

New parish and town councils in urban areas

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Communities and DIY democracy

Mark Bevan

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Joseph Rowntree Foundation
The Homestead
40 Water End
York YO30 6WP
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Executive summary

Considerable policy attention has focused on encouraging the ways that residents can have a greater say about what goes on in the areas in which they live. The emphasis has been placed on grassroots development and community self-help in meeting the central government agenda of reinvigorating local democracy and civil renewal. One emerging form of community self-help is the development of resident-led new parish and town councils. Since the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, residents who live in any area that is not already wholly or partly within a parish may petition for the establishment of a parish council in their area. Since this time, 107 new local councils have been developed (although a proportion of these have been initiated by district or unitary councils, termed principal authorities).

Parish and town councils (collectively termed local councils) are democratically elected bodies and all residents living within the parish or town council area who are registered on the electoral register are entitled to vote. Elections are held once every four years. Residents are also entitled to attend meetings, and local councils must hold an Annual General Meeting once a year at which residents are entitled to question the local council over the conduct of its affairs.

Local councils have very little in the way of duties that they have to perform and yet their remit can range very widely in terms of the activities they can potentially engage in. This versatility can lend itself to a focus on the priorities that emerge from residents in any community whether they live in rural or urban areas. Local councils are often portrayed as a traditional, long-standing form of government, with a particular relevance to the rural context, yet this belies the potential role that local councils can play in urban areas.

It would seem that now is a good time to be a local council. Government policy has emphasised the positive contribution that local councils can make in their area and is gradually providing the means to develop this role. A cornerstone of the

developing role of local councils will be the introduction of the Quality Parish in 2003 and it is proposed that local councils that attain quality status will have an enhanced role to play within their area, covering the areas of consultation, delivery of services and information. This development is linked with the availability of training and greater freedom for local councils to spend money that will bring direct benefit to their area, but that falls outside their specific powers.

Commentators have reviewed the potential for local councils to undertake an enhanced role in their area. They suggest that it will be the larger local councils, particularly those subject to the Best Value regime that will have the capacity to undertake the direct delivery of services, compared with smaller local councils. Nevertheless, all local councils can exercise considerable influence as a means of representing residents' views, and it is in this respect they could have a potentially significant role to play in providing a link between the priorities and views of residents on the one hand and agencies active in their area on the other.

This research has focused on Blakelaw and North Fenham, Newcastle upon Tyne where residents have established a new local council in their neighbourhood. Their experience was compared with three other areas where residents have either recently established local councils or are campaigning to develop one. In the three areas where local councils have recently emerged, a particular emphasis has been placed on regeneration and dealing with the effects of disadvantage. Respondents identified a number of issues and themes in the process of establishing and running new local councils in these areas.

- Respondents noted the hard work required to make the transition from a community group into a new tier of local government. Being members of a new local council represented a steep learning curve for all those involved. Respondents placed great emphasis on the need for information.

- Respondents highlighted the value that they placed on opportunities to share their experiences with other new local councils. Some respondents were keen to pass on their experience to residents in other areas who may be considering going down this route. There would also seem to be potential for building wider links across the country at large, enabling new councils to share their experiences, not only about processes involved in establishing new local councils, but also being able to draw on experiences of established local councils in relation to service delivery, engaging with residents and partnership working with other stakeholders. The good practice website established by the Local Government Association, hosted by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), would seem to offer great potential in this respect.
- Greater clarity was required over specific issues with regard to the relationship between the local council and the principal authority. Current guidance emphasises the development of positive working relationships between tiers of government. However, it would be more realistic to acknowledge that conflict is part and parcel of working relationships and that residents and agencies need to be able to resolve, and work through, any tensions that develop to identify common ground.
- A further issue was the initial costs involved in establishing a new local council, such as establishing a base from which to operate and acquiring essential office equipment. There is the potential for the first precept to take account of the start-up costs of a new council, as occurred in the case of Headland Town Council, although these initial costs may not necessarily be acknowledged by the principal authority, as it has responsibility for setting the first precept.
- There is also the issue of the time required for residents to develop the skills and confidence to grow into the new role of councillors. There is already a precedent for residents to be given the opportunity to develop these capacities in other types of resident-led activity. One example is through the tenant empowerment grant programme (Section 16 funding), which is made available to residents who wish to exercise their right to manage their own housing services.
- Since a local council was often a new feature of governance in an area, other urban-based organisations and agencies were not necessarily used to working with local councils. Furthermore, it was felt that, even if such agencies were used to dealing with established local councils, they also might not necessarily be aware of the range of activities that local councils could become involved in, particularly in relation to tackling the needs of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and regeneration in urban areas. Indeed, there was a concern expressed by respondents that their efforts to promote the potential of local councils in their area were hampered by the word 'parish', which might also exacerbate the perception of local councils as limited in their scope. Another factor is the degree to which there may be antipathy towards the new local council, either from within the local council area, or from other organisations and agencies.
- Tensions may also arise over the way an emerging resident-led structure can sit alongside existing community and voluntary groups and activities in the area. While it has been suggested that it is important not to lose sight of the origins of new local councils insofar as they represent a form of community self-help, the research has also highlighted the value to respondents of drawing a clear distinction between the local council as a tier of local government and

community and voluntary groups when it comes to representing the views of residents in, for example, regeneration initiatives, or feeding into Local Strategic Partnerships.

Recommendations

- Local councillors have considerable responsibilities, learning how to operate within the specific structures of local government, but also employing staff, budgeting, fundraising, representing communities, case work and service delivery. Not least is making the transition from a group of residents campaigning for a new local council to local councillors, especially since very few of the residents involved are likely to have any prior experience of working in this type of structure. Training and guidance needs to recognise the particular requirements of residents working for the first time in a new local council. Such training offers the potential for a continuous and expanding cycle of capacity building within an area, as residents develop the skills and confidence to take on this new role, and as more residents are drawn into the process. Furthermore, the costs of this capacity building, in terms of time and money, need to be recognised.
- A strong message from the research was the value placed on sharing experiences between new local councils. One way of developing skills and confidence would be an opportunity to make links with other new local councils around the country. This could be taken forward by the development of a national network for new local councils, or through the development of a website. One example could be the potential offered by the website for local councils hosted by the Improvement and Development Agency, which would also facilitate the sharing of good practice between new and established local councils.

- Current guidance emphasises positive working relationships between principal authorities and local councils. In addition, it would be helpful to acknowledge the potential for tension and conflict between tiers of government and to offer ways that such tensions might be mediated and resolved.
- Raising awareness among service providers of the role of local councils, particularly in urban areas: this is not just about raising the profile of local councils, but also about addressing perceptions of the scope of local councils with regard to the type of activities they can engage in.
- Further research is necessary to explore the views of residents who live in areas where new local councils have been established about the development of this type of governance.

There is a huge diversity in the approaches to facilitating resident involvement in the local governance of their neighbourhoods and there is no single 'right' way to achieve this involvement. However, there are very few instances where residents themselves can exercise a right to demand that a new form of community involvement be established in their area, which is recognised in statute. Local councils offer one option for devolving power to the level of neighbourhoods that is being explored by a number of principal authorities around the country. Significantly, the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 also enables residents to establish local councils if they so choose.

Local councils offer a powerful way for residents to engage in community self-help. They provide residents with an input into the governance of their areas that is independent and permanent, and, crucially, cannot be dissolved by any external agency. The new local councils in this study have emerged out of a concern by residents to have a greater influence on the local governance

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of the communities in which they live. In this respect, the establishment of the new local councils appears to be firmly rooted in the type of community self-help activity that central government is seeking to encourage with its emphasis on facilitating civil renewal and community capacity building. Resident-led initiatives, such as new local councils, will inevitably lead to a patchwork of different

approaches to representation within principal authorities. In assessing the merit of various forms of resident involvement in the governance of their areas, perhaps it is necessary to consider not only the outcome, in terms of the specific type of involvement established, but also the process in which residents have initiated and developed their own representative structure.

1 Introduction

Background

If, as a community, you want to have a parish, then you are going to have to do something about it. If you leave it to somebody else, it's a fair bet that it'll never ever happen. So if you want it, and you want it bad enough – you do it. (Parish councillor)

Considerable policy attention has focused on encouraging the ways in which residents can have a greater say about what goes on in the areas in which they live. The Modernising Local Government agenda has emphasised the renewal of local democracy as a key concern. Policy attention has also focused on neighbourhood renewal, particularly in relation to community involvement in regeneration. The overall aim of these policies is concerned with the need for local communities to identify problems in their areas and, by working with other stakeholders and government agencies, to improve local outcomes by joining up local services and making them more responsive to local needs (Burgess *et al.*, 2001).

However, research has highlighted the fragmentation of local governance (Pratchett and Wilson, 1996), leading to the issue about how residents respond to, and engage with, this diverse range of agencies operating in their area. Previous research has also noted weaknesses in resident involvement in the context of regeneration (Carley and Kirk, 1998). In part, this relates to the way in which residents often have had to engage with a succession of agencies, partnerships and area-based initiatives. While the government has emphasised that the long-term solution lies principally in improved co-ordinated mainstream services, the Regional Co-ordination Unit began a comprehensive review of area-based initiatives in 2001. This review aimed to improve the co-ordination and integration of initiatives and the way in which they interact with other activity in localities. A number of action plans flowed from this review, one of which has led to a further

review of support for community groups, which is currently being undertaken by the Active Community Unit (ACU). The government has reiterated that the active engagement of communities is a central plank in its New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal. The ACU has spelt out the government's commitment to a number of central themes, including community capacity building and civil renewal. It has pitched its discussion on community capacity building in generic terms and has deliberately not specified the diverse ways in which communities may engage with service delivery or the governance of their areas. The emphasis has been placed on grassroots development and community self-help in meeting the central government agenda of reinvigorating local democracy and civil renewal.

One emerging form of community self-help is the development of resident-led new parish and town councils. Since the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, residents who live in any area that is not already wholly or partly within a parish may petition for the establishment of a parish council in their area. The petition must define the area to which the new parish will relate. Thus, a significant element of the Act is that the residents themselves identify the area covered by the new local council. The petition must also be signed by not less than 250 local government electors, or by 10 per cent of the local government electors of their area. If a district or unitary council receives a petition from residents that complies with the terms indicated above, then they must send the petition to the Secretary of State. By late 2002, some 107 new local councils had been established since the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, including a number in urban areas. However, it must be noted that in some areas principal authorities have initiated the process of establishing these new local councils, while, in others, residents have petitioned for the new local councils themselves.

The government has recently announced a number of policies to enhance the role of parish, town and community councils (referred to as local councils, while district, unitary and county councils are referred to as principal authorities). Nevertheless, in spite of this policy attention, the role of local councils within the neighbourhood management agenda has been neglected (Burgess *et al.*, 2001; Taylor, 2000). Indeed, commentators have highlighted that the full potential of local councils has not been realised because of their absence in most urban areas (Coulson, 1998). This belies the potential contribution that local councils could make in terms of enhancing both local democracy and the delivery of services in their areas, particularly in the context of regeneration. The idea of developing local councils in urban areas is certainly not new (see Young, 1970), but is perhaps higher up the agenda given the current policy context. A key feature of new local councils established by residents is that they represent an opportunity for residents to initiate and lead the development of this form of representation in their area, independent of any other government structure. This research focuses on the development of a number of new local councils in urban areas and their potential for engaging in the regeneration of the communities that they represent.

Aims

This research had a number of aims. These were to:

- monitor the development of a new urban parish council in Blakelaw and North Fenham, Newcastle upon Tyne
- compare the processes involved in establishing the parish council in Blakelaw and North Fenham with other new urban parish councils
- assess the potential for new urban parish councils to make a long-term contribution to shaping local governance, particularly in the context of area-based regeneration.

Methods

This report sets out the results of a research project to monitor the establishment of a new urban parish council in Blakelaw and North Fenham, Newcastle upon Tyne. The report also draws on the experiences of three other areas to illustrate the processes involved in trying to establish new local councils in urban areas and to compare them with the experiences of residents in Blakelaw and North Fenham. In one case, Headland Town Council in Hartlepool was established two years before in 1999. In contrast, Offerton Estate Parish Council, Stockport was established in 2002. The fourth area was in Headingley, Leeds and comprised a community group that was in the process of trying to establish a parish council in its area. All four areas were classed as non-rural according to the Countryside Agency's Ward Level Definition of Rural Areas 1998.

For the purpose of this research, a new local council was defined as one established as a result of the provisions of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. A key feature of the local councils in the research was that residents had used the provisions available to them under the 1997 Act to petition for a local council themselves. The scale of the research was necessarily small and it was not intended to be representative of all new local councils established after 1997.

The report describes the process of establishing and running new local councils from the perspective of some of the residents involved. A qualitative approach was taken to establish the views of a range of residents involved in this process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with residents involved in the campaign to establish the local council in Blakelaw and North Fenham. These interviews were repeated about a year-and-a-half after the local council had been formed. Interviews were also conducted with the two other newly formed local councils and a representative of a group campaigning for a local council in Headingley. After a draft copy of the

report was completed, residents from the three newly formed local councils were invited to attend a seminar that provided an opportunity for feedback on the report. The information presented in this report is based on the individual views of the respondents concerned and is not the view of the local councils involved.

A literature review was undertaken to set a national context for the report. This review was supplemented with interviews conducted with the National Association of Local Councils, the Local Government Association and practitioners involved in working with local councils, including new local councils.

Description of the four areas

Blakelaw and North Fenham is located about two-and-a-half miles to the north west of Newcastle upon Tyne city centre. The area was built mainly in the 1950s and 1960s, and has a population of about 6,000 people. It is composed mainly of council housing. The area is covered by a number of initiatives including the North West Partnership (funded through the Single Regeneration Budget) and a Health Action Zone. The secondary school, Firfield Community School, was the first 'Fresh Start' secondary school in the country.

The Headland Town Council is located in Hartlepool. The area forms a peninsula and was formerly administered by Hartlepool Borough, prior to its amalgamation with West Hartlepool in

1967 to form Hartlepool Borough Council. About 60 per cent of housing in St Hilda Ward, which includes the Headland, is composed of social rented housing, owned either by the council, or Registered Social Landlords.

Offerton Estate Parish Council is located in Stockport. The parish is composed predominately of council housing, with a small proportion of owner-occupied accommodation and property owned by Registered Social Landlords.

The research also included a campaign to parish part of Headingley, Leeds. This area is a very diverse community and includes a high proportion of students living in privately rented accommodation.

The level of deprivation for each ward where the local councils are located can be compared with the rest of England by using the Indices of Deprivation 2000 drawn from National Statistics Online (Table 1). Rank 1 is the most deprived ward out of a total of 8,414 wards in England. However, it should be noted that the census wards cover a larger geographical area than the local councils and, to a certain extent, will mask the specific characteristics of the local council areas.

Report structure

Chapter 2 provides a description of local councils and an overview of the recent policy context.

Chapter 3 outlines residents' reasons for wanting to establish a local council in their respective areas

Table 1 Level of deprivation in wards containing the four study areas

Census ward	Rank score based on all wards in England (rank 1 is the most deprived ward)
Blakelaw	785
St Hilda (The Headland, Hartlepool)	124
Great Moor Ward (Offerton)	2,740
Headingley	4,388
Total wards in England	8,414

Source: National Statistics – Indices of Deprivation 2000.

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and how this was achieved. The discussion relates primarily to the experiences of the residents involved in establishing the local council in Blakelaw and North Fenham, but also draws on the experience of respondents in the other three areas. Quotations are drawn from residents in all four areas. Chapter 4 moves on to focus on the

experience of the new parish councils after they had been constituted and provides a description of the type of activities they have been able to engage in. Chapter 5 draws on these experiences to highlight the potential of local councils in urban areas.

2 What are local councils and what can they do?

There are about 8,700 local councils in England, covering about 30 per cent of the population. Local councils have traditionally been associated with rural areas and small towns, and about 40 per cent of councils contain less than 500 inhabitants, although 10 per cent of them have populations of over 5,000. These latter councils account for over half the population represented by local councils and about 65 per cent of total expenditure (Ellwood *et al.*, 1992, 1998; Skelcher, 2001).

Parish and town councils are democratically elected bodies and all residents living within the parish or town council area who are registered on the electoral register are entitled to vote. Elections are held once every four years. Residents are also entitled to attend meetings and local councils must hold an Annual General Meeting once a year at which residents are entitled to question the local council over the conduct of its affairs.

Local councils have a considerable range of powers, but very little in the way of duties. Research has identified the most common types of activity undertaken by local councils (Ellwood *et al.*, 1992), which included maintenance of village halls or community centres, parks and open spaces such as village greens and footpaths. The range of powers was extended by the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 to also include the provision of public transport, traffic calming and community safety. Local councils can only undertake activities for which they have specific powers, otherwise their activity is *ultra vires*. However, a key power available to local councils in relation to their creative potential is enshrined in section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, which provides local councils with a general spending power for the well-being of local residents. Local councils have tax-raising powers and can generate income through the precept, which is a charge on the council tax.

There is considerable variety in the level of activity between local councils and views on the

role that local councils can play in their areas. Some local councils have a very low profile and set a very low precept each year, an occasional precept, or none at all. Other local councils have worked in very creative and innovative ways to deliver services in their areas. A key factor has often been positive and successful working relationships between local councils and the district, unitary or county councils. A number of examples can be highlighted of local councils that have connected up with other service providers and their patterns of delivery. Burgess Hill Town Council, in Hampshire, provides an illustration of joint working between partners across the public and private sectors, to provide a single help-point service to its residents.

While their capacity to undertake delivery of services varies considerably between local councils, a strength is their potential to represent the priorities and needs of the residents they represent. As Coulson (1998) notes, as an independent local authority, local councils are also able to hold the principal authority to account over services delivered within the local council area. In the context of renewing local democracy and neighbourhood renewal, local councils can be a mechanism through which to represent the voice of local communities.

In spite of the lack of policy attention on the specific role that local councils could play in relation to neighbourhood management (Taylor, 2000), the government has announced a package of measures to enhance the role of local councils and to encourage councils to take on greater responsibilities (DTLR, 2001). In parallel to providing an enhanced ability for local councils to engage in the delivery of services, the government has also set out frameworks to ensure that these greater responsibilities are reflected in a greater accountability and are subject to monitoring of the performance of local councils.

There have been a number of developments in this respect. A cornerstone of the developing role of local councils will be the introduction of the Quality Parish in 2003, the details of which were set out in the Consultation Paper *Quality Parish and Town Councils* (DEFRA, 2001). It is proposed that local councils that attain quality status will have an enhanced role to play within their area, covering the issues of consultation, delivery of services and information.

In November 2002, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) announced that new powers were going to be granted to local councils, which will come into force at the end of March 2003. Arising from the government White Paper *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services* (DTLR, 2001), the government will increase the amount of money that local councils are allowed to spend under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972. These arrangements will allow local councils to spend up to £5 per elector of their budget on projects that bring direct benefit to their area, but that fall outside their specific powers. The move is timely because local councils have increasingly made use of the potential offered by section 137 funding and any future expansion of local council activity to support their communities could be impeded by the current arrangements (Ellwood *et al.*, 2000). This research highlighted that, although most local councils regarded the current financial limit as satisfactory, a small proportion of councils felt constrained in their ability to respond to local needs by the limits imposed on spending under section 137.

A further development has been a relaxing of the borrowing approval system for local councils. A new and emerging development will be the availability of grant funding direct from central government to local councils. As the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has noted, this development requires new legislation as central government currently does not have the power to undertake this. Nevertheless, the

intention is that grant money will be made available for Best Value local councils, to help them cover the costs of undertaking Best Value. Significantly, NALC is working towards securing grant funding availability for all local councils.

The then Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (now the ODPM) also published a guidance note on financial arrangements with parish and town councils (DTLR, 2002). This note was aimed primarily at helping to avoid 'double taxation'. This situation can occur when a local council provides a service, but the principal authority still charges taxpayers within the parish for the equivalent services provided elsewhere. However, the guidance also notes that dealing with double taxation has to work within the broader context of partnership arrangements between local councils and principal authorities. The guidance highlights that this issue has already been resolved successfully in a number of areas, which has tended to happen in localities where there are very positive relationships between the respective tiers of government. Indeed, the guidance goes on to stress that the basis for resolving financial arrangements will arise from ensuring that satisfactory arrangements for joint working are in place.

To this end, considerable attention has been focused on helping to facilitate the development of positive working relationships between local councils and district or unitary councils and shire councils. The Local Government Association (LGA) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) have developed guidance on the development of model charters between principal authorities and local councils (LGA and NALC, 1998). Based on this model, and also examples of existing charters, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs set out a model charter in its Consultation Paper *Quality Parish and Town Councils* (DEFRA, 2001). The intention of the model charter will be to cover relations between all local councils and their

principal authorities, and set out the way in which the principal authority will work with local councils. Further, the Local Government Association, the National Association of Local Councils and the Countryside Agency have established a range of good practice on a number of key issues in relation to local councils as part of the Improvement and Development Agency 'Knowledge' website (www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk). In part, this good practice relates to the development of charters, but also covers aspects of joint working between principal and local councils on matters such as planning, training and providing services. Nevertheless, there is increasing pressure on principal authorities to show evidence for how they engage with local councils and they will be expected to demonstrate how they will engage with local councils as part of their Best Value Performance Plans. Thus, in areas where relationships between principal authorities and local councils are strained, at least the avenues for joint working will be in place.

A further development has been the introduction of a new Ethical Framework for local authorities, including local councils. Under the Local Government Act 2000 all local councils must adopt a local code of conduct, which has established universal standards of conduct for all public office holders in local government. In November 2001, the Parish Councils (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2001 came into effect. The standards committee of the district or unitary council in the area where the local council is located acts on its behalf. Research on the volume and nature of parish council standard cases highlights about a thousand cases per year, but has emphasised the complexity of cases (Skelcher, 2001). As part of these developments, a package of funding has been set aside for the training of clerks of local councils.

However, while these announcements represent a step in the right direction, they fall short of the

new powers given to principal authorities by the Local Government Act 2000 to promote the social and economic well-being of their communities (Ellwood *et al.*, 2000). It has been suggested that, by excluding local councils in this way, they have denied them the opportunity to take on the role of community leaders for local people (Wendt, 1998). Thus, while the package of changes can be seen as a wider move by central government towards local councils taking on a more significant and proactive role (Skelcher, 2001), in comparison with other tiers of local government, the extent to which local councils can take the lead and initiative has been hedged within certain parameters.

Furthermore, there is a need to move away from equating local councils with rural areas, as there is a danger that the potential of local councils in urban areas is overlooked. One instance of this issue can be seen in the operation of the Vital Villages Programme administered by the Countryside Agency. There is very little in the way of grant funding that is available primarily to local councils outside of monies that can be provided through grant funding by the principal authority. Any parish or town council in rural areas can apply to the Countryside Agency for a Parish and Town Plans Grant for a community to set down a vision for their respective settlement. While there is no denying the value of this programme and the role that local councils in rural areas can play in this respect, it does reinforce the notion that local councils are a rural phenomenon, whereas all local councils, rural and urban alike, have a valid contribution to make in establishing a vision for their area.

Central government has emphasised a cornerstone of its new commitment to neighbourhood renewal is engaging communities fully within this process. In order to help facilitate community groups, the government has highlighted three levels in which government intervention can contribute:

- 1 through encouraging community self-help
- 2 through community capacity building – this level is concerned primarily with equipping individuals and groups with the skills and resources they need to take effective action in their communities
- 3 supporting participation in partnerships (Active Community Unit, 2001).

Local councils offer a relatively powerful structure for residents to develop as a means of community self-help. Previous research has highlighted a strength of local councils as combining independence with delegated control (Burns *et al.*, 1994). Their independent status is

enhanced by the fact that local councils can rely on their own resources by utilising their own tax-raising powers through the precept. Residents in a number of areas around the country have taken advantage of the opportunity offered by legislation since 1997 to develop new local councils in their areas. This development coincides with increasing policy attention at the national level on the role that local councils can play. While policy attention continues to place an emphasis on the role of local councils in a rural context, this belies the contribution that local councils can make in urban areas. The next chapter describes the reasons why residents in a number of urban areas have opted to develop local councils in their neighbourhoods.

3 The experiences of setting up a new local council

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the process of establishing a new local council in Blakelaw and North Fenham. It draws on the experiences of respondents to describe the reasons why they wanted a new local council for their area. The discussion relates primarily to the residents involved in establishing the local council in Blakelaw and North Fenham, but also draws on the experience of respondents in the other three areas. The chapter then moves on to highlight the respective campaigns to establish the local councils. It concludes by considering some of the implications of forming a new local council, compared with other forms of community governance.

The process of establishing a local council

The local council was established in Blakelaw and North Fenham after two years of campaigning. The idea for a local council for Blakelaw and North Fenham first came about in 1998, after residents there became aware of the potential offered by the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. An association was formed called the 'Campaign for a Parish Council for Blakelaw and North Fenham'. The petitioners in Blakelaw had three main aims for a local council in their area:

- It should try to be an effective and representative voice for the needs, interests and concerns of the area.
- It should help assess the impact of all the various schemes and policies as they affect Blakelaw and North Fenham, and help service provision and regeneration policies to be as joined up as possible.
- It should encourage people in the community to become active citizens and participate in democratic structures and use

their skills and talents in the service and regeneration of the community.

A series of public meetings were held in the area to promote the campaign. A key step was to send out a questionnaire to ask residents whether they wanted a local council in their area and what they would like a local council to be called. It was felt that this approach, along with posters and leaflets, would raise the profile of the campaign and let people know that collecting signatures for the petition would start in the near future. There were 107 responses to the questionnaire, with 88 per cent of responses in favour of establishing a parish council and 12 per cent against the idea. The publicity also allowed the campaigners to highlight the role and responsibilities of a local council to residents in the area. The petition itself was launched at a public meeting in October 1999, and 602 signatures were collected over the next couple of months and submitted in early January 2000 (one respondent rather ruefully noted that, with hindsight, collecting signatures in the winter months was perhaps not the best timing). As part of its consultation on the new local council, Newcastle City Council sent a letter to all residents in the proposed local council area outlining the purpose of a local council. It also sought to illustrate the possible costs of the local council for council taxpayers in the area. However, the City Council identified a notional precept of £50,000 in its letter to residents and the residents leading the campaign for the local council objected to the use of this figure. The City Council retracted this illustration, but respondents felt that the letter had damaged their credibility in the area. The City Council was not convinced of the need for a local council in the Blakelaw and North Fenham area and opposed the petition in its submission to the Secretary of State. It put forward the argument that there was not a need for a local council in Blakelaw

and North Fenham, as the cost of setting up an extra layer of bureaucracy would not outweigh the potential benefits as set out by the petitioners. In particular, the City Council felt that local taxpayers could ill afford additional costs and that its own proposals for community planning and community participation would lead to a more effective engagement with local people than through a local council (Newcastle City Council, 2000).

Nevertheless, the local council was inaugurated on 1 April 2001. Elections took place in May 2001, at the same time as the general election, and ten local councillors took up their responsibilities in June 2001.

Respondents noted a number of particular issues when they reflected on the process of establishing a parish council. An important concern for respondents was getting hold of information and knowledge about the processes of setting up a local council. This issue related not so much to complying with the requirements for a petition, but to having confidence in subsequent discussions with the principal authority. One respondent spoke of the political naivety of the group. This person suggested that, with hindsight, a much more measured approach to establishing the local council might have been better. She suggested that time spent, maybe up to a year beforehand, researching the information needed to go through the process of establishing a local council before embarking on the actual campaign to establish the parish council itself might well have reaped dividends.

The approach taken by the Headland Town Council was to anticipate what would be required at an early a stage as possible. As early as 1994, the pressure group involved was mandated at its AGM to move for a civil parish for the area. While the bill for the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 was going through parliament, the pressure group monitored the progress of the bill and identified in advance the requirements it would have to fulfil once the act became statute:

The benefit of the Local Government and Rating Act [1997] provisions for petitions from communities is that the control of the process is in the hands of the community. They select how they are going to get the petition together. They select if they have got enough signatories. They, by judiciously looking at the timetable of council meetings, select the time that the petition is submitted.

The Headland Town Council sent out a questionnaire to all residents within an identified area to ask them if they wanted a local council within the area, with a range of options about what to call a possible new local council. As part of this survey, the campaigners asked residents to note down the number of electors in each household and the campaigners kept a record of the 420 residents who responded positively to the question of a local council for their area. The campaigners needed about 200 signatures to achieve the 10 per cent required and concentrated their efforts for the petition by collecting signatures from these latter residents. However, once the requisite number of signatures had been collected, the campaign delayed handing in the petition to the principal authority for nearly a year, until they felt confident that they had undertaken the necessary research to establish the information they needed for the next stage of the process of establishing a local council. One respondent noted that it was important to be able to talk from a position of strength, rather than of weakness.

Purdue (2001) has highlighted the role of community leaders in effecting change in an area and the difficulties faced by community leaders in their relationships with statutory partners. In the Headland and Headingley, interest in developing a new local council stemmed from existing community or pressure groups. This feature was also the case in Offerton, where pressure to develop a new local council stemmed from an existing residents' association in Offerton Estate. However, what marked Offerton as slightly different was the

role of a single individual who, as Chair of the residents' association, championed the campaign for a local council in the area (Hetherington, 2000). In Blakelaw and North Fenham, interest in a local council coalesced around a group of individuals.

Although three of the areas had established a local council in their area, Headingley was still in the process of achieving this goal. The campaign had stalled around the attempt to collect signatures for the petition. A key difference between Headingley and the other three areas seemed to be the size of the population to be served by the proposed local councils. The other three areas were quite tightly defined and included no more than a couple of thousand residents, so that around a couple of hundred signatures were needed to achieve the 10 per cent required to fulfil the requirements of the 1997 Act. However, Headingley had attempted a more ambitious target to achieve a local council embracing about 18,000 residents, requiring a much larger petition.

Why form a parish council?

Respondents from all four areas reflected on a range of reasons for wanting to establish a local council in their respective areas. One issue was a sense of frustration over established channels of consultation with statutory bodies and partnerships operating in their areas. Another was a feeling that their area had been ignored in terms of investment and consultation. In this regard, a local council was seen as a way of establishing a body in the area that would have to be listened to. Further, a local council was seen as a means for residents to have a voice in the area that could stand up to the challenge of legitimacy and of effectively representing residents' views:

We started to look at a means of trying to get a voice. A legitimate voice and a voice that had to be heard.

Another feature of local councils that proved attractive to respondents was that they are a permanent and independent body in their area. One group of respondents commented on the successive waves of consultation that had been set up and then replaced in their area:

We wanted to see consultation as a process. So that it wasn't just a whole series of one-off things by different people. So that people over time could build up a core of wisdom and knowledge, and therefore be able to engage critically with policy development.

Other respondents saw the development of a local council as a way of helping to foster community spirit and community identity in their area:

Just to give it a sense of pride back that's been knocked out of it.

In one case, campaigning for a local council was seen as a means of re-establishing the specific identity of the Headland within Hartlepool Borough Council and of helping to foster civic pride in that specific locality. There was a feeling that this identity had been lost when Hartlepool Borough and West Hartlepool were amalgamated in 1967.

In addition to the view that a local council would enable residents to have a general influence on their neighbourhoods, a couple of respondents also indicated specific issues that were of particular concern to them as individuals. For one resident, being able to provide a safer environment with a reduced fear of crime was important. In Headingley, there was considerable pressure on local facilities to meet the needs of the diverse range of residents in the area, as an increasing proportion of services, including housing, were seen as catering exclusively for the student market. It was also felt that a local council would be able to provide a focus for the community on planning issues and to exert a greater influence on the balance of facilities in the area.

A further issue was the size of population that could be served by a local council and where the boundaries of active and meaningful communities should be drawn. Research has drawn attention to the size of populations served by principal authorities in the United Kingdom compared with other European countries. Commentators suggest that individuals identify with communities of up to about 5,000 people (Burgess *et al.*, 2001). As one respondent noted:

It's to do with human scale. It's to do with the scale of things that people can imagine. They know that this is their area.

A couple of respondents commented on the size of populations served by decentralised localities within principal authority areas, such as wards, area committees or area forums. These respondents felt that the issues faced within their immediate neighbourhood were very different from those faced by residents living in other parts of the same area structure established by the principal authority. Indeed, one respondent noted this issue in relation to working in the new local council:

I can walk round, and when I see something that needs fixing, I can report it. Say I see a hole in the road that needs doing, I can report that. If I see litter lying about, I can report it. And I can monitor it then, you know, 'cos I'm virtually on top of it. I can see when it's been done and when it's not been done ... We know the people in the area. We've a much better idea, 'cos we're not even one step removed, we're actually part of the community. So what they feel, we feel. It isn't a case of us and them. It's a case of us.

Thus it was felt that local councils would be able to provide a permanent focus for the priorities of residents living in a relatively small area, defined by the residents themselves. Even in quite large local councils covering much larger populations, individual councillors will be responsible for, and accountable to, relatively small numbers of

residents, since local councils are divided into wards. This view coincides with a government recognition of the need to focus regeneration initiatives such as New Deal for Communities on 'clearly defined neighbourhoods of fewer than 4,000 households, small enough to put the community at the heart of the renewal process' (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, 2002).

A related issue was that residents were able to identify and define their own area to be served by the new local council. It is very unusual that residents can form their own administrative boundary, and this issue is a key requirement in the 1997 Act. As part of the submission to the Secretary of State, the campaign for a town council for the Headland was mindful of fulfilling the requirements set out in the then Department of the Environment circular 11/97. In its submission to the Secretary of State, it outlined the proposed geographical boundary of the local council, with particular regard for the need to show that the local council would serve 'an identifiable community' and also to detail the facilities that hold that community together. In the case of the Headland, this is geographically a very distinctive community because it is composed mainly of a peninsula. Blakelaw and North Fenham is bounded by three major roads. Offerton Estate Parish Council is principally formed around a single estate, although there has been an issue about the boundary here. The motivation for the local council was driven primarily by a desire for a greater voice for residents on the estate, stemming, as it did, from the residents' association there. However, the petition used current polling districts, including a small area of private housing on the edge of the estate. This has been the cause of some friction around identity. Also the occupants of the private housing will be paying the highest rates of tax through the precept, but it was felt that they will be unlikely to gain from any benefits because the focus of attention will be on the estate itself.

In identifying communities the significance of naming should not be underestimated:

A parish council is partly about emotion and belonging. And that's why the name is important.

Both Blakelaw and the Headland consulted on the naming of the new local council and, in the case of Blakelaw, strong representation was made to include North Fenham in the title. The experience in Headingley also demonstrated the strength of feeling about naming and its significance in terms of reflecting a sense of belonging to an area. In the latter case, a proposal to parish part of Headingley caused friction with people outside the proposed boundary who felt that they were part of Headingley as well.

The proposals for Quality Parishes emphasise the importance of local councils engaging with all communities in their area, not just community of place, but also communities of interest. This was an issue taken very seriously by respondents in one area, who emphasised that a key role as a new local council would be to engage with the residents in their area. There was a concern over the level of participation of residents in local elections and in terms of activities as well. Further, it was felt that there was a need to develop capacity among residents to engage in partnership working, including the provision of training. A key task for the new local council was seen as working with residents who were not engaged in existing voluntary or community groups in the area, but it was pointed out that it was important not to tread on the toes of existing groups in the area:

The local groups will have their own agendas and own issues, but we need to look at why do the rest of the community not access those groups. So it's about taking a step further back. We need to find out exactly what stops these people from getting involved. And if it's basic facilities like childcare, whatever, we need to be able to look at that. And if that's what we need to provide to get them involved we need to do that. Because every house on this estate will have their own problems. If we can take

some of that away from them to allow them to come out and take part, that has to be far better than not having a say at all. They're very diverse people, with very diverse needs.

Furthermore, it was felt that a local council would be able to work with voluntary agencies and community groups to help provide a joined-up view of services and activities delivered within its area. Another motivation was that a local council would be able to provide greater access to information about the needs of the area and of ways of tackling them. In relation to this point, it was felt that a local council would be able to approach funders directly for money for the area.

A number of respondents were keen to distance themselves from negative public perceptions of local councils. Time and again, respondents spoke of the 'Vicar of Dibley' image of local councils, which is a point that has been reiterated by a number of commentators within the recent literature on local councils (Raine and Copus, 2001). Furthermore, respondents noted how the traditional functions of local councils did not always sit easily with the issues and problems facing their own areas. A couple of respondents felt that the published information that was accessible that listed the powers available to local councils was not very helpful or inspiring. Indeed, a number of respondents took exception to the list of powers that local councils could undertake, which did not seem to relate to issues that were relevant to their area or which they would want to undertake. There was a feeling that the kinds of activities that were envisaged for the new local council would have a broader impact than this:

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.

Why a local council and not other mechanisms for community involvement?

A key message from the respondents was that residents should be able to exercise control, and have ownership, over the structure in place and that there should be some element of independence from the principal authority. Therefore, what was significant was not just the type of structure, which provided the opportunity for resident-led activity, but also the process, which enabled residents to initiate and develop the type of representation of their own choosing.

There are very few instances where residents can exercise a right to demand that a new form of community involvement be established in their area, which is recognised in statute. Parallels can also be drawn with the way that tenants living in local authority housing can exercise their right to form Tenant Management Organisations.

Recent research has highlighted a number of alternative methods for community governance in areas of mixed tenure in the context of transforming neighbourhoods (Knox and Alcock, 2002). This research also emphasised that a central feature of these organisations is that they should include a legally constituted organisation with strong resident leadership and direct accountability to residents. The research by Knox and Alcock (2002) put forward a range of alternative governance mechanisms and suggested that a company limited by guarantee would be the most effective way to allow residents to participate in, and exercise control over, their neighbourhoods. They also highlighted local councils as an alternative mechanism of community governance and emphasised that local councils are in a strong position to exercise influence over mainstream services. This could be through their ability to undertake services themselves, or on behalf of a principal authority, or through processes of consultation, particularly in relation to the preparation of Community Strategies.

Sullivan (2001) has drawn attention to the need to consider that different objectives for devolved governance at neighbourhood level will require alternative structures that play to their particular strengths. For example, while area committees and forums exist to advise or decide on local issues, neighbourhood management exists as a means for implementation. However, the existence of parallel structures in a single neighbourhood such as a company limited by guarantee or a local council should not be seen as mutually exclusive but can build on the particular strengths of either type of involvement. For example, Coulson (1998) has suggested that, while a company limited by guarantee may offer a stronger means of delivering services tied to economic regeneration, a strength of local councils lies in providing a permanent and independent forum for representing the views of residents. Certainly the review of the potential of local councils by Pearce and Ellwood (2002) suggests that it will be the larger local councils, particularly those subject to the Best Value regime, that will have the capacity to undertake the direct delivery of services, compared with smaller local councils. Nevertheless, all local councils can exercise considerable influence as a means of representing residents' views, and it is in this respect that they could have a potentially significant role to play in providing a link between the priorities and views of residents on the one hand and agencies active in their area on the other.

However, in comparison with local councils, other forms of resident involvement are often tied to particular localities or tenure. For example, New Deal for Communities is focused on the most deprived areas in England, while Tenant Management Organisations are relevant to tenants living in social rented accommodation. A feature of local councils is that residents in any area where a local council does not already exist can legitimately petition to form one.

These reasons lead on to a consideration of local councils compared with other ways for residents to become involved in the governance of their areas.

Respondents stressed that one reason for wanting to develop a local council in their area was its independent status, which is an argument that has been advanced elsewhere. For example, Long (2001) makes the case that, while, for example, area committees play a crucial role in linking principal authorities and the services they provide with residents, nevertheless they operate within the overall corporate strategy of the principal authority. Furthermore, it has been argued that other avenues for resident participation such as neighbourhood forums, even with funding at the disposal of residents, are ultimately accountable to the principal authority (Findlay, 2000).

Nevertheless, there can be considerable overlap between local councils and other devolved structures, and there is a concern that local councils may be increasingly marginalised by a focus on alternative models of devolution and decentralisation within areas (Burgess *et al.*, 2001). Corrigan (2000) has highlighted the diverse approaches that principal authorities have made to develop stronger links with local communities, including ways of enhancing representative democracy. Such models may not necessarily be independent in the way that local councils are, but have representative democratic arrangements in place, in many cases with a focus on linking residents in disadvantaged communities with regeneration initiatives. For example, Walsall MBC has established local committees in neighbourhoods covered by Single Regeneration Budget funding. Each neighbourhood is divided into constituencies of about 100 households, and residents of each constituency (between about 150 and 300 people) vote for representatives to sit on local committees for each neighbourhood. The committees provide a link between residents, council services and other partners such as the Health Authority and Police (Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, 2003). Community elections for regeneration partnerships are also a feature of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative. Research on community elections

in the Newcastle upon Tyne's West Gate Partnership has highlighted the potential for community elections to provide a useful complement to local government elections as well as a means of reinvigorating, and renewing interest in, democracy at the local level (Shaw and Davidson, 2002).

Government guidance has set out that careful consideration should be given to the way that decentralised structures fit together so that the respective roles of existing local councils and other methods of engaging residents, such as area committees, are maintained (DETR, 2000). Corrigan (2000) has highlighted examples of areas where a balance has been struck between different methods of representing communities, recognising the role of local councils. However, a key feature of these discussions is that the new methods of decentralisation have been developed by principal authorities or regeneration partnerships, and have worked with established local councils. Indeed, not all of the new local councils located in urban areas have necessarily been initiated by residents themselves. Occasionally principal authorities have chosen to press for new local councils in their areas. One example is East Staffordshire Borough Council, which has initiated new local councils in Burton on Trent. Milton Keynes has also opted to have local councils across the authority in urban and rural areas alike.

A question faced by respondents in this research is how an emerging resident-led structure can successfully sit alongside other forms of resident involvement that are established or planned for an area. At root is the issue of how bottom-up and top-down forms of representing communities can be successfully linked, and how tensions arising from these developments can be resolved. The next chapter describes some of the activities that the new local councils have been involved in since their formation and highlights some of the ways in which they have begun to engage in partnership working with existing stakeholders and agencies operating in their area.

4 What happened next?

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the experiences of Blakelaw and North Fenham after the local council was established. Respondents reflected on the process of working in the new local council and commented on the type of activities they had been able to undertake. They also discussed relationships with organisations and residents in their areas. These experiences were compared with the views of the other two new local councils in Offerton and the Headland.

Working in the new local council

One issue emphasised by a number of respondents was making the transition from residents involved in a campaign or pressure group to establish a local council, to being local councillors in a new tier of local government in the area. The research and development worker in Blakelaw and North Fenham reflected on this process highlighting that the developing capacity of the organisation was not something that happens overnight (Rose, 2002). The fragility of the newly formed local council required a consideration about what was needed to sustain it. This point has been highlighted in relation to new councillors working in established local councils for the first time:

The problem is that we assume that somehow on election councillors become transformed into experts on the law, procedures and financial management of a local authority, knowledgeable about the intricacies of the land use planning system and sensitive to a host of principal authority policies.

(Howes, 1998b, p. 327)

However, as Rose (2002) has highlighted, this issue is compounded when all the members of a local council are working in local government for the first time. It will inevitably take time for councillors to establish the necessary knowledge and expertise to work effectively as a local council:

In some ways it was a relief that you got past all the hassle of the campaign. But it was still very nerve-racking ... we were literally walking blind. You can't even say we were blinkered. 'Cos there isn't anything that we can go by. So it's very much fumbling around in the dark.

This issue was reiterated by another councillor who noted that there was a mismatch between the level of skills and knowledge credited to the local council by external agencies, and the actual level and capacity of members. This point was not to deny the willingness and capacity of councillors to learn, but to emphasise that time was needed for them to find their feet. Therefore there was a need for agencies offering support to understand this. For example, although it was known that parish councils have powers, it was not clear how powers can be exercised in practice:

There are certain laws and by-laws that parish councils deal with, and we've the paperwork and it says 'you've got powers over...'. But we don't know what they mean by 'powers over...'

However, acquiring information on technical matters was only one aspect of capacity building that was identified. One respondent noted how the confidence of the councillors had grown, especially after a team-building exercise:

I felt it gave confidence, to build relationships up and have confidence to be called parish councillors. Whereas before they would never label themselves with the title. And being able to use that authority in certain situations and being able to say 'here, that's not on'.

One respondent discussed the crucial role of the parish clerk in helping to nurture and sustain the new group, particularly in the early stages of a local council's existence. A clerk could provide help and support in terms of advice, but could also play an important role in providing encouragement and confidence building as individual councillors grew into their role:

The clerk works 16 hours a week, which is nowhere near enough for her to carry out her duties. She's having to start up systems and procedures from scratch, so she's having to piece it together, and she's learning as much as we are. So we're learning together in that sense. But it's being able to work out what we can and can't do.

In the case of Offerton, the parish clerk was a local authority officer who was able to provide guidance to the councillors on the operation and due process of the local council. A parish clerk who could provide clear support in this way was felt to be an important asset in a situation where councillors were feeling their way and may unwittingly exceed their powers.

One respondent who had acted as Chair reflected on the fragility of the new local council and also on the consequent pressures on the Chair in providing the leadership and direction required during these early stages in the life of the new local council. In particular, it was felt that, since the new local council lacked the established structure of the support of a local political party, or perhaps an established voluntary organisation with a committee structure, this placed an increased burden on the Chair. A further issue here was the effort that needed to be spent on keeping the group together and sustaining interest.

Respondents commented on sources of support and advice that they had received. The importance of links and liaison with other parishes has been highlighted elsewhere (Jones, 1998). Respondents from one parish commented on the encouragement and advice they had received from another new urban parish, which they had found to be particularly helpful. They had found it invaluable to be able to share their own experiences and draw on others' advice about the processes of establishing a new local council. There were more mixed views on the help received from respective county associations of local councils. Most respondents were very positive about the advice

and support given. However, a couple of respondents felt that the county associations were less experienced in giving the specific support necessary to groups of residents working collectively in local government for the first time, particularly in an urban context.

A further cause of vulnerability is that a new local council lacks the facilities or a base from which to operate:

It will be created with nowhere to live. No equipment. No stationery. No phone. No fax – in this day and age, the essentials for administering even the smallest groups of people. But especially for a new parish where residents have been saying for years that no one listens to them and that nothing goes on.

One respondent commented that there is very little recognition of the costs involved in getting a new local council off the ground and that there are no start-up grants or funding available from external sources to help to facilitate this. Certainly Offerton Estate Parish Council has found this issue to be a pressing difficulty, with no facilities for community groups to meet on the estate. Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council has offered a shop on the estate at a peppercorn rent, but the local council will still have to find funding to refurbish it. The Headland Town Council in Hartlepool was perhaps fortunate in this respect because the facilities for a permanent base already existed within the new local council area in the shape of the municipal buildings that used to house Hartlepool Borough prior to its amalgamation with West Hartlepool in 1967. Successful negotiations between the new local council and the principal authority secured an office within these buildings.

Although money is potentially available through the precept to cover start-up costs, there are many calls on this source, not least stemming from the requirement to employ a parish clerk. Furthermore, if the precept has been set at a low level in the first year by the principal authority, then very little funding is available at the very time

that the local council needs funds to cover start-up costs. However, the first precept for the Headland Town Council included an amount of money to cover the start-up costs of the local council. In Hartlepool, the level of the first precept was decided by the principal council after pressure was brought to bear by the shadow local council to consult with them over the level that should be set.

As more new local councils emerge, there is a need for greater clarity in the processes of establishing new local councils, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities between statutory bodies. Two issues illustrate this lack of clarity within the current arrangements. One issue concerns the formation of the shadow local council, which is brought into being after the Secretary of State signs the order to establish the new local council. The shadow local council operates until the first election, after which the elected local councillors take over. In Hartlepool, after protracted negotiations, responsibility for the shadow local council was devolved to the residents who had formed the steering committee to campaign for the new local council and the ward councillors for the area. In contrast, in Blakelaw and North Fenham, the shadow council was composed of the elected ward councillors for that area.

A second issue revolves around the responsibility for setting the first precept. In Blakelaw and North Fenham, the level of the first precept was decided by the principal authority. This was also the case in Offerton. The principal authority has a responsibility to achieve a balance between a workable level of funding for the new local council against the charge made to individual taxpayers. In setting the first precept, it is the accountable body and, in the case of Offerton, a representative of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council noted that it was careful to try and avoid any backlash against itself in the level of precept that was set.

A couple of respondents emphasised that the new local councillors needed to have the

confidence to assert the place of the local council in networks and partnerships. One of these respondents reflected that, to a certain extent, being assertive in this way was a reflection of strong individuals, or by being just plain bloodyminded. However, respondents were keen to stress that acquiring information and knowledge was essential for residents taking on the role of councillors, including drawing on the experience of other new local councils that had recently gone through the same process.

Another issue raised by respondents was being able to handle the media, particularly in the face of opposition to the local council from agencies and individuals who were familiar with using the media to get viewpoints and opinions into the public domain.

Activities undertaken

In two of the local councils, a certain amount of frustration was apparent at the seeming lack of progress and practical results from the local council. This was particularly the case in Blakelaw and North Fenham as considerable effort was expended on trying to get a number of key schemes and projects off the ground, which ultimately proved fruitless, leading to a degree of disappointment and despondency among members of the local council. In addition, considerable time was spent on getting key staff in place, including a parish clerk and a community development worker.

These views were lent a degree of urgency because, rather than having the usual four-year cycle to the next local council election in which to build the capacity of the new organisation, the timing of general elections for local councils in 2003 has meant that respondents in Blakelaw and North Fenham, but also in Offerton, have felt under pressure to show quick results to their electorate. Respondents were very conscious of making a new charge on residents through the precept and of being able to demonstrate to their respective

communities that the local council had been able to show value for money. There was a sense that, although it was unavoidable that it took time for the local council to find its feet, this reason would sound rather lame as an election platform:

We've got all these things on the boil, but there's not much visible, to be seen at the moment, 'cos they're only just beginning. Whereas some things will be long term and a lot will depend on if we get elected next year.

There was a concern that the local council needed to retain the support of residents in the area otherwise it could become marginalised. In Offerton, in particular, the local council had been established in the face of considerable opposition from some of the residents there, which added a further source of pressure to show results.

Nevertheless, a key achievement for two of the parish councils was being able to employ community development workers to work in the new local councils. This achievement in Blakelaw and North Fenham was viewed as an essential stage in developing capacity within the local council area, but also in developing the capacity of the local council itself. One of the respondents noted that the employment of a development worker was distinctive from activities undertaken by more established local councils, as was the fact that funding had been secured from external sources to cover the cost of the development worker.

An important role for the community development worker in Blakelaw and North Fenham has been helping to develop a vision for the parish. This work echoes the Vital Villages Programme and the activities of local councils in rural areas in undertaking this role. As part of this work, a considerable number of interviews have been conducted to help define existing priorities by a range of different agencies and networks, and, just as importantly, how these priorities are determined. These interviews and discussions have

taken place with statutory, voluntary, community and unorganised or unattached groupings of residents. The development worker in Blakelaw and North Fenham has also been working closely with the YMCA Detached Youth Project, to develop a community arts photographic and video project.

In the case of the Headland Town Council, two community development workers and an assistant administrative officer were secured through the North Hartlepool Partnership with money from the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) Round Six. The community development workers started in January 2000 and the Town Council is currently negotiating with a community development company to become the employers as part of the exit strategy of the SRB to keep the project going. One important role for the development workers has been to support the 40 or so community groups in the area, of which about half have been initiated and developed with the help of the development workers.

Respondents noted that one focus for activity has been building up community identity and civic pride in their area, partly through celebratory events. For example, the Headland Town Council has established a Christmas lights event on the Headland. Similarly, Blakelaw and North Fenham has also focused on raising the profile of the local council within its own area, including a stall and display at the Blakelaw Festival. The latter council also invited a theatre group based in Northumberland to perform in Blakelaw (possibly the only time Blakelaw has featured in the arts review section of *The Guardian*).

The Headland has had a business plan for each year with objectives to try and achieve. It has managed to secure a number of litterbins and also some benches for the promenade area. One respondent noted that it may not seem much but it has showed success – it matters to the people that live there, and is an important step in raising the profile of the council and establishing its credibility in the area.

One issue noted by a respondent was the amount of casework undertaken by the local council on behalf of individual queries from residents. In Blakelaw and North Fenham, the local council had responded to a range of issues involving individuals. One example given was responding to residents wanting the local council to act on their behalf in relation to getting social service assessments. Other examples included responding to queries from residents over planning issues.

Working in partnership

Research has noted that the role of local councils in relation to community involvement has been somewhat neglected by policymakers (Burgess *et al.*, 2001). A difficulty is that, while government attention on the role that communities can play focuses on community and voluntary organisations, there is a question over where new local councils sit within this context. The report on community self-help from Policy Action Team 9 emphasised the role of community self-help at the heart of neighbourhood renewal and looked at the barriers to community activity in poor neighbourhoods (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). The formation of new local councils by residents presents examples of a community response to the governance of their area. However, as soon as an area becomes a parish, then, as a tier of local government, it ceases to be defined as a community group or activity. Certainly the Active Community Unit makes no mention of the role of local councils and neither does the cross-cutting review. Yet a growing number of new local councils have clearly emerged out of a concern by residents to have a greater influence on the local governance of the communities in which they live. While it is necessary to recognise the features of local councils that, as a tier of local government, make them distinctive from community groups, it is also important that areas of overlap between

community self-help and the development of new local councils are not overlooked.

In Blakelaw and North Fenham, it was felt that considerable time would be needed to develop working relationships with voluntary and community groups within the local council area. A key issue in this respect was felt to be that the local council should not be seen as a threat to these groups, but as complementary. One area where potential conflict could occur, for example, was in representing the views of residents on regeneration partnerships. The residents involved in the formation of the Headland Town Council were careful to make a distinction in this respect between representing a community view on the board of the North Hartlepool Partnership (the managing body overseeing the delivery of the Single Regeneration Budget Round Six) prior to the formal establishment of the Headland Town Council, but then relinquishing this role after the Town Council had been formed. They were clear that, once the Town Council was formed, then, as a statutory body, it should be represented in its own right and that community groups would need to be represented by another body. One role for the community development workers employed by the Headland Town Council was to organise an election based on proportional representation among community groups within that area to elect a community group representative to sit on the Partnership Board.

Respondents also discussed working with the principal authority. A couple of respondents noted that relationships often depended on which department they were working with:

Certainly, with the council departments, a couple of them are absolutely brilliant. And then there's a couple not so hot.

It was felt that departments that were used to working with parish councils, such as planning departments, quickly established working relationships. For example, the Headland Town

Council has worked in partnership with the principal authority to help free up time for Hartlepool Borough staff in a neighbourhood office located within the local council area. In Offerton, a direct link has been created between the new local council, the ward committee and principal authority, as the Chair of the local council is also a ward councillor for Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, and is also an executive councillor for regeneration in Stockport, which includes housing issues. However, it was felt that other departments or functions of principal authorities were not necessarily used to working with a local council, particularly with regard to activities not traditionally undertaken by existing local councils in these areas.

Pratchett and Wilson (1996) have highlighted the fragmentation of governance at local level, requiring local councils to work with a diverse range of agencies and organisations. A couple of respondents were positive about the contribution that a local council could play in providing a central focus for residents in this respect. Nevertheless, it also requires an awareness by these various organisations of the role of local councils, particularly in arenas where perhaps local councils have not traditionally been active. One respondent felt frustrated that occasionally other agencies did not appear to take the local council seriously as a tier of local government. However, another respondent considered that organisations were not deliberately excluding the new local council from partnership working, it was just that these organisations were not aware that a local council could have an input. It was felt that raising the profile of a local council would take time, but it would also require a willingness on the part of other stakeholders to acknowledge the role of the local council. This experience was not unique to the local councils in this research. Pearce and Ellwood (2002) have drawn attention to the need for a change in attitude of officers and members towards local councils. Even where other agencies accept

the role that local councils can play, changing the culture of large organisations to 'think parishes' takes time (Hopkins, 1998).

One respondent pointed out that the local council can exert influence over a principal authority by its ability to invoke reviews by the auditor, inspector's enquiries, or complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman. A further point in this respect noted by a respondent was that community groups, including local councils, should have the confidence to assert the power that they have over regeneration partnerships, in that such partnerships need the community on board to secure funding and could not have a community group objecting to a scheme. This respondent noted that, in an area that was used to getting nothing, what could there be to lose?

Attention has been drawn to confusion between the church, parochial church councils and local councils (Coulson, 1998). A number of respondents also commented on this issue and the difficulties it caused them during the campaign to establish a local council. Some respondents stated that this confusion had continued once the local council was up and running. Blakelaw and North Fenham noted that one reason for undertaking a recent newsletter to all residents in its area was to try and set the record straight on this matter once and for all. However, this problem was not confined just to residents. One respondent commented that the same misconception occasionally had to be overcome when dealing with practitioners in trying to establish contacts and networks with organisational partners.

It would be easy to say that it is important to build up a relationship of constructive partnership working between the local council, the principal authority and other stakeholders. However, new local councils are often established in an absence of trust, borne of frustration among the residents who have pushed for the new local council. New local councils themselves may be viewed with suspicion among existing stakeholders and networks, which

may remain to be convinced of the value of a new tier of government emerging in a locality.

Cutting across this latter issue is the relationship between an emerging local council and the local party political scene. Local councils can be seen as a way of representing local views through an elected body, which is independent of the party political arena (Tricker *et al.*, 1993). While it is the case that local councils offer a separate arena for the representation of communities, there is a very complex relationship between local party politics and members of local councils. It would seem that the development of some new local councils has been championed by particular parties. Nevertheless, one motive for the creation of new local councils is the desire by some residents to effect change in the area where they live, and there is a potential danger that the creative potential of such local councils could become dulled if their membership reflected the existing local political status quo. However, Young (1970) suggests that the small scale and localised nature of parishes allows for a credible challenge to party political groups from other residents within parish areas. One respondent highlighted the apolitical nature of their local council in spite of the diversity of political views represented by the individual members of the council. However, this respondent also noted that, as a group of residents

campaigning for the local council, they had had to fend off attempts to manipulate the process by local political parties.

The transition from a group of residents campaigning for a local council into a formal tier of local government could be said to represent an exercise in community capacity building in itself. Respondents emphasised the need for guidance and help in developing this capacity. There are parallels with other research which has also highlighted the development of representative structures such as community elections for community representatives on the partnership boards of New Deal for Communities initiatives (Shaw and Davidson, 2002). This latter research noted that attention needs to be given to the provision of training and information for potential candidates. Although it is early days for the new local councils, as residents get to grips with working in local government, the focus of attention on addressing the specific concerns of their respective areas emphasises the versatility and potential of this type of governance. The next chapter highlights some of the strengths and weaknesses of local councils, and draws out recommendations based on the experiences of the residents involved in developing the new local councils in this study.

5 The potential of new local councils in urban areas

It would seem that now is a good time to be a local council. Government policy has emphasised the positive contribution that local councils can make in their area and is gradually providing the means to enhance this role. This emphasis builds on the potential roles that local councils can already play. Coulson (1998) has highlighted that a strength of local councils lies not only in their capacity to deliver services, but also in the influence that they can exercise on their area. A particular feature of local councils that is often highlighted is that they represent the tier of government that is closest to the community: they are able to focus on local needs; they are well placed to involve people and to voice local concerns (Long, 2001). A significant advantage of local councils is that their independence guarantees their permanence in an area. Research has highlighted that consultation in regeneration initiatives in the past has tended to be short term and has suggested that a one-stop participation process would give people the opportunity to establish local priorities for development, to monitor service provision and to be involved, on a life-long basis, in the management of their neighbourhoods (Carley and Kirk, 1998). In this respect, local councils offer a long-term focus for residents as successive and/or overlapping partnerships and regeneration initiatives come and go. Nevertheless, a criticism of local councils is that, as a rule, they have tended to punch below their weight. There is a very diverse range of objectives that local councils have chosen to set for themselves in how they see their role within the areas that they represent. NALC has emphasised that a model for the future direction of local councils lies in drawing on the good practice evident among those local councils across the country that have taken on a creative and proactive role. The motivation and drive that has led to the formation of new local councils suggests a willingness to want to take on this more proactive role in their areas.

Service delivery

There is a growing potential for local councils to undertake delivery of services. The research by Knox and Alcock (2002) illustrated this potential by raising the possibility that local councils could become involved in a housing management function on behalf of a principal authority. There was a view that the new local councils could have a significant role to play in emerging discussions over possible Large Scale Voluntary Transfers of the council stock in their areas to other landlords, although not necessarily in relation to the direct delivery of housing services, but as a way of representing residents' views. However, there was a concern among a couple of respondents that new local councils may bite off more than they can chew with regard to undertaking direct service provision, certainly until the organisation has matured and grown into its role. Pearce and Ellwood (2002) have suggested that it will be the larger local councils that will have the potential to make the most significant contribution to service delivery. However, the experiences of Blakelaw and North Fenham Parish Council and the Headland Town Council have shown that the capacity of local councils of all sizes can be enhanced by applications for external sources of funding such as grants, or via funding as part of regeneration partnerships, or by employing key staff such as development workers.

Although there are many examples of good practice among individual local councils undertaking the provision of services, Coulson (1998) has noted the difficulty of delivering services at local council level and has said that these problems should not be underestimated. One example is the loss of economies of scale. Pearce and Ellwood (2002) highlight that local councils could work in consortia to help develop capacity among adjacent local councils to deliver services.

This development would replicate the approach to service delivery taken by French communes, where individual communes group together to develop the economies of scale to deliver services. The commune is the basic unit of administration in French local government. While each commune serves a population of about 1,600 people, they have responsibility for a much broader range of local public services than the lowest tier of government in England. These responsibilities include water and gas supply, disposal of waste, maintenance of local highways, provision of nursery schools, running of primary schools, social security payments, employment of local police officers, drawing up local and land use plans, issuing planning permissions, environmental protection, social services, civil registry of births, marriages and deaths, and running training programmes for the unemployed (Howes, 1998a). Certainly the government has put forward the case for more flexible joint delivery between local authorities, albeit at different tiers from local councils. However, while this approach might have potential where there are substantial areas covered by local councils, a feature of the new local councils in this study is that they tend not to be adjacent to other existing local councils.

Additional points of concern that have been identified associated with local councils include that the solutions to problems in a local council area might require action outside the area. In some policy areas, the small geographical focus might not be appropriate for the delivery of particular services. Moreover, there might well be a wide variation in the provision and standard of services between different local councils. An issue for the principal authority is being able to provide an equitable service across the whole authority. For example, Milton Keynes notes that some local councils in its area have considerable capacity to deliver services in their own right, have a large staff and their own legal representation. Other local councils do not have the same capacity. Milton

Keynes has four officers in a parish liaison team to try and achieve a balance across the authority and has systems to deliver services in those areas where a local council cannot take on this role.

Representing communities

A strength of local councils is that they can be a powerful focus for representing the views of residents. Their independence from other agencies and tiers of government coincides with a direct accountability to their electorate. A potential problem is that the community focus may be drawn too narrowly and may exclude residents (Long, 2001). An example of the latter situation was apparent in an area where a district-wide survey of housing needs was undertaken by a principal authority. Having identified target villages where housing needs were particularly high, the respective local councils of these villages were invited to help in the next stage of trying to address these needs. In the event, most of these local councils chose not to represent the needs of those members of their community who were in housing need and declined to assist further. This example is not to disparage local councils in rural areas, and there are countless instances from all round the country of the key role that local councils have played in tackling head on the housing needs in their area. The point is that the existence of a local council as a structure does not guarantee the representation of the various communities that live within a single neighbourhood. Furthermore, commentators have highlighted the apathy of the general public towards democratic structures as evidenced by low turnouts at local elections. Respondents noted that, while there was a concern to actively engage residents, it was felt that it would be more likely that interest in the local council from residents in the area would ebb and flow around specific issues. Nevertheless, a challenge for local councils is to be able to sustain interest not only among residents at large, but also

among individuals willing to stand as local councillors to ensure that the council does not become marginalised through apathy and lack of support. Chanan (2002) has raised the question of the extent to which a small number of organised and more articulate residents can develop and maintain links with the majority of other residents in an area. NALC (2000) has highlighted this challenge with respect to local councils and how, as a form of representative democracy, they can respond to the need to actively engage with the various communities that live in their area. Pearce and Ellwood (2002) have highlighted that local councils have increasingly become proactive in seeking the views of residents and representing these views to other bodies, principally through the use of village appraisals and surveys of housing need. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has noted that an important element of achieving Quality Parish status will be that local councils should be representative of all parts of their communities. Blakelaw and North Fenham Parish Council had a strong focus on building links within its area, based on the development of an inclusive vision.

A recognised voice in urban areas?

Although Long (2001) notes the contribution of local councils in both urban and rural areas, there is an issue about the extent to which local councils continue to be associated with rural areas. While a number of issues that communities face in rural and urban areas will be distinctive, it is also important to recognise the similarities in some of the difficulties facing rural and urban communities, particularly in relation to disadvantage. A key issue in rural areas is access to facilities and the continuing haemorrhage of services such as shops, post offices and banks. Research has highlighted similar problems facing residents of disadvantaged communities in urban areas (Speak and Graham, 2000). To a certain extent, these difficulties have

also been recognised by government policy, with funding from the government for urban post offices in deprived areas. However, while local councils have a clear role in rural areas, with opportunities available for grant funding to enable them to undertake plans to provide a vision for their communities or to tackle transport issues, such opportunities are not available to local councils that are located in urban areas and that represent residents who may face similar problems.

Realising the potential: the local experience

This research has drawn on the approach taken by groups of residents in different parts of the country to have a greater say in the areas in which they live. Respondents identified a number of issues and themes in the process of establishing and running new local councils in these areas.

- Respondents noted the hard work required to make the transition from a community group into a new tier of local government. Being members of a new local council represented a steep learning curve for all those involved. Although the requirements set out in the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 and associated guidance for residents to petition for a new local council are not onerous in themselves, respondents placed great emphasis on the need for information. This could be acquired either through their own research, or through advice and guidance provided by other bodies, but particularly other new local councils that have been through a similar process.
- Respondents highlighted the value that they placed on opportunities to share their experiences with other new local councils. Some respondents were keen to pass on their experience to residents in other areas who may be considering going down this route. It

was felt that there had been particular benefits to the link between Headland Town Council and Blakelaw and North Fenham. There was the suggestion that links with other new local councils could go further than the sharing of information and could include mentoring by more experienced local councillors.

- There would also seem to be potential for building wider links across the country at large, enabling new councils not only to share their experiences about processes involved in establishing new local councils, but also to draw on experiences of established local councils in relation to service delivery, engaging with residents and partnership working with other stakeholders. The good practice website established by the Local Government Association, hosted by IDeA, would seem to offer great potential in this respect.
- Greater clarity was required over specific issues with regard to the relationship between the local council and the principal authority. For example, one particular concern to come out of the research was consultation over setting the level of the first precept. NALC (2000) has put forward that, in embracing the spirit of Best Value, a fifth 'C', collaboration, should be added to the other four 'Cs' of Challenge, Compare, Consult and Competition, in relation to local councils and the way they can expect to work with, and be listened to by, principal authorities. Current guidance emphasises the development of positive working relationships between tiers of government. However, it would be more realistic to acknowledge that relations will not always be constructive. Taylor (2002) has emphasised that tensions are inherent in partnership working as much as conflict is

essential to democracy, and that communities and public agencies will need the skills to be able to work creatively through conflict and identify common ground. In particular, there is room for some guidance that sets out how local councils can expect to operate in circumstances where principal authorities may be indifferent or hostile. In this respect, guidance also needs to acknowledge the relatively powerful position of the principal authority. Respondents' views on this issue were mixed. Some felt that trust was gradually building between the local government tiers in their area. Others felt that the experience of working in a local council could be characterised as one of a continuous struggle in relation to partnership working. In this respect, the level of commitment required on the part of residents should not be underestimated.

- A further issue was the initial costs involved in establishing a new local council, such as establishing a base from which to operate and acquiring essential office equipment. There is the potential for the first precept to take account of the start-up costs of a new council, as occurred in the case of Headland Town Council, although these initial costs may not necessarily be acknowledged by the principal authority, as it has responsibility for setting the first precept.
- There is also the issue of the time required for residents to develop skills and confidence to grow into the new role of councillors. A common theme running through recent research into community involvement in other forms of local governance has emphasised the need for effective training and guidance so that residents can take part effectively and with confidence in structures such as New Deal for Communities and Tenant Management Organisations

(Cairncross *et al.*, 2002; Shaw and Davidson, 2002). There is already a precedent for residents to be given the opportunity to develop these capacities in other types of resident-led activity. One example is through the tenant empowerment grant programme (Section 16 funding), which is made available to residents who wish to exercise their right to manage their own housing services. In this case, residents can form a Tenant Management Organisation and time and funding are made available to allow residents to receive independent advice and guidance to ensure that they are competent to take on management responsibilities. A further example is the Community Learning Chests, which are available to residents in the most deprived areas of the country to enable them to develop the skills and knowledge to be able to play an active role in neighbourhood renewal. It is arguable that residents who want to develop a local council in their area could have access to similar streams of funding not only to allow them to develop the skills and confidence as individuals to take on the role of working in a new tier of local government, but also to allow the new local council some time to mature as an organisation.

- Since a local council was often a new feature of governance in an area, other urban-based organisations and agencies were not necessarily used to working with local councils. Furthermore, it was felt that, even if such agencies were used to dealing with established local councils, they also might not necessarily be aware of the range of activities that local councils could become involved in, particularly in relation to tackling the needs of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and regeneration in urban areas. Indeed, there was a concern expressed

by respondents that their efforts to promote the potential of local councils in their area were hampered by the word 'parish', which might also exacerbate the perception of local councils as limited in their scope. As has been noted elsewhere, it may take time for organisations to 'think parishes' (Hopkins, 1998). Another factor is the degree to which there may be antipathy towards the new local council, either from within the local council area, or from other organisations and agencies. Taylor (1995) has noted that resident-led initiatives in general have sometimes had to face official resistance to their aims, but usually pick up local authority and other support along the way.

- Tensions may also arise over the way an emerging resident-led structure can sit alongside existing community and voluntary groups and activities in the area. While it has been suggested that it is important not to lose sight of the origins of new local councils insofar as they represent a form of community self-help, the research has also highlighted the value to respondents of drawing a clear distinction between the local council as a tier of local government on the one hand, and community and voluntary groups on the other, when it comes to representing the views of residents in, for example, regeneration initiatives, or feeding into Local Strategic Partnerships.

Conclusion

There is a huge diversity in the approaches to facilitating resident involvement in the local governance of their neighbourhoods, and there is no single 'right' way to achieve this involvement. However, there are very few instances where residents themselves can exercise a right to demand that a new form of community involvement be

established in their area, which is recognised in statute. Local councils offer one option for devolving power to the level of neighbourhoods which is being explored by a number of principal authorities around the country. Significantly, the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 also enables residents to establish local councils if they so choose.

Local councils offer a powerful way for residents to engage in community self-help. They provide residents with an input into the governance of their areas that is independent and permanent, and, crucially, cannot be dissolved by any external agency. The new local councils in this study have emerged out of a concern by residents to have a greater influence on the local governance of the communities in which they live. In this

respect, the establishment of the new local councils appears to be firmly rooted in the type of community self-help activity that central government is seeking to encourage, with its emphasis on facilitating civil renewal and community capacity building. Resident-led initiatives, such as new local councils, will inevitably lead to a patchwork of different approaches to representation within principal authorities. In assessing the merit of various forms of involvement of residents in the governance of their areas, perhaps it is necessary to consider not only the outcome, in terms of the specific type of involvement established, but also the process in which residents have initiated and developed their own representative structure.

Recommendations

- Local councillors have considerable responsibilities, learning how to operate within the specific structures of local government, but also employing staff, budgeting, fundraising, representing communities, case work and service delivery. Not least is making the transition from a group of residents campaigning for a new local council to local councillors, especially since very few of the residents involved are likely to have any prior experience of working in this type of structure. Training and guidance needs to recognise the particular requirements of residents working for the first time in a new local council. Such training offers the potential for a continuous and expanding cycle of capacity building within an area, as residents develop the skills and confidence to take on this new role, and as more residents are drawn into the process. Furthermore, the costs of this capacity building, in terms of time and money, need to be recognised.
- A strong message from the research was the value placed on sharing experiences between new local councils. One way of developing skills and confidence would be an opportunity to learn by making links with other new local councils around the country. This could be taken forward by the development of a national network for new local councils, or through the development of a website. One example could be the potential offered by the website for local councils hosted by the Improvement and Development Agency, which would also facilitate the sharing of good practice between new and established local councils.
- Current guidance emphasises positive working relationships between principal authorities and local councils. In addition, it would be helpful to acknowledge the potential for tension and conflict between tiers of government and to offer ways that such tensions might be mediated and resolved.
- Raising awareness among service providers of the role of local councils, particularly in urban areas. This is about not just raising the profile of local councils, but also addressing perceptions of the scope of local councils with regard to the type of activities they can engage in.
- Further research is necessary to explore the views of residents who live in areas where new local councils have been established about the development of this type of governance.

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