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Communities in Control



Power to the people... The White Paper covers a number of areas that will give people more information and more say on what happens in their communities

A new White Paper aims to put more power in the hands of individuals and communities, and **Vivien Goldsmith** looks at some of the ways this will be achieved

In October the Secretary of State, Hazel Blears, will have an important one-to-one meeting. She will not be consulting a seasoned campaigner or experienced lobbyist, but having her first monthly meeting with her youth advisor.

The Department is working with delivery partner the Young Advisors Charity to draw up a short-list of nine young advisors – one from each region

of the country – aged between 15 and 21 to form a panel that meets every three months. The panel is chaired by Hazel's youth advisor (this post rotates around panel members every six months) who will feed back the panel's views, and those of other young people the panel have gathered in their regions, at monthly meetings with the Secretary of State.

This is just one of the initiatives outlined in the White Paper *Communities in Control: real people, real power* launched in July at Cambridge House, a multipurpose voluntary organisation in Southwark, London (see p6). The Government's proposals to pass power to communities and individual citizens covers being active in the community,

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Fire service gets vital funding boosts



The Fire and Rescue Service will receive two major cash injections – £80m for New Dimension units and £130m of Private Finance Initiative (PFI) credits.

New Dimension units enable mass decontamination of the public, high volume pumping, search and rescue from collapsed buildings – including the use of urban search and rescue (USAR) dogs, and equipment for detection and identification of unknown or potentially dangerous chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear substances.

Over £200m has already been spent on purchasing units, ongoing training and support. This additional £80m – spread over three years – will go to Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) hosting these units to keep them in service for future emergencies.

The equipment has already been used in a variety of situations and locations, including the summer 2007 floods, a substance spillage that released hydrochloric acid gas near a school in Tamworth, Staffordshire, building collapses, extinguishing fires that normal appliances couldn't reach, and to assist with a collapsed vehicle transporter (pictured above) near Bath, Somerset.

"In times of crisis our firefighters need the latest equipment. These new capabilities can be used whatever the original cause – whether it is industrial accident, severe weather or terrorist activity," said fire minister Parmjit Dhandu.

Meanwhile FRAs can bid for a share of the £130m PFI credits for projects to provide new vehicles, modernise existing fire stations and build new ones with a community safety focus, as part of the Government's commitment to reducing accidental fire-related deaths at home by 20 per cent, and arson by 10 per cent by 2010.

Parmjit added: "We've already invested over £400m through PFI and have a number of excellent examples of successful projects. This year we have announced support for four new stations and a community lifeskills centre in Gloucestershire, 10 new and refurbished stations in Suffolk, and 16 new stations in the North West."

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Editor: Nicola Veness,
GTN 3533 4593, 020 7944 4593

Editorial Office: Internal communications team, Communities and Local Government, 7/H3 Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU

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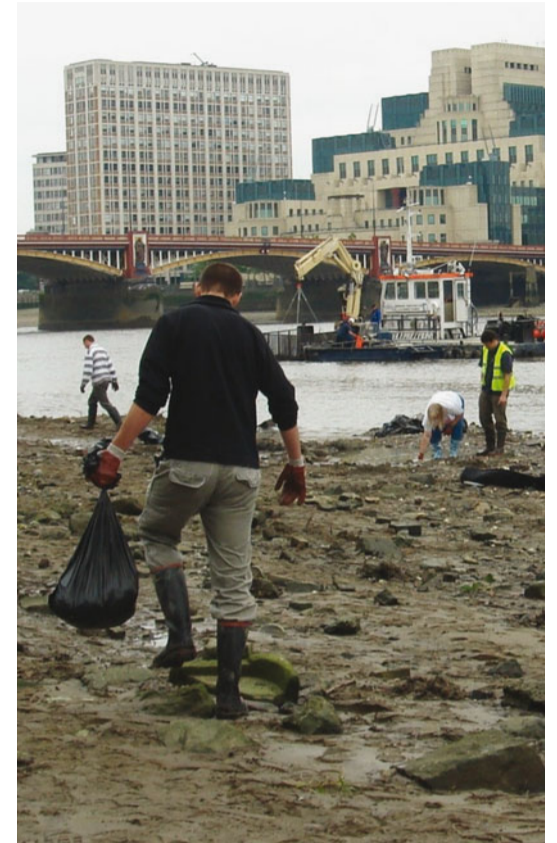
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(continued from page 1)

access to information, challenge, redress, ownership and control, having an influence and standing for office – for example taking on a formal civic role such as councillor.

Currently only 29 per cent of local councillors are women, 4 per cent have a Black or minority ethnic background and just 0.3 per cent are under 25 years old. "A big chunk of the work will need to be done by local authorities and political parties. What we are doing is setting expectations and clearing the way," says Alison Lyon, team leader on civic engagement. For instance, proposals to allow remote voting could remove barriers to becoming a councillor for those who live in remote locations, have parenting or carer responsibilities, or difficulty in travelling. "It might tip the balance and help talented and motivated people to become councillors," says Stephen McAllister, head of branch, Conduct and Council Constitution.



Mucking in... Departmental staff help with a riverbank clean-up

Get involved – get volunteering!



photo: Andy Bodycombe

The Department launched a new volunteering scheme for staff in July, to encourage people to get involved with charities or local community projects which enable the Department to deliver its priorities

Line managers can support their staff to get involved either individually or by organising a team volunteering event. All staff will receive up to three days paid leave per year for volunteering activities and are encouraged to record details of these once completed on their learning and development page on PIMS.

Many staff across the Department are already keen volunteers, giving their time to help people at home and overseas.

Gwyn Roberts, a policy officer working on the code for sustainable homes, is supporting Solar-Aid, a new charity set up to help fight

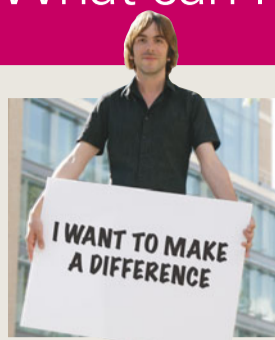
poverty and global warming in the developing world. One of its projects helps entrepreneurs create a business converting kerosene lanterns to solar power (pictured left). Among the many benefits of access to this clean and safe energy source, is that it enables children to study after dark.

Gwyn has volunteered with Solar-Aid for around a year and a half, including attending meetings to develop the future of the charity and being involved with stands at the Big Chill and Glastonbury festivals this summer. As well as talking about the charity's work, he is planning a sponsored drive from London to Cape Town to raise money. "It's enjoyable going along to festivals, but I also do office work for the charity, which relies on volunteers to help out." To make a donation, and find out more about Solar-Aid, visit: www.overlandinthesun.com and www.solar-aid.org

Alun Hughes, head of the Social Enterprise unit, has just come back from a secondment to the New Zealand civil service and wanted to get more involved with his local community in north London.

A key issue for the community was to re-open the local police station. So Alun has applied to join the Met Volunteer Programme, which involves local communities with their policing, and he soon hopes to be manning the counter – "Evenin' All!"

What can I do?



Communities in Control: real people, real power is relevant to every citizen, including staff in the Department. Here are some of the things people can do to get involved:

Information is power

Go to your council website to learn about its services. If information is not there, demand an explanation!

Get your voice heard

Petition your local council – it will soon have to respond and debate the issue if communities are unhappy with the answer.

Gear up your group

Take your community group to the next level. Set up a neighbourhood council or apply for a grassroots grant or 'Communitybuilders' funding.

Shape spending

Petition your council to have more say about spending decisions.

Take a stand

Find out about being a local councillor, a young advisor, school governor or housing association representative. Your council should help you find out more.

Donate some time

Become a volunteer for a good cause, mentor or read to children in a local school, join a youth council.

Having your say

Fewer than a third of local authorities guarantee a response to petitions. The White Paper proposes that local councils should have to respond to all petitions, including e-petitions, relating to their own public services, or where the council shares delivery responsibilities. Petitions could call for action – to deal with empty properties, transfer the ownership of a building to the community, calm traffic at an accident blackspot, or improve street lighting – or call for a participatory budgeting exercise or a local referendum, but planning issues are excluded.

"Petitions are not just about complaining," says Rosie Milner, Community Empowerment Policy team leader. "We want them to be positive as well. A positive outcome could also come through a protest petition. For instance, a petition for a new children's playground in the local park could lead to a new community group being set up to get involved in the park, using the names on the petition as a starting point.

"The maximum threshold to trigger a debate in the council is 5 per cent of the people living in the area, but we would like to see some authorities go lower," says Rosie. "Anyone who lives, works or studies in the area will be able to sign petitions, including under-18s."

A businesslike approach

Engagement with the community can be combined with a businesslike approach; the bottom line of a social enterprise is not just concerned with profit – it is also related to people and place, and therefore closely related to



Social enterprise in action... Cornwall's Eden Project

"The White Paper takes a broad approach to empowering both individuals and communities... it has the potential to offer something for almost everyone"

Communities and Local Government's agenda.

The Department is setting up a Social Enterprise unit to support social entrepreneurs. "Social Enterprises are companies that care," says Alun

Hughes who heads the Social Enterprise unit, "and social entrepreneurs are a combination of Mother Theresa and Rupert Murdoch."

There are at least 55,000 social enterprises in the UK. Well-known examples are The Big Issue, Cornwall's Eden Project, and the fair-trade coffee company Cafédirect. Less well-known examples include Cirencester's 1870 open-air pool, which transferred to local people 35 years ago and has thrived ever since, and Crosby's 1939 cinema – the Plaza – that faced demolition but reopened as a community enterprise in 1997 with a shop, social club and kids club.

The White Paper takes a broad approach to empowering both individuals and communities. With the right platforms and mechanisms, it has the potential to offer something for almost everyone.



WHO ARE WE?

Dan Monnery – Strategy and Policy, GO-North East

Reason for joining the civil service? "After doing a degree in economics and politics, I was really keen to work on interesting and topical policy issues – it's fascinating to have the inside track on things."

Fascinating fact? "For a holiday one year, I drove a battered old Fiat from Baku in Azerbaijan to Tblisi in Georgia (and back); getting across the border was challenging...luckily we had a Diplomat with us."

COMMUNITY

REACHing out to young Black men and boys

The first ever national role model programme for Black boys will soon unveil its first recruits as part of a £1m package of measures designed to help raise the aspirations of young Black men and boys.

The REACH initiative responds to a series of recommendations made in 'An Independent Report to Government on Raising the Aspirations and Attainment of Black Boys and Young Black Men'. It aims to get positive images and role models – such as businessmen, doctors, lawyers, artists and community workers – on the radar,

rather than just celebrities, or those who glamorise crime and gangs.

The recruitment campaign for role models runs until September and at least 20 will be selected by an independent panel including fashion designer Ozwald Boateng, entrepreneur Tim Campbell, Operation Black Vote's founder and director Simon Woolley and Metropolitan Police Superintendent Leroy Logan.

Tim Campbell said: "The role modelling project has massive potential to change the way that our community addresses some of the issues around young Black men's underachievement. We have a real opportunity to get voluntary organisations, the Government and individuals working together to tackle these issues head on."

Once recruited, the role models will share their stories in a number of ways, including events and visits across the country. Secretary of State Hazel Blears is keen that applicants who aren't selected for the national programme still play a role locally.

Hazel said: "It's crucial that we improve the life chances of young Black boys. These kids need realistic alternatives to show them that every opportunity is available to them."

www.direct.gov.uk/reach

COMMUNICATIONS

A picture of eco-towns

A new 'look and feel' has been developed for eco-towns communications.

The campaigns and marketing team invited three agencies to bid for the chance of developing the new eco-towns voice and personality to illustrate the initiative's vast scope.

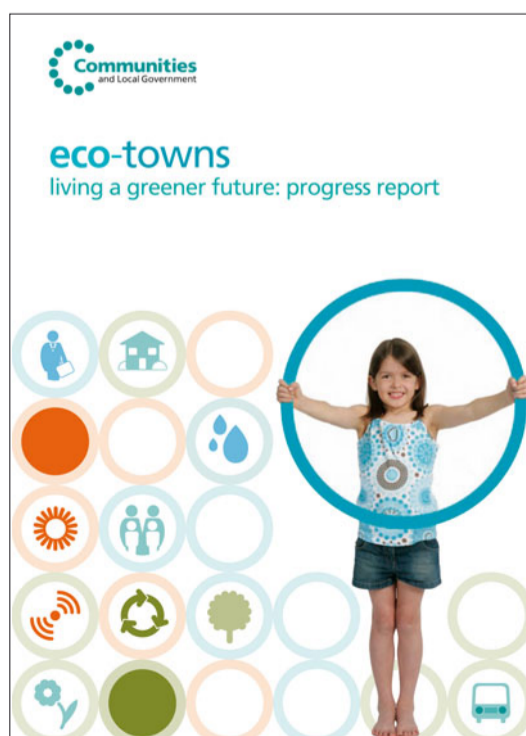
The chosen creative combines warm colours with icons that reflect key areas successful eco-towns must incorporate, such as transport, business, sustainability, green space, affordable homes and communities.

Corina Thomas, campaign manager for eco-towns said: "The communications world often uses a single still image to describe a complex story, and seeks to influence reactions to that story through the design of the image.

"The design was the first step. We now have a dedicated group of agencies helping us make the policy happen.

"I'm sure the agencies enthusiastic approach to the design and concept was not only because of the eco

element, but because the initiative seeks to solve major issues affecting many people: lack of affordable housing and reducing our impact on the environment. This is a new beginning for the eco-towns "story"."



LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Nine new unitary authorities to be created

Following Parliamentary approval, nine new single tier (or 'unitary') local authorities are being established from 1 April 2009, meaning that a number of existing local authorities will be abolished.

Local people will benefit through more co-ordinated, improved local services, and a single local point of reference for the services they receive. The change will also empower local communities, with a greater role for parish councils, and create the strong local leadership necessary to promote economic prosperity.

In Cornwall, County Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire and Wiltshire, a single unitary authority for each county will be established.

Cheshire and Bedfordshire will each gain two unitary councils to replace the existing local authorities. 'Cheshire East' will comprise Congleton, Crewe and Nantwich, and Macclesfield, while 'Cheshire West and Chester' covers Chester, Ellesmere Port and Neston, and Vale Royal. 'Central Bedfordshire' will include the districts of Mid and South Bedfordshire, with the remaining area covered by a new unitary, 'Bedford'.

In Cornwall, Shropshire, Wiltshire and Bedfordshire, the changes are being led by a special executive (formed of councillors from all the affected local authorities in the area) until elections are held in 2009. In Northumberland, County Durham and Cheshire, elections have already taken place and the newly elected councils and executives are leading preparations.

The Local Structures team is working closely with affected local authorities while preparations are underway, and asks departmental colleagues to bear in mind the additional pressures affected authorities may be under during this period. The team can also facilitate discussions between the authorities and colleagues if the changes impact on work or policy areas.

IN BRIEF

Equalities month

November will be Equalities Month in the Department, with a number of events and activities planned to showcase the Department's commitment to this important area, plus the launch of the newly recruited diversity reps. Keep checking the intranet during October for a full events schedule.

NEWS ROUND-UP

DEVELOPMENT

Helping staff find the right words

The Department's dedicated speechwriters, Lyndsey Jenkins and Peter Steggle, have been running in-house workshops to help colleagues develop their own skills.

While Lyndsey and Peter write speeches for the Secretary of State and ministers of state, other ministers' speeches are written by whichever directorate they concern.

"Speechwriting is an important part of being a civil servant and no matter what your job is, you're probably going to have to write a speech at some point. What we wanted to do was share some of the tricks of the trade," explains Peter.

Each session features an introduction where Lyndsey and Peter give tips and talk about five key things to consider: your purpose, your speaker, your audience, the policy and your structure.

There are practical exercises too, where staff write speeches for famous figures to get used to putting the theory and rhetoric into practice, for example Hillary Clinton accepting a vice-presidency nomination, or Roger Federer announcing his retirement from tennis. Recorded speech clips are used to show how these can work, and occasionally, ministers themselves attend the courses to give advice from their perspective.

The courses have proved very popular with staff and more are likely to follow, so keep checking the intranet for confirmed dates.

IN BRIEF

Olympic regeneration

A panel of international speakers visited the Department in May for a joint Olympic Programme team/Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) learning event to discuss the regeneration benefits of hosting major events.

Facilitated by OECD's Greg Clark and the Department's Geoff Tierney, it looked at how to leverage local benefits and lessons learned, to assist with planning for London 2012 and its legacy. Guest speakers included Matteu Hernandez, chief executive of Barcelona Activa, and Paolo Verri, director of Italia 2011, sharing their experiences of the Summer and Winter Olympics respectively.

A summary of this event is now available, and OECD kindly donated copies of its book *Local Development Benefits from Staging Global Events* to share with delegates. To request a book or summary, email katharine.rees@communities.gsi.gov.uk

FIRE

'Pull your finger out' leads to double success



The Department's recent Fire Kills campaign featuring actress Julie Walters is to return to our screens from 15 September following the success of the initial campaign, and in January 2009 to coincide with the smoke alarm's 40th anniversary.

Julie (pictured above) was shown urging viewers to 'pull your finger out' and test smoke alarms in the ad breaks between programmes, in a campaign prompted by research that showed many people didn't regularly

make such checks.

The initial campaign ran from January to March 2008, and describing its effect, Fire Kills campaign manager Tom Foxtton said: "Tracking research demonstrated that the campaign was thought-provoking and extremely powerful. Awareness of fire safety messages increased to 64 per cent from 46 per cent as a result of the advertising – the greatest increase ever seen in smoke alarm maintenance campaign bursts.

"It demonstrates that the simple smoke alarm maintenance message works as a very effective call to action, and the creative itself is a poignant reminder of the fatal consequences of not having a working smoke alarm."

In addition to helping to save lives, the Fire Kills campaign also scooped a coveted 'highly commended' award at the Marketing Society Awards for Excellence 2008. It was praised for being 'an exemplar of consistency in communicating... showing the long-term benefits of identifying insights and taking an integrated approach to achieve targets'.

www.direct.gov.uk/firekills

HR

Focussing on staff development opportunities



Staff development... Sue Evans (left) talks through courses on offer

The Department's 'new ways of working' (see p 13) isn't just about improving use of resources – it helps individuals develop through a focussed events programme.

This 'focus on development' offers staff the opportunity to shine that features in the departmental values. July saw the introduction of *Focus on You* – for grades AA to HEO to gain confidence and take greater responsibility for their personal

development – and *First-time Manager* for those new to management roles or wanting to refresh their skills. These programmes continue in September with details on the intranet.

September and October see the launch of 'rapid development workshops'. These concentrate on different topics for different staff grades, for example *Personal Impact* for AOs to SEOs, *Responding to Challenge* for team leaders, and *Preparing and Delivering Board Papers* for deputy directors and above. Additionally, a *Focus on new Deputy Directors* begins, and 360-degree feedback will be introduced at SCS level.

Sue Evans from Learning and Development says: "We are serious about the values and our people. This programme underlines our commitment to providing staff with the capability and confidence to perform well, and drive the changes necessary to meet the needs of our communities."

[intranet > Our People > Learning and Development](#)



Keeping in touch with community issues

Cambridge House's director of resources, Burger Edwards, is a firm believer that the best way to find out about local communities is to go direct to them, as he tells **Sara Lovell**

After 120 years of tackling poverty and supporting social change in Southwark, London, Cambridge House was a fitting venue for the official stakeholder launch of the White Paper *Communities in control: real people, real power* by Secretary of State, Hazel Blears, in July.

The voluntary organisation was ahead of its time when established in the late 19th century – setting up the first free legal advice centre in 1894 – and is still breaking new ground today.

Working with communities

Cambridge House works within one of the most deprived boroughs in the country providing services directly to local people and communities – from advocacy to legal advice to providing a neighbourhood centre that acts as an anchor for the community.

With a finger firmly on the pulse of the local community, the charity is ideally suited to its stakeholder role, acting as a sounding board on policy matters and critical friend to the Department.

Director of resources, Burger Edwards says: "Our relationship as a

stakeholder with Communities and Local Government is fairly new, but we have a lot to bring to the table with our experience of working at the grassroots with very deprived communities."

"With a finger firmly on the pulse of the local community, the charity is ideally suited to its stakeholder role"

Where, for example, could you canvass the views of 500 Somalian residents within a matter of days? It's perfectly possible in Southwark, as Burger points out: "The Government often refers to hard-to-reach communities but we see it a different way. We are part of those communities and we know how to make contact and find out about them."

Contact with the Department has included a fact-finding visit to Southwark by departmental staff. Cambridge House's chief executive, Clare Gilhooly, sits on the Department's Third Sector Partnership



board and the Third Sector Advisory board within Cabinet Office.

Funding where it's needed

Cambridge House already supports many smaller organisations that make use of its facilities and services and welcomes the Government's £70 million Communitybuilders initiative which aims, in the words of Hazel Blears at the launch, to "provide a vital focal point for community life, bringing people together and providing services and activities under one roof."

The charity is keen to see the extra funding go where its needed most, as well as cutting unnecessary bureaucracy.

Burger says: "Ninety-nine per cent of the support needed by community groups is very small and while public money should be well scrutinised, we believe the rules should be flexible for smaller organisations."

He cites the example of a local resident who Cambridge House was helping with learning English and skills transfer. "He had been unemployed for a long time but eventually got to the stage where he could work," says Burger.

"However, he needed £120 to register with a regulatory body – a small amount of money but a huge barrier. We gave him the money and a month later he paid it back and is volunteering within the community."

Keeping ideas flowing

Red tape can prove the undoing of some of the most innovative ideas so Cambridge House is planning to take legal and governance burdens off the shoulders of small groups.

Burger says: "We can enable people to deliver their ideas, such as the mum who has a plan for addressing knife crime – a huge issue in this area – but finds having to set up a constitution off-putting."

It's just one of the imaginative ways in which Cambridge House is responding to today's issues – and their experience is proving invaluable in policy-shaping.

The relationship can work both ways, says Burger: "Being in closer touch with the Department gives us benefits and insights too. We would certainly hope to think there is a very good exchange of ideas and views."

PREVENTING EXTREMISM DIVISION



Leading by example... The National Muslim Women's Advisory Group with Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Secretary of State Hazel Blears

Working with communities to prevent violent extremism

Bringing communities together needs to happen at ground level, especially when tackling violent extremism, as **Sara Lovell** finds out

The London bombings of July 2005 and subsequent terrorist plots have set alarm bells ringing across the country, not least in Britain's Muslim communities.

While the police and intelligence agencies work to counter further attacks, the involvement of 'home grown' suicide bombers demands a much deeper understanding of how young people get drawn into violent extremism – and what can be done to prevent it.

The Preventing Extremism division was set up within the Cohesion directorate in September 2006, to support and empower communities in tackling violent extremism. The division works across departments and with local authorities and communities to deliver the cross-government 'prevent' strategy.

A complex agenda

Daniel Greaves, deputy head of the division, says: "There is a new awareness that we need to look at the root causes of violent extremism and provide support to challenge extremist messages. This is a hugely complex, sensitive agenda and we have spent much time and resource in understanding radicalisation.

"Our approach is to put power in the hands of communities. In this respect, we are working very closely with local authorities to engage communities to address these issues."

'Prevent' is one of the top three priorities for Secretary of State Hazel Blears and the division's task is backed up with considerable support – £45m over three years for local areas was announced in the 2008 Comprehensive Spending Review.

In July 2008 the division launched *Preventing violent extremism: next steps for communities*, which sets clear priorities – supporting local partnerships, fostering community leadership, and equipping faith leaders to challenge misinterpreted messages to build resilience to extremist interpretations of Islam.

A robust approach

Sabin Malik, principal community cohesion officer for the London Borough of Hounslow, was a speaker at a packed departmental lunchtime staff seminar on the issue that month.

She says: "This is not just about building communities. In Hounslow we have taken a very strong line – such as talking directly with young people about issues such as suicide bombings, Jihad, citizenship and engagement with wider British society. We empower organisations to use Islam and our shared values to counteract extremist and violent views."

Sabin sits on the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group, which was set up by the Department, and is keen to promote women as leaders within the community who can influence young people's vulnerability to

radicalisation.

After two years hard work, Sabin is seeing some positive results. "We always have to acknowledge and address the real challenges that our Muslim communities are facing. However, women and young people in West London feel more confident about their British Muslim identity and recognise they have a positive role to play," she says.

Engaging with communities

Fiyaz Mughal, a councillor in nearby Haringey, also spoke at the seminar. A peer mentor with the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA), Fiyaz believes that councillors and other community leaders have a vital role.

He says: "We need to encourage democratic engagement within communities and build up civil society. There are a range of projects happening locally, from mentoring to women to mosques, and there is a real appetite for this within communities."

For example, a women's pathfinder project looked at Islam in Europe over the last 1,000 years, equipping them to pass on a shared history to boys to help them identify with Britain, and that Islam is not foreign to Europe or Britain.

Other projects work to engage faith leaders in mosque schools in promoting the message to young British Muslims that their faith is compatible with being a British citizen.

i To find out more about the division, or link up with its work, email neil.o'connor@communities.gsi.gov.uk



The benefits of flexibility

'Nine to five' office life has been revolutionised by alternative ways of working, and the Department's Flexible Workers Network supports staff and helps them learn from each others' experiences, as **Philippa Barr** discovers

The Flexible Worker's Network (FWN) is far from just a 'talking shop' where people chew over the minutiae of working at home. The organisation and its members are people keen to have an impact on policy, and show that their working lifestyles can benefit the Department.

The network launched a decade ago in the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Originally run by and for part-time workers, it has expanded hugely over the last few years and is now run by a small management team. It has around 180 members with a variety of working patterns, including part time, job-sharing, compressed hours and home-working.

Speaking from experience... Secretary of State Hazel Blears speaks about her experience of having a flexible worker in her Private Office team

Retaining talent

Mike Falvey, director general, Human Resources and business change, says: "Encouraging those who prefer working flexibly to do so is one way of both unlocking and retaining talent."

He wants the network to keep him informed about how the Department can improve its policies and practices, and this is happening already. Management team member Yvonne Dove sat on the workforce equalities taskforce and helped develop proposals which led to an announcement in October 2006 that all Department jobs should be open to flexible working, unless they specifically state they are not suitable.

The job share register, located in the intranet's electronic job

"Encouraging those who prefer working flexibly to do so is one way of both unlocking and retaining talent"

advertising system and open to all, should help support this. "You don't have to be actively seeking a new job to put yourself on the register – it's a great way of keeping your options open for future job moves," explains network chair, Alison Davis.

In July 2007, the network helped HR draft and launch the Department's flexible working policy, and is liaising on the review. The Network also

“If my children are ill, or it is school holidays, I am ‘on the premises’ even if I am not constantly interacting with them”

liaises regularly with the Workforce Equalities team, inviting it to the network’s main meetings.

“We had a stand at the Staff Network Day in September 2007 and, of course, we keep HR up-to-speed with any individual issues raised by our members,” says Alison.

An open forum

The Network has three formal meetings a year with guest speakers invited, and it’s hoped its October meeting will include a talk about the flexible workspace pilot.

Secretary of State Hazel Blears spoke at the June 2008 meeting about having a flexible worker in her private office team. Hazel declares herself proud to be part of a government making workplaces for everyone fairer and more inclusive, adding: “I want to make sure we practice what we preach, so we’ve made sure that all jobs are available on a flexible basis unless there’s a strong case against.”

An informal mentoring scheme has been launched by the network (contact Jane Cockerill for information on GTN 3533 3410) and future aims include linking up with the Women’s Network, and to set up an intranet discussion forum. Alison’s particular ‘wish list’ also includes increasing the network’s influence and expanding its membership. She summarises: “We believe flexible working can help to achieve a better work-life balance.”

i To join the network contact Ryan Persaud, GTN 3533 5689, to be included on the email list.



Open to all... The network is open to men and women who work flexibly for a number of reasons

Life in the flexible working lane

Staff talk about the highs and lows of a working life outside the mainstream

The home-workers

Jane Reed is a specialist drafting lawyer who began working partly from home in 2001 to accommodate family life (she has two children). She now usually works from home four days a week and spends the remaining day in the office. But, she says:

“If necessary I will come in on other days for meetings or to attend parliament – you have to be flexible yourself – and you need to have a good support system. I have regular divisional meetings and I begin my day in the office with a chat with my colleagues to keep them up to speed with what I am doing.”

Jane says the crucial factors in successful home-working are efficient and reliable remote access, making full use of email and voicemail and keeping clients and colleagues in and outside the department apprised of her whereabouts and contact details.

She describes the benefits to family life as ‘immeasurable’: “If my children are ill, or it is school holidays, I am ‘on the premises’ even if I am not constantly interacting with them. And it’s handy to be able to multi-task by putting washing on!”

Jane joined the network earlier this year and says that it is good to have the potential to liaise with staff who have similar lifestyles.

James Blake is a deputy director responsible for local area agreements. He says: “I work flexibly and I think there is something important about someone at this level setting such a precedent”.

James applied to work a nine-day fortnight five years ago with alternate Fridays off, when his wife returned to work after their daughter was born. This changed in 2007 to a ten-day fortnight, but working at home on Wednesdays, following the birth of his son, so James can drop him at nursery, and take care of his daughter after school.

“Some colleagues have even said it is easier to get to speak to me when I am at home,” James adds. “This arrangement allows me invaluable time to work, think and write at home, and also to have dedicated time with my children.”

The part-time worker



Another worker whose family life benefits from flexible options is **Cathy Dowse**, part-time events

manager in Hazel Blears’ Private Office. Cathy’s main ‘outside’ commitment is to her children, and her working pattern allows her to pick them up from school.

Describing her working pattern, Cathy explains: “I am part-time but don’t do the same hours every day. It can be difficult to work in Private Office on a part-time basis because ministers’ diaries can often change at very short notice, but it is possible so don’t be put off applying for certain roles if you have alternative working patterns.”

The job-sharer



Jo Sweeney is a full-time equalities lead within the Safer and Stronger directorate, Government

Office for the South West, but formerly Jo shared a job in the Race and Diversity Action team at the Home Office. Her job-share partner was Matthew Isted, now a full-time Drug Improvement Partnerships manager for the Government Office of the South East.

Jo would encourage anyone to job-share, with the proviso that she found her career progress slowed down during that period. She explains: “I don’t know if it’s a coincidence, but both of us have been promoted since we went back to full-time work”

Jo achieved the job-share arrangement with the help of former manager Paul Greenaway, and ‘found’ Matthew using the Home Office job-share database.

She says: “Each time our period of work came to an end, we’d email each other about what we had done and what the current issues were. We each took on a specialised area – I dealt with ‘gender’ and Matthew with ‘age’, but we could both tackle every aspect of the job and colleagues knew there would always be one of us there to deal with anything.”

Personally speaking

Living the dream

The **Staff Working Group (SWG)** look at the practicalities of implementing the departmental values

We've read the leaflet, we've been to the workshops, we've thought about how they can make the Department a better place to work, and there probably isn't a single person who would disagree with any of them. What are they? The new departmental values, of course.

The SWG welcomes any new initiatives that will make the Department a better place to work, but we worry that they might be just another initiative like 'excellence in delivery' that will die a quiet death. Are they just a set of aspirational values or will they become a practical reality?

"Are they just a set of aspirational values?"

It's early days, but it would be good to know:

- is there a project plan in place?
- what is the time frame?
- will sufficient resources be provided?
- who will monitor whether we are following the values and desired behaviours?
- who will take action if they are not being followed?

Let's focus on "We give people the chance to shine". If we are serious about unlocking talent, will more training be funded centrally?

Some of us have found that if we wish to develop new skills that are essential for a future post – such as project management skills – we have had trouble getting training approved from divisional budgets for skills that are not high priority for our current post. It is therefore tough to move to a different area, especially in these days of fewer advertised generalist posts. In what ways will we get the opportunity for training for new ways of working in the future?

And what happens to managers who do not give their people a chance to shine? Will they fail their prime objective?

SWG members look forward to finding out how everyone will do, feel and live the values. They must be more than a dream.

Personally speaking

Adding value?

Antony Carpen from the Community Empowerment Division, suggests that actions will speak louder than words when it comes to the departmental values



I've taken part in a fair number of events that have led up to the development of our departmental values in recent months. Some of them have been interesting and stimulating, others less so.

Some of the veterans of the Department have asked what happened to all of the previous corporate agendas that looked at this area, wondering whether this time things really will improve.

I can't fault the Department for effort – it really has gone to town this time around. However, for it to register with all of us, the values need to be more than just words.

Are junior staff really given a

chance to shine? Are managers being given access to the support and training they need to allow people to reach their potential? Do we know enough about the system we work in to make connections with people in other policy areas?

If not, what are we going to do about it?

Hopefully, over the following year we'll see positive examples and answers to the questions above.

i Will the departmental values make a difference to how we work? How do we turn the concepts into reality? Have your say on the intranet's corporate values forum...

Everyone must play their part in *Making*



Mike Falvey, director-general HR and business change, responds to the Staff Working Group

I am delighted that we are discussing the values. Now is the time for lively debate to consider how we can live them and what barriers must be overcome. One of the key purposes of the *Making it Happen* workshops is for us all to engage with the values and consider how they relate to the work we do.

We went through a long journey to develop our values, during which over a thousand staff gave their input. We listened to what you said. You ask whether they are aspirational values or whether they are to be a practical reality – I say both. As the SWG say, it is hard to imagine anyone would disagree with these values, which represent staff views, and so we should now all work to make them a practical reality. Different parts of the Department will be better at some values than others but over the next year I hope to see more and more of what we do having the values as the foundation.

Please note we do not expect overnight change. We are in this for the long haul and have put in place an accountability structure to deliver long-term behavioural change.

You should all have had the opportunity to attend a *Making it Happen* first-phase workshop. There are four phases spread over

approximately a year, as we all consider how the values relate to the detailed work that we do.

In terms of resources, the key resource is ourselves, motivating one another to implement these values in our daily working lives. There is a team of coaches who are on hand to offer support and to oversee *Making it Happen*. Please speak with your director if you want to know who yours is. They provide me with weekly updates and work alongside the directors to ensure that momentum is not lost.

There are many things already going on in the spirit of the values. We are so serious about *Making it Happen* that it will be part of the prime objective for all managers.

In terms of training, half of all training is already centrally-funded. One example is the recent *Focus on You* workshop where staff take time to consider their skills and skill-gaps and draw up ways to develop in these areas. Those who attended gave it highly positive feedback. More sessions are taking place in September – I recommend you sign up!

In addition, we are holding programme and project management (PPM) training, with 200 staff having already been trained. One of the benefits of PPM is that it builds in opportunities in projects for staff to challenge policies and to be creative where things are not going as well as they could.

In the last few weeks I met with the

Register for the intranet or miss out!

 **Rachel Christopher, head of Digital and Print Media, writes:**

Did you know 1,406 staff have registered for the intranet? If you're not one of these people, you're missing out on a powerful set of tools designed to make your working life easier.

If you register today, you can personalise the intranet to suit your needs by creating customised lists of links to your favourite pages, monitor news from all your favourite websites and blogs on one screen via the RSS reader, and comment on colleagues' existing intranet blogs or start one of your own!

It's a good way to make your voice heard by voting in polls and quizzes, or joining the debate on the forums to share views with colleagues or pick up a bargain on the 'For Sale' forum. You can keep up to date through newsletters like the Team Leaders Bulletin, help colleagues communicate

it Happen

Staff Working Group to discuss 'annoying processes' in the Department, and they will shortly be reporting these back to me so we can address them and make changes. They will be using their voice to be creative with the way we do things.

We must all continue to play an active part in making the values happen. It is not just something for the Board to do, but for us all to do. On being ambitious and creative, let's always seek to do the best we can, thinking about whether the old way of doing things is actually the best way. Let's listen to one another's ideas and challenges, giving one another a voice. Let's give each other opportunities to shine, and let's take those opportunities proactively and enthusiastically. And let's share our knowledge and information with one another so that we can work as one department, and deliver against our PSAs and DSOs to the best of our collective abilities. Then we really will make them happen!

'Ask Mike'

If you have any questions you would personally like to put to director-general HR and business change, Mike Falvey, email him at mike.falvey@communities.gsi.gov.uk and put 'ASK MIKE' in the subject line.

'It's a good way to make your voice heard by voting in polls and quizzes'

more clearly by defining obscure jargon on our Jargon Buster, and share knowledge and collaborate by creating your own intranet pages through the wiki tool.

Registering is quick and easy. Simply navigate to the 'login' page from the link in the top-left corner of any intranet page, click on the 'register' link and follow the instructions. If you have any difficulty with this, the e-comms team is happy to help by phone or in person - call GTN 3533 6670 to speak to them.

If you've got opinions about the new intranet, but don't want to use these tools, then you can give us your feedback without registering. Look out for our user survey on the intranet homepage soon.

Is it recess, or have we adjourned?

 **Neil Richardson from the Digital and Print Media team writes:**

Regarding Permanent Secretary Peter Housden's personal message to departmental staff published on the intranet on 22 July, I understand that in House parlance this is an adjournment (hence the expression adjournment debate), not recess, and that recess only occurs when an election is called.

Can anybody offer clarification please?

 **Paul Davies, parliamentary clerk, replies:**

Periods when the House is not sitting are commonly called recesses, though they are perhaps more properly termed adjournments.

There are currently five usual periods of recess in each session: Christmas, February, Easter, Whitsun and summer. The decision as to when to take recesses is made by the House pursuant to the terms of a motion proposed by the Leader of the House.

The short period between each session is known as prorogation. Dissolution of Parliament occurs when a general election is called.

i Visit the intranet's 'Jargon Buster' wiki

Personally speaking

The loneliness of the long run up to christmas....

Ruth Ludbrook from a very busy Workforce Equalities team has plenty of work on the horizon to keep her and Lucy Burt occupied



In this column I'm going to tell you a bit about the work we've been doing over the summer and the exciting events we have planned for the autumn.

On 23 May our team worked with the Digital Inclusion team to run a 'silver surfers' day, which was featured in Whitehall and Westminster World. We also helped to sponsor the civil service float at Pride London, which ferried a number of our own lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) Network members through London on 5 July.

Also, the Board accepted the recommendations of the Black and minority ethnic (BME) consultation report, which were incorporated into our update of the workforce equality and diversity strategy. If you would like a hard copy of the report, email Lucy at Lucy.Burt@communities.gsi.gov.uk. Our team is also near the end of reviewing our flexible working guidance, which is now over a year old and got the Department nominated as an 'exemplar employer' by lobby group Opportunity Now.

That was then... now we are looking ahead to all the work we need to cram in before a (oh so brief) break at Christmas! One of the major pieces of work we are taking forward at the moment is a proposal by Peter Housden to host an Equalities Month, which we hope to hold in November.

It will be the first time that a government department has really demonstrated its commitment to equalities with a concentrated programme of events over such an extended period, so we're receiving a lot of interest and even support from other government departments. We're working to make this high-profile, with public and private sector involvement. We'll be releasing more information nearer the time; be sure to look out for it so you can take part.

Tailored targets get to the grassroots issues

What are the burning issues for your community? Crime rates? The quality of the environment? Finding somewhere affordable to live? **Sara Lovell** looks at the Local Area Agreements that will tackle these priorities

All local authority areas now have their own, tailored targets for tackling the issues that matter most to the community through Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

Communities and Local Government has been working across central government and with the Government Offices to introduce the three-year agreements as outlined in the 2006 local government White Paper. They replace a host of performance indicators, cutting red tape for public services such as the police, education, health and local councils.

Up to 35 'bespoke' local priorities have been set by Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) country-wide alongside a slimmed-down set of national targets.

For example, in Yorkshire and Humber, a top priority is reducing the number of 16 to 18 year olds not in education, training or employment, while a key focus for the South West is affordable housing.

James Blake, deputy director of policy for LAAs says: "All communities now have a strategy built on hard evidence of the social and demographic changes they face and the things the community feels



are important."

The targets for all 150 local areas can be viewed at www.localpriorities.communities.gov.uk, a website (see picture above) designed to get local people engaged in the process. The Department is also publicising LAAs widely through national and local media to encourage community involvement.

James says: "The new system has made local areas focus on their real priorities and the connection between them – for example, child poverty and the links to poor housing, domestic violence and joblessness. Different partners then sign up to the targets relevant to them."

With experience of piloting LAAs within London Borough of Barking & Dagenham, head of Policy, Performance, Partnerships and

Communications, Guy Swindle, welcomes the new approach. "We needed to develop a shared view of our priorities with our partners," he says.

"A watershed for us was a 24-hour event for senior people from the main statutory providers. We agreed that the real cause of problems in our area was economic, and lack of aspiration, feeding into poor jobs, health and so on."

The Barking & Dagenham LSP chose six key priorities – such as helping people to invest in their future, improving health and creating a more attractive place to live and work.

While it's very early days in terms of delivering results, there are already some positive outcomes, says Guy: "We were already doing good things with our partners but the relationship is stronger now. We are all working from the same starting line and are beginning to understand each others' language and processes and build trust."

To further cement the partnership, the Council is introducing a new web-based performance management system, enabling all partners to enter and access data.

Partners are starting to align their budgets in their joint efforts to meet demanding new targets – for example, the Primary Care Trust is promoting better health by funding free swimming for all under-18s in the borough.

LAAs certainly represent a new way of working between central and local government, and the challenge now will be to maintain its momentum across central government and the public sector.

James believes the will is there to do it: "The targets are challenging but there has been a very positive reception from local authorities and other agencies and we also have strong support from ministers and our Board."



High priority... Housing features strongly for many local authorities



WHO ARE WE?

David Watson, Campaigns and Marketing unit

Reason for joining the civil service? "I joined because I'm passionate about the potential for good communications to help improve the lives of people across the country."

Fascinating fact? "When I was head of marketing at DEFRA (before joining Communities), I developed and launched the cross-government ACT ON CO2 climate change campaign."

NEW WAYS OF WORKING



A new take on ways of working

There's more to flexibility in the workplace than hours or location – **Nicola Veness** sees how flexible deployment could pay dividends

Flexible working, flexible deployment – what's the difference? Flexible workers adjust their work patterns (see p8-9), while flexible deployment examines how best to use resources to achieve business objectives.

The Department is embracing a number of 'new ways of working' (NWW) to help it do just that. HR's Sally Blandford, Sheeba Islam and Annette Charles ran an event in July to showcase the initiative and how it reflects departmental values.

"Every government department is facing resource cutbacks and has to deliver its objectives for less," says Sally. "Being tied up on low-priority tasks can feel demotivating. Flexible deployment should provide more opportunities to get involved in challenging and worthwhile projects and enhance capabilities at the same time."

Initially, NWW involves teams mapping the whole range of their

projects and activities, to see which do – and don't – make a major contribution towards delivering their objectives, and prioritising what really matters.

Active resource management then involves reviewing this information each month – using a spreadsheet championed by Regeneration Performance and Digital Inclusion's Bert Provan – to assess priorities, and to make decisions on team requirements and staff availability.

'Help us help you'

NWW offers benefits to individuals too. To build a clearer picture of the abilities people bring to the workplace, a skills and experience profile has been created in PIMS. People can record the skills they have developed in and outside work and highlight their developmental goals. It complements an online CV, which acts as showcase for staff, helping them get involved in new projects and activities.

"Mike Falvey gives the example of meeting people who may have a

"Every government department is facing resource cutbacks and has to deliver its objectives for less"

Getting involved... Staff attending the busy 'new ways of working' event in Eland House

relatively junior post here - but in their private life they're a school governor, appointing head teachers and making big development decisions, and those skills and abilities aren't being tapped into here," explains Sally.

Other initiatives include a 'focus on development' (see page 5), centrally-funded training, volunteering and learning 'on the job' through projects.

A further developmental opportunity introduced as part of NWW was the career development gateway, piloted during spring to find future HEOs.

The process is broader than a traditional promotion board or a job-specific interview. Candidates' evidence-based application forms are carefully sifted, leading to an assessment centre with written and group exercises and an interview. All candidates, whether promoted or not, can receive feedback to help with their future development.

"The assessors gave detailed thought to every candidate and focused on their potential to perform at a higher level" adds Annette. "The deciding factor was how well each candidate performed, not an arbitrary limit on successes." Promotion tickets – valid for a year for internal HEO posts on level transfer – were given to 26 people, and 18 have already secured new roles.

Onwards and upwards

Denise Mann is one of those 18. Now with the Strategic Housing team, she joined the Department as an EO in January 2008 and heard about the Gateway. Her manager agreed it would be a good learning and development opportunity and Denise found it quite a positive experience:

"The jobs started coming thick and fast and it was nice to know there were a lot of line managers who were completely confident in the process."

Another Gateway is planned and Denise advises potential candidates: "Get your application in early, get the support of your line manager and talk to other people already at that grade to find out how they got there."

By October, the Board wants all directorates operating NWW or a system offering the same quality of information – and when it offers a win-win for individuals and the organisation, why not?

Personally speaking

Making connections

Learning and Development's **Wendy Slinger** – currently on secondment to the Ministry of Justice – ponders the benefits of networking...



Is networking an art or a skill and do we do enough of it? It's a great way to spread best-practice, knowledge and expertise, and generate innovative opportunities and beneficial contacts.

The Department's formal internal networks are well publicised on the intranet but informal networks are like underground rivers – fluid, ever-changing; known by some but not others.

The least visible area seems to be the 'join' in our 'joined-up government', because it's unclear where the inter-departmental networks are. More awareness of these wider civil service networks – what they do and who is eligible to join – will avoid silo thinking.

How do we pool experience, and who drinks from the pool? The Department is offering staff up to three days paid leave a year for volunteering in the community – a volunteers network would utilise the knowledge and skills gained. Many of our staff are already engaged in voluntary work, so hands up the school governors, magistrates, local councillors, hospital helpers, school mentors and local fund raisers?

The Cabinet Office is now encouraging staff familiar with internet networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace to explain to others how these sites operate – the objective being to enhance understanding of the issues important to young people.

There's worlds within worlds, ripples across lakes and maybe there are only six degrees of separation? Well that's networking for you.

Michael's pool win is only trophy at Sports Day



The sun made about as many appearances as the Department's staff on the winners rostrum at the joint Sports Day with the

Department for Transport back in July.

The Department's only winner was Finance and Payment's Michael Oliver. He ran the Pool competition and was persuaded to enter in order to give someone a first-round opponent – but much to his embarrassment, Michael went on to win the whole thing!

But despite the grey clouds and occasional drizzle, staff threw

themselves into the sporting events with abandon. And they were rewarded for their efforts with the musical stylings of the Southern Rag-a-Jazz Band.

Close but no cigar

The Department did secure a couple of creditable runner-up spots in the

Trophy winners 2008

Mixed Tug-o-War: CSN

Petanque: Alan Turnbull & Mouna Kehil

Netball: CSN

Softball: Walking Wounded

Darts – Men: Keith Hughes (Eastern DfT)

Darts – Ladies: Victoria Price (GCDA)

Pool: Michael Oliver

Cricket: Superstars 6

Football – Men: FCF Combo

Football – Men (Plate): Woodland Wanderers

Football – Ladies: BRE

Tennis: Mick Chambers & Chris Howes



Success!... Michael Oliver (left)



WHO ARE WE?

Jo Sweeney, Safer and Stronger directorate – GO-South West

Reason for joining the civil service? "I transferred when my employers, The British Council, moved to Manchester from London. It was a short-term measure, but 16 years later I'm still here!"

Fascinating fact? "I was an archaeologist and, in my early twenties, drove a Land Rover to Iraq to work on a site just south of Baghdad - with plenty of adventures!"



The 100m... but with space hoppers!

mixed netball and women's football. 'The Reformers' were pipped to the netball crown by the 'CSN' team from DVLA, having edged out CLG's Press Office team for a place in the last four when a last-gasp goal was controversially disallowed.

And the female members of the Press Office team (pictured left) were unlucky again when at two-all in the ladies football final, they conceded a third to lose to the 'BRE' team in the dying seconds of the match.

Reflecting on a successful event, SPARTA assistant secretary Graeme Starkey said: "We were extremely happy to see so many staff enjoying themselves, particularly the larger than usual parties from Leeds, Bristol and Southampton. Although my personal highlight during the afternoon was the spirited mayhem on the subsidiary track, the best moment of the whole day probably came when I was finally able to collapse into an armchair at home."

Make a note – Sports Day 2009 (complete with spirited mayhem!) takes place on Friday 17 July.

On board

Board members give tsm an insight into what makes them tick

Name: Christina Bienkowska



Job title:
Director, strategy and performance

Joined the Department:
November 2005

Previous job:
Head of policy and performance for schools and children, young people and families, at the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

First job:
Saturday job in the Medical Records department of the old St George's Hospital, and first real job in the Education Department overseeing agricultural education provision, including courses for aspiring lumberjacks (honest!)

Books:
Le Grand Meaulnes by Alain-Fournier, *Tender is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and almost any detective story you care to mention

Music:
All sorts. From Van Morrison, Bruce Springsteen, Mississippi Blues – shows my age – to all Chopin (my Polish half means I'm immediately reduced to tears)

Films:
Chinatown, The Full Monty, The Producers, The Third Man, The

Story of the Weeping Camel

Best of times:
Living in Paris and Marseilles in the 1960s

Worst of times:
Losing people dear to me

Greatest wish:
Can't beat world peace...

Typical working day:
I'm a morning person so in the office around 7.30am, which gives me time to think before the day starts in earnest. Lots of meetings, but I try and keep them short and focussed. The best moments are often the conversations with Board colleagues or others where we try and solve problems together, and find practical ways to make things happen. Aim to get some fresh air at lunchtime and – with the help of everyone in strategy and performance directorate – to leave at a sensible time and not take any work home with me

Leisure time:
Time with family and friends, and travels to amazing parts of the world to pursue my passion for ancient history, art and architecture – most recently Iran, Bolivia, Uzbekistan and Pakistan

COMMENTS & LIFESTYLE

Did you invite your parents to work?

The morning of 23 May saw some nervous people gathering in the third floor hot-desking area of Eland House – some staff brought their parents into the office, while others acting as volunteers waited to introduce them to the Internet.

The reason? 'Invite Your Parents to Work' day; a national event set up by Digital Unite as part of Adult Learners Week, with sessions taking place in companies, libraries and community centres all over the country. The Department decided it was important to participate as part of its commitment to digital inclusion, and the event was run by Peter Stean of the Digital Inclusion team, and Lucy Burt from Workforce Equalities.

There are still almost 10 million older people in the UK who can't use the Internet, and in today's increasingly 'digital' world this can be a distinct disadvantage. 'Invite Your

Surfin' CLG... 'Silver surfer' Adrian Turner is coached by Matthew Louis (left) as Lucy Burt and Mike Falvey look on



Parents to Work' day, or 'silver surfers' day as it's also known, gives many thousands of them a taste of the Internet through hands-on sessions.

Those nervous people in the hot-desking area need not have worried – the event went beautifully and was thoroughly enjoyed by all who participated.

The parents' ages ranged from late-

50s to mid-80s. Some had never touched a mouse before, others wanted to know how to blog and use a webcam, but all learned from and enjoyed the process. The volunteer trainers also had a great experience – everyone learned something new and there was a happy buzz in the air throughout the day. Peter and Lucy thank everyone who took part.

LIFESTYLE



SUDOKU EASY



To solve, fill in the grid so that every row, column and box contains the numbers 1 through to 9.

			4	2	1			
	2	5				8	4	
6		4		5		3		2
	6		5		9		8	
			2		6			
	3		7		4		1	
2		1		9		4		3
	9	3				1	5	
			1	4	3			

SUDOKU SOLUTION ISSUE 10

The Sudoku winner from issue 10 was Andrew Hitter of the European team, Government Office for the East of England

7	3	1	4	9	8	2	6	5
8	9	6	5	2	7	3	4	1
5	4	2	1	6	3	7	8	9
1	2	3	6	8	5	9	7	4
9	5	7	2	3	4	8	1	6
4	6	8	7	1	9	5	2	3
6	8	5	9	4	2	1	3	7
2	7	4	3	5	1	6	9	8
3	1	9	8	7	6	4	5	2

ENTRY FORM ISSUE 11

Please complete this form and attach it to your Sudoku grid then send it to: **tsm editor, Room 7 H3, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU**

Correct entries will be included in a draw to win a £5 Marks & Spencer voucher. **Closing date 15 October 2008.**

NAME

ADDRESS

The Last Word

Selvin, 36, joined the Department from Cabinet Office in 2002 and works in Mainstreaming Equalities. He's also a trustee for the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust (www.stephenlawrence.org.uk)



Selvin Brown

How did you become a trustee?

The Trust's chair and chief executive are members of a fellowship, the British-American Project, that I'm a member of. They thought that my skillset and background (including working for the Department), and being a Black male role model in particular, would be helpful.

For a long time I've always thought about Stephen. I'm about the same age as him, and I went to school in Raynes Park, London, and used to get racially abused regularly on my way home. So when I learned more about the Trust and Stephen's life, I thought 'this is a good thing and he would have done this for me'.

It's the best thing I've ever been involved with and the thing I'm most proud of.

The trust's interests in urban design and regeneration echo the Department's work. What are

the parallels? I've been leading on developing the Trust's five-year strategy. The Trust's vision is to raise 70 per cent of its funding from the private sector, 30 per cent from the public sector (which it aims to cap), and to have a physical presence in our core cities. We're seeking to bring together statutory agencies with responsibilities, private sector organisations with their business acumen and corporate social responsibility, and in so doing, create an opportunity for young people who lack their own 'social capital' to play a role in shaping and creating their own communities.

If you don't have the 'social capital' that others have, but you have a dream – like Stephen – we can help. We're the ideal outfit for delivering the Department's vision of sustainable communities. And all we want is a bit of love; people to use the facilities, to be talked about as a place of learning.

Alongside the architecture bursaries, how does the trust engage communities? We were part of Open House and we encourage people in the local community to come in and play a role. When Hazel Blears came to the centre, she said 'isn't it amazing; won't the young learners feel valued that they're being invested in with a £10m state-of-the-art building and equipment?'. From personal experience at the Trust I can see this

approach can make a big difference to these young people from some of our most deprived communities; they feel valued and invested in.

Counter to popular belief, the centre is not a Black community centre – 50 per cent of people who attend are white; 50 per cent are Black and minority ethnic. Also, 40 per cent are female, 25 per cent are over 20 years old and 15 per cent have a disability. It's a melting pot for learning where anyone who is genuinely interested in 'skilling up' can. We run adult basic literacy programmes, things that don't involve the built environment but that you might need to change to engage and educate parents, in order to help the young learners. People at the heart of the Trust believe everybody has potential, and we give everybody the chance to aspire and achieve.

What do you bring to the trust and what's the reward for you? My tireless enthusiasm! A young – but not too young – perspective, my public policy, ministerial and Whitehall approach. I also think I bring some hope. Our board is made up of pretty impressive people who I learn from, admire, and who inspire me – that's what I get from it. Sarah Ebanja – our chair – is an incredibly inspirational leader; Keith Ajegbo is one of the most outstanding men I've ever met. And Stuart – Stephen's younger brother – is a real source of inspiration.

LIFESTYLE

