

The contribution of learning to flourishing neighbourhoods

A key concern in the regeneration of Birmingham is that of creating economic prosperity for residents whilst also creating 'flourishing neighbourhoods'. These are neighbourhoods where people are relatively happy to live; where public and private services are well delivered; where there is a strong network of activity and where residents feel that they have some degree of influence over their lives.

A number of managers from different agencies, with a concern for neighbourhood renewal in Birmingham explored what a flourishing neighbourhood might look like in terms of learning, and established what data might be needed to substantiate this.

A neighbourhood is flourishing, in terms of learning, when:

- there are large numbers of families given an early learning start:
 - children have access to high quality learning experiences 0-3
 - there are well resourced, well staffed nursery-equivalent places for all children wishing them (age 3-5)
 - libraries and other community venues are well equipped and welcoming to families with children 0-5
 - additional support is available to specific groups and families (currently those in hostels; refugee/asylum seeking families; those wanting to develop bilingual skills in young children; those in need of parenting support or advice; young children in public care etc)
 - there are sufficient pre-school childcare places
 - children enter school with adequate levels of language, literacy and a sense of number

- there is high quality primary and secondary education
 - there are sufficient school places in the locality for those that want them
 - schools are reported as being of high quality, by internal and external reviews
 - pupils readily attend school
 - schools are secure, attractive and welcoming
 - schools are well staffed, and have good resources and facilities across the curriculum
 - schools act as reliable information, access and referral routes to other opportunities and services
 - parents are able to support their children's learning

- there is additional support available out of schools:
 - there is a variety of well used youth opportunities re leisure, art, sport, technology, citizenship, culture etc
 - specialist 1:1 or small group support services exist for young people
 - young people are involved in local decision-making
 - libraries, supplementary schools etc are linked to mainstream schools and are well equipped

- there is good access to ICT facilities outside school hours
- there are supported opportunities re mentoring, challenge, taking on community roles – by, and for, young people
- there are high levels of skills achievement across all groups (11-25)
 - young people have ‘access to significance’, being able to define a valuable set of activities for themselves
 - there are no clear gaps in achievement levels between different groups
 - achievement rates at 11, 16, 19 are relatively high
 - there are a high proportion of people qualified at level 3 and level 4
 - young people needing additional support know who to turn to
 - young people make the transition from learning at 14 to continuing learning, in work training etc by age 19
 - there are high levels of literacy, language, numeracy and ICT skills post-16
- there are sufficient, appropriate opportunities to continue learning post-16
 - libraries and adult learning venues are well staffed and well stocked with appropriate materials
 - learning is available via a variety of loosely-linked organisations; in a variety of forms; and via a range of organisations
 - ‘next step’ learning is accessible in terms of place, time, by ICT etc
 - there are local training opportunities for adults wishing to take on community roles or be involved in community activities
 - there are people who are sufficiently motivated about learning, that they act as learning advocates
 - there is readily available information about learning opportunities
 - there are ways of learning that can happen anywhere/anytime
 - there are wide opportunities for families to learn together at a range of community sites
- there is an environment rich in stimulation and opportunity
 - good use is made of media and ICT, for learning
 - people seek out opportunities for change and improvement; people take responsibility for own learning
 - there are openings for creativity and problem solving
 - area looks beyond the immediate, tries to get a sense of the bigger picture
 - homes and community venues are seen as places that stimulate learning
 - there are opportunities (for all ages) to learn to be healthy, to be safe, to be ‘green’, to be involved, to be employable etc
 - learning is related to art, sport, culture, spirituality, academic knowledge etc
 - organisations in the area link up to support learning
 - there is easy local access to the wider sets of social resources
- there is a valuing of learning and of the variety of cultures
 - there is promotion of ‘learning’ as well as ‘courses, programmes, groups’
 - ‘achievement for all’ is celebrated

- there is an expectation that provision will be high quality
- each learning opportunity is strongly able to create a further desire to learn
- draws on resources within different sectors; reflects a diversity of cultures and traditions
- learning is seen as a valuable tool – as a ‘solution’ not a ‘problem’
- people learn from each other and see themselves as having something to teach others

This framework was used, in 2004, in a number of ways:

- to feed into discussions about measurement of progress towards flourishing neighbourhoods (not only in terms of contributing to Birmingham as a learning city, but also contributing to the wider considerations of Birmingham as a safe place, an environmentally sustainable place, a healthy place, an economically secure place, and a place with good housing and transport etc).
- to advise local decision-makers about the best investments of local development money
- to feed into local planning mechanisms, in terms of what are the ‘puzzles’ for each area and what might the solutions be.

Clearly these range far wider than the focus of the Core Skills Development Partnership. At the same time it is equally clear that many of the Core Skills developments we are pushing forward connect with many of the above elements.