavy’ or ‘autocratic’ system); and there are those with a wide range of actors from a range of sectors who are well connected and able to make decisions, as well as playing important facilitation and brokerage roles, which connect a wide range of assets and resources.

The strongest systems are those with strong leadership that it is not based purely on a top down approach, but encourages and inspires self determination and innovative crossover between networks, within a wider framework of shared values and purposes.

Perhaps the most fundamental element of a system is that it is not about independent individuals and organisations going off in their own directions to create change in their own way. Such a system, demonstrating a lack of connectedness and un-joined up approaches, will suffer through lack of coherence to deliver positive change in a locality.

Linking quantum physics and place policy

An illustrative example comes from quantum physics. There are no independent entities at all at the quantum level – it is all about the relationships which make up the ‘whole’. Relationships between atoms and particles – it is the same rule in our localities in which we are trying to steward during these difficult economic times – webs of relationships. This is the same whether it is for individual organisations – say a local council and its constituent parts – corporate procurement, adult and social services, children’s services, highways, planning and economic development – or for a wider area relating to cross-sector structures such as Local Strategic Partnerships. Of course, some organisations and areas are more effectively connected than others, and some use this connectedness to the benefit of localities better than others.

2.2.3 Managing systems carefully

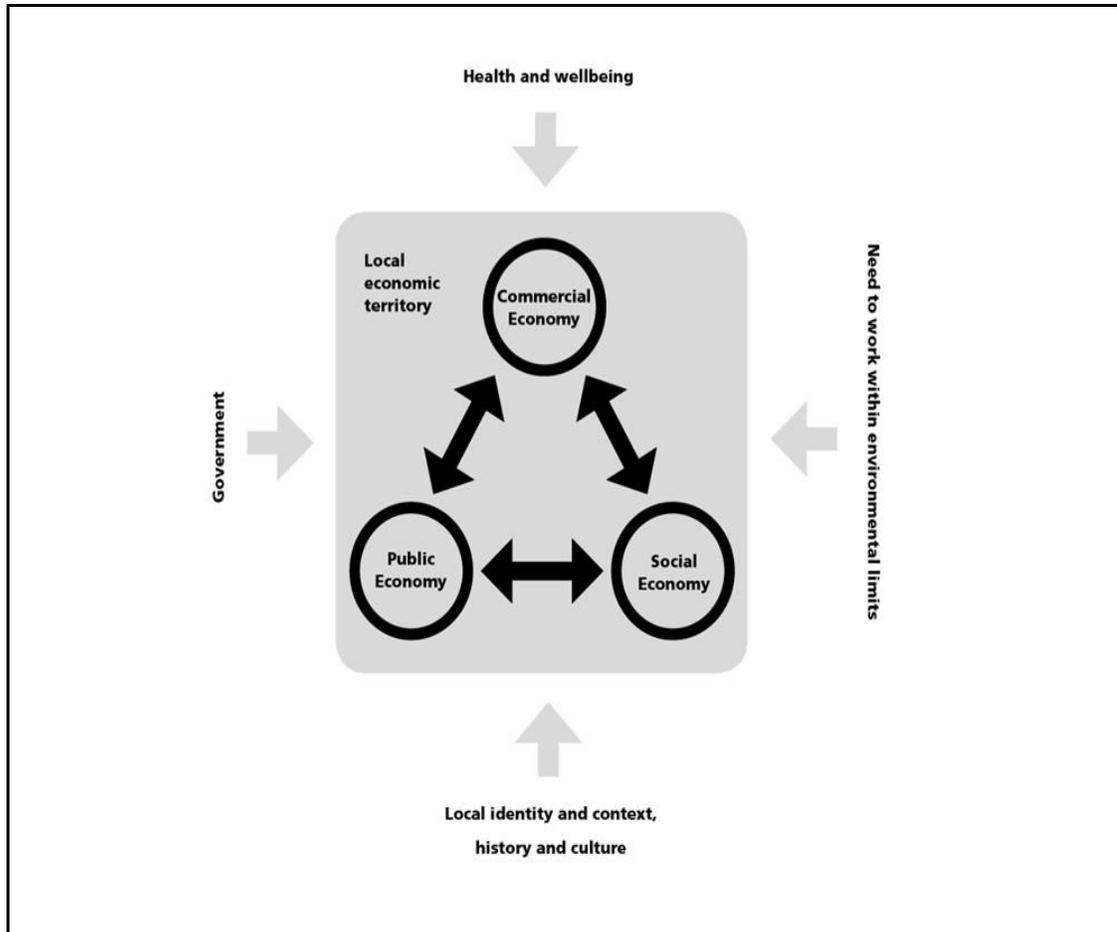
Despite the key advantages of a systems approach to addressing issues that places face, there are also a number of inherent dangers to the development of a complex web of cross-sector networks within a locality. One of these is that it can be very easy to have particularly complicated relationships within a system which are hard to track and can lead to duplication of efforts. An overcomplicated system with too many actors involved can lead to failings in networks and reduce the focus on the ‘big picture’. The stronger and more resilient systems are those which are able to arrange the patchwork of players across the public, social and private sectors in a way which is most conducive to achieving strong synergy between its parts and avoiding such complications. Relationships, just for relationships sake, will not work – there must be a substance behind it to make it work in practice.

2.3 Transferring systems thinking to place resilience

CLES has utilised the challenge to the economic orthodoxy and the theory of systems thinking to develop a new and innovative approach to looking at economic and place policy.

2.3.1 The model

The CLES resilience model, as highlighted in Figure 1, is a mechanism for both researchers and place strategists to understand the function and resilience of a geographical place.

Figure 1: The CLES resilience model

Our resilience model has been designed to provide a conceptual framework of how a local place is structured and the relationships that influence it. The model moves beyond traditional 'linear' and 'silo' thinking about economic development, taking a 'whole systems' approach that looks at the key agents and linkages operating within places. The model's principal assumption is that, through improving the quality of the multitude of relationships within a local place, synergies and innovative responses to socio-economic problems can be fully developed. The CLES resilience model is unique, in that it explores all of the assets and resources within a locality to ensure future positive change, and is predicated on the resilience being achieved by a place having the systems in place which help both individuals and institutions to collaborate effectively in developing solutions to challenges.

2.3.2 The methodology

During the piloting of the CLES resilience model, ten measures were developed that sought to gauge a place's resilience. There are three measures that explore the shape of a local place; three measures that explore the relationships that influence a place; and four measures that explore the influence of wider factors upon a place. The measures are as follows:

- **Measure 1: The commercial sector** – this measure explores the strength of the commercial sector;

- **Measure 2: The public sector** – this measure explores the strength of the public sector;
- **Measure 3: The social sector** – this measure explores the strength of the social sector;
- **Measure 4: Commercial sector’s relationship with the public sector** – this measure explores the existence and effectiveness of partnerships between the commercial and public sector;
- **Measure 5: Public sector’s relationship with the social sector** – this measure explores the existence and effectiveness of partnerships between the public and social sector;
- **Measure 6: Social sector’s relationship with the commercial sector** – this measure explores the existence and effectiveness of partnerships between the social and commercial sector;
- **Measure 7: Health and wellbeing and the relationship to the local economic territory** – this measure explores how local health and wellbeing issues relate to the local place;
- **Measure 8: Relationship between the local economic territory and working within environmental limits** – this measure explores how the climate change agenda has been integrated into the economy of the local place;
- **Measure 9: Relationship between the local economic territory and local identity, history and context** – this measure explores the extent to which a place is shaped by and manages its identity, history and culture;
- **Measure 10: Relationship between the local economic territory and governance** – this measure explores how national and local governance has affected the local place.

Using qualitative research techniques, the place is then given assessments in relation to each of the ten measures and an overall resilience assessment. Each measure is assessed on the following sliding scale:

- **resilient** – there is compelling evidence of robust relationships between the different spheres of the local place, and these relationships have been developed in bold and innovative ways. The sectors are working together very effectively and are having a clear positive impact on the locality, evident in partners’ responses to local challenges and wider economic influences. The strong relationships and resources present make the area very well prepared to deal with economic, social and environmental shocks, as well as inherent conditions and emerging opportunities;
- **stable** – there is evidence of sound relationships between the different spheres of the local economy. There is adequate communication between the sectors, often facilitated by dependable forums. There is some evidence that the sectors are working well together, supported by examples of where the sectors have come together to develop local responses to challenges. The relationships and resources present make the area relatively prepared for shocks, conditions and opportunities; and there is some evidence that partners are responding to wider economic influences. However, more creative collaboration is required in order to strengthen local economic resilience;

- **vulnerable** – the relationships between the different sectors are significantly underdeveloped. Whilst there may be some communication, it tends not to be sustained or strategic. As such, relationships may be precarious. There is very limited evidence of the sectors coming together to respond to local challenges or wider economic influences. Without improvement, the local economy will be vulnerable to shocks and inherent conditions and will be unable to respond to emerging opportunities;
- **brittle** – there is little evidence of relationships between the different sectors. Where cross-sector relationships exist, they are often characterised by tension and conflict. The sectors are not working collaboratively to respond to local challenges or to address wider influences on the economy. The local economy is therefore susceptible to economic, social and environmental shocks, and is unlikely to be able to tackle inherent conditions, nor respond to emerging opportunities.

3 COMMON FACTORS OF RESILIENCE AND EXAMPLES

3.1 Common factors of resilience

The resilience studies undertaken by CLES across eight places in the UK and internationally has identified a number of factors that influence the resilience of place. These factors are as follows:

- a thriving voluntary and community sector which is able to respond to challenges and increase community capacity;
- strong civic engagement and participatory democracy with key citizen involvement in the function of place;
- a strong public sector which understands its economic footprint and uses this to effectively support its local economy;
- a diverse business sector with financial and social inclusion for communities;
- high levels of diversity in the local economy with evidence of cross-sector working;
- efficient, effective and pluralistic delivery of public services;
- strong levels of governance which encourage a balance of top-down and bottom-up working;
- public policy which effectively connects with commercial activity;
- close understanding and integration of land use planning with economic development.

3.2 Examples of resilience

A number of places have been assessed as resilient on one or a combination of the relationship measures, predominantly the relationships between the commercial and public sectors, and the public and social sectors. Places assessed as resilient on the relationship measures have been allocated as such because of their ability to respond to emerging challenges, their ability to foster effective partnerships, and their ability to develop innovative interventions.

The following section explores each of the interventions which have contributed to the measure being assessed as resilient.

3.2.1 Commercial and public

Cherwell – Job Club

The Job Club is an initiative Cherwell instigated with the local MP since January 2009 to counter the effects of the recession on the locality. The scheme is an example of best practice in terms of the public, private and social sectors working together to counter an economic shock.

The Job Club offers jobseekers the chance to meet directly with employers, training providers, career experts and benefits advisers, whilst in a supportive environment, also providing access to jobs pages and the internet. There are now two Job Clubs running in Banbury and Bicester, and over 2,000 jobseekers have visited both clubs since January 2009. The Council, with strong support from the local MP, made a commitment to divert resources to the scheme and believe it has played a key role in keeping unemployment in the District at a lower level than it otherwise would have been.

Cambridgeshire – The Hive

Members of Cambridgeshire County Council's Cabinet have approved plans to create the multi-million pound education and enterprise park called The Hive. What will make The Hive different to other business parks is that its overarching focus will be on business that's good for both society and the environment. It will be home to three projects: SmartLIFE Low Carbon; SmartLIFE Eco Homes Innovation Park; and the Good Business Centre:

- SmartLIFE Low Carbon is a partnership between Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridge Regional College that will support businesses looking to adapt to a low carbon economy and teach the skills needed to build and maintain low carbon homes and renewable energy solutions;
- SmartLIFE Eco Homes Innovation Park, a partnership between Cambridgeshire County Council and the Building Research Establishment (BRE), will demonstrate both low carbon and zero carbon homes, and lifestyles;
- Good Business Centre, a project of Cambridge based charity, Citylife, will support social and environmental enterprises through business support and affordable space for start up companies to develop their ideas and business.

South Staffordshire – Think Local

Think Local is a business initiative for the whole of Staffordshire led by all eight local authorities and the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce and Industry. It encourages the public sector and private companies to buy local, giving local businesses every opportunity to prove their value and succeed. The Think Local website provides businesses with information about local procurement opportunities and offers a directory of local businesses. In signing the Think Local pledge, local authorities in Southern Staffordshire and beyond are committed to the principles of local procurement.

3.2.2 Public and social

Forest Heath – Community Garden, Newmarket

Forest Heath District Council and the Newmarket Voluntary Network are currently working together to provide a community garden space within Newmarket. The land being proposed for this transfer is owned by the District Council and will further enhance the green infrastructure within Newmarket. Also involved in backing this project are a number of local businesses, who have assisted in the process up to now and will act as sponsors going forward.

Lichfield – The Jigsaw Project

Lichfield District Council has established good relationships with local RSLs, including Midland Heart and HomeZone Housing Association (e.g. Lichfield District Council and HomeZone have co-funded a community development post for the Burntwood area and HomeZone is also a member of the LSP). Lichfield District Council and Midland Heart have worked together to develop the Jigsaw Project, located at Dimbles Lane, North Lichfield. Whilst Lichfield is a fairly affluent area on the whole, there are nevertheless pockets of deprivation in North Lichfield.

Following a public consultation in 2005, Midland Heart and Lichfield District Council have worked together to renovate an empty shop in North Lichfield which was proving to be a blight on the neighbourhood. With the support of local volunteers, and donations from the Dulux Decorator Centre in Stafford, the empty shop has been transformed into a hub of community activity, known as the Jigsaw Project, which has been host to a whole range of community activities. The collaboration between the Council and RSLs are seen as the key reason for the project's success.

3.2.3 Social and commercial

Tameside – Voluntary representation on Tameside Enterprise Board

At the wider Tameside strategic level, the Chief Executive of St Peter's Partnerships sit on the new Tameside Local Enterprise Board, which will further enhance linkages between the sectors. The organisation also aims to support local business through its community enterprise, Enterprise Plus, helping local people access learning and employment opportunities. This service also provides managed workspace for local businesses through the development of 'Can Do' zones. These include a number of buildings on the fringes of the town centre that have been renovated for this purpose, such as The Old Vicarage, and later in the year, Clyde House. Importantly, these managed workspaces are affordable for smaller enterprises and can help ensure that appropriate space is available to support creativity and innovation in Ashton.

Bradford – Be Involved

Bradford Chamber of Commerce delivered this as part of the Enterprising Bradford Programme. The project aimed to help ensure expertise of the private sector flows into local areas, in particular local enterprises operating in the most deprived areas, or who have customers/beneficiaries living within the most deprived areas. At the heart of the programme was the transfer of skills from the private sector to third sector organisations through a combination of skills sharing, mentoring, volunteering and pro bono work.

4 THE SHIFTING FOCUS TOWARDS COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The previous sections of this publication have focused upon the theory of place resilience, the importance of adopting systems based thinking to economic and place policy, and examples of practice from CLES' place focused research. As detailed earlier, the emphasis of the Barrow Cadbury Trust grant, and the specific work in North Walsall, has been upon community resilience. The beauty of a systems based approach to understanding place and resilience is that the principles can be exchanged intermittently regardless of geography, thus the exact same principles of understanding, measuring and improving resilience can be applied to neighbourhoods, communities and town centres.

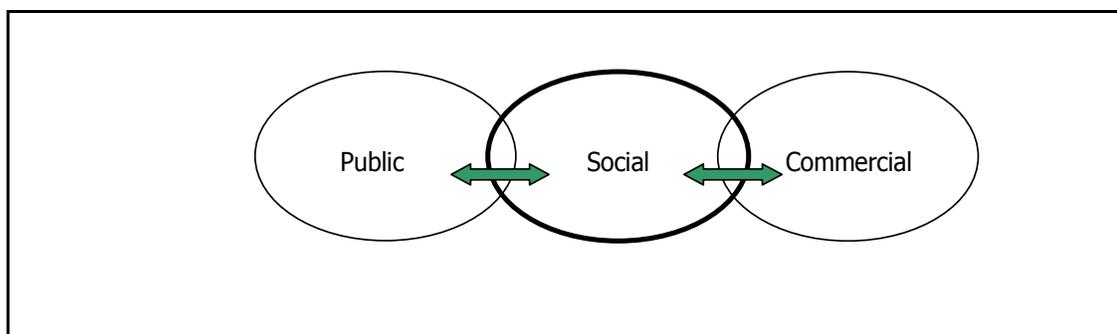
4.1 What makes a resilient community?

For CLES, resilient communities are those which are capable of bouncing back from adverse situations; they can do this by actively influencing and preparing for economic, social and environmental change. When times are bad, they can call upon the myriad of resources that make them a healthy community. A high level of social, public and private capital means that they have access to good information and communication networks, and can call upon a wide range of resources. They are places where place improvement activities are efficiently implemented through a well managed balance between 'top down' and 'bottom up' structures, equally involving all actors within the community – public, private and social. In particular, the social sector is well connected, strong, and shares good links with other sectors. Resilient communities will often have good connections with other neighbourhoods across the public, private and social spheres, particularly where they share commonalities.

4.2 Measuring community resilience

The ten measures which underpin the place resilience model, as described in Section 2.3.2, also underpin CLES' approach to assessing community resilience. The slight change is that with the focus being upon community, greater emphasis is placed upon the social sector, in particular the presence and extent of: the community enterprise; credit unions; charities; voluntary and community sector organisations; development trusts; and cooperatives. Greater emphasis is also placed upon exploring the effectiveness within the community of the focus on voluntary and community sector infrastructure, and the role of the social sector in shaping relationships with the public and commercial sectors. This change is reflected in Figure 2, which highlights the predominant focus upon exploring the shape of the commercial, public and social economies; and the effectiveness of the relationships between the three.

Figure 2: The community resilience model



Subsequently, there is also less emphasis placed upon the wider influences of: health and wellbeing; working within environmental limits; local identity, history and context; and governance. That is not to say these external influences are less important, they are just less likely to influence upon the function of community than some of the more relationship focused measures.

4.3 Community resilience aims and objectives

The aim of the project in North Walsall is therefore to encourage and promote greater community resilience, to help communities harness valuable resources (often untapped), and to develop bottom up sustainable solutions to particular local needs and aspirations, by helping to create the conditions within which this can happen; complementing top down approaches from public policy. Our objectives are to:

- assess existing levels of community resilience in North Walsall;
- determine local needs and develop a locally responsive plan of activities to strengthen community resilience;
- support the development of new approaches and strengthen existing activity.

It is important from the outset to understand what the research in North Walsall is and is not designed to do. It is mainly a qualitative, primary piece of research to assess the systems and processes within North Walsall, to understand the capacity of the locality to respond to shocks, deep seated challenges, and opportunities. The aim is not to go over in great detail the specific issues that North Walsall faces, or to assess the potential of centres and places; this has been covered elsewhere. However, where such issues are mentioned, it is for the benefit of the wider context of the study. This work is about understanding the way in which a locality functions more broadly, through collaboration and partnerships between individuals and organisations, and to explore how this can be developed further.

5 COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN NORTH WALSALL

The specific area of focus which has been used as a case study for the community resilience research, and in relation to the Barrow Cadbury grant, was North Walsall. CLES engaged with Walsall Council at an early stage in the research process in order to ensure buy in and commitment to taking forward the findings. We chose Walsall as the focus for the research for a number of reasons:

- we wanted to engage with an authority which was not one of the ‘usual suspects’ for research focus in the West Midlands. We wanted to avoid any duplication of other Barrow Cadbury funded activities in Birmingham and Sandwell in particular;
- CLES has undertaken regeneration focused research in Walsall in the past, meaning we had a sound understanding of the geography of Walsall, the economy, and its socio-economic challenges. Previous work has included the evaluation of Single Regeneration Fund Programmes and the contribution towards the development of a master plan for the Birchills area of Walsall;
- Walsall, particularly areas of North Walsall, has been in recipient of significant regeneration monies over the last ten years. With this funding in decline, the CLES place resilience model was seen as a way of thinking differently about community regeneration and adopting new processes within place;
- Walsall is an area of contrast, with areas of significant deprivation; twinned with prosperity. There is also a diverse population and a range of challenges around tackling worklessness, low skills and health related challenges.

Following consultation with Walsall Council, it was decided that the area of focus for the community resilience research would be North Walsall. The locality is one of six Area Partnership localities in Walsall, encompassing four electoral wards. Walsall Partnership chose North Walsall because of its diversity, challenges around cross-sector relationships, and a desire to add value to existing Area Partnership activities and Area Action Plans.

This section of the publication details the findings of the community resilience research in North Walsall. It provides an overview of North Walsall before discussing in detail each of the measures of community resilience in relation to North Walsall, and providing assessments in relation to each of those measures. The analysis has been derived from desk based reviews of strategy and documentation; and stakeholder interviews with representatives from the public, commercial and social sectors in North Walsall. The section concludes with a series of recommendations and discussion about how they have been taken forward by the Walsall Partnership in the six months following the publication of the draft report in July 2012.

5.1 About North Walsall

North Walsall is one of six Area Partnership localities in the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall. Lying to the North of Birmingham, the North East of Sandwell, and the East of Wolverhampton, it has a strong industrial and manufacturing history. North Walsall constitutes the electoral wards of Bloxwich East, Bloxwich West, Birchills-Leamore, and Blakenall.

5.1.1 Socio-economic context

The four wards of North Walsall are extremely diverse in terms of the demographics of their population and economy. Particular parts of the locality are characterised by an ageing population, with others home to a much younger demographic.

For example, 27.7% of the population of Bloxwich East are aged over 60; this compares to the Walsall average of 23.2%. Similarly, 38.5% of the population of Birchills-Leamore are aged under 25; this compares to the Walsall average of 32.8%. There are particularly young populations in Birchills-Leamore and Blakenall where 9.4% and 9.0% of the population respectively are aged between 0 and 4.

The diversity of the wards is also different in terms of ethnic make-up; 15% of the population of Birchills-Leamore are non-White British, with 11.1% of the population from an Asian or Asian British background. The ethnic make-up of Bloxwich West and Bloxwich East is much less diverse, with 96.1% of the population of each ward being White British.

Access to employment opportunity is a challenge in three of the four wards of North Walsall; this is reflected in current levels of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claims. 6.7% of the working age population of Walsall are currently (May 2012 – latest available data) claiming JSA; 9.8%, 9.7% and 8.4% of the working age populations of Birchills-Leamore, Blakenall, and Bloxwich East respectively claim JSA. The exception is Bloxwich West; whilst above the Walsall average at 7.0%, the area has less claimants of JSA as a proportion of the working age population than the other three wards.

Subsequently, worklessness is also a challenge in North Walsall. This is reflected in current levels of claims of JSA, Incapacity Benefit (IB), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS) and other income related benefits; 17.6% of the working age population of Walsall are currently (November 2012 – latest available data) workless. Levels of worklessness in each of the four wards of North Walsall are above the Walsall average. Worklessness is a particular challenge in Blakenall where 28.3% of the working age population are workless; this presents a significant challenge around supporting people back into work and providing support for lone parents. 23.7%, 22.5% and 19.7% of the working age populations of Birchills-Leamore, Bloxwich East, and Bloxwich West are workless.

There are particular issues around deprivation encompassing income, employment, health and educational inequality in the wards of Blakenall and Birchills-Leamore. Blakenall is the most deprived ward in Walsall, with over half of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the most deprived 5% nationally, with Birchills-Leamore the second most deprived ward in Walsall. Education appears to be an odd barometer in North Walsall. Bloxwich West, despite being the least deprived of the four wards, has the lowest levels of educational attainment, with less than 40% of 16 year olds achieving grades A* to C at GCSE. In Blakenall, where there are much higher levels of deprivation and worklessness, educational attainment is better, with 60% achieving grades A* to C.

5.1.2 Existing strategy

Each Area Partnership locality has in place a partnership board, bringing together a selection of public, social and commercial partners, with a responsibility for acting upon an Area Community Plan and an Area Action Plan for their locality.

The Area Action Plan for North Walsall was developed in 2010 and involved input from partners such as Walsall Council, West Midlands Police and the Walsall Housing Group. Importantly, the Area Partnership and Area Action Plan are framed by the involvement of communities and residents in North Walsall. The Action Plan is framed around eight core themes:

- 1) tackling anti social behaviour and crime;
- 2) providing positive activities for young people;
- 3) creating cleaner streets and open spaces;
- 4) tackling worklessness and unemployment;
- 5) improving educational attainment;
- 6) removing negative impacts on the local environment, including scrap dealing;
- 7) promoting healthier lifestyles;
- 8) reducing teenage pregnancy.

A number of project activities are already being undertaken across North Walsall by partners and residents in relation to each of the above themes. These include: dispersal orders to stop gangs congregating; removal of scrap wagons and dealing; opportunities for young people to produce radio broadcasts; and the development of an independent living skills programme for homeless people.

5.2 Assessing community resilience in North Walsall

5.2.1 Measure 1: Social sector

The first measure of community resilience is the social sector. This measure seeks to understand the shape and strength of the social sector in North Walsall. The social sector incorporates a wide range of community, voluntary and not-for-profit activities. It is characterised by a number of different types of organisations, including: community enterprises; credit unions; charities and voluntary groups; development trusts; and cooperatives. For the purpose of the community resilience work, it also includes housing organisations (housing associations and other registered providers).

The types of organisations captured under the banner of the social sector play an important role in our communities and in society more broadly. For example, they:

- deliver services, often to groups that are underserved by mainstream provision;
- advocate and lobby on behalf of community causes;
- facilitate local economic development;
- often help improve the local environment;
- build residents' capacity through volunteering.

A sector based upon community associations

The model of the voluntary and community sector organisations in North Walsall is based around that of community associations. These community associations, such as the Sneyd Community Association and the Frank F Harrison Community Association, have been historically linked to schools. The school provides a physical space out of which the community association can operate, with the activities offered often linked to young people (e.g. youth clubs, sporting activities and intergenerational projects).

This model has sustained organisations in terms of a physical base, but has come under pressure as a result of the Building Schools for the Future Programme; and the need to work in particular catchment areas.

For example, the Frank F Harrison Community Association has recently had to re-locate (albeit to a new facility) as a result of the Building Schools for the Future Programme and the school no longer wishing to consolidate the link. Similarly, the Sneyd Community Association is restricted in their community activity by the relative isolation of their base at the Black Country University Technical College to residential areas; and the barrier of the M6 motorway.

The focus upon particular neighbourhoods, such as Bloxwich, Beechdale or Mossley, restricts the ability of community associations to work together to address issues across North Walsall as an entirety. Indeed, there is often competition between community associations as opposed to collaboration.

A fragmented sector

This lack of coordination between community associations is reflected in the general opinion of the voluntary and community sector in North Walsall that it is fractured, unstructured, fragmented and suffers from a real lack of leadership or effective infrastructure support.

Taking infrastructure support first, there is a real lack of an organisation in North Walsall, and indeed Walsall as a whole, that:

- provides a network opportunity for voluntary and community sector organisations;
- provides capacity building support for the voluntary and community sector;
- provides the conduit or link between the voluntary and community sector and the public sector.

Despite the diversity of population in Birchill-Leamore in particular, there is also a lack of specialist voluntary and community sector infrastructure in North Walsall for BME voluntary and community sector organisations.

Together with a lack of infrastructure, is a lack of leadership or lobbying voice for the voluntary and community sector. This is a particular challenge where the community associations are seeking to demonstrate the issues facing the neighbourhoods in which they are based and the service demands of their communities.

The lack of effective infrastructure (both generic and specialist) is having implications upon the voluntary and community sector's ability to respond to and take advantage of the changing funding environment for the voluntary and community sector. The community associations, bar a few examples, are still very much reliant upon grant funding, whether that be through the local authority and other public sector organisations, the schools in which they are based, or external sources such as the Big Lottery Fund. The fragmented nature of the sector in both North Walsall and Walsall more generally, is challenging the credibility and ability of the voluntary and community sector when it comes to contracting and delivering services (e.g. few organisations are able to fully articulate their skills and impacts).

A strong social housing sector

There are a number of social housing providers in North Walsall (including housing associations, registered social landlords, and supported housing providers). This element of the social sector in North Walsall appears stronger than the disparate and fragmented voluntary and community sector described above.

Each of the social housing providers, particularly Walsall Housing Group and Beechdale Community Housing, provide not only tenancy services for their residents but a host of 'wider role' services that demonstrate a commitment to community and an affinity to place.

Walsall Housing Group also provides in-house property maintenance services, meaning local jobs, a healthier local environment, and a consideration of North Walsall in the supply chain. Around 300 people are employed through Walsall Housing Group's Direct Labour Organisation (DLO).

The relationships between housing providers are also more evident than in the wider social sector, with organisations working together across stock boundaries to provide services which are of importance to their tenants.

An inward looking and protective community

The fragmented nature of the voluntary and community sector in North Walsall also has implications for the behaviour of communities. As a result of the narrowly defined focus of the community associations and the lack of integration between voluntary and community sector organisations, communities tend to be very inward looking and protective. This is particularly evident in the demographic and cultural make-up of the wards in North Walsall, and the often poor cultural attitudes of communities towards difference. A key example of this is the lack of integration of the large settled Traveller Community in North Walsall, particularly Bloxwich, into wider community activities and indeed local services.

People in North Walsall are very protective of the neighbourhood in which they live, which is not necessarily a bad thing but raises concerns over cohesion and integration. A 2010 report for Walsall Council by the Institute of Community Cohesion highlighted this exact issue of polarisation by ethnicity:

'Participants in both White and BME focus groups readily identified what were perceived 'no-go' areas for ethnic minorities and BME dominated areas, where the trend was for Whites to move out.'

Some areas of opportunity

Having stated that the voluntary and community sector is fragmented, fractured and lacking in leadership and infrastructure, it is important to note that there are some very good organisations in North Walsall. Both the Frank F Harrison Community Association and the Sneyd Community Association are longstanding providers of needed activities for the communities in which they are based. There is an opportunity to embed them into wider public service commissioning, particularly in relation to youth services.

There is also an opportunity in Mossley, which forms part of the Bloxwich West ward, for communities and the voluntary and community sector to really influence future regeneration and community action through the ten year £1 million Big Local funding. There are also some emerging examples of community led enterprise in North Walsall, particularly a furniture recycling social enterprise operating in Birchills.

Resilience of the social sector

The section below presents CLES' assessment of the social sector in North Walsall.

Figure 3: Resilience assessment for Measure 1 – the social sector



We have assessed the social sector as 'vulnerable' because:

- there are some community associations in North Walsall operating on a neighbourhood basis;
- this neighbourhood focus restricts the ability of community associations to work together;
- voluntary and community sector infrastructure in North Walsall is fragmented and lacks leadership;
- there is also a lack of specialist infrastructure;
- the voluntary and community sector are restricted by the lack of effective infrastructure in responding to the emerging funding environment;
- the social housing sector is strong with a commitment to place;
- communities in North Walsall are inward looking and protective;
- there are some opportunities for the sector but there is a key need for more effective infrastructure and integration in North Walsall.

5.2.2 Measure 2: Public sector

The second measure of community resilience is public sector; this measure seeks to understand the shape and strength of the public sector in North Walsall. The public sector includes: local authorities; the health service; the police and fire and rescue services; and local education providers, including schools and colleges. As such, the public sector has a number of roles within place:

- deliver a range and diversity of frontline and mainstream services;
- steward and enable wider place shaping and local strategy;
- procure goods and services;
- deliver regeneration and economic development activities;
- provide employment and up-skilling.

Strong strategic driver of place

The public sector, particularly Walsall Council, have been integral in developing the partnership and governance structures which are evident in North Walsall. The Area Partnership for North Walsall draws together a host of public sector partners from across North Walsall, with a common goal of improving services, neighbourhoods and livelihoods. The development of the Area Partnership and associated Action Plan is based upon strong cross-public sector leadership and drive for improvement.

Whilst not always linking up collaboratively to the Area Partnerships across Walsall, the local authority's regeneration team have also been important in strategically enabling change in North Walsall. They have been important in putting the conditions in place, often through physical development or renaissance, to enable the more socially focused activities of the Area Partnership teams to flourish.

A commitment to place

The public sector in Walsall generally, and subsequently in North Walsall, have a strong commitment to place. There is a drive across public sector partners to regeneration, particularly tackling worklessness and raising skills levels and aspirations. There are key relationships between the local authority and Walsall College in relation to apprenticeships and supporting young people from North Walsall into employment opportunities.

Given the fragmented nature of Walsall as a place and between the town centre and North Walsall in particular, the provision of some public services are delivered on 'one stop shop' principles; offering outreach support in particular neighbourhoods and communities. The facilitation of one stop shops is cross-sectoral, with local authority benefits services twinned with Jobcentre Plus advisory support and National Health Service provision. This reflects a whole place approach to service provision.

A reality of cross-public sector working

The strategic drive and commitment to place in Walsall is not just rhetoric in North Walsall; it is being followed through in the delivery of the Area Partnership Action Plan. For example, the Police are working in partnership with the local authority to both rejuvenate the district centre in Bloxwich and tackle issues around shop theft; the local authority is working with NHS Walsall and the West Midlands Fire Service to deliver improvements in parks in North Walsall and other open and green spaces; and the local authority is working with Walsall College and schools to promote opportunities at the University Technical College in Sneyd.

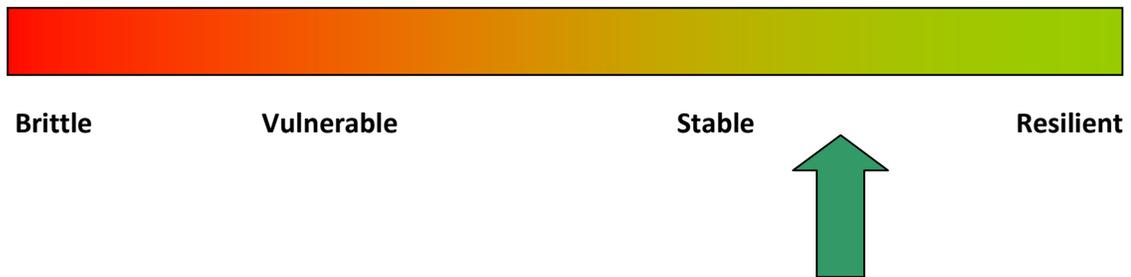
Raising awareness of procurement opportunities

Previously funded through the Working Neighbourhoods Fund and now being mainstreamed in the regeneration team, Walsall Council have sought to harness the local impact of their procurement spend through Think Walsall. This is effectively an e-procurement portal system which seeks to open procurement opportunities to local businesses and the voluntary and community sector across Walsall. It raises awareness of potential opportunities through text alerts and enables potential suppliers to engage with buyers through meet the buyer events.

Resilience of the public sector

The section below presents CLES' assessment of the public sector in North Walsall.

Figure 4: Resilience assessment for Measure 2 – the public sector



We have assessed the public sector as between 'stable' and 'resilient' because:

- the public sector through the Area Partnership are a strong strategic driver of place in North Walsall;
- the regeneration team at Walsall Council are effective in putting the conditions in place for economic development;
- there is a commitment to place and a reality of cross-public sector working;
- there are a host of funding challenges facing the public sector at the moment which will be a test of the adaptability of partners;
- more could be done around the procurement process in terms of supporting the local business and social sectors to access opportunities.

5.2.3 Measure 3: Commercial sector

The third measure of community resilience is the commercial sector; this measure seeks to understand the shape and strength of the commercial sector. The commercial sector includes multi-national business, small to medium sized enterprises, and retailers. The commercial sector's primary role in relation to place is to enhance output and productivity, and create employment opportunity.

A number of commercial sector spaces

North Walsall is home to a number of spaces for commercial sector location:

- the proximity of the M6 motorway, which runs parallel to the four wards of North Walsall, make it a good location for distribution and logistic businesses, particularly with the presence of a motorway junction. Indeed, two major logistics organisations have distribution centres in North Walsall in the form of TK MAXX and Homeserve. These organisations are potentially key sources of employment opportunity for residents living in North Walsall;
- North Walsall also has two business parks in the form of the Leamore Business Park and the Phoenix Business Park. These business parks play to Walsall's industrial and manufacturing strengths, with the make up being largely SMEs with focuses upon engineering, trades, maintenance and manufacturing activities.

The challenge with the focus upon manufacturing and maintenance trades is a potential lack of diversity in the commercial sector in North Walsall; and effectively an inability to respond to emerging new sectors and opportunities.

Matching jobs and residents

Whilst North Walsall is home to commercial sector space, as described above in the form of two major distribution businesses and two business parks, there is a poor infrastructure offer when it comes to linking residents to the business park and distribution outlets. The primary mode of infrastructure is road which presents both affordability issues and environmental issues. There is a lack of connectivity between the business parks and residential areas in North Walsall, meaning the only option open to residents is the use of the car which can hold back North Walsall residents in accessing employment opportunities.

Positive business to commercial sector infrastructure relationships

The two business parks at Leamore and Phoenix are supported by two dedicated business park coordinators from the Black Country Chamber of Commerce. The coordinators provide a number of services to over 100 businesses on each of the Parks, including: business watch schemes; advice around business rates; and support to business development opportunities. The coordinators are also designed to act as a conduit between the businesses and the public sector.

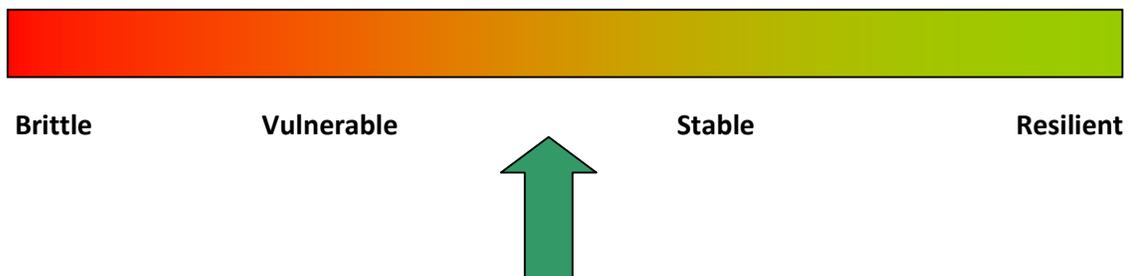
A different economic footprint

The commercial sector in North Walsall operates on a different economic footprint than the public and social sectors. Where there is a strong inward focused voluntary and community sector in North Walsall, and a local authority which is increasingly committed to supporting local purchasing, the commercial sector tends to look outwards (e.g. businesses in Bloxwich West have stronger links to markets in Wolverhampton and Birmingham than Walsall). Similarly, the presence of the M6 means there is an advantage to exporting elsewhere within the West Midlands and nationally.

Resilience of the commercial sector

The section below presents CLES' assessment of the commercial sector in North Walsall.

Figure 5: Resilience assessment for Measure 3 – the commercial sector



We have assessed the commercial sector as between 'vulnerable' and 'stable' because:

- there are a number of commercial sector resources in North Walsall in the form of major logistics businesses and the presence of two business parks;
- the diversity of business in North Walsall is relatively narrow;
- there are poor infrastructure links between jobs and residents;

- there are effective links between businesses on the two business parks and the Black Country Chamber of Commerce;
- businesses in North Walsall operate on a less localised economic footprint.

5.2.4 Measure 4: The relationship between the social and public sectors

The fourth measure of community resilience is the social sector's relationship with the public sector; this measure explores the existence and effectiveness of partnerships between the social and public sector in North Walsall and the level of interaction between the two sectors.

The relationship between the social and public sectors in North Walsall is reflective of the strength and weaknesses of the two sectors identified in Measures 1, 2 and 3. The relationship between the community associations, wider voluntary and community sector, and the public sector is hampered by the lack of effective infrastructure and leadership. The relationship between the social housing sector and the public sector is better because of the alignment of priorities and the buy in to Area Partnership working.

Positive social housing and public sector relations

The relationship between the social housing sector and the public sector in North Walsall is a positive one. The Walsall Housing Group in particular have been working in partnership with Walsall Council to align priorities and share commitments to regenerating some of the most deprived parts of Walsall and rejuvenating district centres. Central to this is a joint investment plan entitled '*Transforming Walsall Together*'. The investment plan shapes ten individual projects across Walsall which seeks to provide the Borough with:

- housing to meet the needs of all residents;
- safe and attractive neighbourhoods;
- accessible schools and learning opportunities;
- employment and training opportunities for every resident;
- community activities, including sports, arts and culture;
- a thriving enterprise economy.

There is a particular focus upon working together in one part of North Walsall. In Bloxwich, Walsall Housing Group and Walsall Council are building homes and improving its district centre and conservation area. The activities are supported by the Walsall Partnership and the Walsall Housing Partnership.

The Walsall Housing Group also has a strong commitment to embedding community capacity building, health promotion, and community champions as part of physical regeneration activities. Funding for these 'softer' activities again comes in the form of a partnership relationship between Walsall Housing Group and Walsall Council. The Visionary Investment Enhancing Walsall Programme is a joint venture which utilises VAT savings to invest in community regeneration projects across North Walsall and the wider local authority.

Poor voluntary and community sector infrastructure and public sector relationships

The relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the public sector in North Walsall is poor. Whilst some of the community associations have effective individual relationships with local authority departments, such as youth services or with other public sector partners such as NHS Walsall, there is a collective lack of voice for the sector.

This is reflective of the lack of leadership associated with voluntary and community sector infrastructure across Walsall, meaning there is no effective engagement with the voluntary and community sector, the programme board of the Local Strategic Partnership, and the delivery activities of the Walsall Partnership. This lack of relationship has a number of implications for the voluntary and community sector in North Walsall and communities. These implications include:

- a lack of vehicle for voicing community needs around services to the public sector;
- a lack of understanding of what the voluntary and community sector does in North Walsall amongst the public sector;
- a lack of ability to access capacity building support to enable access to public service contracts;
- a lack of means for demonstrating the social and economic impact of voluntary and community sector organisations;
- a lack of trust amongst the public sector of the voluntary and community sector as a deliverer, with a subsequent knock-on effect on grant funding.

The challenge around infrastructure for the voluntary and community sector is not just a social sector issue in North Walsall. Indeed, there appears to be a lack of drive from the public sector in supporting the creation and development of effective voluntary and community sector infrastructure.

Positive community association and educational institution relationships

The historical relationship between schools and the community associations at Sneyd and in Bloxwich is an important and positive one. Being based in schools, such as the Black Country University Technical College, provides head teachers and governors with an understanding of the added value community associations bring to educational activities. There is an understanding, particularly at the Sneyd Community Association, of the knock-on impact of such relationships upon the wider community.

Lack of capitalisation on the principles of Think Walsall

Very few of the community associations and wider voluntary and community sector organisations based in North Walsall have accessed public service contracts. There is not only a challenge here around the capacity and skills of the voluntary and community sector to deliver contracts, but also around the targeting of the Think Walsall initiative. Think Walsall has predominantly focused upon the commercial sector and alerted them to potential procurement opportunities. There is a challenge of rolling this out to the voluntary and community sector as there is insufficient knowledge amongst the public sector of the capabilities and capacity of the voluntary and community sector in North Walsall to deliver.

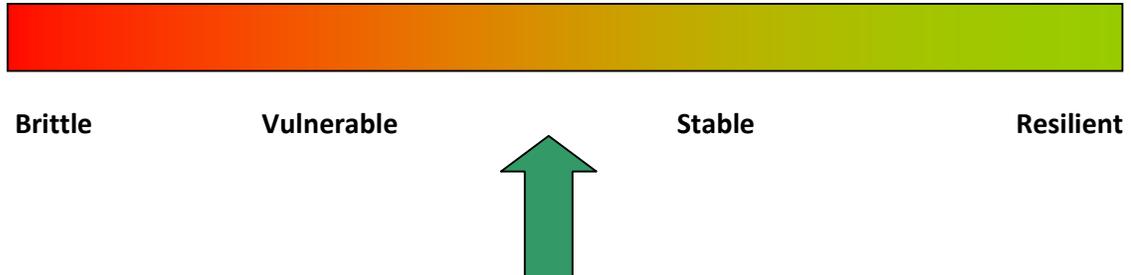
Formal and informal welfare and employment support

One area of emerging relationship between the social and public sector in North Walsall is in relation to welfare advice and employment support. Through their partnership management structure, Jobcentre Plus are seeking to work with community associations in North Walsall to provide advice around what the welfare reforms mean for communities and individuals. They are also working to bulk up neighbourhood level and informal employment support activities (e.g. Jobcentre Plus is working with Steps to Work – the core provider of employment and training services in Walsall – to facilitate the creation of a Job Club at the community association in Beechdale).

Resilience of the relationship between the social and public sector

The section below presents CLES' assessment of the resilience of the relationship between the social and public sector in North Walsall.

Figure 6: Resilience assessment for Measure 4 – the relationship between the social and public sector



We have assessed the relationship between the social and public sector as between 'vulnerable' and 'stable' because:

- there are positive relationships amongst certain aspects of the social and public sectors, particularly that between the Walsall Housing Group and Walsall Council, and the community associations and educational institutions;
- there are also some good relationships around welfare reform and employment brokerage;
- however, the relationship between voluntary and community sector organisations and the wider public sector are poor, reflective of the lack of effective infrastructure;
- additionally, the principles of Think Walsall are not being fully capitalised upon to support the voluntary and community sector to take advantage of the new funding environment.

5.2.5 Measure 5: The relationship between the social and commercial sectors

The fifth measure of community resilience is the social sector's relationship with the commercial sector; this measure explores the existence and effectiveness of partnerships between the social and commercial sector in North Walsall and the level of interaction between the two sectors.

At present, there is not really a relationship between the social and commercial sectors in North Walsall. Stakeholders suggested that the relationship was one which was difficult to understand, difficult to manage, and difficult to ultimately find a fit between the two sectors; this is reflective of the situation in many of the localities which CLES has undertaken resilience research.

A lack of corporate social responsibility

Despite the presence of the two key logistical organisations and the two business parks in some of the most deprived areas of North Walsall, there is no real relationship between businesses based there and voluntary and community sector organisations and communities themselves. The notion of corporate social responsibility and providing social benefit through business does not seem to filter down through the Black Country Chamber of Commerce and with businesses based in North Walsall.

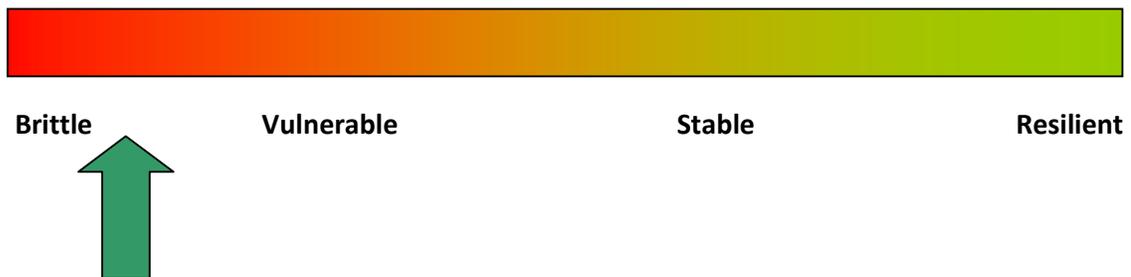
Some relationships through housing organisation supply chains

The only evidence of commercial and social relationships is through the supply chain of Beechdale Community Housing. Maintenance services for Beechdale Community Housing are provided through a private sector contractor, which in turn delivers some community focused projects and employs a specific Resident Liaison Officer for engaging with residents.

Resilience of the relationship between the social and commercial sector

The section below presents CLES' assessment of the resilience of the relationship between the social and commercial sector in North Walsall.

Figure 7: Resilience assessment for Measure 5 – the relationship between the social and commercial sector



We have assessed the relationship between the social and public sector as between 'brittle' and 'vulnerable' because:

- there is a lack of understanding in North Walsall of the potential of the relationship;
- the notion of corporate social responsibility is not filtering into the business community in North Walsall;
- there is some minimal evidence of supply chain relations in the housing organisation sector.

5.2.6 Measure 6: The relationship between the public and commercial sectors

The sixth measure of community resilience is the public sector's relationship with the commercial sector; this measure explores the existence and effectiveness of partnerships between the public and commercial sectors in North Walsall and the level of interaction between the two sectors.

Lack of business intelligence in the local authority

The stakeholders identified that there was a general lack of intelligence in the public sector, notably in the local authority around the offer of businesses in North Walsall. This was particularly found to be evident around procurement, with perceptions that there were very few North Walsall businesses providing goods or delivering services; or indeed aware of and engaged with the procurement process.

There is little understanding in particular of: what businesses there are in North Walsall; what activities they undertake; what types of services they can potentially deliver; and most importantly what type of support they need to bid for and potentially access contracting opportunities.

Additionally, businesses felt that some of the meet the buyer activities offered through the Think Walsall initiative were cumbersome and not really tailored to the needs of the businesses based in North Walsall, particularly the business parks at Leamore and Phoenix.

The lack of understanding of the commercial sector by the local authority was also felt to be poor in relation to democratic accountability and procurement.

Councillors and key representatives of electoral wards in North Walsall were deemed by the business community as having insufficient understanding of the scale, calibre and capabilities of businesses based in their locality. These challenges have led to an anti-council culture in North Walsall.

Lack of representation on Walsall Partnership

Like the social sector, the commercial sector is not really represented on the structures of the Area Partnership in Walsall generally, or engaged with the Area Action Plan in North Walsall. Bar the Bloxwich Business Partnership, which is involved in the redevelopment and crime reduction activities, there is little representation of the commercial sector in the partnership structure; this is surprising given the relative size of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce and their smaller level geographical approach to business park coordination.

Again, this is a challenge for the commercial sector as there is no real mechanism for highlighting:

- business needs;
- business challenges (e.g. business rates);
- links to other challenges (e.g. crime and disorder);
- support in tackling issues (e.g. worklessness and low skills).

More effective cross-public sector relationships

Whilst the relationship of the commercial sector with procurers and councillors at Walsall Council, and the Walsall Partnership in North Walsall is pretty ineffectual, the relationship between the commercial sector and the wider public sector is more effective. There are particularly important relationships between the Walsall College and business, and Jobcentre Plus and employers.

The relationship between the Walsall College and business is largely based around supporting young people into apprenticeships and placements with businesses in North Walsall. It is enabling courses at the college to meet business demand and for businesses to provide apprenticeship opportunities that are relevant to the skills of the younger population. The Black Country Chamber of Commerce are acting as an effective conduit in the relationship.

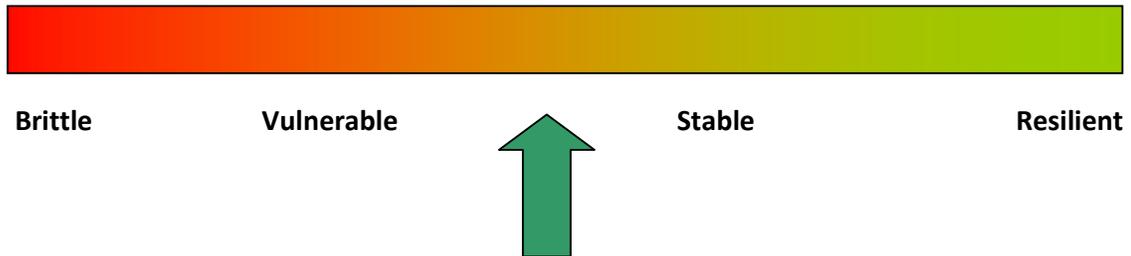
The Jobcentre Plus and business relationship is based around adopting effective employer engagement practices that give individuals who are currently out of work the opportunity to apply for and access employment opportunities at businesses based in North Walsall.

Businesses are also working with the Walsall College and schools, such as the Black Country University Technical College, to ensure skills around engineering are embedded into the curriculum. This is to ensure that young people have the skills required by local business in the future.

Resilience of the relationship between the public and commercial sector

The section below presents CLES' assessment of the resilience of the relationship between the public and commercial sector in North Walsall.

Figure 8: Resilience assessment for Measure 5 – the relationship between the public and commercial sector



We have assessed the relationship between the social and public sector as between 'vulnerable' and 'stable' because:

- there is a perceived lack of understanding of the local authority in relation to what business and North Walsall does;
- there is a lack of representation on Area Partnership structures by business representation organisations;
- there is a lack of means of demonstrating business need to local government and the Walsall Partnership;
- there are effective relationships between the commercial sector and other public sector partners.

5.2.7 Measures 7 to 10: The external influences

Measures 7 to 10 of the community resilience approach seek to assess the influence of four external factors upon the function and resilience of North Walsall. The four external factors are:

- 1) health and wellbeing and the relationship to the local economic territory;
- 2) relationship between the local economic territory and working within environmental limits;
- 3) relationship between the local economic territory and local identity, history and context;
- 4) relationship between the local economic territory and governance.

Measure 7: Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing is a huge pressure on North Walsall and requires significant levels of public sector resource. There are a number of key challenges which are outlined in the Walsall Area Partnership health profile:

- generally health outcomes are worse in North Walsall than the Walsall average and other Area Partnership localities;

- indicators of child health are poor, which is worrying given the high proportion of the population of North Walsall which are aged 0 to 4. There are very low levels of breastfeeding and high levels of child obesity;
- indicators of sexual health are also quite poor, with high levels of teenage pregnancy and low levels of Chlamydia screening;
- life expectancy is lower in North Walsall for both men and women.

Coupled with the very real issues identified above, take up of health services is low. Usage of health services, predominantly around screening and acute medicine, is poor suggesting little interest in health until it has reached hospitalisation levels. The situation in North Walsall is complicated by the proximity of North Walsall to Staffordshire, resulting in access to provision by health providers in both localities.

On the resilience scale, the relationship between the local economic territory and health and wellbeing is therefore 'vulnerable'.

Measure 8: The environment

This is very much a wider issue relating to activities of Walsall Council. For the Council, the issues relating to the environment and climate change are increasingly coming to the fore. The environment is a corporate priority alongside the issue of tackling worklessness and is evident as a cross-cutting theme across much of Walsall's strategy. Through each of these drivers of strategic influence, there is recognition of the importance of partnership working between public, commercial and social sectors to enable environmental goals; however there is little evidence as to how this strategic focus is evident in delivery activity. Organisations in the public, commercial and social economies certainly have commitments to the environment; however there is a lack of qualitative evidence.

On the resilience scale, the relationship between the local economic territory and the environment is therefore 'stable'.

Measure 9: Local identity, history and context

In terms of the identity within North Walsall, there is a real challenge around cohesion and integration of different ethnicities and communities. There are concentrations of particular ethnicities in particular parts of North Walsall, such as the strong Asian concentration in Birchills-Leamore and the White working class population of Bloxwich; however there is very little engagement or interaction between these two communities on a day-by-day basis. The ICOCO report suggested that the spatial concentration is not just a result of polarisation but other factors such as: families not being able to afford to move; or choosing to remain in neighbourhoods close to places of worship, family and friends, shops and community facilities.

On the resilience scale, the relationship between the local economic territory and local identity, history and context is therefore 'vulnerable'.

Measure 10: Governance issues

This measure, to an extent, relates to the wider governance issues across Walsall, and how the Council works to implement central government policy at the local level. The Area Partnership structure in Walsall is an innovative and effective one. On the one hand, it enables common policy priorities contained within the Community Strategy to be filtered down to smaller geographic levels; whilst on the other, it gives localities the flexibility to respond to locally defined issues.

5.3.2 Ways forward in North Walsall

As such, there are a number of recommendations emerging from the community resilience study in North Walsall. These recommendations are designed to add value to existing activities being undertaken by the Area Partnership and through the Area Action Plan. They are to be owned by the Walsall Partnership but need to engage representatives of the public, commercial and social sectors in North Walsall and, importantly, communities. Further analysis of the principles surrounding these recommendations is detailed in Section 6 of this publication.

Recommendation 1: Develop community sector champion

This research has highlighted that there is clear fragmentation amongst the voluntary and community sector in North Walsall. We therefore recommend that the Walsall Partnership facilitates the development of a voluntary and community sector champion for North Walsall. This champion would seek to promote the activities of each of the community associations in North Walsall and scope the potential for joint projects and activities. The champion would also provide a key conduit between the community associations and the wider voluntary and community sector in Walsall, together with the local authority.

Recommendation 2: Scope specialist infrastructure development

This research has highlighted that, whilst there is clear diversity in the demographics of North Walsall, there is little representation of such diversity through specialist infrastructure for black and minority ethnic voluntary and community sector organisations. We therefore recommend that Walsall Partnership works with the voluntary and community sector to bid for specialist infrastructure development support through the Big Lottery Fund or other sources. This would enable the capacity of BME voluntary and community sector organisations to be developed and networks between organisations to be forged.

Recommendation 3: Promote social value

This research has highlighted that the community associations in North Walsall provide a range of activities for their communities of focus and contribute to a wide range of outcomes. What is missing is a formal means of these organisations demonstrating such impact. We therefore recommend that the Walsall Partnership work with community associations to develop a tool which enables them to promote their economic, social and environmental value. This could be based upon methodologies such as Social Return on Investment, and would give the associations' opportunity to promote their value to commissioners and procurers.

Recommendation 4: Develop cross-community festival

This research and previous research undertaken by ICoCO has highlighted key challenges in North Walsall around integration and cohesion, despite the locality being relatively diverse overall. The challenge is that diversity is concentrated in pockets of North Walsall with little scope for interaction. We therefore recommend that the Walsall Partnership develops a cross-community festival which brings communities together and celebrates diversity.

Recommendation 5: Undertake procurement process and practice activities

This research has highlighted that Walsall Council have made a good start in reshaping their procurement processes and practice through the Think Walsall initiative; however there still remains a small number of local businesses competing for opportunities as a result of a lack of awareness and skills. We therefore recommend that Walsall Partnership undertake a range of activities around public procurement:

- through supply chain analysis, they should seek to understand procurement spend and where it is going. This would enable them to identify the proportion of spend which is in the local economy and identify businesses for influencing;
- through market testing and the business intelligence team, they should seek to understand the skills and capability of the potential supply chain;
- they should provide capacity building support for small business and voluntary and community sector organisations who have the potential to bid for public service contracts;
- they should seek to influence the behaviour of the existing supply chain in order to enhance local economic benefit. This could be undertaken through formal or informal arrangements around apprenticeship creation.

Recommendation 6: Develop business ambassador scheme

This research has highlighted that the relationship between the commercial and social sector in North Walsall is 'brittle'. Aside from a few examples in the housing sector, there is no evidence of corporate social responsibility strategy amongst key businesses. We therefore recommend that Walsall Partnership develop a business ambassador scheme where there is a role to promote amongst the North Walsall business community the merits of the voluntary and community sector and vice versa.

Recommendation 7: Engage the Black Country Chamber of Commerce in the partnership

This research has highlighted that, whilst there is a relatively strong business sector in North Walsall, they are not represented on the wider partnership by the Black Country Chamber of Commerce. We therefore recommend that Walsall Partnership prioritises re-engaging the Chamber with the activities of the partnership. This has important linkages to other recommendations, notably around procurement and business ambassadors.

Recommendation 8: Set up co-production pilot

This research has highlighted that there is not necessarily a relationship in North Walsall between the public and social sectors when it comes to the design and commissioning of public services. We therefore recommend that Walsall Partnership set up a co-production pilot for a particular aspect of service delivery. As public spending falls, there will be an increasing need for the public and social sectors to work together in a reciprocal relationship. A local programme/pilot of co-production, governed equally by the social and public sectors, will encourage users to design and deliver services in equal partnership thus opening the market to social sector organisations.

Recommendation 9: Develop local employer engagement strategy

This research has highlighted that there is a disconnect between employers and the local labour market in North Walsall. This is affected by poor infrastructure linkages between communities and work places. We therefore recommend that Walsall Partnership facilitate a local employer engagement strategy. This would allow businesses to pool resource and expertise for their recruitment activities. A more coordinated and joined up approach would therefore be advisable – sharing information, joint promotional activity, and jointly developed action planning which maximises value for money.

Recommendation 10: Adopt ward coordination approach to community regeneration

This research has highlighted the strong role of the Walsall Partnership as stewards of place and facilitators of relationships within the public sector. There is however a need for wider partners in the social and commercial sectors to be involved in future service delivery. We therefore recommend that Walsall Partnership adopt a ward coordination approach to community regeneration. Many of the partnerships at present are mainly driven by the public sector (with some voluntary sector presence but very little private sector representation), so formalising opportunities for the private and social sectors to influence activities, both strategically and in terms of directing service delivery, may strengthen a ward coordination approach.

5.4 Responding to the ways forward

Six months after completing this research, CLES revisited Walsall Partnership to explore the extent to which the above recommendations were being taken forward and the perceived usefulness of the research activity. The research had provided Walsall Partnership with a grounded understanding of some of the issues affecting the resilience of North Walsall, notably in terms of the brittleness of commercial and social sectors and the lack of relationships between them. In effect, it provided an evidence base for many of the issues that they suspected might be affecting the social and commercial sectors in particular. Walsall Partnership is taking forward the recommendations in a number of ways:

- the recommendations are being used to inform the refresh of the Area Action Plan for North Walsall and importantly frame the wider strategic priorities of the Walsall Partnership and its governance;
- Walsall Partnership and the Council in particular are seeking to address the challenge of fragmentation in the voluntary and community sector by bulking up infrastructure. They are involved in the recruitment of a new chief officer for Voluntary Action Walsall;
- the recommendations are being used to shape new funding bids that support voluntary and community sector infrastructure development and wider regeneration. In particular, a strategic funding officer is being recruited to focus particularly upon accessing Big Lottery funding;
- a key element of the refreshed Action Plan will be about devolving responsibility and resource to communities. Walsall Partnership are therefore using the recommendation around co-production to better allocate resources and engage the voluntary and community sector through community budgeting;
- Walsall Partnership are also seeking to enable efficiency in service provision through local area coordination, thus bringing together agencies and partners across the public, commercial and social sectors.

6 TOWARDS RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Having explored the concept and theory of community resilience and undertaken a specific case study in North Walsall, the final section of this publication explores the means by which communities become resilient. The principles and mechanisms below have been drawn from the intelligence gathered in North Walsall, the recommendations, and CLES' wider work around place.

6.1 Means of community resilience

6.1.1 Whole place

The challenge of cuts is stark, with an impact particularly upon places which have been recipients of area based monies over the last fifteen years. The issue for these localities is maintaining service provision and mainstreaming activities into everyday functions of place. Whilst these initiatives have been effective, they have also led to disjointed working, thematic working, and duplication of provision. The future is very much one of joint working, aligning priorities, pooling resources, and making efficiencies based upon collaborative working; effectively coined in the term 'whole place'.

A resilient community is therefore one where there is a strong public sector enabling role, but also a whole place working practice, where activities connect inter-departmentally within other parts of the public sector, and across the commercial and social sector. Whole place approaches need not just be about a local authority boundary. Through structures such as neighbourhood partnerships, and through ward coordination, there is an opportunity for all three spheres of place to influence the provision of activities and services.

6.1.2 Progressive procurement

Public procurement is becoming an increasingly important driver of place and communities. There is a realisation that through adopting progressive principles to procurement, places can achieve change in their local economies in terms of employment, business development, skills development, and the circulation of money. The challenge with procurement is changing the often risk averse and siloed nature of public procurement. Procurement needs to understand place, its supply chain, local economies and the potential market within them, and work across departments and with the supply chain.

A resilient community is therefore one where there is effective and progressive procurement. In this, there are a number of factors and areas of responsibility for both the public sector and partners:

- There is a need to understand where procurement monies are going; how much is being spent and re-spent in local communities?
- There is a need to understand the potential of the local business and voluntary and community sector to deliver services; what are their skills and capabilities?
- There is the need to influence the ethos of the supply chain when it comes to their employment, supplier and environmental choices; how can the supply chain be utilised to tackle issues around worklessness and low skills?

6.1.3 Networked places

In an era of restrained resources, it is increasingly important that organisations work together in a networked manner. Far too often, the voluntary and community sector within specific neighbourhoods and communities has been characterised by in-fighting, duplication, and a general lack of collaboration and consortia working. If communities and the local social sector are going to respond to emerging challenges facing place and emerging forms of delivery in commissioning and payments by results, then a networked sector is a must. Central to this is intelligence and understanding the relative strengths of community organisations within a place, and their potential for collaboration.

A resilient community is therefore one where there is a clear understanding of the constitutional elements of the voluntary and community sector, an understanding of what they do, and a networked approach to how organisations work together. Networked places are those where there are key connectors or nodes for the sector across the locality, with a responsibility to signpost and develop the capacity of organisations.

6.1.4 Co-produced services

Through the notions of big society and localism, there is an opportunity and indeed expectation that communities and the social sector will be more involved in the design and delivery of services. This process has been termed ‘co-production’ and is designed to diversify the provision of public services based upon the needs of communities. The challenge with the principles of localism is that it potentially opens up services that are important to communities, to outsourcing and the private sector.

A resilient community is therefore one which has the capacity and drive to engage in the design of public services, driven by a coordinated network of residents and voluntary and community sector groups. Pilots of co-production are therefore a means of fostering community resilience by prioritising services of key importance for communities and shaping their potential delivery.

6.1.5 Peer mentoring

The relationships between the social and public, social and commercial, and public and commercial sectors are complex. As has been identified throughout this publication, there are challenges around understanding and engagement; and roles and responsibility between and within sectors. As well as adopting joined up and co-produced approaches to service design, there also has to be learning about the operations of various sectors, the barriers to engagement, and how different spheres of the place can work more effectively together. This can effectively be termed ‘peer learning’.

A resilient community is therefore one where sectors are prepared to learn from each other and engage with each other. Mechanisms of peer learning include: employer forums; business mentoring; knowledge transfer; and employment engagement strategy.