

*community*NET

A Living Network

an overview



Du service design and animation

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service design and animation

Introduction

We are seeking to create a peer to peer framework that builds on existing community level service delivery channels, and seeks to enhance their ability to deliver more via mainstream funding.

We propose to do this by exploring & developing:

- The Community Hub model
- The protocols of inter hub communication
- The role of the Community Animateur

Outcomes

3 primary outcomes of implementing this Design Concept::

- Members of the public will have easier access to a wider range of services
- More people will become active within their local community
- Service Providers, including Local Authorities, will have a framework that allows them to get closer to the communities they serve.

Participating Communities

We invited communities that have, or want to develop, something that could be identified as a Community Hub, and are keen to learn the benefits of Peer Networking, to meet to consider if *communityNET* was something they would want to see developed in the County.

Those communities that came forward included several that are recognised as examples of Best Practice. These communities are now part of the Design Team looking to bring *communityNET* to life.

Once protocols are established and the network channels are in place, *communityNET* can be made available to all communities that want to join in; and we will be preparing a Toolkit to facilitate this.



Scope of Change

The design we are proposing involves a paradigm shift in attitude and approach. We are not recommending tweaking the existing structures, but changing the location and direction of power.

The thrust of the latest Local Government Bill is clear that Authorities are going to need mechanisms to get closer to the communities they serve.

We have no reason to doubt the best intentions of those running our Councils in their desire to achieve this objective - but would question whether it is possible for them to create the necessary structures themselves without, at least, appearing paternalistic.

We believe these structures should be designed at a community level with an aim of fundamentally shifting the responsibility and authority to the place where those services are delivered.

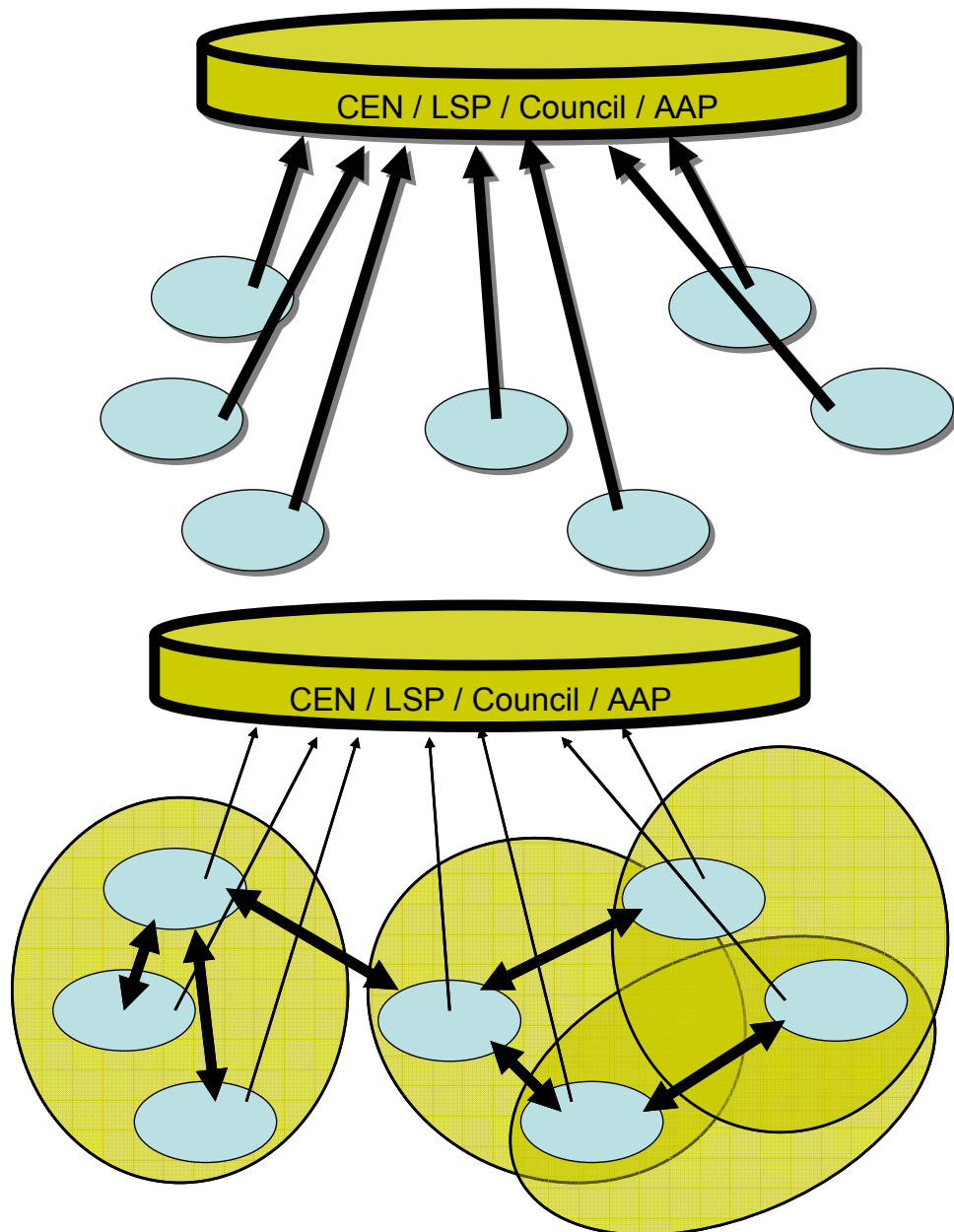
This will involve a huge Capacity Building exercise – but we should not forget there is already a vast amount of Capacity already active in many communities just waiting for the opportunity and mainstream budget to allow them to start the transformation process.

Design Elements

On the following pages we provide an outline of the following elements of *communityNET*:

- Peer to Peer Networking
- Community Hubs
- *communityNET* Protocols
- Community Animateur
- Network Management





Peer to Peer Networking

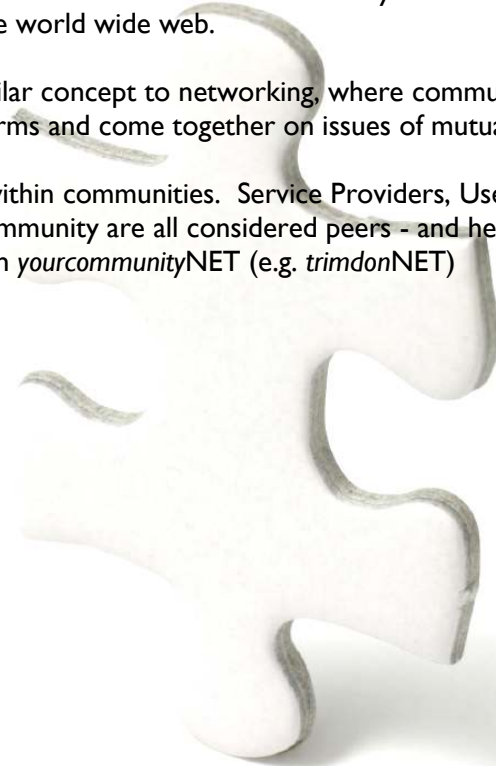
The Design is based on the principle of Peer to Peer networking. As such, we have devised the term *communityNET*. *CommunityNET* is simply the name given to the framework within which communities and service providers can work together on an equal basis. It is not an organisation in its own right.

It offers an alternative to the current structure as radical as the PC and Internet offered to Mainframe computer systems.

“A PC on every desk” was ridiculed when first announced as Microsoft’s vision 30 years ago. Nowadays we are comfortable with the processing power we have at our fingertips, and the information we can access individually from other individuals and organisations across the world wide web.

CommunityNET offers a similar concept to networking, where communities relate to each other on their own terms and come together on issues of mutual interest.

This principle also applies within communities. Service Providers, Users and Commissioners within a community are all considered peers - and hence each community will have its own *yourcommunityNET* (e.g. *trimdonNET*)



The Community Hub

A Working Definition

In each community, a Hub will mean something different. It may be run by any one of a number of organisations - from the Local Authority to a committee of volunteers, to the Post Master.

Put simply it is the place local to where you live or work from where you can access the services you require – whether directly, or by signposting.

It may be a building, a telephone line and/or a web site.

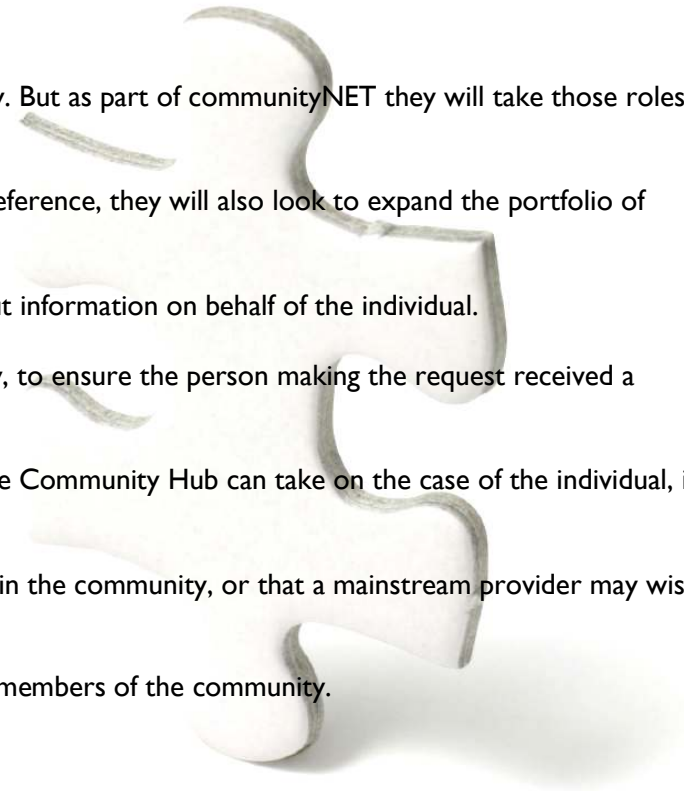
In many communities, there may be more than one “place” that is able to meet this definition. In some places there are none.

What will a Hub offer?

As an access point for Services, a Hub will have two primary roles - Direct Deliverer and Gateway. But as part of communityNET they will take those roles further:

- **Direct Delivery**
As well as delivering services from their own resource, according to their own terms of reference, they will also look to expand the portfolio of services available locally to the community.
- **Gateway**
As well as simply signposting to services, a Community Hub will take enquiries and find out information on behalf of the individual.
- **Follow-up**
This is to establish how accurate their own signposting service was - but more significantly, to ensure the person making the request received a satisfactory response.
- **Advocacy**
If the service received was not satisfactory, there is an opportunity for *Advocacy*, where the Community Hub can take on the case of the individual, if the individual wishes, to explore how the matter may be resolved.
- **New Services**
Following on from an advocacy role, it may become clear that a *new service* is needed within the community, or that a mainstream provider may wish to provide a local version of their service, having had it identified by the Community Hub.

A significant additional role is to receive, welcome, value and act on ideas and contributions from members of the community.



How will it be Funded?

The Community Hub is primarily funded by mainstream services releasing their resource through a variety of appropriate means:

Devolved Mainstream Budgets

As Community Hubs mature they can take on an ever increasing range of work on behalf of the agencies – but apply local management and co-ordination with other services to improve service breadth and quality at a lower cost to the commissioning agency. An element of Overhead is released with the Delivery Budget. BUT the entire overhead of the Community Hub is not met by any one service provider, rather by aggregating total income.

Secondments

Staff currently delivering community based work while reporting to a central management structure can be seconded to a local Community Hub to provide the same service, but in a different work environment. A team of secondees from a number of agencies can be managed more creatively making best use of their transferable skills while still delivering the objectives of the employer. Opportunities abound in the Youth, Leisure and Education arenas.

Service Level Agreements

In the changing climate, more opportunities exist for community based Third Sector organisations to enter contractual arrangements with agencies to provide specific services. Tools such as The Compact and soft loan finance from FutureBuilders cater for Hubs to enter the enterprise society with confidence and an element of security.

Contribution to Large Contracts

Contracts issued by County, Regional or National Agencies may be well beyond the capability or capacity of any Hub – but may be able to be delivered by clusters of Hubs within the communityNET.

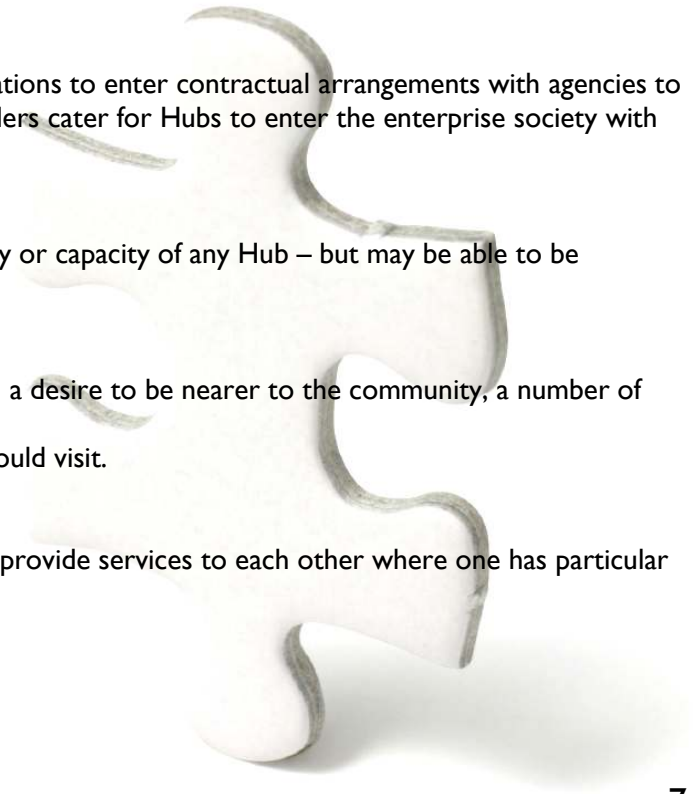
Rationalising existing Local Service Provision.

In many communities there are opportunities to bring a range of services under one roof. In a desire to be nearer to the community, a number of agencies have opened One Stop Shops (for their services).

It is counter-productive, however, to expect people to choose which one-stop-shop they should visit.

Service Exchange

Within the Peer to Peer Network of *communityNET* there will be opportunities for Hubs to provide services to each other where one has particular in house expertise.



Protocols

communityNET is a working title for a Brand that Communities and Service Providers can trust.

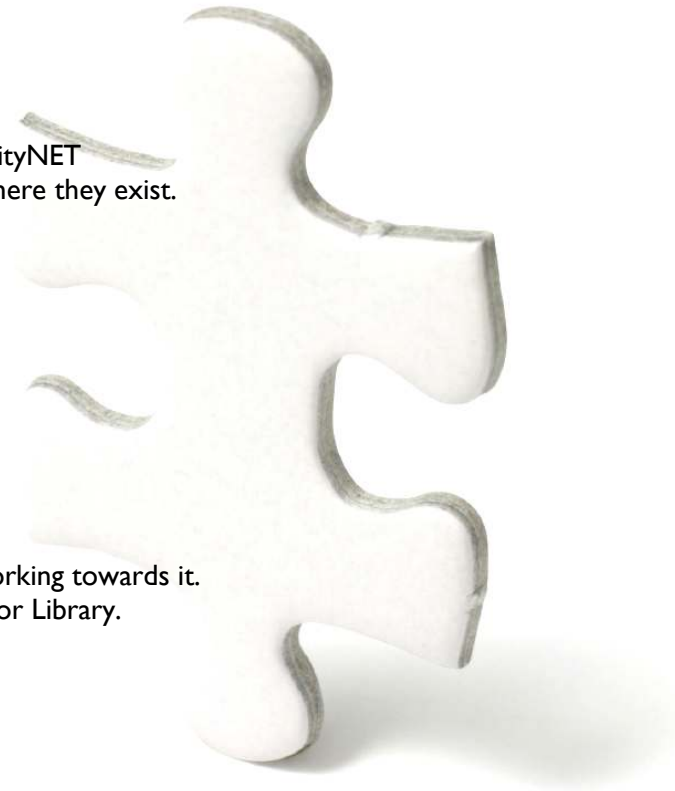
It means that when the public sees the sign, it can approach with needs, wants and ideas.

When Service Providers see the sign, they know there is a structure in place that allows them to devolve responsibility and authority to act on their behalf - with the share of mainstream budget.

Therefore it is essential that there are protocols in place within each participating community - and across the network of participating communities. These are not arbitrary rules - but are simply what the design requires.

To participate in *communityNET*, individual communities will have to demonstrate to each other and Service Providers that:

- All services within the community are aware of each other
- Communication systems are in place to keep other members informed of activity.
- There is a shared understanding of the role of each member within their *communityNET* - especially between the Parish/Town Council and the Community Partnership, where they exist.
- The public interface is empathetic, accessible and available.
- Management, Membership and Ownership is open, transparent and fair
- Financial Probity is guaranteed.
- Personal and Commercial Confidentiality is assured
- For Discussion
 - Parish/Town Council involvement requires achieving Quality Status, or working towards it.
 - The public interface is a front street soft portal, such as a bookshop, café or Library.



Community Animator

A key role within each location's *communityNET* is that of Community Animator - actors on the public stage.

They act as the eyes and ears of the Hub on the street. Their responsibilities would be wide and varied - both responsive and proactive. They may be allocated specific tasks, such as the schools crossing patrol and litter picking; but have the flexibility to respond to situations as they arise.- keeping an eye out for vulnerable people, and helping to carry their shopping - real human needs.

The Community Animator is a mechanism for major strategic objectives to be played out and delivered in real streets, using creative approaches to pooled local budgeting.

Network Management

To run *communityNET* will involve administration, management and support. However, if the design is implemented fully, this will be lean, efficient and accountable directly to the communities themselves.

A new Community Interest Company would be established, owned by the participating Communities, that will perform the necessary management and administrative duties.

One of the primary tasks is to ensure the sustainability of the Hubs that make up the network.

This will involve the following duties

- Broker skills exchanges between Community Hubs to trap money within the network.
- Tender for large contracts on behalf of the Network and share the work between the Hubs.



Democracy and Accountability

Community Partnerships

In most of our communities there is something resembling a Community Partnership, though it may be known as a Residents' Group, or Community Association. In some places there are combinations of all of these. Purely for the purposes of this report, we refer to them as Community Partnerships (CP).

Parish Councils

Similarly with Town and Parish Councils (PC), there are varying examples of the type. Some places do not yet have Parish or Town Councils, though this is being actively addressed. In some places, Councils are active, thriving representatives of the community, whereas in others there are elections for many years with no seats being contested. (Despite there being no contests, the Council may still be doing an excellent job of representing the community interests.)

Working Together

This report acknowledges the importance of vibrant representative democracy at a local level, but also raises the importance and value of participative democracy. Many people cannot, or will not, stand for election to public office, but may still care deeply for their community and have a lot to contribute to its direction and development.

Communities with active Community Partnerships working alongside active Parish Councils have seen the benefits of encouraging both forms of democracy - with the added benefit of an increase in people willing to stand as council representatives.

This Design Concept is not making recommendations on which form of organisation should take the lead in each *yourcommunityNET*, but does make it clear in the protocols, that each member organisation must be clear in its role.

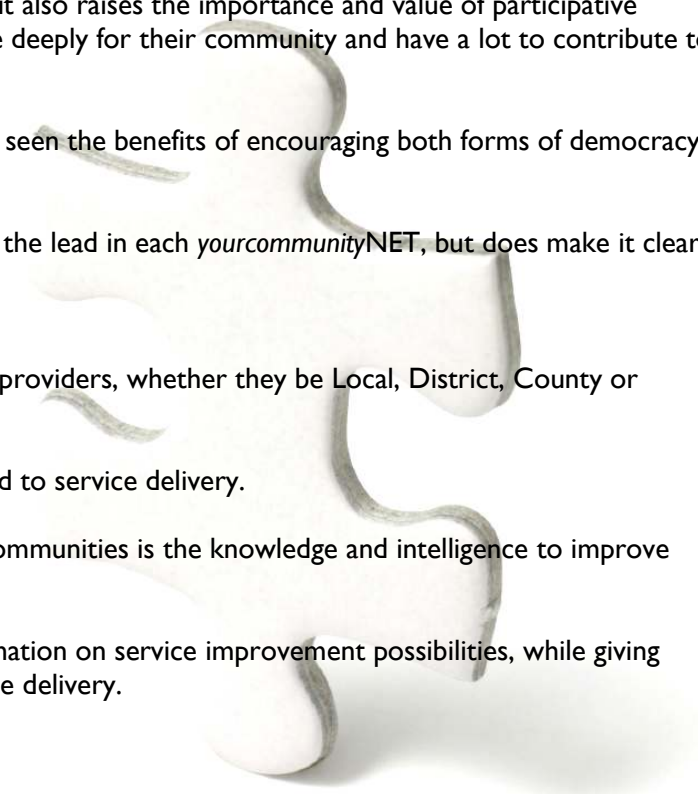
Service Providers

Outside the remit of Community Partnerships and Parish Councils are community based service providers, whether they be Local, District, County or Regional.

To the man, woman or child in the street there is very little accountability or democracy attached to service delivery.

The ability to shape services often happens at a much more remote, strategic level - yet within communities is the knowledge and intelligence to improve services at the point of delivery.

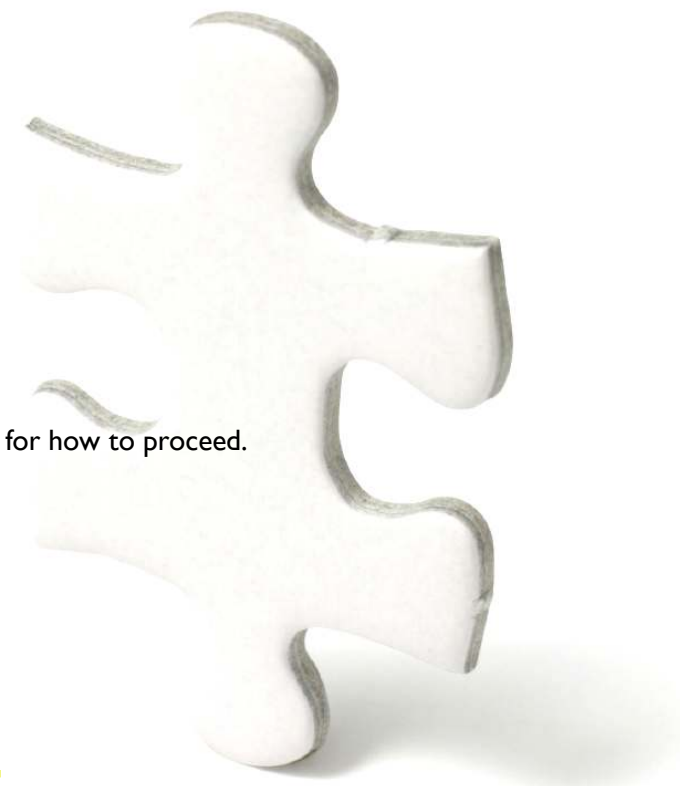
Service Deliverers therefore have a key role in *communityNET*. It provides them with vital information on service improvement possibilities, while giving individuals and communities a level of control over the manner, place and timeliness of the service delivery.



Animation (Next Steps)

1. Establish Design Team
 - 7 volunteer community organisations to establish formative *communityNET*
 - Work up protocols with Communities
2. Redefine future of current Infrastructure Roles
 - Work with CVS, CEN, OVN etc
3. Develop Hubs and Network Tools
 - Facilitate and guide Community Hubs to work to meet protocol requirements
 - Appropriate, multi-level, multi-faceted Upskilling
 - Establish & Develop Communication Tools
 - Start to Animate Peer to Peer Network
4. Monitor & Report
 - Act as proxy Network Management
 - Achieve stable Community Hubs, Protocols and Communications
 - Produce Status Report
5. Achieve Mainstream Devolution
 - Support Formation of *communityNET* CIC
 - Seek acceptance of Framework from Mainstream Agencies
6. Franchise *communityNET*
 - Roadshow *communityNET* to rest of County/Region

These pieces of work are not strictly consecutive, and are not set in stone, but act as an initial guide for how to proceed.



Initial set of outcomes:

1. Agreed set of protocols
2. SMART Action Plan for each Hub to work towards meeting agreed Protocols
3. Provisional Peer to Peer Network of 7 Community Hubs
4. Toolkit Outline to enable the development of new Community Hubs

Learning Outcomes

As this is a new way of doing things, there will be significant learning opportunities for Du, Communities, Agencies and Infrastructure Organisations.

Durham University will be part of the Design team to capture these Learning Outcomes.

"In our view communityNET is the most exciting initiative we have seen in the area of rural service delivery for some time.."

Simon Berry, CEO Ruralnet UK

