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# How local government devolves, and why

Part one: Why work in neighbourhoods  
and communities?

Mapping the territory

November 2006

# 1 Introduction

English local government has a history of experiment in decentralisation and devolution that spans decades. We have learnt much along the way. During 2006, devolution below town and county halls has become a centrepiece of the latest debate about the future of local government. To help inform policy and practice, this briefing gathers together findings into a broad overview of why and how local government has been working in neighbourhoods, empowering communities and devolving power. It is presented in two parts for ease of reference:

- **Part 1:** *Why work in neighbourhoods and communities* analyses why local government devolves, decentralises and empowers, and what impact this can have. It **maps the different strategies which councils have adopted** in engaging with their citizens and communities, and points up national reforms which may help, including on the performance framework, partnership working and frontline councillor roles. It closes by recalling some lessons from experience.
- **Part 2:** *Developing local strategies* follows, offering some more specific **questions and building-blocks** which may be useful to councils taking stock of their approach. It includes further case studies of interesting local authority practice.

In its 2004 manifesto, the Local Government Association demanded not just devolution from central to local level, but also that “power should be devolved through councils and local public services to the communities they serve, by building the capacity of communities to solve problems for themselves and by fostering greater community involvement in local governance.”<sup>1</sup>

After a lively debate, *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (the local government White Paper published in autumn 2006) has put forward a “**do-it-yourself**” framework for devolution by councils, rather than any “one-size-fits-all” model.<sup>2</sup> It suggests that three key elements of the local government framework – commissioning, Best Value and most importantly, the new performance framework that replaces CPA and most other target and inspection regimes – should be **reoriented around the needs and priorities of citizens and communities**. Some changes, such as a **stronger role for frontline councillors**, will be considered by all councils. There remains considerable scope for innovation and variety, and no area has yet perfected its approach.

Part One of this briefing maps three separate dimensions of this kind of activity for local authorities: **responsive local management**, **community engagement**, and **community governance**. Councils will combine these differently according to their aims and context. Part One concludes by mapping the approaches of a number of local authorities according to these dimensions, identifying six “ideal type” strategies:

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<sup>1</sup> LGA, 2004

<sup>2</sup> DCLG, 2006(1)

- 1. Localised management**, focused on making services more responsive, effective and efficient.
- 2. Neighbourhood management**, combining community involvement with localised management.
- 3. Community empowerment**, where the main aim is to engage citizens and build stronger communities.
- 4. Devolved governance**, centring on more local arrangements for democratic decision-making or influence, and on elected representatives.
- 5. Participatory governance**, which combines representative democracy with active community involvement for more responsive decision-making.
- 6. Mixed models**, in which all three dimensions are more balanced.

### The challenges are clear

- 61% of people in England do not believe they can influence local decisions<sup>3</sup>
- Satisfaction with councils is lower than satisfaction with council services<sup>4</sup>
- Even satisfaction with local authority services has fallen recently<sup>5</sup>
- The rate of incremental service improvement is slowing in many areas, suggesting a need for more creative solutions
- The public finances are tightening
- Two-thirds of us still do not vote in local elections
- 35% of people in the most deprived neighbourhoods say they are interested in politics, compared to 69% in the least deprived areas<sup>6</sup>
- 71% feel a strong sense of belonging to their neighbourhood<sup>7</sup>
- 73% say they want neighbourhoods to have more influence over some services and budgets<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> DCLG, 2006(2)

<sup>4</sup> DCLG, 2006(3)

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. ODPM, 2004

<sup>6</sup> Electoral Commission, 2005

<sup>7</sup> Home Office, 2003

<sup>8</sup> LGIU/YouGov, 2006

## 2 Why work in neighbourhoods and communities?

Not all councils have yet decided to prioritise neighbourhood working or community governance. Those for whom it is important cite three rationales:

1. **to make services more responsive, effective and efficient.**
2. **to engage and strengthen their communities.** or
3. **to improve local democracy and devolve power.**

Some councils focus on just one of these goals. For others, all three are important. The rationale helps to determine what to do in practice.

Where service responsiveness is the priority, decentralising management is more likely. If the main concern is to deepen democracy or localise power, we usually see strategies centred on community governance. Where the emphasis is on empowerment or cohesion, civic participation or community capacity-building tend to be fundamental.

Yet it is becoming clear that these objectives and strategies are not opposed. In fact, they support each other. Devolving power and neighbourhood management can offer openings for communities to get involved. Better local democracy relies on civic participation and responsive services. And both devolved governance and community engagement can help drive improvements in delivery.

**WORKING IN  
NEIGHBOURHOODS  
& COMMUNITIES**

**THREE WHYS,  
MANY WAYS**



As this briefing demonstrates, areas will continue to develop different models in response to varying needs and priorities. In some localities there appears to be less public demand today for devolving decision-making or service delivery. This may be because citizens are content to delegate these to competent authorities. But sometimes it is the result of low expectations.

Many authorities pioneering neighbourhood management have also begun to develop complementary strategies for devolution or empowerment. They are doing so partly because levels of satisfaction are falling, and because a majority of people still feel unable to influence local decisions.

Section 4 below explains some of the outcomes sought by these kinds of activity – a stronger local democracy, responsive, high-quality services, citizen empowerment and social cohesion. It sketches out how these may be measured through citizen perceptions, quantitative indicators and qualitative means, and it summarises the strong, growing evidence that such approaches can make a significant difference to these outcomes.

## 3 Mapping the territory

It is not always clear how councils' strategies for working with neighbourhoods and communities can be compared, or what terrain is covered by terms like "neighbourhood working" and "community governance". We can look at this in three dimensions: local *management* (making services more responsive and community-centred), community *engagement* (involving or empowering citizens and communities), and community *governance* (devolving democracy and decision-making power).

### The three dimensions of working with neighbourhoods and communities

#### Management

*Objective:* more effective, co-ordinated, responsive delivery and management

*General approach:* delivering more responsive and better-targeted services through a combination of voice and choice, partnership working and service localisation, responding better to public needs and priorities

*Main outcomes:* improved citizen satisfaction with services; better outcomes; narrowing gaps; better value in services; quality of life

#### Engagement

*Objective:* more active and involved citizens, and more cohesive communities

*General approach:* enable communities and neighbourhoods to get together, express their views, engage in dialogue, challenge constructively, and participate in finding solutions or helping to achieve outcomes

*Main outcomes:* increase in people who feel they can influence local decisions; sense of belonging and ethos of mutuality and respect; raising aspirations; service improvements

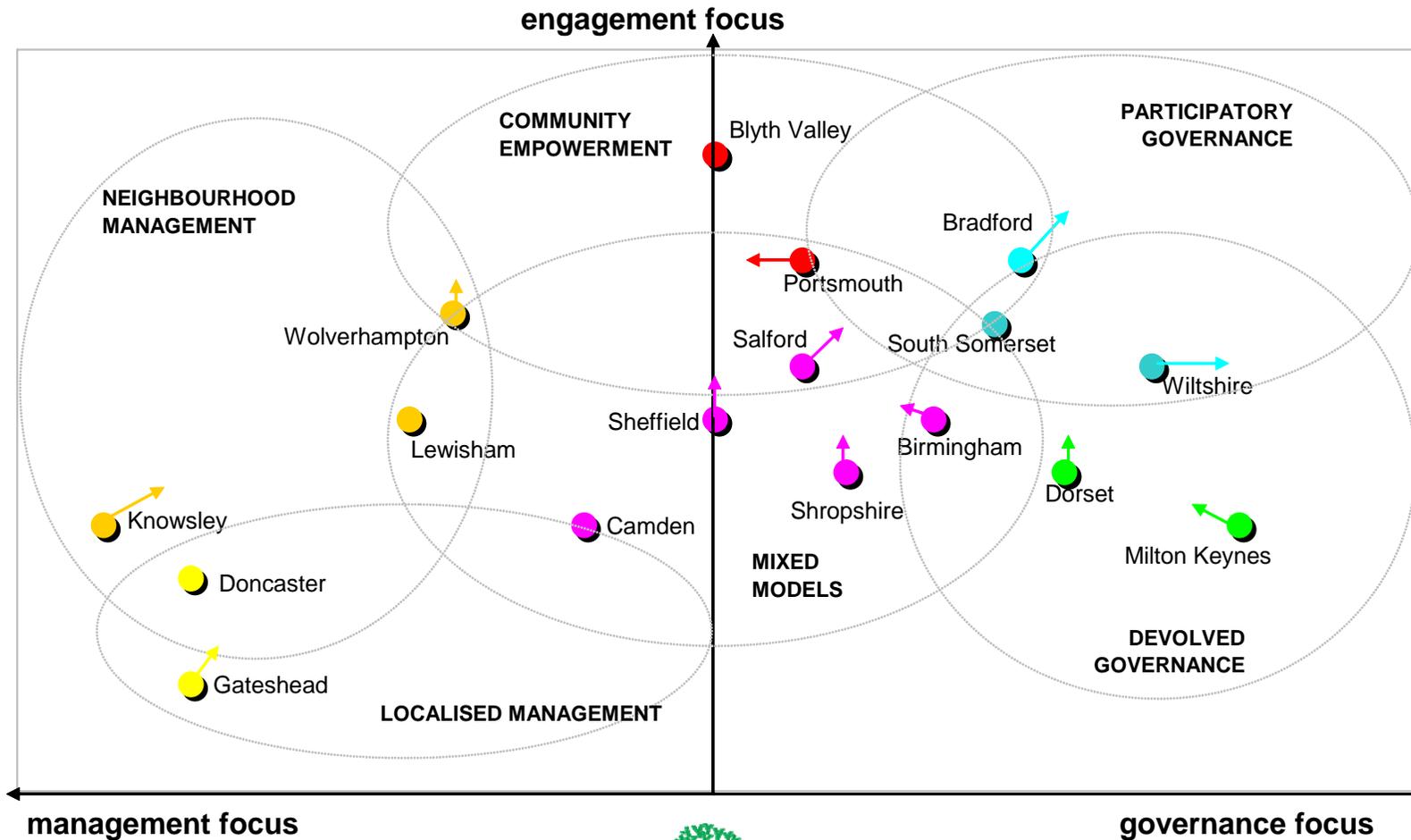
#### Governance

*Objective:* to improve the responsiveness and accountability of decision-making

*General approach:* more active, accessible and empowered democratic representatives

Some councils choose to focus on just one of these dimensions. Others combine them, seeking to ensure that each element supports and feeds into the others. Part Two of this briefing provides more detail about the tactics and building blocks which go to make up an overall approach. The diagram below suggests how various local authority models might fit into this analysis. Many of these councils are reviewing their approach at present: arrows indicate a likely direction of travel, where this is known.

## - TYPOLOGY OF COUNCILS' DEVOLUTION STRATEGIES -



This indicative map cannot capture the variety of each local approach, and should not be taken to imply value judgments. Depending on the context, more modest strategies sometimes prove the most appropriate. In particular, we should remember that governance and management are not opposed – indeed, more responsive management is both necessary for the effective devolution of power, and can follow from it.

Models often vary from neighbourhood to village within any large council area. Responsive management and community governance are increasingly combined. A large group of local authorities would be hard to place on this map, because as yet they lack a developed area-wide strategy for neighbourhood working. Nonetheless, the map helps us to cluster local authority strategies into six different “ideal types”:

1. **localised management.**
2. **neighbourhood management.**
3. **community empowerment.**
4. **devolved governance.**
5. **participatory governance. or**
6. **various mixed models.**

Below we describe what each of these strategies may typically involve, with examples by way of illustration.

### 3.1 Localised management

A strategy of *localised management* focuses primarily on making services more responsive, effective and efficient for local people and communities. The core activity is usually to rethink how the council's services are delivered locally and how its staff work in communities. This may mean:

- appointing neighbourhood co-ordinators with a general remit.
- joining up services in multi-disciplinary teams.
- co-location in area or neighbourhood offices.
- giving patch responsibilities.
- delegation of budgets and management decisions.

The Islington decentralisation reforms of the late 1980s took this kind of approach; but today localised management is seldom confined to the council, although often centres on it. It frequently involves partnership working with other services, from the sharing of data to joint tasking. There may be efforts to involve users through consultations, or to contract community organisations to provide some local services. Localised management is closely related to neighbourhood management, but tends to put greater focus on altering provision, and less on aspects of community empowerment and involvement.

## **GATESHEAD**

### **From area co-ordination to neighbourhood management**

In 2002, Gateshead established a small central team to develop neighbourhood management capabilities. The borough was first divided into five areas, each with an Area Executive Forum (mini-LSP) of senior officers across the public services, doing joint tasking through a "Problem-Solving" framework and with access to a central £120,000 budget. Some participatory action planning has begun at a more local neighbourhood level, notably in the small town of Birtley. 85 natural neighbourhoods were identified, with a "vitality index" collecting data on each. Gateshead recently decided to give five of its ten cabinet members area portfolios, and they will chair the Area Forums, relaunched to include frontline ward councillors and local groups alongside the service partners. The council is piloting joined-up teams in local environmental services which appears to have had a big impact on morale and productivity, and undertaking a wide-ranging Best Value Review of services to neighbourhoods to decide its next steps.

## **3.2 Neighbourhood management**

The phrase "neighbourhood management" has been used to describe a wide variety of approaches. This can sometimes be confusing. In Doncaster, the model began with localising and co-ordinating the provision of local authority services.<sup>9</sup> In Knowsley, there is more of a focus on cross-service delivery partnership. In Wolverhampton, the emphasis is turning toward devolution and community empowerment. But there is a lively National Neighbourhood Management Network sharing practice in this field, and analysts tend to agree on two things:

1. Neighbourhood management is *primarily* about reshaping, influencing and joining up mainstream services, rather than their direct delivery (although more localised, devolved or community-based delivery may be one of its outcomes).
2. Community engagement and resident involvement in determining priorities and achieving outcomes are cornerstones of the approach.<sup>10</sup>

Neighbourhood management strategies tend to include many of the activities associated with localised management. But they place greater emphasis on activities such as community development and resident involvement, participatory action planning, and the setting of priorities and service agreements through neighbourhood charters. These tools are used to help specify and drive through service innovation and improvement.

Linkages to formal governance and political legitimacy need to be considered carefully. Many neighbourhood partnerships involve local councillors. Some hold their own elections (in Camden's Gospel Oak, a door-to-door ballot innovation resulted in a higher turnout than at the equivalent council election, although such practices bring their own

<sup>9</sup> ODPM, 2006(1); also see Part 2 of this briefing

<sup>10</sup> National neighbourhood management network, 2006; ODPM, 2006(2)

risks). Only a few "neighbourhood management" schemes have had no governance structures attached.

The national neighbourhood management pathfinders centre on a strong neighbourhood manager and team capable of championing change, and are led by resident-majority neighbourhood partnerships. They provide cross-service frameworks for tasking and tailoring in areas with populations of 5,000 to 20,000.

Caution is appropriate about the extent to which their intensive approach can be rolled out or spread thinly across several neighbourhoods. But less deprived neighbourhoods need less support, and some council-wide models achieve efficiencies while being effective across the larger area. There is also anecdotal evidence that other public agencies can find it easier to engage through area co-ordination frameworks, rather than having to sit on very many neighbourhood-level bodies.

Wolverhampton offers one impressive story of a serious experiment in neighbourhood management in several areas simultaneously, which has now grown into a city-wide framework of partnership governance. Particular investment continues to be targeted on the poorest areas.

### **WOLVERHAMPTON: Growing city-wide neighbourhood management**

From 2002, Wolverhampton City Council and partners used Neighbourhood Renewal Fund money to support neighbourhood management pilots in its seven most deprived neighbourhoods. Teams were employed by the council, but co-located with local "managing agents" including the YMCA, Groundwork, and a housing association. Each pilot developed neighbourhood action plans with local input, and had a £20,000 "quick wins" budget. Most were led by partnerships of residents and service providers, focused on developing community capacity to engage, and on influencing and reshaping services. Key local projects have been championed and significant funds levered in. The experience was overwhelmingly positive, with clear evidence that the neighbourhoods became cleaner and safer, and of improvements to local facilities. Learnings could be shared rapidly between the seven areas, and it proved easier for strategic partners to engage with this model.

Wolverhampton has now reshaped its landscape of management structures around one city-wide framework of 15 local area and neighbourhood arrangements (LANA), linked to the LSP. The areas vary in size, serving populations from 7500 to 33,000. "Managed areas" of greater need will be served by the full neighbourhood management approach, with a lighter-touch network of support for "co-ordinated areas". Each will have a partnership on which councillors and a majority of local residents and VCS representatives will sit alongside service providers. The neighbourhoods will set up "task and finish" groups and work with commissioning and provider partners to reshape services and develop local solutions. There is a common governance framework that ensures accountability at a local level, with power to hold annual public conferences and to develop participatory Local Action Plans that link neighbourhood issues to citywide priorities. The framework is being designed to help engagement and neighbourhood-focused service planning to grow organically over time.

Wolverhampton CC, 2006; Inspira, 2005; ODPM, 2005(1)

### 3.3 Community empowerment

In *community empowerment* strategies, the main aim is to engage and build stronger communities, and to strengthen the capacity of active citizens and community-based organisations to take initiatives or assume responsibility for aspects of local well-being. Tactics of co-production, community service delivery, partnership working, community assets and devolved decision-making can be used to help achieve this. But the main emphasis falls on developing social capital and cohesion – bonding between like people, bridging the gaps between different groups, or linking citizens to public agencies – and on collective efficacy, or the ability of communities to achieve things together.

For instance, Camden Council has been investing quietly in community involvement development for decades, and has a strong base of local, national and international civil society organisations in its area. It has focused little on community of place, although it has ten neighbourhood partnerships for its more deprived areas and is considering its next steps. Interestingly, it has run two social capital surveys, which have indicated that trust in local service providers and the public's sense of influence are both rising. Attention is being paid to what this reveals about the relationships between social capital and needs such as public health, and interventions are reviewed accordingly.<sup>11</sup>

The two case studies below give a further sense of the variety of community empowerment strategies. Blyth Valley district has developed an excellent network of

#### **BLYTH VALLEY: Reviving hope through community-led transformation**

In 1995, Blyth Valley in Northumberland was suffering structural and economic decline. A number of young people died from drug misuse, leading to a national documentary. The council committed to tackle the root causes and become a "community-led" council. It invested £1 million of its total £10 million budget in strategic community development. 20 workers were employed to build the capacity of local people and groups to take forward their own activities and engage with public agencies. A hub-and-spoke network of "community hubs" was established, at least one building in each ward. They include enterprise, resource and training centres. Community development principles were mainstreamed in corporate and service strategies.

A decade later, the outcomes include a doubling of volunteering, and of voluntary and community organisations (from 300 to over 600, leveraging in £6.5 million in external funding). Once-low housing demand has risen sharply, bringing in investment. The council has used Section 106 receipts to create more community amenities. Blyth Valley also established three community assemblies in 2002, meeting monthly and open to all. They are usually chaired by a councillor. A budget of £80,000 is available for small project bids to each. Up to now they have largely been consultative, but were reviewed by Scrutiny in 2006; more officer support and service devolution to assemblies are under consideration.

IDEA, 2005(3); IDEA, 2006

<sup>11</sup> ippr and Camden, 2005

community hubs and taken an innovative approach to strategic community development. Portsmouth has been building particularly interesting community service delivery relationships. They share a commitment to mainstream involvement and empowerment across their activities, and both have seen the evidence that this is making a difference.

**PORTSMOUTH:  
Mainstreaming community involvement and service delivery**

In 1993, Portsmouth City Council established 24 neighbourhood forums for two-way dialogue with the council. Basically consultative, they are supported by a council link officer, can bid for money and make representations. In 1999, five Community Boards were also set up in the deprived areas of the city to enable residents to determine and monitor the use of Single Regeneration Budget funding in their areas, in particular for community service delivery. The council is encouraging them to achieve independence through asset development. Community Improvement Partnerships are bringing together schools and residents to deliver extended schools and improve learning outcomes. Portsmouth also has an innovative approach to tenant participation, with options for people to get involved in whatever way they prefer – through estate panels, block representatives, “stock option” panels and conferences, and customer focus panels. But there is a tense relationship with a new town council in Southsea.

The Portsmouth Community Network (made up of local communities and the voluntary sector) has a third of Local Strategic Partnership seats. When the Community Strategy identified community involvement as a priority, the council created a corporate “Community Involvement, Empowerment and Development” team to mainstream this ethos, working with the VCS. They are undertaking a Best Value review of engagement structures across the organisation. A Consulting People toolkit recognised by the IDEA is designed to teach staff how to put communities at the heart of what they do. Satisfaction with opportunities for participation has risen from 48% (2001) to 56% (2005), and satisfaction with services from 77% to 83% from 2004 to 2005.

Young Foundation, 2006; Civic Pioneers, 2006; Somerville, 2006

### 3.4 Devolved governance

In devolved governance strategies, the emphasis is on establishing more local arrangements for leadership and decision-making, with elected representatives at the heart. Devolved governance can take a variety of forms:

1. Devolving *within the council*, to area governance committees of councillors. These range from having an advisory or co-ordinating role and distributing small enabling funds up to disposing of large parts of the council’s budget, as they do in South Somerset and Kingston-on-Thames.

2. Devolving *beyond the council*, for instance to parish and town councils (which play the central devolved governance role in Milton Keynes).
3. Devolving *alongside partners* to mini-Local Strategic Partnerships, as in Birmingham, where £120 million was devolved to eleven district strategic partnerships that bring together councillors with other service providers and partners (although even here, councillors tend to have a key role in decision-making with the district directors).
4. *Empowering frontline councillors*, for instance, by giving them administrative support, access to budgets and greater ability to influence decisions affecting their areas. This vital element can and should be integrated in most strategies, so is explored in more detail below.

Quite often, councils that take devolution seriously will combine a number of these approaches. Where devolved governance is designed to have real impact, it is backed up by the provision of adequate support to the representatives involved, by helping to establish connections between them and service managers, citizens and communities, and sometimes by deeper shifts in the way the council and its partners work across all services, an approach which may resemble that of localised or neighbourhood management. The combination of devolved governance and localised cross-service management is an integral part of the model in South Somerset and other places, but appears still to be insufficiently widespread.

### **SOUTH SOMERSET: Devolving through area committees and parishes**

Over the last twenty years, South Somerset district council has delegated much decision-making to four area committees with dedicated support, each holding large budgets. Every ward councillor sits on an area committee, and they are chaired by members of the executive to help information flow from the strategic to the very local level. The area chairs' portfolio includes creating stronger communities, local consultation and community engagement. It also includes liaison with parish councils, local partnerships and regeneration forums, and councillors often attend these bodies' meetings. There is delegated responsibility for planning, and grant support for village halls, small community grants, local business regeneration, play schemes and community development. Area committees devolve to and work with a lively network of parish and town councils, delegating elements of functions like street cleaning, licensing and street trading, and working to ensure that parish plans influence and are informed by wider area plans. There are nine market towns, all with local partnerships supported by the area teams and local councillors, and linked into wider planning processes.

The area-based staff have a community development focus and maintain a network which has drawn in other council frontline staff, public and voluntary sector partners and officers from other Somerset districts. Staff in other disciplines have also been trained to facilitate participative community meetings. The district has had great success in drawing in funding for community involvement projects from external schemes. One study found that 500 out of 700 VCS organisations in the district had received direct or

indirect support from the council. But the age of the area committees having everything devolved to them as “mini-district councils” is past, and operational departments are no longer duplicated. South Somerset have constantly evolved their approach to area working, adapting to the changing environment. The next steps involve setting up neighbourhood forums to inform the area committees - leading place-shaping dialogue, involving stakeholders in holding services to account for service delivery, and exploring further ways of designing services around citizens. It is suggested that the four area chairmen will become full members of the Local Strategic Partnership, acting as advocates for stakeholders, citizens, and the area’s neighbourhood forums.

Young Foundation, 2006; Civic Pioneers, 2006; IDEA, 2006(2)

### 3.5 Participatory governance

Like devolved governance, *participatory governance* strategies are intended to establish more locally responsive arrangements for shaping and making decisions. They differ in putting a greater emphasis on active community involvement. While elected representatives tend still to play a central role in these systems, they also make space for citizens and communities to get involved in setting priorities, and influencing or even helping to make decisions. There are few well-developed models of this kind in English local government today. But it is an area of growing experimentation, often inspired by international experience.

Salford has an interlocking structure of councillor area committees, community committees, and neighbourhood management executive panels, including opportunities for citizens to participate in deciding how devolved budgets of over £350,000 council-wide are spent, and a developing framework for reshaping mainstream services. Wiltshire has built an effective county-wide community planning process with substantial public participation, which helps inform the Community Strategy and draws on parish plans. It operates at a “community area” level in which market towns are clustered together with their hinterland, based on an analysis of shared interests, detailed historical research and present-day identifications. New community area boards are now planned, building on this participatory process to bring elected representatives together across the three tiers to make decisions about devolved services and budgets. Bradford (see below) provides another excellent example of an area working to bring devolved governance and citizen participation together through an “emergent” approach involving many actors and tactics.

**BRADFORD:*****Sharing power, joining up well-being***

In Bradford, a framework bringing devolved governance together with citizen empowerment is evolving. 15 years ago the council set up five area committees for communicating with citizens and influencing services. They hold small delegated budgets, including for environment and highways, and are supported by dedicated staff, who run over 250 “neighbourhood forums” and public engagement events annually – with over 20,000 attendance in 2005/6. Bradford also has 13 parish and town councils, five established in the last half-decade, and the council is taking a positive attitude toward the establishment of more – possibly even for Bradford Trident NDC area.

Bradford Vision LSP also developed an innovative “neighbourhood action planning” model. People have come together in partnerships in 65 self-selecting neighbourhoods, working with service providers to identify priorities and actions, with £5,000 support for plans and £20,000 for actions. Mainstream services have been reshaped, over ten times as much funding has been levered in and one participant has become an elected member. From 2004, the council decided that this locality planning should take place everywhere in the district, including parish plans and a new “urban village” process. The council and the LSP have now been working together on area action-planning to join up the strategic with the very local, initially through a budget of £1.4 million and now through a further £1m district-wide devolved to area committees for commissioning priority actions. Bradford is also one of a handful of areas experimenting with “participatory budgeting”, and has 30 participatory “community of interest” plans. These diverse strands are not yet fully joined up. But the council looks set to play a fuller role in convening the LSP in future, and the value of the overall approach is becoming clear.

Young Foundation, 2006

### 3.6 Mixed models

Locally responsive management, citizen engagement and community governance are not opposed. Many areas combine all three, and in some, no clearly dominant thread can be identified. These are captured in the centre of our map as *mixed models*. As neighbourhood working and community governance practices become embedded, it may be that more councils move into this territory.

We can identify three different kinds of “mixed model”:

1. **Light-touch pluralists:** some councils have thus far decided to accept or encourage many different approaches in their neighbourhoods. For instance, Sheffield at present works with a wide variety of community forums and other bodies, and uses many of the tactics discussed in this briefing here and there, though it is establishing new neighbourhood pilots to explore a more co-ordinated approach. Wakefield has used Safer & Stronger Communities Neighbourhood Element money to trial three different models of neighbourhood governance – ‘Community leadership’ (councillor-led), ‘Collective efficacy’

(gathering together the community sector), and 'Real-time democracy' (with public influence and participatory decision-making supported by ICT).

2. **The 'London effect':** a number of London boroughs emphasise service delivery and place a greater accent on engaging and supporting people in communities of interest, rather than neighbourhoods; there is also often scepticism about devolved governance. Though not universal, this effect seems to be motivated by diverse, often-mobile or transient populations, local inequalities, concerns about political entryism, and bad memories of the experiment in Tower Hamlets (which has more recently developed an innovative model of partnership governance through mini-LSPs). Nonetheless, councils as diverse as Southwark, Newham and Kingston-on-Thames have devolved substantial budgets to councillors or community bodies.
3. **Three-dimensional hybrids:** some authorities combine substantial elements of responsive management, community governance and citizen engagement in their strategy, with no dimension clearly paramount. For example in Birmingham, this three-dimensional approach is an attempt to tackle the complex variety of challenges faced by a deprived and ethnically-diverse city of a million people, while building on a rich history of experiments in community engagement and decentralisation.

#### **SHEFFIELD:**

##### *Lively diversity, slowly emerging coherence*

In the mid-1990s Sheffield City Council established 12 Action Areas, each with an Area Panel bringing frontline councillors together with some support to discuss local issues, develop strategic plans and help meet local needs through the distribution of small budgets. Influencing mainstream services has always been a feature, and services such as Children and Families have recently been localised (albeit on different boundaries). The council recognises and works closely with more bottom-up Community Forums, set up by local people across much of the city on a wide variety of models with populations ranging from a few thousand up to 40,000. There is also a long history of tenant involvement. Area Panels and Community Forums have worked together, e.g. in Southey & Owlerton, and are expected to do so more in future. Sheffield has an effective Neighbourhood Information System tracking change graphically over time, and a programme of "transformational projects" targeting investment toward closing gaps.

Sheffield has a number of anchor community organisations, including Netherthorpe & Upperthorpe Community Association, Manor and Castle Development Trust and Burngreave NDC, all of which have helped to influence citywide policy. The council is currently working in five areas to strengthen neighbourhood arrangements, trying out a number of models. Local partnerships will be established for each, with a leadership role for frontline members, strong community engagement and influence, possibly neighbourhood charters, and a twin focus on public service improvement and community engagement. Sheffield has also innovated in asset transfer, factoring in a history of maintenance and service provision to offset market valuations, and is examining its portfolio of community assets.

Sheffield CC, 2006; Young Foundation, 2005-2006

# 4 Outcomes of effective neighbourhood working

Neighbourhood working and community governance have a range of outcomes. Devolution can damage service quality and value for money if mishandled. But done properly, it can lead to significant improvements in **citizen perceptions**, quantifiable progress against “**hard**” **indicators**, and **qualitative transformations** in local well-being. The following table shows three main outcome areas: a flourishing local democracy, responsive, good quality services, and social cohesion and empowerment. These areas overlap, and many of the outcomes correlate.

Outcomes of neighbourhood working and community governance

Outcome area	Quantifiable outcomes	Citizen perceptions	Qualitative outcomes
<b>Democratic life</b>	- election turnout	- trust in local government and elected representatives	- responsiveness of decisions to local needs and priorities
	- levels of public involvement in governance (e.g. school governors, local meetings)	- satisfaction with the council - sense of influence over local decisions	- quality of local leadership
<b>Empowerment and cohesion</b>	- social capital indicators	- interest in public issues	- tensions or cooperation among different social groups
	- equity of participation	- personal aspirations and preparedness to take action	- levels of interaction or segregation
	- local community sector	- attitudes toward mutuality and respect - expectations of the state	
<b>Responsive, good-quality services</b>	- service outcomes	- match between provision and local priorities (public value)	- services which respond better to local needs
	- equity of outcome between rich and poor areas - efficiencies and value for money	- satisfaction with local services	- higher quality services and step-change innovation - new facilities or services to address unmet need

Effects on service performance and efficiencies are quite easy to attribute to changes in practice. But higher-level outcomes like a sense of influence over local decisions, satisfaction or trust are affected by a wide range of factors. Sometimes the effect of an intervention will appear only after a few years. Sometimes a major improvement in local quality of life, such as the conversion of a derelict building into a vibrant community centre, cannot be captured by indicators.

Recently, service decisions have often been driven by performance targets set by central government. Often the value of locality working lies in its ability to join up services, to

make changes in one area (e.g. clearing rubbish from an open space) whose effects will be felt most in another (e.g. lower crime, meaning less costs throughout the criminal justice system). So the value of neighbourhood working and community governance can be hard to attribute straight away, or to match up with service silo incentives. Where resources are constrained, the temptation is sometimes to cut back on investment in such activities.

However, the next wave of Local Area Agreements is likely to shift the incentives toward taking **“whole-system” approaches to improving local well-being**: joining up services creatively, involving the public, and taking preventive approaches. Done well, neighbourhood working and community governance can make a vital contribution: identifying diverse needs, making connections, opening up access to the hard-to-reach, developing innovative local solutions, giving communities the sense that the local state will respond, and helping them to take more ownership of issues themselves.

That is why a growing number of councils are viewing such activity as **a strategic function of equal value to performance management, strategy or finance**. It is becoming critical for the local government community to share more lessons about successes and failures in this field, the applicability of different models and the value each can generate.

## 4.1 Evidence of positive impact

At the turn of the century, an important Economic and Social Research Council study of six council areas by a group of leading academics found that variations in civic participation were not sufficiently explained by either socio-economic status (although this had a strong influence) or levels of social capital.<sup>12</sup> It concluded that **how political leaders, managers and other civic institutions behave toward citizens makes a big difference**: do we have an attitude of “we know best” and a system to match, or do we encourage residents to become involved and offer a set of opportunities which make sense to them? The approach will influence whether relations with communities develop in the direction of co-operation or conflict. The evidence in the box below illustrates these conclusions. (Clearly, as the study took place in 2000-2002, these councils have changed significantly in the interim and Hull, in particular, has moved on.)

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<sup>12</sup> Research conducted 2000-2002 and presented in Lowndes et al, 2002; ippr, 2006 provides the most accessible introduction to the findings

### Governance matters - ESRC research, 2000-2002

Across a range of indicators, people in Middlesbrough were typically around 10% more likely to take actions to influence local decisions than people in Hull, despite their similar socio-economic profile – although people in Hull were more likely to enter into conflict through demonstrations or strikes.

“In Hull, unresponsive institutions within the political, managerial and civic domains are linked into a vicious circle that militates against any new form of political participation... In Middlesbrough, a different approach has emerged in which the different rule sets have interacted to enhance participatory opportunities. There are strong incentives for community activists to participate, and equally good reasons why politicians and officers should encourage them to do so and listen to their arguments.”

Lowndes et al, 2002; IPPR, 2006

An extensive study for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now DCLG) of the **value of community involvement**, in particular in improving services to deprived areas, recently found that “the benefits can take some time to emerge and are often difficult to quantify. However, the evidence shows systematically that the benefits tend to outweigh the costs. Moreover, the benefits from deliberative engagement and community provision forms of involvement accrue to the community at large, as well as the particular users targeted and engaged in the process.”<sup>13</sup>

### Findings for community involvement in mainstream services

It was found that community engagement can give providers better local knowledge; make users' access to services easier; increase provider awareness of the need for joined-up solutions; enhance the motivation of frontline staff, and prompt innovation in service design and delivery. This translated into:

- new or improved services
- reductions in unit and other costs of service provision (e.g. lower housing management costs thanks to reduced tenant turnover)
- increased satisfaction
- improved environmental quality
- reductions in both crime and the fear of crime
- better prospects for improved health, and
- improved employment opportunities.

There appears to be particular value to including an element of community provision.  
ODPM, 2005(2)

Evaluation of Single Regeneration Budget programmes found that putting resources into community engagement at the earliest stage possible made projects more likely to be robust, and made it more likely for benefits to be sustained after the SRB funding ended. The National Audit Office's value for money study of the Single Community Programme concluded that community participation was "vital to ensuring value for money in public services."<sup>14</sup>

There is a shortage of systematic studies into the impact of devolved governance strategies on turnout, trust, satisfaction or sense of influence, although there is some indication that these can be positively effected. But widespread indications of **the effectiveness of neighbourhood management** have now been confirmed by evidence of significant benefits to both citizen perceptions and service outcomes across the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder programme, as the next box shows.

This evidence demonstrates the real value of more co-ordinated and flexible services. That approach to management can dovetail with a wide range of community governance frameworks. Devolved decision-making is unlikely to be effective if local service networks are not configured accordingly to respond. As explained below, some councils have begun to demonstrate how neighbourhood management might be scaled up to cover a whole area. **All councils should actively consider how these lessons might inform the evolution of their own models.**

### **FINDINGS FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT PATHFINDERS:**

#### **A good value way to improve public satisfaction and local outcomes**

New findings suggest that when done well, *neighbourhood management works*: it improves liveability, safety and happiness. The data come from the evaluation of hard outcomes and the household survey of pathfinders, compared to a group of similarly-deprived neighbourhoods to isolate council-wide effects. The findings show what kind of improvements can be achieved in three years through a modest investment in community involvement and service responsiveness, and without major regeneration funding. The effect of averaging conceals the fact that many pathfinders have experienced more dramatic impacts from interventions targeted at particular local problems.

- 31% of residents think the pathfinder neighbourhoods have improved in the last three years, compared to 22% in comparable neighbourhoods (almost half as many again).
- Overall satisfaction with them as places to live rose from 71% to 75%, with strong increases of 10-15% in a handful of areas and no change in comparable neighbourhoods.
- Residents' feeling that they can influence local decisions rose from 23% to 26%, the national benchmark, while remaining static at 23% in comparable neighbourhoods.

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<sup>14</sup> Home Office, 2004; NAO, 2004

- Public perception of problems in the areas fell, in some cases sharply. Concerns about burglary fell by a quarter (14% in absolute terms) and arson by a third (10% absolute).
- Concerns about key problems fell faster in the pathfinders, where worries about arson, vandalism and graffiti, and litter and rubbish all improved by 6% more than comparators.
- Happiness about how most problems are being dealt with improved a lot more in the pathfinders. Satisfaction with street cleaning increased by 8% while falling by 2% in comparable neighbourhoods, and satisfaction with policing rose by 6% compared to no significant change in the comparators.
- Analysis of actual crime outcomes suggests that crime has fallen in three-quarters of pathfinders, and that the crime gap was closing with the wider local authority area more often than it was widening. There is also considerable evidence of real improvements to the local environment and facilities.
- Evaluation shows that real changes were made to mainstream service delivery as a consequence of neighbourhood management, achieving more accessibility, more responsiveness to needs, higher quality services and higher levels of provision. Many of the innovations have been scaled up and do not involve displacement effects.
- There has been strong engagement by key partners including the police, Primary Care Trusts and schools, and good involvement on the part of JobCentre Plus, housing associations, youth and leisure services.
- Outcomes from targeted interventions in individual areas include a 15% fall in teenage pregnancies (Hastings), a 63% reduction in vehicle arson (Blacon), satisfaction with street cleansing more than doubled from 30% to 66% (Bolton), and a 17% drop in reported crime (Newcastle under Lyme).
- Changes were naturally perceived most in the visible services. Impacts on public health or learning are less obvious to local people, though there is anecdotal evidence of progress on these points. The key issue of worklessness has not been prioritised so far.
- Perhaps because of neighbourhood management's particular focus on service influencing, relatively little impact can be seen on indicators of social capital or cohesion.

ODPM, 2006(1); ODPM, 2006(3)

## 5 Dialogue in local governance: making the connections

A vital lesson from our experience of neighbourhood working and community governance, in England and internationally, is the importance of genuine, open, two-way dialogue between strategic leadership and local communities.<sup>15</sup> Such conversations can be achieved in different ways, but they have four conditions:

1. Citizens and communities need to feel that their voices are listened to.
2. Strategic community leadership across an area should be *connected to* but *differentiated from* more-local community advocacy, with the interface between the two roles being well-balanced.
3. Basic mutual acknowledgement and respect should be maintained between strategic and community leaderships, even in cases of disagreement.
4. The place of other public services in this dialogue needs to be clear.

These lessons have important implications for how local governance frameworks are set up, from area committees and frontline councillors to Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements.

But the search for a complete governance model, designed by the council to fit the needs of all neighbourhoods, can often result in a system which is complex, overbearing or offputting in practice. Space must be created for effective bottom-up neighbourhood initiatives to grow. Simple routes in to access the system are also essential if residents are to feel a greater ability to influence local decisions. Simpler and more effective local governance, more strategically integrated and more locally responsive, could make a big difference – as is illustrated by the findings of a recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation study.

### **Whose town is it anyway? The state of democracy in two northern towns** **Key findings**

- Only 5% of public spending in Burnley and Harrogate is controlled by the district councils – but many people see 'The Council' (district) as the main local agency.
- Over 30 different organisations, many unelected "quangos", have some role in governing Burnley and Harrogate.
- Residents rely on local newspapers for information about public bodies – but the press continues to concentrate on district councils.
- The party system is being effectively kept going by just 100 people in each district.
- Internationally, local democratic participation and civic engagement tend to be higher where there are smaller units of local government – yet British local authorities are already several times larger than their European equivalents.
- Only 24% of Harrogate respondents, and 16% of those in Burnley, feel able to influence local decisions.

JRF, 2006(2)

## 5.1 How do area governance and neighbourhood working relate?

Councils that serve a wide geographic area (for instance in the rural shires) or have large populations (as with the core cities) tend to be most likely to adopt devolved governance models, considering it an important way to get closer to their communities and underpin local democracy. But they often devolve first to their own structures, serving areas which are still quite large and cover many different neighbourhoods.

Where a council's area governance structures cover small populations, match local geographic identities, and are set up to engage effectively and reciprocally with the range of local services and communities, they can fulfil many if not all of the functions of community governance. However, area structures typically cluster together a few wards. This makes them less natural as forums for community engagement, while valuable for elements of service co-ordination and devolved decision-making. Where they exist, these larger area structures tend to play just one part in community governance, albeit a significant one.

Many counties and cities have come to see area governance as an intermediary level of organisation. It makes it easier to engage with genuinely local communities, parishes or neighbourhood forums, while providing a sufficiently strategic forum for co-ordination with other public services. This has driven the rise of the "mini-LSP" at area level.

Tensions can arise between area and neighbourhood arrangements, in particular where the distinctive contribution of each is not recognised, or no relationship is built between them. Where they coexist, the ingredients of success are to maintain constructive communication, and to agree a clear distribution of functions, powers and responsibilities. Experience suggests there can be a positive correlation between good area working and effective neighbourhood working, especially in larger council areas.<sup>16</sup>

## 5.2 Partnership working and neighbourhoods: the future of Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements

Partnerships and joint working across the public services have become increasingly central in the move from local government to local governance. This has often led to confusion about roles and accountabilities, and the relationships between different thematic and geographic partnerships. Nonetheless, the picture is slowly becoming clearer and, as much of this briefing suggests, partnerships are today often a vital part of effective working in neighbourhoods and communities.

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<sup>16</sup> Young Foundation, 2005-2006

The recent national evaluation of LSPs found that many of them have recently been developing relationships with “sub-localities”.<sup>17</sup> But area-based relationships are not yet as well developed as thematic partnerships. The purposes and effects of “below the LSP” interactions are seldom well-defined, as is the role of ward councillors in these processes. The evaluation identified scope for better co-ordination between councils and LSPs in locality working, and three key roles for LSPs in this respect:

1. Acting as a **governance hub**, providing a venue for sub-local or neighbourhood initiatives to deliberate about common concerns and have a combined voice.
2. Providing a place for **strategic oversight**, with the LSP helping to manage the interface between the needs and aspirations of the whole locality and those of its more local areas or neighbourhoods.
3. **Learning facilitation**, for instance identifying and mainstreaming good practice happening in one particular neighbourhood.

Mini-LSPs bringing together public service partners with elected representatives are an increasingly common practice, although only some ward councillors for the area tend to sit on them (there is sometimes then a parallel forum for councillors to co-ordinate input or take decisions). In Birmingham, District Strategic Partnerships provide a means to link down to networks of neighbourhood forums and other community organisations. The IDEA has been providing a pilot programme of support for greater community sector input to LSPs.<sup>18</sup>

Increasingly, local government is playing the leading role in convening LSPs. The White Paper proposes a duty on key partners to co-operate to agree joint targets, suggesting also that councils and their partners should create joined-up community engagement strategies, and that the role of local government in public health and well-being will be reinforced.

While there is still considerable enthusiasm for the future potential of Local Area Agreements (LAAs), they have often proven challenging and frustrating to negotiate. In some places they may have helped give more focus to neighbourhood working, but they have also occasionally disrupted it. An initial evaluation has revealed a number of barriers to involving communities properly.<sup>19</sup> However, in future the White Paper envisages them becoming “implementation plans” for the Community Strategy, including more area-based funding. It also makes them a cornerstone of the new performance framework, as a basis for councils and their partners to agree a small number of targets with government. If achieved, this should leave space for more bottom-up input into determining LAA priorities and approaches in future. Neighbourhood charters or more local area agreements may provide tools to achieve that end.

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<sup>17</sup> ODPM, 2005(3)

<sup>18</sup> IDEA, 2006

<sup>19</sup> ODPM, 2005(4)

## 5.3 Frontline councillors and local democracy

After the 2000 Act many “backbench” councillors have not found a new and meaningful role, although there are councils which have made significant efforts in this regard through practices including area committees, area-based scrutiny as in Shropshire, or devolving budgets to frontline councillors as in Staffordshire and Surrey. Several studies of the frontline councillor role, good practice and remaining dilemmas have recently been published.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> IDEA, 2005(2); JRF, 2006; IDEA, 2006

## About the Young Foundation

The Young Foundation brings together insight, innovation and entrepreneurship to meet social needs. We have a 55 year track record of success with ventures such as the Open University, Which?, the School for Social Entrepreneurs and Healthline (the precursor of NHS Direct). We work across the UK and internationally – carrying out research, influencing policy, creating new organisations and supporting others to do the same, often with imaginative uses of new technology. We now have over 60 staff, working on over 40 ventures at any one time, with staff in New York and Paris as well as London and Birmingham in the UK.

[www.youngfoundation.org](http://www.youngfoundation.org)

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# How local government devolves, and why

Part two:  
Developing local strategies

November 2006

# 1 Introduction

**Part One** of this briefing, *Why work in neighbourhoods and communities?* explained why local government devolves, decentralises and empowers, and what impact this can have. It outlined the significance of current national-level reforms, and recalled some lessons from experience. It also mapped the various strategies which councils have adopted in engaging with their citizens and communities.

## **Six different devolution strategies**

These ideal-type strategies, explained at greater length in Part One of this briefing, each mix **citizen engagement**, **devolved governance** and **responsive management** in different ways:

### **1. LOCALISED MANAGEMENT**

*Making services more responsive, effective and efficient*

### **2. NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT**

*Combining community involvement with localised management*

### **3. COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT**

*Engaging citizens, building social capital and stronger communities*

### **4. DEVOLVED GOVERNANCE**

*Localised decision-making centring around elected representatives*

### **5. PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE**

*Combining devolved democratic arrangements with active community involvement*

### **6. MIXED MODELS**

*More equal focus on citizen engagement, devolved governance and local management*

Now in **Part Two - Developing local strategies**, we outline:

- some **practical questions** which councils can use to review what they are currently doing in this area, and what their direction of travel might now be.
- some **basic building-blocks**, or tactics and approaches which can be brought together to make up different kinds of local strategy, illustrated by short case studies.

The October 2006 local government White Paper set out a clear policy direction: public satisfaction and involvement will become important measures of local government success in future. Councils everywhere should see the value in **taking stock together with their partners and communities** of what they are doing, and identifying areas where they might go further. This is an agenda for **continuous improvement** in the practices of local government and its partners. Innovation can be reconciled with well-established arrangements through evolution, rather than revolution. We hope this briefing provides further inspiration for the dialogue that should already be happening in each locality.

## 2 Taking stock, taking action

The context of needs and priorities will vary from council area to council area, and from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. So will the level of existing activity, capacity and political commitment. When local authorities are reviewing their approach to neighbourhood working, the following questions are important.

### 2.1 What should inform the development of your strategy?

#### Taking stock

- What is the local authority **currently doing to encourage, support or deliver neighbourhood working, community governance and empowerment?** What are **partners** currently doing?
- Could these activities be **better co-ordinated**, and are they delivering **best value**?
- **How much capability is there to take responsibility for initiatives locally?** *Where* is this capacity – in communities, the council, elected representatives or partner organisations? *Where* are the *shortfalls* in capacity?
- Is community capacity spread evenly or concentrated in particular small areas? What is the link between this and structures such as parishes, regeneration partnerships or strong formal community bodies?

#### Defining outcomes

- What are the **key local needs**, and how could they be better served?
- What are the **main outcome areas** where you want to see improvement?
- How do these needs or outcomes link to any other outcomes being used, for example in local area agreements or community strategies?

#### Evolving strategy

- Of the strategies identified above **which relate most closely to your own approach**, and **what should your direction of travel now be?** How can you build on existing strengths and local capacity, *and learn from any failings?*
- *What* is the nature of the **commitment** local political leaders are making to devolution? What are the **concerns** of local politicians? *Where* are there gaps in support, at both strategic and local levels?
- How should you **strike the balance** between taking a common approach across your locality, and engaging with a variety of different neighbourhood arrangements?

- Are you clear about **the relationship between democratic representation and participation**, and do you have a local framework for securing a representative community voice and accountability for devolved activities?

## Public dialogue

- **What are the views of partners, residents and communities on these questions?**
- What contributions can be made in future by other **public agencies, the voluntary and community sector, and neighbourhood bodies**, as well as by elected members and council staff?
- How will **residents** know about the opportunities you offer?

Public sector experience of radical change has demonstrated that “big bang” approaches are often not the most desirable. Evolutionary change will frequently have a greater chance of success. But for such change to happen it needs to be approached seriously, with long-term commitment, and an understanding that it may take many years for it to become properly embedded.

## 2.2 Closer to People – the core actions

In *Closer to People*, the LGA and IDEA offered an initial guide to how every council can take stock of its arrangements for devolving to communities and local organisations, and for empowering the public to influence their lives and local services.<sup>21</sup> This will mean each council putting in place what they believe to be appropriate for their area. *Closer to People* set out a small number of essential basics that every council should consider and address:

1. Every council should **know and understand the distinctive communities and neighbourhoods** that it serves.
2. Every council should have arrangements in place to **enable people to be more actively engaged in shaping the future of their communities** – giving them **influence** over local services and action, and **helping them to develop the capacity to tackle local issues for themselves**.
3. Every council should ensure that it has mechanisms in place to **allow communities to shape services and hold their providers to account** (including making it easy for them, should they wish, to help in performance management of contracts).
4. Every council should **provide practical support for councillors** in their representative role to act more effectively as community advocates and leaders, and **help communities, where they wish, to exercise direct power and influence** through parish councils or similar bodies.

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<sup>21</sup> LGA & IDEA, 2006

These identify general attributes and outcomes of a good system, without prescribing its detail. They leave it open for each area to evolve its own strategy by drawing on the wide range of tactics, structures and processes described in this briefing and elsewhere. But they set a challenging benchmark against which to assess improvement. While most councils have already made serious strides, few could honestly say that they are satisfied on all these points.

## 3 Knowing your neighbourhoods and communities

The first core action set out in *Closer to People* is for every council to know and understand the distinctive communities and neighbourhoods that it serves. The aim is to develop a shared view of local communities and neighbourhoods with which local people can identify, as a sound and sustainable basis on which to engage and devolve in future.

There is no right or wrong size for a community or neighbourhood – it depends on where people say they live, their local identity and patterns of life. It may be the village or parish. It may be the town, or a part of the town. In cities it may be a small part of the local authority's area. It is also important to ensure that a focus on "communities of place" should not crowd out responsiveness to "communities of interest".

People's own views of their community, town or village, which are likely to be shaped by historical or physical boundaries, the pattern of the built environment or social or family networks rarely coincide with administrative boundaries such as council wards. When defining neighbourhoods, local authorities should try to ensure that residents' views of their neighbourhood are reflected in strategic planning. They also need to recognise that communities, neighbourhoods and parishes with which people identify will frequently be fewer than 5,000 people.

Local authorities in urban and rural areas have tended to take differing approaches to defining neighbourhoods. However the most effective approaches have included working with local residents, councillors and local community groups to identify natural neighbourhoods. The new power of community governance review proposed in the White Paper will provide an avenue for such processes.

### **Defining Urban Neighbourhoods**

Examples of how an urban area can approach defining its neighbourhoods include Wolverhampton City Council who recently involved over 1,250 residents in agreeing boundaries for its new local area and neighbourhood arrangements across the city, with an average population of over 15,000.

Sheffield City Council took an approach that sought to combine local residents' views of their neighbourhood with the social geography of local areas to map out neighbourhoods with an average population of circa 5,000 in order to improve service intelligence and responsiveness.

Wolverhampton CC, 2006; Young Foundation, 2005-2006

Rural areas face different issues in defining neighbourhoods, primarily because of the sparsity of population. Many rural areas are already parished and this provides a strong starting point for identifying natural community boundaries. However this is not the case

universally even in rural areas, and parish structures are not consistent – parishes can consist of a few hundred people or even less. In recognition of this, some rural district and county councils have taken an approach to mapping wider area communities that has involved clustering parishes together alongside non-parished areas to improve service co-ordination, consultation or devolution. This is often done for a market town and its hinterland, where that suitably reflects local identity and service delivery.

### **Rural Clusters in Wiltshire**

Wiltshire County Council is working with its four districts and 256 parishes in 20 community areas. These were proposed based on a study by a local historian of past settlement patterns and contemporary travel-to-work and shopping areas. This was followed by widespread consultation. These community areas have been used for community planning and are now intended as a vehicle for more devolved decision-making and service co-ordination.

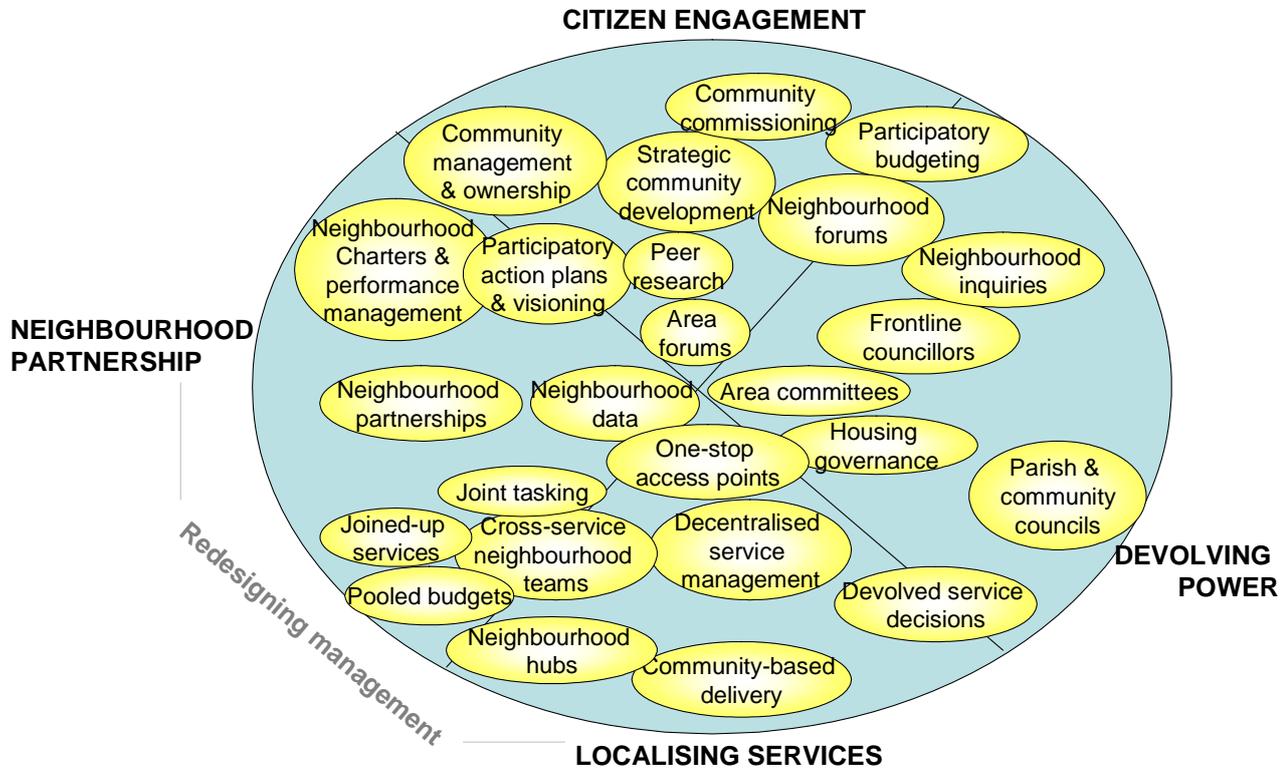
Young Foundation, 2005-2006

# 4 Strategic building blocks

This briefing describes some tools, tactics and practical approaches which local authorities have used for undertaking neighbourhood working and community governance. The three dimensions we used in Part One to analyse local authorities' devolution strategies can also be used to categorise these building blocks:

1. **Citizen engagement**, empowerment and participation, including new kinds of community development and action planning.
2. **Devolving power**, governance and democratic decision-making, including to frontline councillors.
3. **Redesigning management** to be more responsive, divided further into
  - **Localising services**, under which staff, management processes, decisions and/or delivery mechanisms are decentralised, and
  - **Neighbourhood partnership** approaches, which bring together public service partners, often with citizens and representatives.

The diagram below shows some examples of these building blocks. The more innovative the approach typically is, the further it is from the centre of the diagram.



## 5 Redesigning management and community-centred services

There are two related kinds of approach to making local management and public services more responsive: localising elements of services, and helping to join them up so that they work more in partnership. Both of these can help to support other approaches – for instance, where responsibility for some services is delegated to more local community governance structures, or where communities and public services participate together in developing local plans or charters. Some tactics for localisation and partnership working are described below.

### ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- Do you have agreement about which services or elements of services can be localised, and which should be standard across the council area? Is this published so that community bodies know what the potential is?
- Will the council financial and management systems support this approach e.g. disaggregating budgets, performance indicators, and contracts to community and neighbourhood level?
- Do you collect information on current patterns of service use and can you use it to refine and target services to meet particular needs and preferences? Do your councillors and service managers understand how engaging the community can help achieve improved outcomes? What local examples of “co-production” such as litter and recycling or in children’s services can you use to illustrate the idea?

LGA & IDEA, 2006

### 5.1 Localising services

**Neighbourhood data** is starting to be used in service planning in a number of places. A number of local authorities, in particular in renewal areas, have developed information systems at ward-level. Some, such as the London Borough of Waltham Forest, have taken this work further and developed local information systems that work at neighbourhood level. More recently a number of authorities have combined “soft” and “hard” data to produce a fuller picture of neighbourhood life. Combining “soft” qualitative data and neighbourhood performance data helps clarify what interventions might add most value to a local area.

Neighbourhood data as a tool for localising services can only be successful when it is accessible to those providing and using services. There are a number of examples of neighbourhood data systems that have not been successfully integrated into neighbourhood working. The reasons for this are varied, but complex design,

unsustainable IT systems, irrelevance of data or a lack of buy-in by partners have all been cited.

### Neighbourhood data – two approaches

SNIS, the Sheffield Neighbourhood Information System, draws together information relating to 100 neighbourhoods across Sheffield, using 45 indicators, grouped under seven domains or themes, to produce a local index of relative deprivation/success. The system uses GIS technology to map the domains and overall index across the 100 neighbourhoods and to produce profiles of each one. Updated annually, it can be used to track progress and monitor how neighbourhoods are changing over time.

Bristol City Council undertakes an annual Quality of Life Survey to establish the overall picture of life in its neighbourhoods and can now undertake a year-on-year comparison at ward level of the way locals perceive their neighbourhoods and the activities local people undertake. Indicators of the Quality of Life measure sustainable development and show if Bristol is becoming a better or worse place to live, by using “traffic light” sustainability or quality of life indicators. Reports have been published since 1996.

Young Foundation, 2005-2006

**One-stop access points** have recently been used particularly in rural areas to provide more integrated access to the local state, which may mean three or more tiers of government and other public agencies. They are set up in a variety of places, from shops to town halls and libraries. Local elected members are also providing services to local people through a presence at such sites. One example of such work can be found in Surrey, where two County Councillors are holding local surgeries at the Horley Help Shop, which is supported by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council. Borough officers are in the building when the surgeries happen and can supplement advice and information given to residents. The presence of the County Councillors means that issues affecting the whole community, such as health and community safety, can be raised and the councillors can use their community leadership role to raise these issues with the relevant body.

**Neighbourhood hubs** go beyond this to offer a range of services in one place that is intensively used by the public. Libraries, larger community centres and facilities, even leisure centres, doctors’ surgeries and possibly supermarkets could provide a basis for a neighbourhood hub. The benefits can include sense of belonging, efficiencies in building management costs and easy access to services. For hubs to work, they need to be located where people go, to have services which many people will want to use, and the space to allow people to stay and network with others. Imaginative use of planning regulations and Section 106 monies can encourage their development. Blyth Valley has built a network of over 40 such community hubs now, each with resource, training and enterprise facilities. They are connected in a network, and also involve deliberate support for residents to develop their personal life pathways and find people to associate with, building social capital.

### **Joint Working and Imagination in Wiltshire**

Steeple Ashton in Wiltshire is a good example of how joint working and local imagination have provided a neighbourhood hub in an old school. Steeple Ashton Parish Council in Wiltshire has renovated an old school in the village to set up a village shop using its precept, a small redundant building grant and many volunteer hours. The shop also hosts an ICT suite which offers villagers free training with ICT training.

Young Foundation, 2005-2006

**Decentralising service management** covers three kinds of change:

1. creating relationships between staff and localities.
2. changing management systems to permit local variation.
3. giving staff autonomy to respond and customise delivery.

Creating relationships between staff and localities can be done by giving patch responsibilities to service staff – say, wardens or environmental services – who may still be based centrally. A further step is to base these service staff in area or neighbourhood offices, sometimes jointly with other services. In its south area, Gateshead has been piloting a virtual team approach to environmental services, which has begun to be effective – recently, it halved the amount of man-hours that a large-scale seasonal planting previously took. In some cases, such teams can also involve partner staff.

The informal contacts, understanding and sense of ownership which these tactics can bring have the potential to improve service provision. But if there is no capacity in the management system to differentiate services according to needs and priorities, for instance by establishing different cleaning frequencies and routines for shopping and residential streets, this effect will be limited. Performance management and staff incentive systems often act as barriers to variety or innovation by demanding a uniformity of provision. But they can be turned around to encourage responsiveness.

Decentralising some autonomy to middle managers or frontline staff provides flexibility to vary what they do in response to diverse community needs and priorities – for instance, street-cleaners might be empowered to lead a rapid response to a fly-tipping incident, rather than reporting it at the end of their shift. Autonomy may be granted in terms of day-to-day routines or decisions about service customisation.

Doncaster provides perhaps the most fully-developed model of council neighbourhood teams currently in practice, and has decentralised over three-quarters of its budget. But it has clearly learnt from the local government experiments of the 1980s and 1990s, and is retaining finance, data and performance management services in the corporate centre. It has also decided against decentralising some services, or brought them down only to area level. It has further to go in involving its partners fully.

### **Service decentralisation in Doncaster**

Doncaster MBC has localised radically through its "Community First" change programme. Five areas have been identified under which 16 neighbourhoods including the town centre are clustered. Each has an Area Manager. A new Neighbourhoods, Communities and Children's Services Directorate has lead responsibility for the delivery of council services geographically. It has three Community Directors, each with a matrix of responsibilities including responsibility for geographical areas and a LAA theme (e.g. stronger, safer, sustainable communities).

Each neighbourhood has a dedicated delivery team and a neighbourhood manager, responsible for the delivery of all council services within the neighbourhood – both those their team provides directly, and those provided borough-wide. Neighbourhood managers can seek support from others in areas with which they are less familiar. Each one also leads on a specific cross-cutting thematic policy e.g. horticulture, community safety, youth services. The key "community first" services that are directly under the control of the neighbourhood managers are grounds maintenance, grass cutting, arboriculture and horticulture; parks and play equipment; public rights of way; FLAG (fighting litter, abandoned cars, graffiti); recycling, household waste recycling centres; pest control, dog wardens; public conveniences; community safety, through Community Safety Wardens; and Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

The delivery of some other services e.g. school social work and adult social services, has been devolved to the five areas. In 2006/2007 approximately 80% of the council's budget has been devolved to area level. There has not yet been a further devolution of budgets to neighbourhood level. Other services are being considered for restructuring to neighbourhood working. Waste collection and street cleansing currently continue to be provided through borough-wide contracts. The Council is investing in training of staff to help them work within the new arrangements. Performance management and monitoring is centralised, leaving neighbourhoods to concentrate on service delivery.

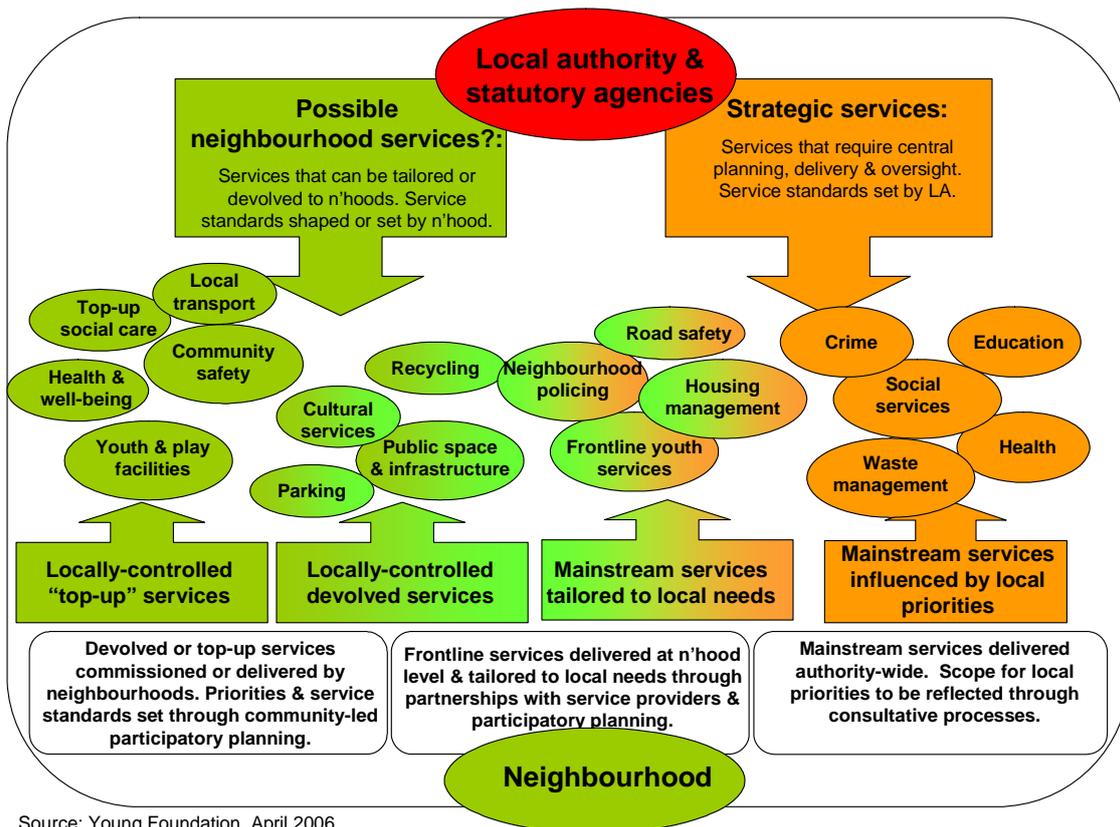
ODPM, 2006(2); Young Foundation, 2006

When it comes to resource planning, changes in the use of budgets or staffing levels may be permitted. Good relationships with the police in neighbourhoods often rely on the scope of autonomy granted to the BCU commander. Accountability is always needed for greater managerial autonomy, and the approach taken has to balance responsiveness, risk and equity. But this agenda can mean empowerment for officers as well as for councillors and communities.

For councils, localising service management has demanded the creation of new relationships between staff and localities, deregulating management systems to permit local variation and giving staff autonomy to respond and customise delivery.

Many local authorities are currently analysing which services could be devolved to area or even neighbourhood level. Whilst this is affected by local needs and circumstances, a broad distinction can be made between services that need to be managed at the strategic local authority wide level – including homeless services and child protection –

and services that can be organised at the very local level, including many environmental services. In between are services which may be tailored or “topped-up” through co-production or financial contributions at local level. Sometimes minimum standards are set for the whole area, and variations permitted above that. The following diagram should be taken as indicative, rather than prescriptive – in particular because service delivery involves complex value chains.



Source: Young Foundation, April 2006

### **“Value Chain” Approach**

Knowsley is one of several authorities which have been working with their heads of service to analyse the many different functions within each service, with a view to establishing which might benefit from local influence, discretion, tailoring or devolution, and which need to remain strategic. This “**value chain**” **approach** can often deliver efficiencies or better quality outcomes. However, it needs to feed into a consistent framework of cross-service working at neighbourhood or area scale if the benefits of local service co-ordination are also to be reaped.

Young Foundation, 2005-2006

**Community involvement in service delivery** is another way of ensuring that local services are responsive to local needs and aspirations. It takes many different forms, and the way that local communities get involved is often determined by local political history, recent regeneration schemes, flexibility in service budgets and the capacity of local communities to take on these tasks (see the citizen engagement section below).

**Community commissioning** involves devolving budgets to a community body to commission neighbourhood services. One of the issues arising from this type of delegation is the relationship between the funding body and the fund managers. Care needs to be taken by councils to recognise the need for flexibility and streamlined management arrangements in the way local funds are used, whilst community groups need to be aware of the legislative burden facing local government when devolving budgets and the need for accountability and due process.

### **Community commissioning for renewal**

Lewisham Neighbourhood Management Panels held leverage funds that could be used to encourage services to find innovative ways to respond to local needs. Services included economic development; community education and estate management were also influenced in this way.

Young Foundation, 2005-2006

## 5.2 Neighbourhood partnership

Neighbourhood partnership is used here to describe a range of approaches that involve joint working among public service partners to change outcomes in a neighbourhood. The Neighbourhood Management pathfinders provide some of the most developed examples of this approach, in which working with residents tends also to be key. There is now substantive evidence of the impact these have on local communities, as Part One of this briefing has explained.

Local partnership working is apparent at three levels: **pooling priorities** (joint tasking and planning, either on an ad hoc basis or through more formal partnerships and mini-LSPs), **co-location and shared services** (cross-service area or neighbourhood teams) and more integrated **neighbourhood management**.

### Putting People First in Sunderland

Sunderland City Council co-located Northumbria police, youth, educational and other community services in the newly-built Hetton Centre, achieved a 15% crime reduction in the Coalfield area of the City within six months of the centre's opening. There had also been a 200% increase in library usage due to the integration of educational, youth, cultural and ICT (Information and Communication Technology) facilities at the Sandhill Centre, serving the people in the west area of Sunderland.

IDEA, 2005(4)

**Joint tasking and planning** involves frameworks for agreeing among service providers – and sometimes also citizens, representatives and/or businesses – on what the priorities for a neighbourhood are and how these will be addressed. These can range from “top down” models where local people are told who will be responsible for undertaking actions against identified priorities, through to “bottom up” models such as community service contracts and parish plans, where responsibilities are shared amongst local citizens and service providers. It can be used for very short-term issues or for longer-term visioning processes.

### **Area co-ordination and mini-LSPs in Gateshead**

In 2002, Gateshead MBC introduced a "neighbourhood management" approach with a small dedicated team responsible for influencing, co-ordinating and challenging services. The borough was divided into five areas for neighbourhood management. Area Executive Forums (mini-LSPs) composed of senior officers from the public service partners were established for each, to link and bend mainstream services. There is an active cross-service tasking framework in each area called "Problem-Solving", led by the police and focused on community safety. It has a pooled budget of £120,000 Gateshead-wide, and often tackles neighbourhood-level issues. Some participatory action planning has begun, notably in Birtley, where a community partnership took over after the abolition of Birtley Town Council with local consent, and has achieved a number of quick wins from hanging baskets to a community asset. However, greater effort has so far gone into service partners agreeing Area Action Plans for delivering neighbourhood renewal and the Community Strategy. Gateshead recently decided to give its ten cabinet members area portfolios instead of a thematic focus. They will chair the Area Forums, being re-launched to include frontline ward councillors and local groups alongside the service partners.

Young Foundation, 2006

### **Calne, Wiltshire County Council**

The Calne Community Area Partnership has brought together residents, parishes, District and County services and other statutory bodies to take forward the communities' concerns identified in a survey and planning exercise in 2004. As a consequence the partnership has developed a local business advice service, changed traffic policy, launched community broadband access and put on numerous community festivals.

### **Community Pride: Community Responsibility in Staffordshire Moorlands**

Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and a number of other partners including local people have developed a local "charter" outline how Staffordshire's LAA targets will be delivered in the locality. In its first stage this work will focus on three of the most deprived areas and seek to establish a contract between all the parties outlining the roles and responsibilities of local people and services. The local LSP has recognised that this model will require significant community development to ensure that local people can take a full role in improving these neighbourhoods.

Young Foundation, 2005-2006

### **Salford: Teaming Up – The Development of Prince’s Park in Irlam, Salford**

In 2002 a “Park and Open Spaces Working Group” was formed with the aim of improving parks and open spaces and making Prince’s Park the hub of the community in and around Irlam. This group is made up of a variety of different partners including the neighbourhood teams, local PCT workers, community committee members, local residents, police, environmental services, sports development workers, local businesses, councillors and specialist companies.

Money from a variety of sources was secured and Community Technical Aid Centre (CTAC) trained local people in consultation and planning for real in order to help develop a 10-year masterplan for the park. Various other consultation and action planning events have been held both in the community and online. The community development worker and the lottery officer helped to set-up a “Friends of Prince’s Park” group and in 2002 environmental improvements based on consultation findings began in the form of paths, bollards and bin upgrades.

Local youth and health workers were approached by a group of young people who wanted to improve the facilities in the park for young people; in particular they wanted a BMX Skate park. The group, known as the BMX Bandits, managed to fundraise £23,000. In addition the park’s group successfully applied for £147,000 from the Big Lottery Fund. The Bandits also used the experience towards their GCSE Design Technology course. A Community Arts Officer was appointed and managed to secure funding for an arts project for the BMX Skate Park.

Local businesses and groups have also been involved in the overall scheme. This involvement has come in the form of volunteering time, providing funds and in kind donations for projects, researching, provision of advertising and marketing skills, organising fundraising, running consultation events, as well as providing employment opportunities and running volunteering schemes.

Civic Pioneers, 2006

**Neighbourhood charters or agreements** are a related area of practice, and often emerge out of action planning or visioning. They tend to be agreements between a council and a representative community body, such as a neighbourhood forum or community council. Parish charters are one example, though seldom offer the most advanced models as they tend to be very general offers from the principal council to all parishes in their area. Where there is no community body, councils may consult on the charter before publishing it, and sometimes local community organisations and individuals come together into a new partnership to monitor the charter.

### **The White Paper on neighbourhood charters**

The charter is the outcome of a dialogue between the community, the local authority and its service providers, which is greatly enhanced where there is a process of neighbourhood or parish planning in operation... Charters will typically take the form of a voluntary agreement between a local authority and a local community. They can cover:

- **information** the community can expect to get about the decisions, policies and services that affect them.
- **standards and targets** which apply to the neighbourhood, including any agreed **variations** from the norm for the local authority area as a whole.
- **priority actions** to be adopted by service providers, along with any **commitments from the local community** to assist the council and service providers and to take action itself. and
- **options to take on wider responsibility for functions or facilities** of direct interest to the community.

DCLG, 2006(1)

The Great Lever Charter in the Bolton neighbourhood management pathfinder has been negotiated by service providers and is signed by the borough chief executive and the police chief superintendent, and sets out responsibilities, service standards and key contacts. In conjunction with the active reshaping of services, satisfaction with the area has risen by 16% and dissatisfaction with litter and rubbish has fallen by 18%.

### **Foxwood Neighbourhood Agreement, York**

Foxwood, a mixed tenure area of 1,363 properties, had concerns about vandalism and lack of youth provision. This prompted the City Council, in partnership with residents, to develop a community safety and crime initiative that focused on inter-agency solutions and community empowerment, launched as a "neighbourhood agreement" in 1998. A series of other agreements between local residents and service providers have since been developed. The agreements take the form of succinct statements of background information, targets, response times and contract points. These agreements are then monitored by a community Action Group and more formally within the Foxwood partnership, comprising residents, service providers and elected members.

The monitoring has enabled residents to hold service providers to account and makes resource allocation and target setting more transparent. Inter-agency working, the empowerment of local residents (through the monitoring process and skill development) and improved services have all resulted. Concerns which are likely to arise elsewhere include lack of involvement from the broader community, difficulty engaging owner-occupiers and difficulties in raising interest in issues and service improvement rather than just physical renovation.

JRF, 2000

In some areas, local groups and neighbourhood panels are starting to be involved in **neighbourhood performance management**, by examining performance information and working with service providers to focus on particular outcomes. Expectations and priorities can be clarified through the agreement of neighbourhood charters as explained above.

### **Local area performance in Tower Hamlets**

Communities have been supported to monitor local performance and identify their priorities for action in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. A number of local area partnerships (LAPs, which are mini-Local Strategic Partnerships) cover the borough and each of these is responsible for examining outcomes for the local area and agreeing a small number of areas for priority actions. The local authority is a member of these partnerships and commissions activities to address local priorities.

Young Foundation, 2006

## 6 Citizen engagement

### ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- Do you have a community engagement strategy? Is community engagement one of the council's priorities? Is the strategy shared with local public service partners? Does the strategy aim for community cohesion as well as devolved engagement?
- Do you have neighbourhood or parish plans? Have local people been involved in designing your council's approach to community working so far?
- Do you have a strategy for the voluntary and community sector that includes their role in devolution and delivering the community strategy and the LAA?

LGA & IDEA, 2006

Engaging citizens in developing, improving and sustaining services and local quality of life requires a clear understanding of how "bottom-up" engagement can influence strategic policy, political decision-making and service planning. After a period of decline in the community development profession, it is reviving in a number of areas through more strategic and innovative forms of community engagement, from neighbourhood management to the strategic community development undertaken in Blyth Valley (see part 1 of this briefing).

### Embedding Community Engagement in Portsmouth

Portsmouth City Council has developed a council-wide culture of community involvement by appointing a senior management post to lead on community involvement across directorates, supported by a Community Involvement, Empowerment and Development team. Rather than a "one size fits all" approach, Portsmouth has developed and publicised a 'menu of options' through which local people can get involved. Options include 24 Neighbourhood Forums; 5 Community Boards, awarded beacon status for community involvement in neighbourhood renewal; 5 Community Improvement Partnerships bringing schools and communities closer together; tenant participation; innovative approaches to youth engagement including the Council of Portsmouth Students; patient liaison; neighbourhood management; surveys; consultation; text messaging and work with the voluntary and community sector. 45% of people in Portsmouth now feel they can 'have a say', compared to 21% nationally.

Civic Pioneers, 2006; Portsmouth CC, 2006

Successful community engagement has three components: first, finding out about citizens' fears, concerns and preferences, second, engaging local people in discourse about local issues, and third, developing communities' capacity to participate. Councils use a wide range of methods to engage with their citizens for the purpose of either capturing views or opinions about a specific issue or as part of an on-going dialogue between the council and local people about the shape of local services. The majority of councils recognise that developing the capacity of local people to engage in service commissioning and evaluation is a prerequisite of successful engagement, and increasing numbers are using core funding to support this work.

There are a number of ways that a local authority can establish the views and opinions of its citizens. One is through participatory forums or regular consultative meetings. In many places local authorities have set up their own **area forums**, which have few formal powers but are used as sounding-boards for consultation (these were present in 54% of authorities by 2004).

Elsewhere there are **neighbourhood forums** and **recognised neighbourhood bodies**, often established bottom-up by residents. These can undertake a number of activities, from acting as sounding boards and avenues for community voice, to developing and monitoring local action plans and even becoming involved in service delivery. There is a wide diversity of models around England. Experience from areas such as Birmingham and (in the USA) Portland, Oregon suggests that the level of local government's commitment to such structures – developing constitutions, dispute resolution, fostering umbrella associations and making a real commitment to dialogue and listening – is a key factor in their success or failure.

### **Recognised neighbourhood forums in Birmingham**

Birmingham has a well-honed system for recognizing neighbourhood forums as arenas for local voice and action, and now has over 70 such bodies. They can be established bottom-up after a petition of 25 names is raised, through public meetings, the adoption of a constitution and election of a residents' management committee. They can then apply for recognition from the council and membership of the Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums, which provides capacity-building, collective voice and mutual learning. Recognised forums have certain rights, including an influencing role with respect to the devolved district governance system through which they can make representations. They provide an opportunity to shape the issues that affect local communities, such as community safety, environment, health and social issues, housing and transport. Membership is free, and open to all aged 16 and over. Neighbourhood forums themselves decide the area they will cover. Usually this is an area that forms a 'natural' neighbourhood, which can be as few as 500 or up to as many as 5,000 households. Some officers in Birmingham speak of an emerging ladder of neighbourhood arrangements - from local authority-led neighbourhood management, to neighbourhood forums, to new community councils.

Young Foundation, 2005-2006

Another approach is to use **time-limited engagement** – research, consultations or inquiries. This type of engagement can be particularly useful for neighbourhood working when it is used to gather baseline information on how people want to engage and what local concerns or issues are.

When consultation outcomes influence how local priorities are set and residents see improvements to local services as a result of their involvement, they are reassured that they can influence local decisions. However, badly planned consultation or public involvement that does not drive change will undermine the future willingness of participants to be involved. Therefore, it is vital that one outcome of every consultation is **feedback to local communities** about the impact of the consultation and the decisions that have been taken.

**Peer research** has produced interesting results for local authorities in engaging local people, because peer researchers can access communities that traditionally have escaped formal consultation such as refugees or young people. It can encourage local people to voice views or opinions that they are uncomfortable or unconfident about feeding into formal consultation. One example is Learning Links in Portsmouth, which has trained over 800 local people as community researchers to carry out research and consultation on the issues that matter most to them. The project, supported by the city council, has provided valuable information for public services, but also gone on to give many researchers the confidence to become 'change-makers' in their local community.<sup>22</sup>

**Youth engagement** often requires establishing specific forums or frameworks, which must then be linked into mainstream decision-making processes.

### **Red Hot Green Youth in Camden**

The Gospel Oak Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder, established in 2002, has been particularly successful in engaging young people in its work through the Red Hot Green youth forum. Members of the forum are trained in peer research then paid to gather the views of their friends on the issues the neighbourhood management team is trying to tackle, which has made a real difference to the way projects are delivered by the pathfinder.

Young Foundation, 2005-2006

**Neighbourhood action planning** is one of the most powerful forms of citizen engagement and local working, especially when it manages to combine substantial resident participation and ownership with real engagement on the part of the service providers who will be responsible for implementing many of the actions proposed. It can be seen in a wide variety of practices – from the parish planning approach which is now widespread in rural villages across England and often engages a majority of residents there, to participatory appraisals with which South Tyneside has been experimenting.

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<sup>22</sup> Portsmouth CC, 2006

### **Neighbourhood action planning in Bradford**

From 2003, Bradford developed an innovative process of neighbourhood action planning (NAPs), inspired by local hearings held by Faith in the City in the early 1990s and by international development practice. As well as providing support from a team of LSP neighbourhood partnership managers, £5000 support was offered for creating plans and £20,000 to help carry out recommendations, resourced through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. This helped bring people together in 65 self-selecting neighbourhoods of between 900 and 11,500 people. It catalysed partnerships at the heart of each, enabling residents (with service providers) to identify priorities, seek changes in mainstream services and develop local initiatives. Smaller neighbourhoods have been encouraged to cluster together to gain greater purchase over service providers. From 2004, the council decided that locality planning should take place everywhere in the district, whether through NAPs, parish plans or a new "urban village" process. Mainstream services have been reshaped, over ten times as much funding has been levered in and one participant has become an elected member.

Young Foundation, 2006

### **Parish planning**

West Berkshire council has been particularly effective in its approach to involving local people in parish planning. Of its 63 parishes, 39 are actively involved in the parish planning process, and a further 11 have shown an interest. Between 61% and 96% of residents have responded to each of the parish planning consultations, and large numbers have become more involved in further activities. Practical support and advice is given to the process by the council, Community Action West Berkshire and the Rural Community Council for Berkshire. Parish plan surgeries are held and peer learning opportunities are available. Toolkits are available on the Council's website, including for involving young people. High levels of participation are not the only outcome – for example Purley's plan has helped in securing a local farmers' market, £10,000 from the LSP to improve recreational facilities, neighbourhood wardens to help reduce crime and fear of crime, new adult learning programmes, more cycle paths and road calming.

Civic Pioneers, 2006

### **Participatory appraisal in South Tyneside**

South Tyneside MBC has been experimenting with an innovative programme of neighbourhood appraisal and action plans, inspired partly by practice in the global South. The participatory appraisals have prioritised the views of local people as 'experts in their own neighbourhood', focusing on issues such as drugs, crime, barriers to employment, graffiti and education. Teams made up predominantly of residents have been trained to conduct the appraisal, using flexible, accessible and interactive tools like maps and spider diagrams. Two waves of street work and interviews in local shops and schools were used – first to find problems, then solutions to inform a neighbourhood action plan which needs to secure the buy-in of all stakeholders. In the Horsley Hill estate area, over 600 interviews and 1400 responses went into the planning, 1300 volunteer hours were contributed, and a formal neighbourhood partnership is being established to bring together councillors, the residents' association and service providers in a more constructive relationship. There have been a marked decrease in anti-social behaviour and significant environmental improvements, and Citizens' Advice and a credit union are to offer new outreach services to the estate.

IDEA, 2006(2)

Successful partnership working will often involve local people being active participants in addressing local issues, a process which can be empowering in both character and outcomes. Such partnerships are built on shared information and an active dialogue between those providing services to and those using services in a neighbourhood. This approach has been more successful in improving performance outcomes and engaging local people where frontline officers, ward councillors and local people are empowered to take responsibility for delivering actions and challenge blockages to change.

### **Working Together to Address Youth Crime in Newcastle**

Newcastle City Council's approach to environmental networks in one of its neighbourhoods demonstrates how finding out about local concerns can be tied into developing solutions to these issues. On the St John's estate in Newcastle, the community beat police realised that a partnership approach involving local people and other service providers would work better than the police attempting to address the problem of anti-social behavior and youth crime alone.

They approached Ward Co-ordinator Heather Docherty who brought together police, council services, YHN and organisations such as Patchwork and Sure Start. "Getting information and evidence from residents about the problems in the area was also important. This is always difficult because of the fear factor involved in reporting crime and crime disorder. Fortunately the Community Beat Manager was well-known and liked which helped build trust.

"We realised environmental works could help prevent anti-social behavior. Local councillors encouraged walkabouts on the estate to identify problems, such as overgrown areas which could be cut back. We also held a community consultation event where residents used a variety of 'planning for real' and participatory appraisal techniques to help produce a priority list of environmental improvements. Working together encouraged services to rethink their approach and look at ways they could improve. It also meant we could access different pots of money."

Civic Pioneers, 2006

Engaging in an open dialogue with local people can have a long-term impact on life outcomes in neighbourhoods. The two examples below demonstrate how neighbourhood management, with a community development focus, can improve health outcomes.

#### **Oldington and Foley: Oral Health**

The pathfinder worked with the primary care trust to introduce new dentist services and make residents aware they were available. To get over issues of literacy, they raised awareness primarily through door-knocking rather than leafleting.

*Result:* increased take-up of new dental services, 15% of residents signed up.

#### **Greater Hollington, Hastings: General Health**

Working with the council and primary care trust, the pathfinder has established a service level agreement with the PCT to provide targeted health improvements tailored to residents. The range of interventions has included Active Living, Mental Well Being, Eating and Drinking Well and Smoking Cessation.

*Result:* information available to date has shown that by 2004/5 there was an 86% fall in the number of babies born to mothers who smoke and a 20% increase in levels of breast-feeding compared with only 9% in Hastings. The area is also on target to meet a 15% reduction in teenage pregnancies.

Shared Intelligence, 2006

Much of the innovative practice in engaging local residents recognises the need to engage people in ways that will fit with their lives rather than in formal governance arrangements.

### **Virtual Community Development**

Neighbourhood Fix-IT is a web-enabled tool that, on the surface, looks like a mechanism for reporting street scene faults through a web-based mapping tool. However, the difference between this and other such initiatives is that it opens up the possibility of the council and local people entering into dialogue about how issues can be addressed and other residents encouraged to do so. Neighbourhood Fix-It will offer the opportunity for neighbourhoods to take responsibility for their local environment without ever having attended a meeting and opens civic participation to a number of people who are not interested in formal arrangements.

[www.mysociety.co.uk/brokencivicinfrastructure/](http://www.mysociety.co.uk/brokencivicinfrastructure/)

Local communities also get involved in managing services, which can be empowering. **Community management** can range from community graffiti-busters to the management of housing stock in a local authority area. Examination of this type of provision shows that with support and a clear wish to make services more responsive to local needs, these services can improve the local environment, support community cohesion and give a sense of community to local areas.

### **Community Gateway in Preston**

Community Gateway Housing in Preston was designed to be an attractive option for tenants, where communities can develop their own vision for their neighbourhoods and pick the level of responsibility over services that is right for a particular area.

This way of working means that tenants can be involved in local plans and decisions as much, or as little, as they want. And time and money is made available to help residents learn and develop their skills, and influence their landlord's work in a meaningful way.

Preston City Council was the first local authority in England to pursue stock transfer through the Community Gateway approach. The council realised that the level of investment needed to bring homes up to the national Decent Homes Standard was not available from its own finances. But transferring all the stock was not a popular option – unless there was a way that local people could get involved and make positive social change happen in the city. Developing the Community Gateway Association was the perfect solution to a tricky problem.

Chartered Institute of Housing, 2003; [www.communitygateway.co.uk](http://www.communitygateway.co.uk)

Community management of services is increasingly prevalent across England. Many of the examples are of village or estate-based activities. These demonstrate that local

communities can successfully manage services with, in general, the risks of capture or misuse being very small. The box below provides a sample of these types of activities.

### **Communities Managing Services**

#### **HARCA, London Borough of Tower Hamlets**

Poplar Housing and Regeneration Community Association in Tower Hamlets is a registered social landlord managing more than 6,000 homes. Housing rejuvenation has gone hand in hand with community led regeneration projects centred on employment and training, young people and advice amongst others.

#### **Wyecycle, Kent County Council**

Household waste is now 25% of what it was in Brook, Kent, thanks to Wyecycle, a community recycling initiative, commissioned by Kent County Council.

#### **Community speed guns, Surrey County Council**

Residents of some Surrey villages have been particularly concerned about speeding in their area, so the local police force began to train villagers to operate hand-held speed guns, cutting average speeds significantly. Communities have now overwhelmed the police force with demand for the scheme, which tackles a long-standing gripe.

#### **Perry Common Community Association, Birmingham City Council**

Brought together to renovate former council properties on the Perry Common estate in Birmingham, residents have gone even further, building and managing an extra care housing scheme. The surplus made from the scheme is invested into street scene improvements. Residents now steer the delivery of environmental services in the area, prioritising Birmingham City Council's street scene budgets to meet their needs.

Young Foundation, 2005-2006

**Community ownership** and **community anchor organisations** which provide a range of services and opportunities and work to knit together their areas often have a very deep impact on empowerment and capabilities, and their development can be encouraged and supported by local authorities. Some have benefited from millions in regeneration funding, but others have developed with much smaller investments and canny entrepreneurship. Some are now taking on an increasing role in public service delivery. A number of examples follow.

## **Community anchors**

### **Barton Hill Settlement**

Barton Hill Settlement provides a wide range of services including childcare, services for young people and over 50s, education and courses, advice and guidance, and community computing. Over the past fifteen years it has transformed the area, with the support of £50m of regeneration funding, particularly reducing isolation and social exclusion. The settlement is a hub for community development in the east of the city, providing services to many other groups.

### **Burslem Community Development Trust in Stoke on Trent**

In 1999 Burslem CDT signed an agreement with Stoke on Trent City Council to share the challenge of improving Burslem Park and ensuring it continues to meet a range of leisure and recreational needs of local people. Since the partnership started, Burslem CDT has taken over much of the park maintenance, restored the park lodge as a focal point, and established a resident group to raise money for other new features.

### **Shoreditch Trust, London**

Shoreditch Trust is a community-led regeneration programme, created in 2000 as part of the New Deal for Communities. The trust is run by a locally elected board who have managed more than £57 million to make positive changes in housing, education, employment, and health. Alongside a neighbourhood management scheme, the trust has established two social enterprises: Shoreditch Digital Bridge and The Shoreditch Property Company to ensure sustainability.

### **South Lakes Development Trust in Cumbria**

Focused on Windermere, Bowness and Ambleside, the South Lakes CDT has brought new investment into the area by improving the public realm, co-ordinating town centre management and providing a business resource centre. Its latest project offers grants to upgrade the facades of shop units where the work will enhance the aesthetics of the area and attract other investment – usually from tourism or new businesses.

Young Foundation, 2006

## 7 Devolving power

To have an impact, devolved governance arrangements must be backed up with good support and connections (e.g. reporting arrangements) with service managers, as well as by engaging citizens and communities. Devolved governance can take a number of forms. **Area Committees** of ward councillors had been established in 51% of leader-cabinet authorities by 2002, and by 2004 held formal decision-making powers in 26% of all authorities.<sup>23</sup> They vary significantly, from vehicles for collecting local views or opinions to holding substantial delegated powers. They serve large areas of more than one ward, and tend to provide an intermediate level of devolution, sometimes combined with smaller-scale forums or community councils as in Birmingham, Rochdale or South Somerset.

### Township committees and more local area forums in Rochdale

In 1992 Rochdale decided to develop its previous managerial decentralisation by seeking to devolve services to four 'township' area committees mirroring natural communities (and pre-1974 boundaries). Each township has a committee with the status of a council Standing Committee and full executive authority, and local strategies on matters such as regeneration. Within this framework, each Township has customised its approach to meeting local needs, forming different working parties and sub-committees to reflect their work with funding partners and schemes operating in the Township areas. Each Township committee is supported by a Township manager and 2 staff, has its own delegated powers and reports to Cabinet. The Township committee is composed from the elected councillors forming that Township. The Township chairs are nominated by the Townships, and hence two out of four are not from the majority party.

The council has continued to develop its devolution arrangements since 1992, and in 2006 decided to redefine how council services link to the Township committees. Each of the council's 20 named services has been determined to be capable of being either delegated to Townships, influenced by them or considered as central/corporate with no direct Township link. The purpose of this development is to bring services and the Townships closer, and by delegating the associated service budgets, for the first time to enable councillors on the Township committees both to determine priorities, and to be able to redirect funds from one service to another to reflect them.

In 2000 work began to develop a framework for the Townships to support and engage with smaller-scale, more participatory Area Forums for consultation and public involvement. This has been a success, developing differently in each Township. Nonetheless, experience to date has led to further work to develop Area Forums - attended by but not managed by elected councillors - which will also be looked at with a view to some delegated responsibilities and funding. These arrangements are currently under active consideration.

Young Foundation, 2006

<sup>23</sup> LGA, 2004

**Devolving to parish and community councils** or other neighbourhood governance bodies is another common tactic, particularly in the rural shires. Essex County Council has devolved a capital budget of £2 million, the Communities Initiatives Fund, to its parish and town councils to help develop their capacity and ensure good value. For each of the 12 Essex districts, £150,000 was devolved to panels composed entirely of representatives of the first-tier councils plus the county cabinet member for localism. Milton Keynes has one of the best-developed models of cooperation with parish and community councils, with impressive results, while also providing a (presently rare) urban example of this practice.

### **Milton Keynes: working in partnership with parish councils and communities**

Milton Keynes has long had first-tier councils, particularly in its more rural northern part. Since 2001 it has been fully parished, the explicit aim being to have a solid community-based layer of governance. The 45 parishes currently contribute around £2.9 million through the precept. This is significant given the historic capping of the principal authority, though the tax base is less robust in the more deprived urban parishes. There are five staff in the council's parish liaison unit, who help manage dialogue and consultation, liaise about the delegation of functions such as play areas and landscaping, and distribute a Parish Partnership Fund of £200,000 to which parishes can bid for typically 50% funding of local improvements or facilities. There is also a Community Parking Partnership Scheme for provision of parking bays, run on a match funding basis. An annual satisfaction survey gathers intelligence from the parishes about council service area performance.

The council encourages parish elections by not recovering costs; elections in the urban area are sometimes fought on party political lines, and dual membership is quite common. Woughton Parish Council manages its own crime and community safety team and a community and youth team. Campbell Park parish council has some young and active councillors, runs an innovative mediation service reducing anti-social behaviour, has installed a skateboard park and runs cultural events. Over 1000 people in the borough regularly attend parish meetings. Since 2004, a charter between Milton Keynes and the first tier councils has set out options for individual parishes or clusters thereof to take on service delivery based on quality standards. It includes a set of schedules, beginning with delivering services like litter collection, street naming, street cleaning and markets, and moving on to taking over the handling of local complaints. When all parishes have met these local standards, a parish assembly for Milton Keynes may play a role in area-wide governance. Already, parish councils have call-in powers in respect to council decisions. The council's Streetcare service has recently been aligned with parish boundaries to improve responsiveness, as has the roll-out of Neighbourhood Action Groups, which should enable further parish involvement in cross-service community safety and neighbourhood management.

LGIU, 2005; Young Foundation, 2006

**Devolving and delegating service decisions** and budgets often happens, whether to area committees or beyond the council to parishes, neighbourhood partnerships or other bodies. The powers involved in these types of arrangements range from having an advisory or co-ordinating role and distributing small enabling funds to disposing of large amounts of the council's budget.

### Devolved decisions across the tiers in Surrey

Since 2001 County and District Councillors have worked together in area committees to prioritise and allocate the highways budget for Surrey. These committees operate across the 12 district areas and provide opportunities for local councillors to bring community issues and concerns to discussions. Each committee is chaired by a county councillor and provides opportunities for these councillors, who are not always executive members, to influence services in the area they represent.

Young Foundation, 2006

**Participatory budgeting** was first developed in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where neighbourhood-level assemblies feed into a process deciding city-wide mainstream budget priorities. A number of "participatory budgeting" experiments have been tried quietly in English local government in places like Salford and Bradford, although thus far most of them would be better described as "participatory grant-giving", because mainstream budgets have seldom been opened up for re-prioritisation. In 2005 Harrow set up an Open Budget process with the Power Inquiry to give local residents a more direct say in the council's spending plans. It included an Open Budget Assembly which brought together 300 residents for six hours to discuss and vote on key priorities for the 2006/07 budget. After trialling the approach, Sunderland's NDC is looking at opening up its whole budget for participatory determination.<sup>24</sup>

### Open Budget Day in Bradford

Bradford is one of a handful of areas experimenting with "participatory budgeting". In 2005, the LSP set aside £315,000 of NRF for environmental improvements. Communities from across the city were invited to submit proposals for their area, and short-listed proposals were taken to an "Open Budget Day" at the town hall. Hundreds of people came, electronic voting facilitated instant feedback, and three more schemes were funded than was thought possible when others offered to slightly reduce their budgets. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive: it had brought together people from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and communities and helped build social cohesion. The next experiment will take place in 2006/2007 in the Keighley area, aiming to involve more local people.

Young Foundation, 2006

<sup>24</sup> DCLG has been supporting a learning network on participatory budgeting with the involvement of Community Pride, the Participatory Budgeting Unit, Tricia Zipfel and Ed Cox.

## 7.1 Empowering Frontline Councillors

Frontline councillors can be empowered by giving them administrative support, access to budgets and greater ability to influence decisions affecting their areas. Substantial studies are already available from IDEA and JRF on this question.<sup>25</sup> New powers of “Community Calls for Action” and scrutiny recommendation may help drive further innovation.

### **The role of the frontline Councillor**

Research by the IDEA found that the key roles of frontline councillors include:

- Engagement with and on behalf of their communities – community development, mediation, consultation, promoting cohesion.
- Influencing and communication.
- Involvement in service management, scrutiny and evaluation – at design, delivery and impact stage.
- Involvement in strategic and service planning to achieve outcomes.
- Negotiation and brokering.
- Partnership working.
- Monitoring and enforcement.
- Representation and casework.

IDEA, 2005

Staffordshire County Council offers one example of how councillors are supported in their local work with a discretionary budget, and Brent has been experimenting with serious ward councillor support.

### **Local member initiative scheme, Staffordshire County Council**

County Councillors in Staffordshire now have a £10,000 discretionary budget to each spend in their ward on community proposals which support Council service priorities.

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<sup>25</sup> JRF, 2006; IDEA, 2005(2); IDEA, 2006

### **Ward councillor support in Brent**

Brent has established pilot schemes in six wards to strengthen the frontline councillor role. Officer support is provided through a small team made up of a team leader and three ward support officers, each of whom serves two wards. There is a core team in each ward of a street care officer, a community safety officer and a police support officer. This team helps ward councillors consult with local communities and draw up ward plans. Each ward has £30,000 to pump-prime activity, bend mainstream spending and tackle barriers to change.

**Neighbourhood inquiries** and **area-based scrutiny** are approaches which many councils are now starting to consider, in part as ways of getting beyond the town hall and involving citizens more in the scrutiny process.

### **Neighbourhood inquiries and practical scrutiny**

Shropshire County Council has been running three area-based scrutiny sessions a year, on issues as diverse as the impact of a new waste disposal facility in an industrial estate on the outskirts of a market town, anti-social behaviour in a deprived area of Shrewsbury, Park and Ride, and the idea of a unified benefits service being explored in Bridgewater, which might have wider application. The meetings have been held 'on the patch' and involved a much wider range of participants and voices, including residents and service providers, in a brief, constructive and focused public conversation about key issues.

As part of the renewal of its library service, Staffordshire County Council began to consider plans for improving Stone Town Library in 2001. After public outcry at the proposals put forward – not properly understood – and the raising of a large petition, a practical scrutiny process was initiated by an energetic young councillor. Over a month, in-depth interviews were undertaken with all parties involved. Architects, engineers and builders were called back by scrutiny, and identified a new and affordable option: to drop a steel frame into the building, enabling the construction of a mezzanine and increasing the footprint sufficiently to allow the library to stay in its current location.

Young Foundation, 2006; Young Foundation, 2006(2)

## About the Young Foundation

The Young Foundation brings together insight, innovation and entrepreneurship to meet social needs. We have a 55 year track record of success with ventures such as the Open University, Which?, the School for Social Entrepreneurs and Healthline (the precursor of NHS Direct). We work across the UK and internationally – carrying out research, influencing policy, creating new organisations and supporting others to do the same, often with imaginative uses of new technology. We now have over 60 staff, working on over 40 ventures at any one time, with staff in New York and Paris as well as London and Birmingham in the UK.

[www.youngfoundation.org](http://www.youngfoundation.org)

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