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Place Based Approach

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What is it and why is it Important?

The focus of this presentation is place-based approach. In the next 20 minutes or so I will touch on some of the issues relating to both place based approach and place management, its history, what we know to date, explore some of the issues that have been identified and identify a way forward for the Neighbourhood Renewal agenda.

Although the notion of place management has been widely discussed in many arenas, there is no one clearly documented definition of what the term refers to. Martin Stuart-Weeks; in a presentation to the Institute of Public Administration states that the term "refers to a shift in the structure and design of public governance and management from functional or out put units to a focus on outcomes. In its simplest terms, it is about a concern with ends and not means."

What do we mean by place? There are many ways that place has been defined, influenced by the varied philosophical, sociological and cultural perspectives and beliefs. It has not been uncommon for people to raise the influence that issues such as age, gender, class and status have on the notion of place, however it is clear that boundaries and exclusion are characteristics of place formation. It is also worth highlighting Steven Untaru's view of places as social constructs, given identity and value by history and through everyday experience of living, visiting and working in them. It is worth reflecting on this description as I think it provides another dimension from which to think about place and it's meaning to those that experience it.

Place based approach and place management has been used widely to reflect the varying attempts to reform the delivery of government services to disadvantaged communities. It is acknowledged by many, including the Victorian Government, that there is a clear equity objective to place management. The fact that there are people experiencing significant social and economic disadvantage within our communities has been accepted and an acknowledgement that it is critical to address this disadvantage, with the aim of narrowing the gap between these communities and the rest of the population. There is also an acknowledgement that attempts to address disadvantage in the past have been, on the whole, unsuccessful, largely due to the fact that responses by government are largely uncoordinated and program based, lack involvement by the community and are short term in focus.

A place-based approach has provided the ideal framework for government to begin to address the issues of disadvantaged communities and acknowledges that the environment is the context for people's lives. Fundamentally, issues of poverty and social exclusion cannot be addressed in isolation from employment and economic development. From a public policy perspective, the focus on neighbourhood provides the capacity to address issues that government could not address if the focus rested only on the individual.

Context, History and What Others Are Doing

The Neighbourhood Renewal strategy in Victoria has acknowledged and built on a number of key learning's from Australia and overseas particularly the United Kingdom. The terms 'empowerment' and community development were accepted among policy makers in the 1960's and early 1970's, informed by the development of new grass roots-based social movements and the civil and human rights agendas they espoused. The 1990's saw the beginnings of an

attempt to redress what was generally accepted as a period in which individualism and economic rationalism dominate mainstream policy discussions and saw the renewal of an interest in ideas about community as a force for social cohesion.

Rather than use the terminology that was accepted in the 60's and 70's, it has changed to reflect the change in times; partnerships, capacity building and social capital are used to reflect issues of community involvement and service coordination that were prevalent several decades ago.

The UK experience has evolved over a number of decades dating back to the 1960's with the development of the Community Development projects. These projects advocated for solutions through greater cross-departmental and professional boundaries supported by joint working. The late 1990's saw renewed interest in addressing inequality and social exclusion through area based approaches. The Blair Government established the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal in the late 1990's. A number of critical issues were identified that they believe impacted on the capacity of the strategy to address place-based disadvantage with limited significant improvements. The poor response by mainstream services to respond to problems, resulted in area based initiatives plugging the gaps in the current service system and the limited capacity of the public service to be integrated or even coordinated, led to changes in this policy. A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal developed by the Social Exclusion Unit was launched in 2001.

The Action Plan sets out a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal that aims to narrow the gap between outcomes in deprived areas and the rest of the country and builds on the Policy Action Teams established in the first phase. It sets out a new approach to renewing poor neighbourhoods. The strategy is highly ambitious and well resourced and focuses on a number of key elements:

- The true scale of the problem is being addressed;
- The focus is on addressing some of the fundamental issues associated with disadvantage - lack of employment opportunities, crime, poor public services and schools and lack of health services. Targets have been established to reduce the gap between deprived areas and the rest of the country;
- The strategy harnesses the hundreds of billions of pounds spent by government departments rather than only relying on one-off regeneration funds;
- Development of Neighbourhood Management and Local Strategic Partnerships for empowering residents and getting public, private and voluntary organizations to work in partnership.

It is also worth noting the range of place based approach initiatives that have occurred in Australia, particularly in NSW. Both the Neighbourhood Improvement Program (now renamed the Community Renewal Program) and the Area Assistance Scheme have been in place for a number of years. The focus of this activity has mainly been on physical environment and infrastructure, however more recently they government has consolidated its program and broadened its focus on place and location as a major design principle and its way of doing business. The Strengthening Communities Unit in the Premier's Department and the extension of the Regional Coordination Program from a pilot to cover all areas of NSW are other key components. A number of place management pilots have been trialed since 1997, including Kings Cross and Cabramatta. Although both projects achieved significant achievements, the short-term nature of the intervention raised the issue of sustainability and timing of 'exit' of the State Government. Other issues related to the potential for long term dependency of the community on place management workers and) agencies and the limited capacity to deal with the underlying significant issues given the pilots short term nature.

A Community Renewal Program was introduced in QLD in 1998 as part of the government's

Crime Prevention Strategy. Taking a place management approach, the program seeks to engage or re-engage both government and local communities with the aim of addressing '...the causes and incidence of crime in targeted areas of multiple disadvantage that experience poverty, unemployment, crime, poor amenity and lack of services.' The program also seeks to raise the confidence and image of these communities. By increasing the level of collaboration with community and State agencies and councils, it seeks to make government work better and be more responsive at a local level and make communities more resourceful and effective in their engagement with government.

Key issues that have been learnt include the importance of good will among agencies, councils and communities to engage in the renewal processes, the importance of recognizing and building on existing community strengths and achievements and the significance of good local area plans and community action plans for community renewal.

Critical to most of these strategies is that the focus on silo program responses does not work in addressing entrenched disadvantage experienced by some communities and the need to establish a new way of working to address local need. It is also important to reflect on the growing complexity of society and the impact that this is having on government's capacity to meaningfully respond.

What We Know and Practical Guide

What do we now understand about place management and place based approach strategies, particularly critical success factors that we must try and stay focused on for Neighbourhood Renewal in Victoria? The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has articulated a framework highlighting key themes from the experience of neighbourhood management in the UK that I think is useful in summarizing critical success factors for place management strategies.

- Joined Up
- People
- Investment
- Infrastructure

1. Joined Up - New structures and systems.

This includes the establishment of flexible governance structures at a neighbourhood level that brings together key players to develop an action plan that articulates a joint assessment of community needs and assets. It also allocates responsibility and mechanisms to monitor progress. Key issues include; clarity of role and the importance of distinguishing between strategic, commissioning and delivery roles; constitutional issues and the need to avoid a proliferation of partnerships and the clear articulation of the relationships between neighbourhood structures and other partnerships; and representation that needs to be balanced, accountable and adequately resourced. It needs to be dynamic rather than static, with adequate capacity for changing membership.

"Joined-up strategy and action must be driven through all levels of public policy making and provision - from top to bottom, from back room to front line - with transparency and multi layered accountability as the guiding principles.' This statement highlights important characteristics of place-based approach including the issue of accountability and being more outcome-focused. It is clear that the need to have a designated point for responsibility and accountability is important in being able to work through problems and monitor the achievement of outcomes for the community. The role of a place manager is a key aspect of many projects although there are differences in the extent of responsibility and their mandated capacity to actively influence the responses of key stakeholders.

Another important characteristic is the importance of coordination and integration in service delivery. It is now accepted that problems being experienced by community cannot be addressed by a single program focused response. For example, Department of Education and Training alone cannot address the issues of poor retention levels in school and increased truancy. A multi faceted response taking into consideration the issues that contribute to these problems will have a greater likelihood of positive outcomes than if Education dealt with the issue in isolation. This requires a willingness to share learning and knowledge more freely across departmental and agency boundaries and committing to contributing to working together to develop solutions.

To effectively achieve integrated service coordination, place management requires a- rethinking about basic processes of governance and public administration. Critical issues relating to funding, accountability and decision making need to be flexibility applied and enable an appropriate role for the community. How community members are involved in the process of determining fund allocation and accountability will be critical issues for Neighbourhood Renewal.

2. People

One of the most critical aspects to the success of place management approaches is the success of engaging and working meaningfully with the community. Government has often been criticized for undertaking token consultation with the community that is not well planned and sees the role of residents as secondary, rather than ensuring that robust and inclusive strategies are in place. Learning's developed through work of the Rowntree Foundation state that 'effective and widespread community engagement will need to be rooted in small scale activities that provide a variety of ways of involvement which build on skills, confidence and social- capital, and which ensures that residents hold their own institutions and representatives accountable.' It is also important to understand that meaningful and sustained community engagement and empowerment does not happen overnight. Ongoing and careful monitoring of strategies is required to ensure that opportunities are available for people to be involved in the many facets of area based processes.

3. Investment

The approach that has been accepted by Neighbourhood Renewal is based on a social justice model rather than one that sees community engagement and empowerment as the key outcome. Neighbourhood Renewal centres on the notion of the importance of equality in access to education and employment with the need to drive action from both a top down and bottom up perspective. There is a strong focus on the need to increase investment in underinvested communities with the aim of making them more equal. It is critical that a key outcome of place management approach is that there is greater equality and fairer access to resources not only a community that feels a greater sense of involvement and pride in where they live.

4. Infrastructure

Infrastructure is not just about financial investment. It is also concerned with the development of the necessary physical and social infrastructure that will support the achievement of key outcomes for local communities. It is about the establishment of strong networks that encourage both formal and informal dialogue, increases channels of representation and accountability to enable access to information, services and resources. Under resourced communities need to be supported in building these capacities so that they are not further disadvantaged. Is there the required physical infrastructure to support access to services as well information technology and other technical expertise to facilitate better outcomes for local people.

In reviewing a range of literature relating to place management, the framework and

understandings that underline the Neighbourhood Renewal Policy framework have incorporated many of the critical learning's of other place management approaches both in Australia and overseas. Issues such as community participation and empowerment in local governance structures, the need for an integrated and coordinated response by government in partnership with community and other key stakeholders and the development of local action plans that set the scene for the work over a medium to long timeframe; have all been considered in the policy formulation. This is all underpinned by a commitment by the Victorian government to support the development and implementation of a place based response in areas that have been acknowledged as being more disadvantaged than other areas of the State.

This is very encouraging for the future of the program, however there are a number of critical issues that require careful consideration if the strategy is to be successful in addressing major critical issues experienced by local communities. A number of issues that will be important, from both a policy formulation and implementation perspective will now be outlined.

Issues

There are significant choices to be made by government and the bureaucracy as to the degree that a place-based approach is fully implemented as part of the government's community building strategy, including Neighbourhood Renewal. What level of emphasis should be given to the strategy given that this approach is focused on a small number of targeted communities? Is there a commitment to address the issues associated with the notion of joined-up government? Will there be a commitment to addressing critical barriers to achieving a coordinated and integrated response. We know that the current bureaucratic structure has a strong programmatic focus. There is an expectation that integration and coordination will be achieved at a local level. However, it is unrealistic to expect that local projects will be able to achieve a more integrated response without changes to accountability and funding at a central level.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans articulate key priorities of importance to local communities. Communities are not concerned with programmatic accountability mechanisms. What they are concerned with is a commitment by government to work with them in different ways to ensure that key outcomes are achieved. It is not uncommon for residents to say, "Why is Neighbourhood Renewal going to be any different?" If we continue to respond to local issues in a programmatic sense with certain defined accountability requirements attached to them, it will be challenging to be able to deliver what the community will increasingly come to expect.

State departments, to varying degrees, are committed to Neighbourhood Renewal. However, at this time, I believe that their focus is on what concerns them and what they are held accountable for. Rather than developing a sense of collective responsibility to issues, their responsibilities rest in their own back yard. There are some great examples of cross-departmental responses to issues. Education, Human Services and Justice have worked together on a number of initiatives that have benefit to a common client group. Education and Human Services has collectively developed Best Start with limited involvement of community in its development. What it does indicate is a willingness to work together. This willingness must be fostered and built upon particularly in partnerships with local people. It also means that there has to be more flexible and creative mechanisms to ensure that departments are not hindered in their capacity to respond, acknowledging the need to be held accountable for the use of public funding. There must be a commitment to allow departments to respond in different ways.

It is also critical to consider whether or not there is a need for a place manager within Neighbourhood Renewal areas. There are a number of examples both in the UK and Australia that have implemented the role of place manager. The role is seen as critical in that the position is accountable to a local community structure that can vary from a tenant's association in the UK, to one embedded in the structure of local government. After significant development led by John Mant, Fairfield Council in NSW implemented a structure that incorporated the

position of place manager. This position has responsibility to ensure that the needs of a local area are identified and acted upon by the service providers within local government. This person has the authority to make things happen within a local bureaucracy, that had been difficult to achieve in the past. Critical issues to consider include the level of authority that might- be invested in such a position, who they might be accountable to and whether there is any discretionary funding available to enable them to take action on issues that are identified by the local residents. In the case of Neighbourhood Renewal might we consider the implementation of a place manager that had the authority to direct departments to act on priority issues and has access to a level of discretionary funding?

Who currently has the capacity to advocate to State government now on behalf of local residents? Currently, the lead department for Neighbourhood Renewal is Human Services. As public servants, there are limitations to the degree that we might criticize government for its approach to critical issues such as funding and integrated and coordinated service responses. This issue will also need consideration so that communities have a strong and robust advocate that can raise issues of concern.

Although there is also a level of commitment from local staff to support the implementation of Neighbourhood Renewal, they face an ongoing challenge as to the implications of targeting new funding and initiatives to Neighbourhood Renewal areas. There will always be competing priorities. What is known from experience in other areas is the importance of not only relying on initiative funding in responding to local issues. It is critical to harness the capacity of mainstream programs and funding to provide sustainable, ongoing responses to local issues. There is a stated commitment by government through the Whole of Government Agreement. For this to be successful, strong leadership will be required to ensure that programs work together with community in targeting funds where they are most needed.

We must also be careful that there is not an overload of initiatives targeted to Neighbourhood Renewal areas. The capacity of regions, agencies and community to respond to new funding initiatives will likely be restricted and rather than achieve a more strategic response, we will be spending our time on short term, one off initiatives that is one thing that Neighbourhood Renewal projects are trying to avoid.

There is also a very real tension between the expectations of government on what place based approach processes will achieve against a scenario where genuine community engagement and empowerment is very slow. Community capacity building and partnerships must have the chance to develop in ways that bring the community along, developing skills, fostering involvement in different ways and ensuring that the partnerships develops on an equal footing. We must learn to be patient, as change will not occur overnight. We must ensure that time, energy and commitment is given to this process if there is to be a sustainable involvement over time. Issues relating to training, mentoring, organisational and personal development must be carefully considered. We must not fall into the trap of trying to 'hurry things along' in order to meet government expectations. A long term commitment is critical to building community capacity building and consultation strategies that are embedded in policy making processes so that public participation is transparent, well planned and implemented with an realistic understanding of expected outcomes so as not to disillusion or disappoint.

A number of people have highlighted critical issues relating to the capacity of the public sector to work in a meaningful way with the community. We are used to being in the drivers seat with limited, if any, engagement with the community in our policy responses. Careful thought needs to be given to how public sector workers can be supported through the provision of skills development and training opportunities. Local people need to be convinced that we are willing to change the way we work and that we are committed to ensuring that the views of local people are taken into account. The question will be the degree to which government is prepared to hand power to local

3. Place Based Approach Sits Within a Broader Framework

We will also have to think about the capacity of the Neighbourhood Renewal projects to deal with structural issues that extend beyond the local level. Experience has shown that Neighbourhood Renewal efforts work best when they are small, intense and local. However it would be unwise not to think about the broader context and the importance of establishing strong vertical integration between neighbourhood activity and formal structures at the municipal, regional and central levels. One example in the West is the work that had been done by the Western Region Economic Development Organisation particularly a project called Skills for the New West. We are seeking to identify how we use the information that has been developed to explore employment and economic development opportunities for Neighbourhood Renewal.

4. Role of Local Government

The role of local government in Neighbourhood Renewal is very important in that they are a critical partner in, initially, responding to key issues that are within their sphere of control. It will also be important to explore the role of local government in the process of identifying long term and sustainable processes once the initial phase of the projects is over. The question will be, will this be seen as cost shifting? The former CEO of one local government authority stated that if Neighbourhood Renewal and other like strategies were successful, it would have a significant impact on the way local government would need to respond and work with local communities and also in the way it managed its business.

Reforms of the Local Government Act are particularly important in this respect in that some of the impending changes identified in the Local Government Act (Update) Bill will place some further requirements on local government authorities to involve the community in their planning processes. This will provide opportunities to think about the role of local government in place based approach and the critical need to develop strong and equal partnerships with local government. This is challenging and will require a willingness to work through issues openly and honestly from both a State and local perspective.

5. Neighbourhood Management - think about partnerships

The UK experience has highlighted the importance of thinking carefully about our partnership structures and the need to avoid creating an 'institutional nightmare' where we place greater and greater expectation of key partnership structures to be able to deal with complex issues. Place based approach does not mean that community involvement is critical in all processes. We must think carefully about the expectations we place on local people in participation on partnerships structures and that we do not overwhelm them in their responsibilities. In establishing local partnership structures, we must take into consideration the time it takes to empower community members to participate in a meaningful way.

We must think about and clearly define the roles and responsibilities of our governance structures and carefully examine ways that we can better integrate these into existing frameworks. Many of the existing mechanisms are not formally constituted and therefore have limited authority in law. Consideration would be well placed in examining the role of local government as a formally constituted authority and j...-'.", we might embed Neighbourhood Renewal into this structure. There will be challenges to reconcile the more formalised partnership structures and locally based, 'grass roots' activity. The question will likely be whether there is a willingness at both the central and local level to explore the possibilities of these approaches and the mechanisms and degrees to which, devolution in decision making might be transferred to the local level.

6. Place Based Manager and Discretionary Funding

The need for a place based manager for Neighbourhood Renewal requires careful consideration for the reasons outlined in the issues section. We need to think carefully about the roles and responsibilities of such a position, what would be the key outcomes and where might this position best sit. Would a place manager be responsible for coordinating activity and act as a point of responsibility and accountability to that local community? Importantly, would the implementation of a place-based manager increase the chances of success of Neighbourhood Renewal and the outcomes for local people? In order to develop this idea more fully, building on the experiences from overseas and Australia, a way forward would be to establish a working party to investigate and make recommendations on how the Government might deal with this issue.

We know that the Community Development funding provides a small opportunity to be able to respond to some local issues however it is clear that other funding is required to give projects a level of flexibility to respond to local issues to achieve specific outcomes. The development of a discretionary funding pool would provide a degree of flexibility to respond quickly and responsively. Issues of accountability and transparency will be important to work through in order to ensure that public funds are being used appropriately.

The Victorian State Government has stated its commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal as its key place management approach to addressing significant disadvantage. They must be vigilant in ensuring that each department commits itself, and acts, to achieve key outcomes. Accountability for the success of Neighbourhood Renewal must be shared if it is to be successful.

As more projects begin to implement key strategies, there will be opportunities to think about issues of funding and accountability. We must challenge existing programs to think about the outcomes achieved through mainstream funding and begin to think about how this funding can be utilized to achieve outcomes that hopefully will make a bigger difference to the way people live and feel about themselves and their environments.

What does this mean to you? In closing, I will pose a number of questions that might help you think through what the critical issues for you might be in your daily work.

- Are you creating environments in which people can talk openly and honestly about critical issues both within government and externally?
- How might you foster the establishment of relationships between organisations that are not the traditional business of DHS?
- Are you thinking about opportunities to integrate neighbourhood renewal with municipal or regional activity?
- Think about how mainstream funding is being used. How can we support local services in ensuring funding is utilized well, in partnership with local communities?
- Think about your relationship with Local Government. How can you further develop your relationship with local government as a critical player in Neighbourhood Renewal? What opportunities and barriers are there to achieve better outcomes for local people?
- Think carefully about your partnership structures. Will these meet your needs in the longer term? How can you start planning for the future?
- What mechanisms are there to support local people in being able to participate fully in Neighbourhood Renewal?