

Parish and town councils and neighbourhood governance

Report of a Joseph Rowntree Foundation seminar held on 11 March 2005

Ines Newman

This report explores the role of urban parish and town councils in contributing to regeneration.

The study reviews policy issues that came out of a seminar held in March 2005, and makes recommendations for government, principal authorities and local councils and stakeholders that will feed into the development of the government's neighbourhood policy, as set out in their paper 'Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter'.

The report explores the roles played by local councils, area committees of principal authorities and area forums in regeneration. It identifies the advantages and disadvantages of each model. The report then draws lessons from three case studies of joint working between urban local councils and principal authorities and focuses particularly on the reforms required to enable urban parish councils to contribute to regeneration and neighbourhood management.



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Finally, any mistakes are my responsibility alone. Not all the recommendations in this paper were agreed by all those attending, but they are a reflection of the broad consensus on the day.

Summary

The objectives of the JRF seminar were to:

- clarify the different roles played by parish/town councils (called local councils in this report) and area committees/area forums set up by principal authorities (district, metropolitan, unitary and county councils) and neighbourhood management structures;
- identify some of the problems that result from possible overlap or confusion about respective roles, and look at how these problems might be addressed;
- identify examples of joint working on neighbourhood and regeneration issues between urban local councils and principal authorities;
- produce recommendations/comments to feed into the development of the government's neighbourhood policy as set out in its discussion paper *Citizen engagement and public services: Why neighbourhoods matter* (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), 2005).

The seminar highlighted how local councils in urban areas, alongside other neighbourhood structures, could make a significant contribution to regeneration and neighbourhood management. While local councils can play an important role in meeting a range of government objectives, the majority of very small local councils do not have significant capacity. So principal councils need to respond opportunistically and look to other neighbourhood structures where local council capacity does not exist. As the government has recognised, there is no 'one size fits all' solution.

Urban local councils exist primarily to give a voice to their local communities on wider issues around the regeneration of their areas. The powers of local councils need to reflect this reality – they should have a general power to promote well-being. There must also be clear routes for local-level structures to influence strategic decisions. These routes must be open to all neighbourhood-level structures, not just local councils, and learning on how to involve neighbourhood structures needs to be spread. This is particularly important in areas with a large number of small neighbourhood structures, where intermediate, co-ordinating structures are required.

The seminar highlighted the political community leadership role of both parish councillors and principal authority councillors. Motivation to stand as a councillor came from those who wanted a better quality of life for all

their residents, and greater influence over the strategic direction of their areas.

Seminar participants emphasised the importance of strong relationship-building between the tiers of government. However, the development of these relationships cannot be driven by coercion. Coercion is a sign of failing partnership working and is of limited value in progressing the kinds of relationships between tiers of local government that will add value to an area. The seminar concluded that support for charter negotiation, peer pressure, councillor development, support for parish and principal councils and County Associations of Local Councils, along with good practice networks, mediation and peer review, were far more effective drivers for change than the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process.

It is clear that parish councillors need support and development if they are to play a wider role, and funding will be required for this purpose. It is also clear that devolution of services may not always be the answer. There is more scope to develop models for local communities to have a voice in the outcomes they want for service delivery in their area, rather than necessarily having devolved budgets and running the services themselves. The seminar concluded that there should be outcome-level agreements between neighbourhood structures and principal authorities and other public agencies. These agreements should specify the outcomes that the principal authorities and other public agencies will provide, and allow local bodies to hold them to account.

The parish model brings many advantages through its precepting powers – the ability to take action independently of the principal local authority in order to meet local needs. However, its limitations must also be recognised. There is a serious problem of resource equalisation. Unless principal councils provide significant grant aid to poorer parishes, or adjust their mainstream spending, the parish council initiative could institutionalise inequality rather than support inclusion and regeneration of poorer areas. The government should not wish to promote a situation in which a parish council can demand devolution of a wider range of services, irrespective of the impact on the key aim of closing the gap between the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the rest.

This report contains some recommendations for central government, principal authorities and local councils (section 6). It is hoped that these will be considered in the development of the government's neighbourhood policy as set out in its discussion paper *Citizen engagement and public services: Why neighbourhoods matter* (ODPM, 2005).

1 Introduction

Two parallel government agendas have grown in prominence since 1997.

Recently, issues around new localism and the devolution of power and decision-making to local level have taken on a new impetus in government circles. This agenda has been driven in particular by a Home Office agenda around policing and anti-social behaviour, community cohesion, social capital and rebuilding trust in democratic institutions.

In February 2005, the government published *Citizen engagement and public services: Why neighbourhoods matter*. This is a key discussion paper on neighbourhoods, issued as part of the government's ten-year vision for local government. The government has called for an open, inclusive debate on how best to progress the already extensive and varied activities that take place at neighbourhood level. Existing local bodies range from elected parish councils and New Deal for Communities boards, to community development trusts, regeneration companies, informal partnership bodies, area forums and area committees of the principal authority.

This issue was further highlighted in the May 2005 elections, as the Labour Party manifesto contained a pledge:

To offer neighbourhoods a range of powers from which they can choose, including:

- new powers for parish councils to deal with anti-social behaviour;
- powers for local people to trigger action in response to persistent local problems;
- community funds for local neighbourhoods to spend on local priorities;
- new opportunities for communities to assume greater responsibility or even ownership of community assets like village halls, community centres, libraries and recreation facilities.

(Labour Party manifesto, 2005)

An earlier agenda centred on concern for deprived neighbourhoods. This was underpinned by evidence of the impact of multiple deprivation, particularly the fact that children in deprived neighbourhoods have restricted opportunities and poorer outcomes than those living in more prosperous areas. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), set up in 1997, established the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme. Building on previous area-based initiatives, the NDC programme was based on two key assumptions: that improved outcomes require long-term investment in deprived areas, and the requirement for local communities to lead and take ownership of regeneration programmes. To date, 39 NDC projects are up and running; 37 of them have governance boards that include directly elected representatives from their local communities.

Nationally, 18 Policy Action Teams (PATs) were also set up to look at different aspects of social exclusion. PAT 4, on neighbourhood management, was one of the most influential. It led to the *National strategy for neighbourhood renewal* (SEU, 2001) and a focus on neighbourhood management as a way of bringing together different service providers to reconfigure services to more closely meet the needs of deprived communities.

A key government goal is now to deliver on the 'floor targets': to raise the standards of education, community safety, housing, employment and health in deprived areas, narrowing the gap between these areas and average outcomes.

The JRF and Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) have already contributed to these agendas. In June 2001, the Foundation sponsored a publication of the Local Authorities and Social Exclusion (LASE) Network: *Area committees and neighbourhood management* (Sullivan et al, 2001). In March 2004, it organised a seminar on *Devolving governance: area committees and neighbourhood management* (Wilkinson, 2004). However, a gap in this work was recognised in that it did not deal fully with the role of parish and town councils (referred to in this report as 'local councils'), and in particular urban local councils, in contributing to these agendas. So in March 2005, a further invited seminar was organised with the support of the LGIU and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). Appendix 3 lists those who participated in the seminar.

The objectives of the JRF seminar were to:

- clarify the different roles played by parish/town councils and area committees/area forums set up by principal authorities and neighbourhood management structures;

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- identify some of the problems that result from possible overlap or confusion about respective roles, and look at how these problems might be addressed;
- identify examples of joint working on neighbourhood and regeneration issues between urban local councils and principal authorities;
- produce recommendations/comments to feed into the development of the government's neighbourhood policy as set out in its discussion paper *Citizen engagement and public services: why neighbourhoods matter* (ODPM, 2005).

This report pulls together findings from the seminar proceedings, and wider research material. It concludes with a set of recommendations for central government, principal authorities and local councils. It is hoped that the findings from the seminar will contribute to the drafting of a Green Paper on neighbourhoods, expected in summer 2005. The recommendations also have implications for wider stakeholders such as the Commission for Rural Communities, the Local Government Association (LGA) and NALC.

The remainder of this report is organised in five sections, as follows:

2. background – the key conclusions of previous work and government proposals;
3. the roles played by parish/town councils and area committees/area forums set up by principal authorities and neighbourhood management structures;
4. examples of joint working on regeneration and neighbourhood issues between urban local councils and principal authorities;
5. issues raised at the seminar;
6. recommendations for central government, principal authorities and local councils.

2 Background

This seminar was part of a continuing work programme, so it is helpful to start by looking at the conclusion of previous work and recent government proposals. The JRF seminar on *Devolving governance* in 2004 proposed some clear ways forward (Wilkinson, 2004).

The key arguments for devolution centre on greater citizens' involvement, achieved as a result of a stronger sense of identity in neighbourhoods and the way in which decentralised arrangements assist in tailoring services to meet local needs. However, devolution has proved problematic, with some high-profile failures in the 1980s (Tower Hamlets, Islington and Walsall).

More recently, the neighbourhood debate has concentrated on small local areas providing a focus for community engagement and partnership. The aim is to allow different public-service organisations to join up their services and bridge the strategy/operational divide, in response to local needs. To be successful in this task, evaluation of existing initiatives¹ has shown that the following considerations need to be taken on board:

1. The purpose and scale (constituency, area, neighbourhood) of decentralisation should determine the governance structure. The form of governance should be fit for purpose, so it is important to clarify whether the key purpose of a neighbourhood structure is efficiency of service delivery, greater consumer choice or greater citizen engagement.
2. There is no 'one size fits all', so flexibility is needed in any national strategy.
3. Decentralisation has costs and does not necessarily lead to better services. There are tensions between devolution and economies of scale, and more evidence is required on how local services can be shaped to meet local needs. Which type of process is most effective and efficient – devolved budgets, devolved contracts, or devolved performance management?
4. Successful outcomes depend on a culture change at the centre of the public agencies involved, and strong political leadership. There is a danger that neighbourhood management can be an 'add on' that confines civic involvement to improving environmental services,

- marginalises wider civic renewal and fragments the capacity of public agencies to join up wider responses to deprivation.
5. To achieve outcomes, more thought needs to be given to the inter-relationship between structures. Successful neighbourhood structures exist where there are good relationships between the tiers of governance/government and strong political support and community leadership from elected councillors on principal authorities.
 6. Participatory models should address the need for systematic, long-term participation in new neighbourhood structures. They also need to foster efficient participation, so that local residents get the maximum benefit from the minimum input of resources and time.
 7. The community of place is just one of various shared communities of interest. The focus on neighbourhoods must not marginalise the importance of empowering other communities of interest, such as ethnicity, age, gender, religion and employees.

The latest discussion paper from the government, *Citizen engagement and public services: Why neighbourhoods matter* (ODPM, 2005), shows that some of these evidence-based findings have influenced policy formation. The government wants to see neighbourhood arrangements being adopted far more widely, but recognises that there can be no 'one size fits all'. The paper recognises the costs of devolution and suggests that neighbourhood arrangements must be balanced with the demands of efficiency and proportionality. The government recognises the need to promote participation, and puts forward as a principle for neighbourhood arrangements that they must be responsive to the needs and diversity of the community.

The government is seeking local flexibility and the involvement of the whole community, not just traditional community activists. The importance of good relationships between tiers of governance is recognised. The government wants to see local neighbourhood charters agreed between stakeholders in each local authority area. It argues that neighbourhood governance must be integrated with, and supportive of, the principal council's role as the democratically elected institution in an area. Local councillors are also seen as being at the heart of the new arrangements.

However, there is still some confusion as to whether the key purpose of neighbourhood structures is efficiency of service delivery, greater consumer choice or greater citizen engagement. For example, the discussion paper suggests that there could be neighbourhood improvement districts, based on business improvement districts, where local residents agree to pay an additional charge to the council tax for a

specific service. This would support the promotion of a strong consumer choice agenda through neighbourhoods. But while the paper seeks to promote citizen engagement, it contains very little about wider engagement in the strategic agenda, or links to other policies promoting empowerment within communities of interest. For instance, it proposes that in addition to the powers local councils are getting to levy fixed penalty notices for litter, graffiti and fly-posting, they should have additional powers to deal with hedge disputes, recommend alcohol licence reviews, and apply for anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs). This is rather than recommending that local councils should have a general power of well-being, to enable them to tie in with the broader strategic agenda of the principal authority. The paper therefore still risks marginalising citizen engagement.

While the government has avoided prescribing a specific form of neighbourhood engagement, it wants to increase the pressure for some devolution and will use Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) to enforce this. The discussion paper suggests that there should be triggers by which local residents can get service providers to take action if provision falls below acceptable standards, such as having to respond to petitions or devolve a service to a neighbourhood body. Neither of these methods promotes the relationship-building that is seen as central to success.

Furthermore, there are clearly tensions in the government's position. At the same time as promoting the neighbourhood agenda, the policy has been to drive down costs and make savings in public spending through economies of scale – the Gershon agenda.²

Many of the issues debated at the seminar were closely linked to the emerging policies suggested in the government's discussion paper.

3 The roles played by different neighbourhood structures

Parishes and town councils – local councils

Parish and town councils (commonly known as local councils) are the first tier of local government, working at grass-roots level within local communities. Local councils are democratically elected and are accountable to the local taxpayer. They have a precept-raising power, which is not subject to limitation. Their proximity to the community and knowledge of the local area help to ensure their value to local communities. The importance of local councils has been recognised across the board for many years. As far back as 1969, the Redcliffe-Maud report on the future of local government stated that parish councils were seen as “contributing a vital element to democratic local government. Their key function should be to focus opinion about anything that affects the well-being of each community”.

More recently, the local government White Paper *Modern local government: In touch with the people* (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), 1998) stated that local councils are an “essential part of the structure of local democracy in our country”. Similarly, the recent urban and rural White Papers (DETR, 2000a, 2000b) also highlighted the essential role of first-tier councils. The important role of the parish sector in delivering local governance is very readily acknowledged, not only by central government, but also by other bodies such as the CRC, LGA and IDeA (Improvement and Development Agency).

There are over 10,000 local councils in England and Wales, and they differ widely in size of electorate. There are small, rural parish councils with electorates of 200, while many local councils cover populations of 10,000-20,000, and the biggest has an electorate of over 70,000. Local councils also differ hugely in resources, aspirations, activities and capacities. Many act as little more than representative forums without elected parish councillors (known as ‘parish meetings’); these have limited capacity to contribute to service delivery or community leadership. Others, however, provide for the recreational, cultural and economic development of their communities. A significant number deliver services such as the provision of sports facilities, parks, museums, youth

services, warden schemes or CCTV in town centres. Many participate in local regeneration programmes, and are among the range of agencies able to bid for a variety of regeneration funding streams. Some local councils, like Peterlee Town Council in the former coalfields in County Durham, do so on a large scale.

The Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme was introduced in March 2003. The guidance explaining the scheme (ODPM, 2003) set out seven criteria for Quality Status, comprising electoral mandate, the clerk's qualifications, council meetings, communication, annual reports, accounts and ethics. Quality Status is a minimum standard and benchmark demonstrating competence. Local councils attaining Quality Status should have enhanced capacity and competence within their area regarding consultation, delivery of services and information. There are currently some 170 Quality Status local councils.

Local councils raise most of their funds by precepting on the council tax. This money is collected for the local council by the principal authority. Under section 136 of the Local Government Act 1972, a local council can precept for an agreed activity. This expenditure would then be recovered from the principal authority but, like other precepted income, excluded from that council's net expenditure total. Principal councils have used 136 agreements to fund services delivered by both principal and local councils and to avoid capping. Local councils raise around 5 per cent of their income through grants from principal authorities,³ and also get some income from property rental and investment income.

Local councils have a statutory right to be consulted on planning issues. Under the Local Government Act 1972, principal councils can delegate a function to another council, and local councils can deliver virtually any service on behalf of the principal authority. They may receive an agency fee for managing such work. Local councils can also deliver a range of services independently from their income (see main powers of parish and town councils in Appendix 1).

Unlike principal authorities, local councils do not have a general power to do anything that furthers the economic, environmental and social well-being of their residents. They have the financially limited power (under section 137 of the 1972 Local Government and Housing Act) to spend up to £5.00 per local government elector where there is some benefit to the area or some or all of its inhabitants.

Some 148 new local councils have been created since 1997, many of them in urban areas. The JRF commissioned Mark Bevan (2003) to undertake an exploratory piece of research to examine resident-led

community governance using the parish council model in three different areas. Mark presented some of his findings at the seminar. In these three areas, groups of residents with a strong sense of local identity and the geography of their community had often set up new parishes in order to tackle issues of deprivation and regeneration. The emphasis of these three areas, however, was on regeneration, which might not necessarily apply to all the new urban parish and town councils set up since 1997.

Residents in the three areas studied felt that the local council model gave them some democratic legitimacy and continuity in involving local people, and provided a focal point for highlighting needs and giving a voice to the local community. Levying a precept also gave them some capacity to tackle local issues.

These new local councils in urban areas were very different to the traditional notion of a rural parish council. As one local urban parish councillor put it:

The majority of problems here aren't what's dealt with in a rural community. We don't have a town lawn, or a town pond with swans on and things like that. We are dealing with inner-city deprivation.

(Bevan, 2003)

Mark Bevan's research found that these new local urban councils faced challenges and tensions in dealing with issues of deprivation. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of this model in dealing with the deprivation agenda are summarised in Table 3.1. These themes are addressed more fully in the following sections of this report.

Area committees

Under the Local Government Act 2000, councils can delegate to area committees those functions and executive decision-making that pertain to their area and do not have an adverse effect on other areas or the whole council. Only councillors elected for the area covered can make decisions. Co-optees (appointed, elected or nominated by voluntary and community groups) often sit on area committees, but have no voting or decision-making powers.

An LGA survey of local authorities in 2004 showed that 26 per cent of local authorities in England and Wales had adopted area committees with delegated executive functions (LGA, 2004). Most of these authorities (88 per cent) had area committees covering the whole of the

Table 3.1: Strengths and weaknesses of local council model

Weaknesses	Strengths
Can lose support in shift from a community group to a tier of government	Initiated and developed by residents themselves
Inflexible boundaries and often very small. Latter may severely limit capacity to influence Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and make direct partnership working with every parish in a principal authority area impossible	Legitimised by elections
Seen as predominantly rural and having limited powers. Poorly understood by wider stakeholders such as those involved in health and education	Permanence and continuity. Can't be dismissed by wider stakeholders
Limitation of precept in poor areas	Can raise money by precept
Problem of sustaining support from whole community	Legally independent of local authority – clear local mandate
Local parish councillors need capacity building – no separate funding for this. There is a <i>Good councillor's guide</i> produced for the National Training Strategy (NTS) for Town and Parish Councils (www.nalc.gov.uk/training/materials.html)	Understand local needs and aspirations, part of the community
Limited power to change how principal council operates or sets agenda, as it is a separate institution. Can be tensions in relationship	Some clear powers and ability to take initiatives

local authority area. The figures varied significantly by type of authority: 58 per cent of metropolitan boroughs, 41 per cent of London boroughs and 34 per cent of unitary authorities had area decision-making structures, compared with only 29 per cent of county councils and 19 per cent of district councils.

The 2000 Act and the development of community strategies was seen as a major driver for the creation of area committees. Many of them cover more than one ward, and the average area committee covers a population of 38,389. For counties, the area structures are often co-terminous with district councils, which increases the average size of population covered. Some area committees, however, only cover a population of 3,000 people.

The functions of area committees vary. Some have delegated powers to consider planning applications within the area. Many have a small projects budget to carry out highway or other capital works. Some have a small grants budget to fund voluntary and community groups in the area, while many have community services and street service functions. Some have housing management functions. Table 3.2 sets out the advantages and disadvantages of area committees.

Table 3.2: Strengths and weaknesses of area committees

Weaknesses	Strengths
Ward councillors may not be local – some have very limited experience of, or training in, citizen engagement	Clear legal and democratic position
Ward councillors may not have much influence with the executive	Can have considerable delegated executive powers
Ward boundaries often not related to neighbourhood boundaries as defined by local residents	Have a clear link with and can influence mainstream priorities and budget in the principal council
Area committees sometimes politicised and in conflict with council if dominated by different political parties. Often formal structures that mitigate against wide community involvement	Usually involve area working across whole council, so can potentially change culture of centre
Agenda usually set by ward councillors, not by community	Can have an open part of the agenda where residents can raise issues
Some committees limited to dealing with environmental and small grants budgets and limited council-only agendas rather than wider partnership working for neighbourhood management	Can easily draw in partnership working from other public service agencies and relate to LSPs and community strategies

Area forums and neighbourhood management

Area forums are consultative bodies. They usually have no legal status, though some have registered as friendly societies or even companies. Some 54 per cent of local authorities have area forums; 81 per cent of these are partnership bodies. The majority act as sounding boards on area issues, play a crucial role in community planning, and supervise neighbourhood management initiatives.

The Social Exclusion Unit's PAT 4 report (2004) first spelt out some of the concepts of neighbourhood management. The neighbourhood management function brings together service providers from different agencies to work together to meet the needs of local residents. It facilitates the operation of partnerships at sub-local level.

The neighbourhood management focus is more 'managerialist' than in other structures. The emphasis is on the role of locally based neighbourhood managers in providing coherence in service delivery under the auspices of an area forum or neighbourhood board. While elected members may sit on the area forum or neighbourhood board, government guidance has not emphasised this role. However, the latest evaluations of New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Pathfinder schemes (CRESR, 2004; SQW Ltd., 2005) makes it clear that success depends on good working relationships with the principal council.

Neighbourhood management areas are usually much smaller than those covered by area forums or area committees. On average, neighbourhood management areas cover around 4,000 households.

Some neighbourhoods and area forums focus on neighbourhood street services and crime prevention. Others are clearly linked to the community plan and neighbourhood renewal strategy, and seek to raise outcomes in the most deprived areas. Table 3.3 sets out the advantages and disadvantages of area forums and neighbourhood management.

Other area structures

There are other neighbourhood structures with decision-making powers not covered in this paper. They include a variety of company structures such as care trusts, Sure Start partnerships, New Deal for Communities boards, market town initiatives, urban regeneration companies and ALMOs (Arms Length Management Organisations).

Table 3.3: Strengths and weaknesses of area forums and neighbourhood management

Weaknesses	Strengths
Ward councillors' role in principal authority is unclear and often contested. Accountability often unclear	Partnership bodies that can address centrally the need to join up and reconfigure services to meet local needs
If local authority services and chairs the forum, it can set the agenda	Forums mostly bring together stakeholders in a community to allow them to jointly set agenda and input into LSP. Local authority support can enable a joint 'voice'
Role of local councils and local councillors can be ignored and seen as a further complication	Provide local councils and councillors with a way of influencing the agenda of the wider public sector, not just the principal authority. Provide other agencies with a say in the council's priorities for the area
Easily taken over by those who are articulate and traditional community activists rather than encouraging those who are not usually heard to get involved	Flexible and responsive
Only advisory – no legal powers. Role limited to co-ordination and influence	Informal – encourages innovation and participation
Can be marginalised to deal with environmental and community safety issues, with little impact on mainstream spending of agencies	Can concentrate on advocacy, neighbourhood plans and input into LSP, not side-tracked into running minor services
Can be seen as a 'talking shop' and lose support and engagement	Can focus on influencing contracts and outcomes rather than devolving budgets

4 Examples of joint working on regeneration and neighbourhood issues

Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes is a unitary authority with a population of 219,000, and is the largest urban area in England fully organised into a parish structure. The rural areas and the new city area had always been made up of parishes. But in the 1990s new parishes were created in some older towns forming part of the new city, so that Milton Keynes was comprehensively organised into parishes, with 47 local councils.

Milton Keynes Council promoted the establishment of the new councils (partly so that it could negotiate section 136 agreements under the Local Government Act 1972, referred to above), supported the elections to neighbourhood councils and exercised powers on their behalf until parish councils had been set up through the statutory process. Many councillors on the principal council are also parish councillors.

There have been some innovative responses to building the relationship between the local councils and Milton Keynes Council. Milton Keynes has a parish liaison team and a Parish Partnership Fund of £200,000, to which parishes can put proposals and bid for funds. However, on the negative side, commitment to devolution of the principal council is not clear. Also, while Milton Keynes Council is happy to pass services onto parish councils, there are ongoing tensions around the allocation of resources needed to carry out these additional functions.

The seminar looked at two of the largest and most active urban parish councils in Milton Keynes: Campbell Park and West Bletchley.

Campbell Park is on the edge of Milton Keynes in a new area of the city and has a population of 13,380 (see www.campbell-park.gov.uk), including a significant minority ethnic population. There are some deprived housing estates in Campbell Park. The parish council's budget in 2005/6 will be £420,000, with a precept on a band D house of £89.69.

Campbell Park Parish Council runs a range of services and manages community and sports facilities in the area. It has delivered some very innovative services on the community safety and health agendas and

negotiated 136 agreements with Milton Keynes council to take on services and avoid double taxation. The parish council has attracted some very young and active councillors, has a youth focus team and a good record on citizens' engagement. It runs an innovative mediation service, which has reduced anti-social behaviour significantly.

West Bletchley is in an older part of Milton Keynes that was mostly developed in the 1950s and 1960s. It is a mixed locale with some deprived areas and is the largest local council area in Milton Keynes, with a population of 21,320. In 2005/6 the parish council will have a budget of £754,455, with a precept on a band D house of £105.74.

Again, the parish council has been delivering some innovative projects: a music project; West Bletchley Carnival, with Inter-action (a voluntary organisation); and working with Milton Keynes Council and English Partnerships on the regeneration of Bletchley town centre. Cllr Ernie Thomas's view was that: "you can do anything you wish in a parish council as long as you take people with you".

Lessons and issues from Milton Keynes

The Milton Keynes example shows the advantages of organising a whole principal council area into a parish council structure. This has facilitated additional service delivery to meet community need in a situation where the principal council was close to the capping level. The local community has responded enthusiastically:

- nearly 1,000 people across the city have regularly attended one of the parish meetings in a cycle;
- there is support for a rapidly rising precept;
- new and innovative services have been developed;
- new partnerships have been created from the 'bottom up' to promote regeneration.

However, some problems have also emerged, as follows:

- There is a serious problem of resource equalisation across Milton Keynes as local councils take on a bigger role. Parishes with properties in low council tax bands have to set higher precepts to meet their expenditure. However, this means that poorer people pay more for services. The band D tax required to achieve income of £100 per property varies from £76.21 in Gayhurst local council area to £162.64 in Central Milton Keynes. This means that if the level of income and service is to be the same across the whole area, people in Gayhurst would pay less than half the amount that

residents living in similar properties in Central Milton Keynes would need to pay. Unless Milton Keynes Council provides significant grant aid to poorer parishes or adjusts its mainstream spending to double its spend in poorer areas, the parish council initiative could institutionalise inequality rather than support inclusion and regeneration of poorer areas. Increased devolution of services without sufficient resource back-up would aggravate this problem. There are also rising expectations for local councils to do more and more as they gain a higher profile.

- As the local councils develop new and innovative proposals, they hit the problem of limited legal powers. They have a general power under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 to incur expenditure not otherwise authorised, but these expenditure powers are limited to £5 per local government elector. This makes it difficult to fund the youth and community work that the parishes increasingly want to move into. A clear view was expressed in the seminar that local councils should have the power of well-being so that they can operate in the same environment that encourages innovation in principal councils.
- The 47 local councils in Milton Keynes are not well linked to the community strategy and Local Strategic Partnership. Co-ordinating structures would need to be developed in order to facilitate this linkage. One such structure does exist: the five largest local councils have formed a 'big 5' group and will be developing a lobbying role regarding strategic relationships with both Milton Keynes Council and the LSP.⁴
- Another issue raised in the seminar was the bureaucratic processes for establishing local councils, which take at least two years. To assist in this process, NALC has produced a guide on how to create a local council.⁵

Easington District Council and Peterlee Town Council

Easington in County Durham is the eighth most deprived district in England. It has received considerable regeneration funding over the years and receives neighbourhood renewal funding. Easington has a neighbourhood management pathfinder which works closely with the parish councils in its area.

Peterlee was a new town created in 1947 in Easington District. In 1956, the residents set up a parish council, which took town council status in 1974. The town has a population of 23,165. The local council's current budget is £1.6m, £1m of which is raised through the precept. The town council has excellent relationships with the district council and county council. Both principal councils give considerable support to Peterlee

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Town Council, in terms of joint working, supporting projects, addressing local issues and regeneration (e.g. community safety, horticultural services, vehicle maintenance work and information technology (IT) support).

The East Durham LSP involves all three tiers of government, and grew out of a task force set up in 1991. A community strategy developed in 2003 drives the joint agenda. The Local Strategic Partnership is also responsible for the neighbourhood renewal strategy. The LSP has an executive group which is split 50:50 between the statutory and community sectors. The parish and town councils collectively, Easington District Council and Durham County Council all have one vote on the LSP. The town and parish councils are involved in the theme groups that work to the LSP, and in a wider community network management group. Peterlee Town Council therefore has significant strategic influence. Furthermore, there is a Peterlee Town Regeneration Partnership. This is developing a town regeneration plan, with central involvement by the town council.

Peterlee Town Council sees its threefold objectives as being to:

- provide a democratic voice for the people, and seek to influence decisions by others which impact on the quality of life in Peterlee;
- support and contribute to the economic and social improvement of the town, and seek out opportunities that will benefit the community;
- provide services directly, in partnership and arranged through third parties, so as to offer services that **the people want**, at the most economic cost.

The town council structure has enabled the local council to get the public involved, identify priorities, forward plan and have credibility. The town council places considerable emphasis on community engagement. It has a website (www.daltonet.com/edbc/peterleecouncil/); conducts a bi-annual residents' survey, service satisfaction surveys and project surveys; and issues a quarterly newspaper. The town council is involved in a wide variety of meetings with voluntary, community and business networks and groups. It uses all forms of media to communicate.

As well as being involved in the town centre regeneration plan mentioned above, the town council has recently created a youth council and works with other groups who are not traditionally actively engaged in deciding on local issues. It runs a range of community buildings and community and sport facilities. The town council also runs Shotton Hall, a major business and conference centre. Shotton Hall provides additional

income for the council, as well as space to facilitate the development of other local agencies and groups, including the education Excellence Cluster. In addition, the town council provides a one-stop shop information centre, which is also used by partners such as the Aim High youth project, a pensions advice service, health services and tourist information.

Lessons and issues from Easington and Peterlee

In the seminar discussions, the principal and local councils both argued that the successful outcomes of their joint work depend on good local relationships. Peterlee is one of the 170 local councils that have attained Quality Status. The town council went in for Quality Status because it saw that reaching this benchmark gives it more credibility, and sends a message to Whitehall that local councils want to, and can, provide quality services.

The two councils and all partners involved in the LSP have a memorandum of understanding, and a charter is currently being developed. However, the feeling is that joint working arrangements are leading to major successes, and would hopefully continue regardless of whether or not a charter were put in place.

Peterlee's success depends crucially on its attitude to community engagement. As John Arthur, the Town Clerk, said at the seminar: "You can provide the best facilities in the world, but if you don't give people what they want it doesn't work." The range of ways in which the council is trying to engage the community, outlined above, are clearly designed to ensure that Peterlee Council is clear about its communities' needs.

Linked to community engagement is the strong partnership building in both the principal authority and the local council. The Easington example is particularly interesting in that it shows a town council that has a strong role in relation to the LSP, has facilitated the work of the Peterlee Town Regeneration Partnership (the Peterlee Regeneration Strategy) and has access to strategic influence within the LSP.

This central role in regeneration is very different from the role envisaged for neighbourhood structures in the government's discussion paper on neighbourhoods (ODPM, 2005). Peterlee's central focus on influence, regeneration and running community facilities does not align with a narrower focus on street services and anti-social behaviour. It should be acknowledged, however, that the roles are not mutually exclusive, and it is generally accepted that Peterlee Town Council should undertake both.

However, the multiplicity of funding streams and neighbourhood structures driven by government initiatives have presented Easington with some problems. There have been some minor governance and decision-making tensions between the neighbourhood management pathfinder and the principal council as the accountable body.

There is also a multiplicity of structures. As well as the local councils, Easington District Council has four consultative area forums, health forums, regeneration partnerships, area-based initiatives (e.g. Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) in its final phase, and an EU URBAN project), housing partnerships, Community First (priority policing areas), an Active England Initiative (youth and sports programme), settlement renewal initiatives, the Seaham regeneration partnership and Sure Start programmes. Rationalisation is needed in all of this. Over the next few years, with the development of local area agreements, this rationalisation will need to take place. The mechanisms of local government and wider community involvement will also need to be renegotiated.

Stockport Council and Offerton Town Council

Stockport is a metropolitan borough council. Though it does not qualify for neighbourhood renewal funding, it has some pockets of severe deprivation. According to the MBC's analysis of statistics, Stockport is the seventh most polarised local authority area in England in terms of wealth and poverty.

Stockport MBC was one of the first authorities to have area committees, which were established in 1974. There are eight area committees, each made up of councillors for the wards in those areas. The committees have budgets to make decisions about traffic calming, pavement repairs, public rights of way and other local highway matters. They determine applications for the use of parks, nominate governors to local schools and consider most planning applications. They also monitor the operation of services provided by Stockport Council and external agencies within their area, and can make proposals for how services can be improved.

The area committees provide an opportunity for local people to have their say through open forums, public question times and public speaking on planning applications. They form an important part of the Council's public consultation process with local community, community council, tenants and residents associations and other local groups, and are an important part of the community planning and community strategy process.

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Offerton Estate Parish Council was established on 1 April 2002 following a petition. At that time, Stockport Council wrote to the residents affected asking them if they wanted a parish council to be created. The overwhelming response was that residents did not support the establishment of a parish council. The results of the consultation were sent to the Secretary of State. However, the government was not convinced by these representations and gave approval to the creation of the only local council within Stockport Council's boundaries, with an electorate of 2,700 and ten parish councillors.

Despite this inauspicious start, relationships between the two councils have developed positively. Stockport Council has supported the parish council by leasing premises at a peppercorn rent, funding a parish development co-ordinator (plus administrative support), and providing a loan towards refurbishment of the parish community centre. The local area committee of Stockport Council commissioned a report from the Audit Commission, *Building a sustainable Offerton Estate parish* (2003). This provided a good base of information for the newly created parish council. The local council has established a Parish Partnership Committee, which has five parish councillors, representatives from Stockport Council, and business and community representatives.

Offerton Estate Parish Council sees its role as “giving the community a voice today, for a brighter, better future tomorrow”. Joint work by the parish council and Stockport Council has led to joint representation to the Passenger Transport Authority on bus services, joint opposition to post office closure, a joint initiative to establish a Friends of the Parks Group to prepare proposals for a multi-use play facility, the preparation of a Parish Plan and the refurbishment of the parish community centre.

Stockport Council has also established another neighbourhood structure as part of a pilot for Local Democratic Renewal. The Werneth Community Partnership is effectively a mini-LSP, with Stockport councillor representation, supported by officers from Stockport Council. The Werneth pilot, like the Parish Partnership Committee, aims to involve people in local decision-making, identify local problems and solutions, and ensure that services are co-ordinated, regardless of which agency provides them. The Council is considering how these mini-LSPs could relate to its area committee structure and the town-wide LSP.

Lessons from Stockport and Offerton

Offerton Estate Parish Council has been successful because Stockport Council has recognised that it is a tier of government and has supported it accordingly. The two councils have found that there can be tensions

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around responsibilities in relation to neighbourhood management unless everyone is signed up to a clear strategy. The commissioning of a strategy by the area committee was an important element in successful progress, together with the support provided by Stockport to the parish council, especially during the first twelve months following its creation. Developing learning through different neighbourhood structures in Werneth and Offerton has also been useful. A clear strategy of how neighbourhood working can link with the principal authority and strategic policy is developing.

There remain some tensions in the relationship. The two councils, however, are clear that progress will depend on how well they continue to work together, and on being able to demonstrate some additionality from the new parish structure.

5 Issues raised at the seminar

The aims of the seminar were to:

- identify some of the problems that result from possible overlap or confusion about respective roles, and look at how these problems can be addressed;
- identify examples of joint working on neighbourhood and regeneration issues between urban local councils and principal authorities;
- produce recommendations/comments to feed into development of the government's neighbourhood policy as set out in its discussion paper *Citizen engagement and public services: why neighbourhoods matter* (ODPM, 2005).

The following issues were drawn out of the discussions.

Links to community strategies

The case studies in section 4 showed clearly that urban local councils exist primarily to give a voice to their local communities on wider issues concerning the regeneration of their areas. It is this task that is the driver for community engagement. They also showed that where there are good relationships between the tiers of government, this input by local councils can add value. Local councils can make a significant contribution to community engagement in community strategies and provide the building blocks to help to develop a community strategy from the bottom up.

The seminar highlighted the political community leadership role of both parish councillors and principal authority councillors in this task. Motivation comes from councillors who want a better quality of life for all their residents and greater influence over the strategic direction of their areas.

Citizen engagement and public services: why neighbourhoods matter (ODPM, 2005) still sees the neighbourhood as the principal avenue for engagement on a limited agenda of safety, environmental issues, community facilities and access. Parish and town councils also have the right to be consulted on development proposals. The government's discussion paper, however, contains too little on how parishes and

neighbourhoods can engage in strategic issues and with wider bodies and partnerships like the LSP, and in negotiation of Local Area Agreements. There is little in the paper on local community plans or ward spatial plans, or on the relationship between democratisation at the centre through interest groups and engagement at the neighbourhood level. The seminar addressed the issue of the extent to which parish councils should and could have a meaningful input at the strategic level.

The conclusion was that there must be clear routes for local-level structures to influence strategic decisions. The Commission for Rural Communities paper, *Planning for vital communities – good practice in linking parish plans, market town plans and community plans* (2004), has done some useful work on this agenda for local councils in rural areas. But the routes to influence strategic decisions must be open to all neighbourhood-level structures, not just local councils in rural areas, and learning on how to involve neighbourhood structures needs to be spread. This will be particularly important in areas with a large number of small neighbourhood structures, where intermediate co-ordinating structures will be required.

Neighbourhood management

Previously, the government's neighbourhood management agenda was very managerialist and did not identify a key role for parish councillors or councillors from principal authorities. The government's new discussion paper (ODPM, 2005), however, now sees the role of the councillor from a principal council ward as central to the new neighbourhood agenda. This is a welcome recognition of the importance of the principal councillor's community leadership role.

Questions were raised in the seminar as to the role of the parish councillor and what training and support do both local and principal authority councillors need if they are going to lead the neighbourhood management agenda. How best can councillors work together to reconfigure services to local needs through the specification and monitoring of contracts rather than devolved budgets or services? How can local responsiveness and the Gershon efficiency agenda be combined? How do parishes relate to the neighbourhood management agenda?

It is clear that parish councillors need support and development if they are to play a wider role, and that funding is required for this purpose. A National Training Strategy for Town and Parish Councils came out of the rural White Paper (DETR, 2000a). This is now run by County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs), the Society of Local Council

Clerks, rural community councils and the University of Gloucestershire. The NTS has developed a certificate in local administration for clerks of local councils and has recently produced *The good councillor's guide* (available at www.nalc.gov.uk/training/materials.html). NALC is also currently producing a training module on chairmanship skills, for use by county training partnerships. However, parish councillors still have little support for developing their role, skills and knowledge.

There appears to be more scope to develop models through which local communities can be given a voice on the outcomes for service delivery they want in their area, rather than necessarily having devolved budgets and running the services themselves. The seminar concluded that there should be outcome-level agreements between neighbourhood structures, principal authorities and other public agencies. These agreements should specify the outcomes that the principal authorities will deliver and enable local bodies to hold them to account.

Another possible model is learning from the success of Development Trusts.⁶ Many of the success stories described in the case studies involved the handover of community facilities to parishes. Community assets can provide a source of income, can often be run very effectively by the community they serve, and there are limited Gershon-type efficiencies to be derived through their being run by large-scale authorities. However, the handover of major services can be more problematic. Not only does this have efficiency implications, but the problems of institutionalising inequality by raising funds for such services through the precept also start to become more serious as more services are devolved in this way. So the focus on community facilities rather than major services may lead to good value for money and more community engagement.

Finally, the case studies showed that there are ways in which local councils can engage in partnership committees or mini-LSPs to help to influence the joint delivery of various services to the neighbourhood. These structures require good relationships between the two councils, active involvement by the ward councillor from the principal authority, and a change in the working practices of the principal authority. Working in partnership cannot just be grafted onto to the existing work practices of the principal council. Neighbourhood working requires significant changes in the way that principal councils and other public agencies operate.

Community involvement

The government's discussion paper (ODPM, 2005) recognises that neighbourhood/area structures and parishes can just involve traditional community activists and be very unrepresentative. More emphasis is needed on inclusivity and accountability. The case studies revealed that community engagement is central to the effectiveness of local councils. The range of ways in which Peterlee Town Council has engaged the community has enabled it to speak confidently on behalf of the community at partnership meetings, and to be both a tier of government and part of the community network in relation to the LSP.

Where both parishes and neighbourhood/area structures exist there can clearly be duplication and the public may be confused. Stockport's attempt to develop a clear model, pilot it and then spread good practice and develop clarity of roles and responsibilities shows one way forward. Strong links between local councils and area committees are helpful. Local Area Agreements may provide a basis for rationalisation, but local councils need to be central to the process of developing them. Memorandums of understanding or protocols for community engagement agreed by all agencies through the LSP might be another way forward.

Funding

Parish councils precept on the council tax. There is no limit on their precept, and clearly those with higher-band housing can raise more income. This issue is particularly serious in the 88 neighbourhood renewal authorities. If neighbourhood renewal floor targets are to be met, mainstream funds of partner agencies need to be directed to those neighbourhoods in greatest need. However, if a parish model of neighbourhood governance with major service devolution is followed, this might be more problematic to achieve. What happens if wealthy areas vote for a service in their area funded through a precept, but oppose an increase in council tax to fund the same service in a poorer area? How does a local authority deal with inequality in service delivery arising through this system? A targeted grant or targeted service devolution programme from the principal authority (rather than a universal scheme) can create political tensions.

There are two issues here. Firstly, the government's discussion paper recognises that there are costs associated with decentralisation, but does not address how these are to be resourced. This is an important consideration given the emphasis placed on the Gershon agenda. Secondly, there is the question of how current funding models (and the proposed neighbourhood improvement districts) can target resources on those neighbourhoods in greatest need.

While the parish model brings many advantages through its precepting powers (i.e. the ability to take action independently of the principal local authority in order to meet local needs), its limitations must also be recognised. The government should not wish to promote a situation in which a parish council can demand devolution of a wider range of services, irrespective of the impact on the key aim of closing the gap between the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the rest.

Relationship and charters

The seminar expressed concern about the idea that local authorities may be forced to devolve a service to a neighbourhood body in response to a petition, or that neighbourhood working would be forced onto principal authorities through the CPA inspection route. It was felt that relationship-building between the tiers of government was central to the success of local councils. Forcing them into neighbourhood working would lead to a 'tick box' mentality, with barriers remaining, and would stop joint working. It could lead to principal authorities imposing their own neighbourhood structures on local communities – a top-down rather than a bottom-up process. Forcing services to be devolved could lead to the devolution of responsibility without significant resources.

The use of charters, negotiated between principal and local councils, might be a more useful way to raise service standards. The feeling was also that charters could help to enshrine a way of working that would ensure that certain strategic matters were developed in full consultation with local councils. However, none of the case studies of good practice had negotiated charters and, while seen as helpful, there was a general feeling that informal relationship-building was more important.

There was also the belief that peer pressure, councillor development, support for parish and principal councils and for CALCs, along with good practice networks and peer review, were far more effective drivers for change than the CPA process. The problem of some principal authorities being very reluctant to engage with local councils was recognised; a centralised agency providing a mediation service was thought appropriate in these circumstances.

The LGIU has engaged in a parallel study on charters between principal and local councils, funded by the Commission for Rural Communities. This study concludes that:

There is clearly a case for the more vigorous promotion of charters among local councils, especially smaller local councils. Better working relationships are seen as a key benefit of charters among

local councils, and this and other benefits must be more widely publicised.

More promotion also needs to be targeted at principal authorities, who are by no means uniformly convinced of the benefits of charters. An educative process is required, aimed at convincing principal authorities of the democratic legitimacy and value of local councils.

The government should continue to develop, fund and promote schemes that encourage joint working between the tiers. Such schemes foster understanding and contribute to better relationships.

(LGIU, 2005)

There is no definitive list of items that a charter should contain. However, the LGIU has designed a ten-point 'checklist' of characteristics that all charters should possess if they are to be of value. This is attached in Appendix 2.

Additional powers

There appeared to be little interest among seminar participants in increasing the enforcement role of local councils. A body which is trying to become more inclusive and focus on community engagement may not be the most appropriate to deal with ASBOs.

The key area of expansion was seen as being into youth work and wider community activity. A clear case was made for local councils to have the power of well-being, so that they would have the freedom and flexibility to do anything that was in the economic, environmental or social interest of their residents. This would support the innovation that was clearly apparent, particularly in the Milton Keynes local councils.

The creation of local councils

Concern was expressed about the bureaucratic procedures currently in place to set up local councils or even change their name. Concern was also expressed about the impact of ward boundary changes for principal councils and the need for these changes to take greater account of neighbourhood and parish structures, to facilitate joint working and support the role of ward councillors.

The ability of 10 per cent of residents on the electoral roll of an area to demand a new parish council is a powerful tool for a people-led approach to community governance. It is one of the few mechanisms

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available to residents to demand a form of governance which is at variance with that imposed by principal authorities. However, there needs to be some way of balancing the views of this 10 per cent with the wishes of the remaining 90 per cent. The current mechanism of consultation by a principal authority is one method, though not always necessarily an objective one. To date, the Secretary of State has always been minded to go with the petitioners. Some thought needs to be given to simplifying the process and ensuring that any new neighbourhood structure has the support of the majority of residents in the area.

6 Recommendations

The seminar highlighted how local councils in urban areas, alongside other neighbourhood structures, could make a significant contribution to regeneration and neighbourhood management. The following recommendations should assist local councils in working with principal councils to fulfil this role.

Central government is urged to:

1. promote local flexibility in neighbourhood structures, in line with its policy that ‘one size does not fit all’;
2. facilitate rationalisation of partnerships and local neighbourhood structures by getting government departments to co-ordinate their activities through Local Area Agreements with principal local authorities;
3. address the funding issues in its neighbourhood policy. Local councils need more financial resources if they are to take on a wider role. The national neighbourhood framework must address the issue of inequality in the ability of different neighbourhoods to raise resources. The neighbourhood agenda must support the objective of concentrating resources in areas of persistent poverty;
4. recognise the potential for local structures to engage in strategic policy-making and promote this role;
5. legislate to give the power of well-being to local councils, simplify the statutory process to create local councils, and ensure that the boundary commission takes local neighbourhood structures into account in its work;
6. develop a national capacity-building programme for councillors in town and parish councils, and recognise that there may be a limit to the time that people will give voluntarily to working for local councils;
7. promote good relationship-building between tiers of government. The emphasis should be less on coercive ways of delivering further neighbourhood working, and more on support for mediation, peer support, joint councillor development programmes and best practice information. Charter development should be supported, but not seen as the only or all of the answer;
8. develop policy and good-practice guidance on outcome-level agreements;

9. recognise the tensions between the devolution and Gershon agendas and address these tensions.

Principal authorities are urged to:

1. be clear about the purpose of the neighbourhood structures they support;
2. clarify the roles and responsibilities of the different kinds of neighbourhood structures, and facilitate a clear strategy and structure to enable local residents to have an input into strategic decision-making. This involves considering whether to promote organisation into a parish structure, and how to deal with the different capacities of existing local councils. A negotiated local charter may be helpful in this process;
3. recognise that neighbourhood working cannot be grafted onto existing working methods. Principal authorities need to change the way they work, to enable local community engagement in local councils to make a difference to outcomes;
4. support local councils and develop good working relationships;
5. support the role of the ward councillor as a local community leader working with local councils and neighbourhood arrangements;
6. seek clarity about the relationship and roles of the different tiers in three-tier areas. Local councils need to seek a relationship with both principal councils in areas with counties and districts, as they want to tackle a range of environmental, youth and community issues.

Local councils are urged to:

1. aspire to giving their local residents a voice on wider strategic issues and on tackling poverty and inequality;
2. develop relationships both with ward councillors and the whole principal council, and with other public agencies through local partnerships;
3. pursue Quality Status, as this important benchmark gives legitimacy to the wider role of local councils;
4. adopt a wide programme of support for community engagement, as this is key to the success of giving local residents a voice and influencing the wider agenda;
5. recognise the resource issues and be more inventive in finding ways to influence outcomes for local residents, rather than just calling for the devolution of services.

Appendix 1: Current powers of parish and town councils in England

Function	Power or duty
Allotments	Power to provide allotments. Duty to provide allotment gardens if demand unsatisfied
Burials and churchyards	Power to acquire and maintain burial grounds and churchyards
Bus shelters and community transport	Power to provide and maintain bus shelters and to fund community transport scheme
Common land, village greens, open spaces and recreation	Power to manage and provide common pastures and to acquire land and manage it for open space, village greens, recreation and public walks
Community centres, public buildings and village halls	Power to provide and equip buildings for use of clubs having athletic, social or educational objectives and to provide buildings for public meetings and assemblies
Crime prevention	Power to spend money on various crime prevention measures
Education	Right to appoint school governors
Entertainment and the arts	Provision of entertainment and support for the arts
Highways	Powers to provide and maintain footpaths, lighting, litter bins, roadside seats and shelters, parking spaces, cycle parks, traffic signs, trees and roadside verges. Power to complain to the district council in relation to protection of rights of way and roadside waste. Power to undertake traffic calming

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Information	Power to provide information
Lotteries	Power to promote
Land and investment	Power to acquire and dispose of land and participate in schemes of collective investment
Postal service	Power to subsidise additional postal and telecommunication services
Public conveniences	Power to provide
Town and country planning	Right to be notified of planning applications
War memorials	Power to maintain, repair and protect
Water supply	Power to utilise springs and streams

Appendix 2: The LGIU's charter checklist

The LGIU's 'charter checklist' (LGIU, 2005)

Does your charter contain:

1. **Recognition:** is there a clear statement recognising the contribution, rights and principal duties of all participating tiers? Does this recognition refer to and support the democratic legitimacy of all tiers of local government?
2. **Engagement:** does the charter contain a clear commitment for principal authorities to engage with key local issues (such as town or parish plans)? Does the charter allow for local aspirations or concerns in the development of key principal authority strategies (such as the community strategy)?
3. **Consultation:** does the charter set out clear, specific *and time limited* procedures and processes for consultation? Does it set out a genuine commitment among all parties to consult on matters of mutual concern?
4. **Governance:** does the charter contain provision for the relationship between local councils and various governance structures in the area (these could be LSPs, area committees, or neighbourhood management structures)?
5. **Communications:** does the charter contain provisions for liaison and communications between the tiers, whether between members or officers? Does it contain provisions for building and developing relationships? Does it say whom to contact?
6. **Ethics:** does the charter contain references to standards, ethics and codes of conduct?
7. **Support:** does the charter set out a commitment for the principal authority to support the development of local councils (for example through training or the sharing of IT resources)?
8. **Empowerment:** is the charter empowering, in that it recognises and accommodates the aspirations of local councils to grow and develop, and actively supports this aspiration? Does it set out clear guidelines for overcoming difficult issues like double taxation?
9. **Flexibility:** does the charter recognise the diversity of local councils, and allow for a different pace and mode of development among them?
10. **Performance, monitoring and review:** is the charter performance managed? Does it contain specific and time-limited provision for monitoring and review?

Appendix 3: Participants in the JRF seminar, 11 March 2005

Name	Position	Organisation
David Carden	Town Clerk	Burgess Hill Town Council
Cllr Thomas Fraser		Campbell Park Parish Council
Crispin Moor	Director, Rural Expertise Group	Commission for Rural Communities
Richard Inman		Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Peter Coe	SRB5 Area Co-ordinator, Parkside & Dawdon Regen.	Easington District Council
Christopher J Rolley	Town Clerk	East Grinstead Town Council
Dominic O'Connell	Policy Officer	Home Office
Dr. Andrew Coulson		INLOGOV
Maggie Jones	Policy & Practice Development Manager	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Andrew Jones	Policy Officer	LGIU
Ines Newman	Head of Policy	LGIU
Cllr Kevin Wilson		Milton Keynes Council
Cllr Ken Cleary	Chairman	NALC
John Findlay	Chief Executive	NALC
Michael Green	Policy & Parliamentary Affairs Manager	NALC
Justin Griggs	Development Officer	NALC
Alan Jones		NALC
Craig Ainsworth	Parish Clerk	Offerton Parish Council
Cllr Keith Ryan	Chair, Offerton Estate	Offerton Parish Council
Steve A'Court		ODPM
Allan Bowman	Head of Programmes, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit	ODPM

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Stuart Heatherington	Senior Policy Adviser	ODPM
John Arthur	Town Clerk	Peterlee Parish Council
Nick Randle	Chief Executive	Society of Local Council Clerks
Duncan Wright	National Treasurer	Society of Local Council Clerks
Steve Hopkins	LGA Adviser on Local Councils	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Mark Welden	Executive Member for Community Development	Stockport MBC
James Gorie	Policy Adviser	Countryside Agency
Dr. Bill Edwards	Co-director of Wales Rural Observatory and Senior Lecturer on Geography	University of Wales
Mark Bevan	Research Fellow, Centre for Housing Policy	University of York
Cllr Ernie Thomas		West Bletchley Council

Notes

- 1 See Sullivan, H. et al (2001) and evaluation of the New Deal for Communities programme, available from the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University. Online at <<http://ndcevaluation.adc.shu.ac.uk/ndcevaluation/Home.asp>>.
- 2 Sir Peter Gershon's *Independent review of public sector efficiency* was published as part of the government's Spending Review 2004. All local authorities have to make efficiency savings following this review.
- 3 1995/96 figure quoted in Long, N. (2001) *Parish, town and community councils*, LGIU.
- 4 The Commission for Rural Communities (2004) has produced *Planning for vital communities – good practice in linking parish plans, market town plans and community plans*. This guide is aimed at all those involved in preparing parish plans, market town action plans and community strategies. It shows how the gap between the policies and perspectives of the bodies with power and the knowledge and aspirations of local communities can be bridged by linking local community-led parish and market town action plans to wider LSPs and community strategies.
- 5 The NALC toolkit on creating new councils is at www.createcouncil.org.uk.
- 6 For more information, see the Development Trust Association site at www.dta.org.uk.

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