

## Chapter 9

## Succession



Democracy Day voting.

In any sphere of activity the evolution of terminology reveals much about the direction of prevailing thought. The regeneration sector is no exception. Ten years ago fixed-life agencies prepared ‘exit strategies’ as they approached the end of their allotted time, implying a clean break and a quick getaway. Today they work up ‘succession strategies’ from the outset.

The shift recognises that lasting improvements in long-neglected areas of chronic deprivation require at least a generation to achieve, perhaps more. That is longer than any regeneration body will be around, which is why strong succession organisations are required, united in outlook and ambition. Somebody has to continue the good work.

At Castle Vale it was always known that the identity of the successor landlord would be decided by a ballot<sup>1</sup>. The continued existence of subsidiary programmes, including training, community safety, and other fields of service provision, would need to be delivered by separate organisations. Some of these already existed, others had to be created.

In order for the successor bodies to gain the necessary skills and experience, the Housing Action Trust would also need to be prepared to give power away, as quickly as possible, not behaviour commonly associated with bureaucracies.

Although it could not predict the ballot with absolute certainty, the Trust could do its best to influence the outcome by creating a credible model for succession, and demonstrating its effectiveness prior to the ballot. This it did through a succession strategy, a plan for the smooth transition of authority once the regeneration programme had run its course.

“We knew from the outset that succession was something that had to be dealt with. Too many regeneration agencies leave it too late, allowing the benefits to wither on the vine,” says Angus Kennedy.

At the beginning the Housing Action Trust faced a tussle with the Department of the Environment – then the Trust’s principal source of funds – over the appointment of a senior member of staff to oversee the succession strategy<sup>2</sup>. The Department did not regard succession as a core feature of the Housing Action Trust programme. It is a view that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister would be unlikely to share today.

In 1995 Carole Wildman’s appointment was followed by the establishment of a succession sub-group, led by Board member Gil Gillis, comprising tenant and resident representatives, Housing Action Trust staff, and representatives of Birmingham City Council.

The group’s role was to identify and nurture local organisations capable of addressing regeneration in its broadest sense. These organisations were to be community-led, and capable of attracting funds from a range of sources<sup>3</sup>.

#### Housing – the successor landlord

At the time of the 1993 tenant ballot it had been widely assumed that tenants of the Housing Action Trust would return to Birmingham City Council once the Trust’s work was done. To many tenants it was not a question that even merited debate. This was not a view shared by everybody, including senior members of staff at the Housing Action Trust, some of whom envisaged a home-grown alternative.

Landlord issues, notably the ‘right to return’ to Birmingham City Council, were a powerful and divisive force in Castle Vale until at least 1999. As described in chapter two, during the early years there was a good deal of disquiet about the Housing Action Trust’s motives. Some tenants were instinctively suspicious about something that they didn’t know or understand. Others were opposed to social housing being run by any organisation other than the local authority. But arguably the most contentious sticking point was the suggestion that the Trust was a Tory plot to privatise housing stock by the back door. There was no reason to believe that was the



Launch of the newly refurbished Topcliffe House in May 2004 by members of the Topcliffe Residents Group, in the presence of pupils from Topcliffe Junior School.



Topcliffe house has been transformed into a modern apartment block for the over 40s. It is one of only two of the original 34 tower blocks that now remain in Castle Vale.





Tenants and Residents Alliance meeting in progress.

case, but this was the cry from some members of the Tenants Representative Board<sup>4</sup> when the Trust introduced its proposal to work with housing associations (see chapter 3).

The problem was that if Housing Action Trust tenants were re-housed in a home built and managed by a housing association, they would become tenants of that new organisation. They would also forfeit their right to return. Some resented being manoeuvred into a corner, although there was an alternative, tenants could choose to be relocated to one of the Housing Action Trust's existing properties.

The difference at Castle Vale, the feature that made the housing associations palatable, was that the two housing associations selected to work with the Housing Action Trust offered to set up a community association to manage the new homes. As far as possible the community association was to be shaped and run by residents. This was the genesis of Castle Vale Community Housing Association, today the estate's popular majority landlord (see chapter 3 for full description of the evolution of CVCHA).

In a relatively short space of time CVCHA became a well-liked, fast-moving organisation. At the landlord choice ballot in autumn 2003, it was selected in preference to Birmingham City Council by an

overwhelming majority. CVCHA was also a trailblazer, being one of only a handful of independent resident-controlled community-based housing associations in the country, and the first to be chaired by a resident. The success of the organisation became the bedrock of the Housing Action Trust's succession strategy.

In terms of structure and responsibility, CVCHA is the closest organisation to a reincarnated Housing Action Trust. As well as its landlord responsibility<sup>5</sup>, CVCHA has strong community representation at board level, and it is based on the estate. It also contributes to community safety, and youth work and has strong relationships with service providers active on the estate. But it is not an exact replica.

If the Housing Action Trust had not also created bodies to continue its work in financial management, job creation, and training, it risked undermining its holistic agenda. Succession was not just about passing responsibility to another landlord.

#### Sustainable succession

There are several successor organisations in Castle Vale (see Side panel 2). All provide services and opportunities that did not exist before 1993, at least not as well, or in the same format.



Community events are regularly held, giving local groups such as CREW (a 50-member performing arts group) a platform to perform.



A Carnival is held in Castle Vale each year. (above) Carnival 1995, themed VE Day.



Children having fun at a community event.





The Lord Mayor of Birmingham Cllr Michael Nangle visited Castle Vale in October 2004 and was interviewed at Vale fm, Castle Vale Community Radio.

The Community Fund was set up to offer financial assistance to residents suffering hardship or distress<sup>6</sup>. There's also Castle Vale Community Radio, which provides training opportunities and broadcasting experience for the local area<sup>7</sup>, and the Community Environmental Trust, which supports all environmental initiatives on the estate<sup>8</sup>. If these and other services fall by the wayside, the estate risks slipping back to the standards of the 1980s. They need to be sustained, and that requires funding.

The Endowment Fund was set up by the Housing Action Trust to provide money to support the successor bodies. "It is a means of ensuring continuity of service," says John Williams, the Housing Action Trust's finance director<sup>9</sup>.

"We began talking about an Endowment Fund in 1999. One idea was buying some land in Birmingham city centre, would have created a steady revenue stream for the estate through rental streams and capital appreciation," says Angus Kennedy. That didn't happen, because the Housing Action Trust was required to invest its funds within the estate. In the end the money was generated from the sale of the Housing Action Trust's remaining stock to Castle Vale Community Housing Association in autumn 2004<sup>10</sup>.

Some successor bodies are likely to be more dependent on contributions from the Endowment Fund than others. For instance, Merlin Venture and the enterprises that it supports (see chapter 7) will seek to become self-sufficient<sup>11</sup>. That's not going to be the case for the Tenants and Residents Alliance, and the 2005 Group, a 'scrutiny group' drawn from resident associations around the estate, which ensures that services are up to scratch. These organisations do not generate funds, but they do keep everyone on their toes, and provide communication networks. Their existence also indicates a high level of motivation – known as 'active citizenship' in regeneration terminology.

Community empowerment means encouraging local people to assist in identifying and resolving problems, before leaving them to sort things out for themselves. It is a feature of Castle Vale that Angus Kennedy rates among the Housing Action Trust's greatest achievements.

"Our efforts to sustain the benefits beyond 2005 would not have worked if we hadn't raised people's sense of self-worth. Confident and strong local leaders are vital to maintain the improved standards," he says.

All too few regeneration programmes have created local leaders, which may have contributed to a widespread suspicion that 'empowerment'

is little more than an honourable intention. For a range of reasons it is a very complex process. Perhaps the biggest hurdle is that people with the right attributes are rare. "You're looking for down-to-earth, forthright, conscientious, bubbly, and assertive individuals", says Dr Dick Atkinson, head of the Balsall Heath Forum, a community group that has led the revival of another of Birmingham's more deprived areas.

Community leaders or 'capacity builders', as they are sometimes known, can also be difficult to identify. And once they have been found it is far from certain that they will have time to spare for community matters. Another problem, as one former Board member suggests is: "Many residents don't understand the language of regeneration. Why would they? But it means that it takes time for them to understand, and contribute to what is happening around them."

Wherever you are, community spokespeople are generally older members of society, people with the time to give something back. It is rare for younger people to come forward, creating a bridge between the generations. That has not quite been the case at Castle Vale, where younger people are embedded in key positions, notably within the ranks of Castle Vale Community Housing Association.

### Final piece of the jigsaw

"The Neighbourhood Partnership came about because we'd clearly missed something. We had all these independent succession organisations, with their own business plans, but they weren't linked. Neither was there a body responsible for patching Castle Vale back into Birmingham," says Angus Kennedy.

Castle Vale Neighbourhood Partnership has responsibility for binding all the succession organisations together. It has also bound other service providers – including the police, and Primary Health Care Trust – into the future of Castle Vale.

The partnership consists of representatives of CVCHA, Birmingham City Council, Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council, Eastern Birmingham Primary Care Trust (PCT), Merlin Venture, West Midlands Police, and six residents<sup>12</sup>.

It is chaired by Lord Corbett of Castle Vale (see chapter 1). "He's not a resident, but he has influence," says Kennedy. "There are residents who could do the job, but as a group they are mature enough to know that they won't have the same level of influence. Would we have the chief executive of the PCT, or the chief of police, or the director of economic development of the city council on the



Castle Vale Community Environmental Trust continues to organise tree planting and other events to raise environmental awareness.

<sup>6</sup>The Community Fund invests its 2% share of the money (£347,750) generated from the sale of the shopping centre back into the community (see Side panel 2.) <sup>7</sup>Castle Vale Community Radio (Vale FM) also produces Vale Mail, a local newsletter published six times a year. <sup>8</sup>The Community Environmental Trust works with schools and youth groups to promote a range of environmental initiatives including litter collection and recycling.

<sup>9</sup>The Endowment Trust Fund will evaluate applications for funding (see Side panel 2). <sup>10</sup>At the time of writing (November 2004), the Endowment Fund was expected to be between £6-8 million, majority financed through the Tenant Market Value (see chapter 8). The funds are expected to last until around 2020. <sup>11</sup>One exception is the network of CCTV cameras, which will be subsidised by the Endowment Fund. <sup>12</sup>One of the six residents is a nominee from the Tenants and Residents Alliance, which holds its own democratic election process. The other five are independent, and democratically elected.



Presenter Tony Robinson and local historian Carl Chinn discuss the changes in Castle Vale during the filming of 'Transforming Castle Vale', a video commissioned by the HAT.

board if it wasn't for Lord Corbett?"<sup>13</sup>

The board of the Neighbourhood Partnership meets quarterly. Administration is handled by a neighbourhood manager – the first began work in November 2004. The manager is the full-time point of contact for the diverse board members. His salary is paid for by five of the core players in the partnership<sup>14</sup>.

“HATs were perceived as expensive, but the Neighbourhood Partnership didn't cost very much, and it could be our greatest structural legacy. Given the momentum nationally towards neighbourhood management, I think it's as pioneering as anything we've done,” says Angus Kennedy.

### The future

It's too early to know whether Castle Vale's strategy for succession has been a success. That will take another 10-15 years to play out. There are grounds for optimism. Paul Scott-Lee, Chief Constable for the West Midlands, says: “The Housing Action Trust retained and empowered the community. Plenty of areas make that claim, although many would not survive without agency support. Castle Vale is not so reliant on external props.”

<sup>13</sup>Lord Corbett will be chairman of Castle Vale Neighbourhood Partnership until at least 2006. <sup>14</sup>The Housing Action Trust dedicated £450,000 towards the running of the Neighbourhood Partnership Board for five years. A further £50,000 towards costs was contributed by the other partners, including CVCHA, Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Police, and the Primary Care Trust. The funds are administered by Castle Vale Community Housing Association.

The legacy of empowerment will also live on in the government's Guide Neighbourhood Programme. In December 2004 Castle Vale was selected as one of eight neighbourhoods with active communities and replicable management structures to spread the message to less fortunate areas. Initial funding has been agreed until June 2007.

Of course, there are causes for concern about the succession strategy, including the continued emphasis on image management. Unlike the Housing Action Trust, which had dedicated PR and communications staff (see chapter 8), responsibility for the projection of a positive message will be spread across all the successor organisations, though guided by the Neighbourhood Management Partnership. As the Trust found, it takes a long time to change perceptions. It would be a shame if the momentum was lost. Nurturing a new generation of local leaders is another issue of concern to many.

A further unknown is whether the successor bodies had enough time under the guiding hand of the Housing Action Trust to fully establish themselves. Are their roots sufficiently deep?

### What is a succession strategy?

“A succession strategy is an agreed and acknowledged framework for activity that will move Castle Vale towards fulfilling its vision once the Housing Action Trust has ended,” wrote researchers from the School of Public Policy in 2000<sup>15</sup>. It is a plan that ensures the benefits of regeneration continue after the government money has been spent.

There are multiple phases to a succession strategy. When developed effectively they respond to local need, and evolve in tandem with local people. The first phase might be to encourage local people to speak with a united voice, followed by the creation of local organisations capable of taking responsibility for issues and services. This may involve a review of existing structures, and a judgement on their long-term viability.

The experience of Castle Vale Housing Action Trust suggests that a succession strategy should be integrated into every aspect of a regeneration programme from the earliest point possible. The idea is to allow sufficient time for successor bodies (see over) to evolve, to establish themselves as independent entities, and to build relationships with each other.

Optimising the time available is also critical in encouraging residents, many of whom may be alienated by the mechanisms and terminology of regeneration, to develop an understanding of what is happening to

their neighbourhood and why. A confident, well-informed local population with democratically elected leaders is a vital ingredient of every succession strategy.

Other considerations integral to succession are encouraging people to communicate, and identifying future funding streams. Succession is also dependent on the overseeing public agency being prepared to give power to the people, not necessarily something that many will have experience of. “It is not in the nature of bureaucracies, but we found that it made us more powerful,” says Angus Kennedy.



Over 4,000 balloons were released at the HAT's Off Fun Day celebration held in October 2004 to mark the wind up of the organisation.

<sup>15</sup>During the winter of 1999-2000, the School of Public Policy (University of Birmingham) evaluated Castle Vale HAT's succession strategy. Its findings were published in a report for the Castle Vale HAT board, 'Evaluating Succession in Castle Vale Housing Action Trust,' Dr Helen Sullivan, Brendan Nevin, and Mike Smith (March 2000).





Lord Corbett (front, right) launches the newly built Sure Start extension to the Yatesbury Avenue Nursery in 2003.

### The successor organisations

#### Castle Vale Neighbourhood Partnership

The Neighbourhood Partnership is the organisation that unites all the successor bodies. It also integrates representatives from the major service providers, making it the principal point of contact between Castle Vale and the wider area. The board meets every quarter. It is composed of six resident representatives, West Midlands Police, CVCHA, Birmingham City Council, Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council, Castle Vale Community Care Partnership, East Birmingham Primary Care Trust, and Merlin Venture. It is chaired by Lord Corbett of Castle Vale.

Tel: 0121 748 8100

#### Castle Vale Community Housing Association

CVCHA is one of a handful of independent resident-controlled community-based housing associations in the country. It was established by two partner housing associations, Sanctuary and Focus, in 1995. Between 1997 and 2004 houses built by Sanctuary or Focus (they were later joined by Mercian) were passed on to CVCHA to manage. Over 1,000 homes were built during this period. In October 2003, the Housing Action Trust's remaining tenants were given the choice of returning to Birmingham City Council or transferring to CVCHA in a landlord ballot. An overwhelming majority (98%) chose CVCHA, making it the dominant landlord in Castle Vale. Today CVCHA provides a range of services across the estate (See chapter 3 for full details).

Tel: 0121 748 8100

E-mail: enquiries@cvcha.co.uk

#### Merlin Venture Ltd

Merlin Venture is the successor body to the economic development function of the Housing Action Trust. It is a social enterprise that offers training and supports local businesses. It also runs a variety of subsidiary social enterprises employing over 100 staff, including a community transportation services, local tenant decorating service, a gardening and landscaping business, and two nurseries providing affordable day care (see chapter 7.)

Tel: 0121 776 8880

#### Tenants and Residents Alliance

The TRA is a democratically-elected tenants' and residents' committee, formed in April 1998 (see chapter 2 for an extended history). It exists to inform, consult and represent the community. At the time of writing the Alliance had a growing membership of 1,015<sup>16</sup>. The Tenants and Residents Alliance was originally core-funded by the Housing Action Trust. Since March 2005 it has received financial support from the Endowment Fund (see below), and the European Social Fund.

Tel: 0121 747 5932

*In addition to the four lead successor organisations, the following have also been established:*

#### 2005 Group

The 2005 Group is a panel of residents who scrutinise the quality of services in Castle Vale. Members are drawn from resident groups across the estate. It works

closely with the Neighbourhood Partnership. Meetings have been attended by representatives of Birmingham City Council, the Learning and Skills Council, Eastern Birmingham Primary Care Trust, the police, Merlin Venture, and CVCHA, who take questions about the standards of street lighting, rubbish collection, and the quality of the environment.

Tel: 0121 748 8100

#### Endowment Trust Fund

The Endowment Trust Fund was set up by the Housing Action Trust to support the successor bodies beyond March 2005. The money was generated from the sale of the Housing Action Trust's remaining stock to Castle Vale Community Housing Association in 2004. Decisions about which successor bodies will receive money, and how much, are taken by the Trust Fund, a registered charity administered by Castle Vale Neighbourhood Partnership.

Tel: 0121 748 8100

#### Community Fund

The Community Fund is a charity that uses a pot of money (£347,750) for good causes and people in need. Originally the money was generated from the sale of the shopping centre, with some additional funding from other sources. The Fund is managed and administered by its Trustees. To date it has provided over £45,000 to 67 applicants.

Tel: 0121 748 5520

#### Community Radio (Vale FM)

The original idea for Vale FM came from a group of young residents who approached

the Housing Action Trust about setting up a community radio station. That was in 1995. Today Castle Vale Community Radio provides broadcasting, training, education and volunteering opportunities for residents of Castle Vale and the wider area. Its approach is based on the belief that radio relies on disciplines which can support the development of individuals and the communities in which they are based. Vale FM has two annual temporary licences, focussed primarily on local issues. In autumn 2004 it applied for a full-time licence as a community radio station to cover North-East Birmingham. It also runs training courses, and publishes Vale Mail, a bi-monthly free newspaper.

Tel: 0121 749 1343, Web: www.valefm.com

#### Community Care Partnership

Castle Vale Community Care Partnership manages the Sanctuary building, which has offered meeting space to charitable and community groups active in the estate since 1999 (see chapters 4 and 5). The Community Care Partnership also manages the Community Fund.

Tel: 0121 748 5520

#### Community Environmental Trust

Castle Vale Community Environmental Trust was established at the beginning of 2000. It has strong connections with the schools, and is engaged in a wide range of environmental initiatives around Castle Vale. It is a company limited by guarantee. Since March 2005 the Trust has been funded by a range of charitable bodies, local businesses, and grant schemes.

Tel: 0121 749 7132.

E-mail: admin@cvcet.org.uk

