Public officials and community involvement in local services

Kathryn Ray,
Maria Hudson,
Verity Campbell-Barr
and Isabel Shutes

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An examination of community involvement in the governance of local services, with an emphasis on the role of public officials.

The role played by public officials in community engagement has important effects on the extent to which community views can influence local services. This study explores the experiences and views of public officials, comparing a local authority, a police service and a Primary Care Trust in one part of London. The research examines:

- public officials' perspectives on the purposes of community engagement, the different types of engagement mechanisms used, and the role played by community participants;

- organisational constraints and enablers of community engagement, including senior management support, resources, performance management systems, time frames and organisational culture;

- the informal practices and processes used by public officials to engage with the community and their attitudes and feelings towards it; and

- officials' views about the extent of community influence and the factors which affected this.

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1 Introduction

This report focuses on the role of public officials in community engagement in local governance. The engagement of citizens, service users and communities in local governance has been increasingly emphasised by the Government over recent years in a variety of different initiatives, such as the New Deal for Communities programme, patient involvement initiatives in health and tenant participation initiatives in housing.

The role played by public officials – that is, paid officials employed by public bodies – in these initiatives has been identified as important in affecting the extent to which community views can have an influence in the governance of local services. Public officials exert an influence through the way they conduct interactions with community members or through what they do with the views that have been received from the public and whether they feed into changes in policy and practice. In this report, we explore the role of public officials in community-centred governance through a case study of one local authority area – Haringey, in North London. We use the experiences from this one area to develop insights and lessons that are relevant to other areas in England where similar initiatives are being undertaken.

The fieldwork for the research took place between February and September 2007, and involved interviews with public officials across different service areas and different public bodies within Haringey, including:

- the police;

- the local primary care trust;

- two services within the local authority – environmental services and children and young people's services;

- a former local authority service (housing), which had been split between the local authority and

an arm's-length management organisation (ALMO);[1]

- the local authority's neighbourhood management service, which represents an attempt to 'join up' services at the local neighbourhood level.

Focusing on the experiences and perspectives of officials within one local borough, but across different service areas and organisations, allowed us to gain an insight into the influence of different organisational structures and cultures on the activities of public officials in community engagement. Within each of the case study service areas, we interviewed officials in different positions, including those with a specialist community engagement function and 'mainstream' staff, and staff at different levels in the management hierarchy. Our main focus, however, was on managerial staff at middle and senior management levels. In addition, we carried out a small number of interviews with other stakeholders to gain their perspectives on the role of public officials in community engagement. This included councillors and individuals working in the voluntary sector. Finally, at the close of the fieldwork, we organised a workshop for public managers to validate and discuss our research findings, and to think about policy and practice implications.[2]

Community engagement in governance and the policy agenda

Defining community engagement
The engagement of communities in local governance has become increasingly central to the policy agenda, both in the UK and across other industrialised countries. However, there is often a lack of clarity regarding the meaning of the term. Terms like 'public participation', 'community engagement' and 'user involvement' are often used interchangeably. We use the term 'community engagement in governance' to mean

the involvement of local people in shaping services and policies. Some other writers prefer not to use the term 'community' in this context because of its ambiguity. Barnes *et al*. (2008), for example, prefer the term 'citizen-centred governance'. Community can have a wide range of meanings, referring to geographically based groupings or groupings based on shared identity or interest. Uncritical use of the term can also overemphasise homogeneity, rather than difference and diversity, within groupings of people. The term community is also often used normatively – that is, it is seen to be something of value rather than simply a descriptive term (Taylor, 2003; Barnes *et al*., 2007).

We use the terms 'public participation' and 'community engagement' interchangeably throughout this report. We retain the use of the term 'community' because of its common usage in policy debate and among the people we interviewed. We do not assume that communities are static or homogeneous and recognise that people will usually belong to a multitude of communities defined in different ways. We use the term in an encompassing way to include the engagement of a wide range of different types of communities, as well as individuals. In interviews, we encouraged respondents to use their own definitions of community engagement in telling us about their practices. Chapter 3 of the report maps out the different definitions that were used. Some practices defined as community engagement were not primarily about governance, but were about, for example, community development or the provision of services in the community. We include discussion of these practices where they were related to governance (as they often were), but our main focus in the report is on community involvement in governance – that is, community involvement in shaping local services and policies.

There have been various attempts to map out the different types of community or public involvement in governance. The most famous is Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder of participation', which envisaged a hierarchy of involvement from non-participation (therapy or manipulation), to tokenistic participation (informing, consulting or placation), through to citizen power (partnership, delegated power and citizen control). This model has been criticised for implying a 'one size fits all' approach to participation, in which 'citizen power' is seen

as the only desirable end goal (Chanan, 2003; Taylor, 2003). Other writers have argued that different types of participation are appropriate for different objectives, such as educating, informing, seeking reactions, seeking new ideas or seeking consensus (Jackson, 2001). However, in practice there may not be such a neat fit between purposes and types of engagement. Barnes *et al*. (2008) note that there is often a lack of clarity or even confusion about the purposes of engagement on the part of those designing participation initiatives.

It has been suggested that there has been a shift over time from *consultative* approaches to community engagement in local governance towards *participatory governance* models, in which public participants play a role in decision-making alongside public officials (and perhaps other stakeholders such as businesses) (Gaventa, 2004). It is suggested that participatory governance devolves more power and influence to community participants because they share the responsibility for decision-making alongside public officials, rather than taking a more passive role implied by consultation. Consultation itself can also take different forms, however, ranging from consumer models in which individuals are asked for their preferences on a pre-defined range of solutions, to forums that provide more space for open deliberation and for communities to shape the agenda (Taylor, 2003). In the report, we look at which of these different types of initiatives were in use in Haringey and why, and explore what public officials felt the strengths and weaknesses of the different types of engagement were.

Community engagement in public policy
The increasing emphasis placed on the engagement of service users, citizens and communities in government policy stems from a variety of different impulses and policy objectives. Barnes *et al* (2007) identify four policy objectives that have taken precedence under the Labour Government in the UK.

- Improved services: a desire to improve the responsiveness of public services and their outcomes for service users.

- Improved outcomes: tackling social exclusion and inequalities.

- Democratic renewal at the institutional level: improving the quality and legitimacy of decisions in public bodies and reducing 'the democratic deficit'.

- Democratic renewal at the individual and community level: building community capacity, community cohesion and civic values.

These different policy objectives are evident in a series of reforms that have taken place over recent years, which aim to transform the relationship between central and local government, and between local government and local communities. These have been described by the Government as heralding a 'new era of devolution', 'handing power' to both local councils and communities in order to improve people's lives (CLG, 2007a).

In 2007 a new streamlined set of national indicators were introduced for assessing the performance of local authorities, providing local government with greater flexibility to set its own local priorities (CLG, 2007b). A *Central–Local Concordat* was also agreed, setting out for the first time the rights and responsibilities of local government and its relations with central government. The Concordat emphasised the responsibility of both central and local government to:

> *… devolve power, and to engage and empower communities and individual citizens – at national level and at local level – in debate and decision making and in shaping and delivering services.*
>
> (CLG and LGA, 2007)

Governance at the local level has also been transformed through the introduction of *local strategic partnerships* (LSPs), which have encouraged inter-agency working across public, private, voluntary and community sectors to establish a vision and long-term strategic direction for local areas in the form of *sustainable community strategies*. *Local area agreements* (LAAs) – three-year agreements between central government and local governance partners – set out a delivery plan to meet the priorities that have been identified for local areas. This has also been accompanied by the development of a new performance assessment framework for local government, *comprehensive area assessment*, which will assess the performance of public services collectively across an area, against the agreed local priorities.

A series of recent initiatives have promised to entail further devolution by putting 'more influence, power and control in the hands of communities' (CLG, 2007c). For example, the 2007 Local Government and Public involvement in Health Bill introduced a new duty for local authorities to involve local people in decisions, policies and services that may affect them or be of interest to them. A recent White Paper (CLG, 2008a) proposed the extension of this duty to a range of other bodies such as police authorities and key arts, sporting, cultural and environmental organisations. This White Paper (*Communities in Control, Real People, Real Power*) also proposed a new duty for councils to respond to petitions from local residents if they gained significant local support, and encouraged the further extension of pilot initiatives, such as:

- participatory budgeting, where local people can discuss and vote on how pots of council money should be spent to benefit their communities;

- 'community ownership', which entails handing over the control of local assets (such as buildings) to community groups;

- 'community contracts' between councils and local people setting out service standards and the responsibilities of each party.

While the multitude of initiatives for citizen engagement that have been established over recent years have undoubtedly provided new spaces for the inclusion of different voices in local decision-making, there is a lack of consensus over how much difference these initiatives have made to local services and how much 'the balance of power' between local communities and Government has been transformed.

Several research studies have identified the existence of 'a bewildering array' of participation structures and initiatives, around which both communities and public officials have found

it difficult to navigate, and this has prompted 'partnership fatigue' among some officials. It has also been argued that new governance structures, such as partnerships, are 'opaque' and lack clear lines of accountability (for greater detail, see Sullivan *et al*., 2001; Wilkinson and Craig, 2002; Bound *et al*., 2005; Maguire and Truscott, 2006; Barnes *et al*., 2008). While the focus of a great deal of research and policy initiatives to date has been on developing capacity within the community for effective engagement, it is increasingly realised that strengthening *government responsiveness* is also urgently needed (Gaventa, 2004). In particular, the role of public officials in governance structures is crucial to achieving outcomes for communities (CRESR, 2005).

Public officials and governance

A number of recent studies have suggested that public officials might be posing barriers to the effectiveness of community influence in new community governance arrangements. The national evaluation of the New Deal for Communities programme, for example, referred to 'silo mentalities' among public officials in some service delivery agencies limiting their engagement with partnership boards, including perceptions about 'operational remit' and a limited commitment to 'non-essential' work (CRESR, 2005). Maguire and Truscott (2006), in a study of local strategic partnerships, argued that the formal language and structures favoured by public officials were offputting and intimidating to community representatives and posed barriers to their involvement. In addition, they argued that middle-ranking managers in service delivery organisations were exerting 'a major brake on progress', since they either felt threatened by community engagement or saw it as a diversion from their 'real' job. Other research has also suggested that organisational cultures and working practices in large public bureaucracies pose barriers to community participation (Burgess *et al*., 2001; Gaventa, 2004; Bound *et al*., 2005; CRESR, 2005).

Lowndes *et al*. (2006), in a study of the impact of institutional context on public participation, argue that there are locally distinctive 'rules in use' that influence public participation through

their impact on the behaviour of politicians, public managers, community leaders and citizens. These include the formal structures through which governance takes place – for example, the existence of a strategic partnership board or a school governing body – as well as the informal practices, conventions and customs that shape behaviour. The latter might not be explicit but involve routine understandings about 'how things are done round here' (Lowndes *et al*., 2006, p. 545). Such shared understandings between public officials can operate to exclude others – who do not share these understandings – from the governance process. Taylor (2003) provides some examples of this, drawing on a range of research studies, such as the use by officials of policy 'jargon'; the implicit rules of interaction in formal meetings; assumptions about who is a 'legitimate' public participant; who sets the agenda; the stage at which the public is engaged in the policy-making process; and whose knowledge and expertise 'count'. Other research has also suggested that opening up governance creates power dynamics between 'professional' and 'lay' knowledges and can be perceived as a threat by officials (Simpson, 1996; Farrell and Law, 1999; Karn, 2007).

In this research, we take a closer look at the role of public officials in governance processes, exploring the extent to which they can facilitate or constrain community influence. The research had the following aims.

- To explore the impacts of a variety of community engagement mechanisms on the everyday working lives of public officials, in a context of multi-sector partnership working.

- To explore the range of factors that impact on the ability of public officials to:
    - effectively engage with a diverse range of communities;
    - ensure that the views and priorities expressed by residents and communities are reflected in changes in services.

- To explore the role of organisational structures and cultures in shaping the responsiveness of public officials towards community engagement in governance.

In *Chapter 2* of the report, we introduce the case study area, and provide an overview of the types of structures and mechanisms for community engagement in governance operating in the various service areas. *Chapter 3* then takes a closer look at the meanings of engagement, exploring links between the different types of engagement, their purposes, their intended participants and the envisaged role of these participants from the perspective of public officials. This provides a framework for understanding the variety of engagement practices, which is drawn on in the remainder of the report. In *Chapter 4*, we look at the factors that officials identified as enablers and constraints on their community engagement practice, in terms of the organisational and wider political context in which they were working. Then, in *Chapter 5*, we examine the enablers and constraints in terms of public officials' own practices, attitudes, values and behaviours. In *Chapter 6*, we explore officials' perspectives on the extent of community influence through involvement in local governance, before concluding in *Chapter 7*, and drawing out some implications for policy and practice.

2 The context and structures for community engagement in Haringey

Summary

- The population is highly ethnically diverse in Haringey, alongside significant inequalities in wealth across the borough, resulting in different capacities for engagement and tensions for officials in reconciling the different voices expressed.

- Neighbourhood management has recently been rolled out across the borough, which represents a commitment to area-based working at the local level. Links with environmental services and the police are particularly strong and relationships with other services are still developing.

- There were commonalities in the types of engagement practices across services, but different organisational contexts contributed to different structures for engagement. Differences related to the level of uniformity and centralisation of engagement practices, and the organisation of engagement (on a geographical or thematic basis).

- Housing and police had a range of formal mechanisms in place, which allowed community involvement in decision-making. Health represented the opposite end of the spectrum, with limited resources for community engagement. Much of its engagement practice was undertaken via intermediaries.

- Organisational restructuring was affecting all the service areas to differing degrees, and there had also been restructuring in the voluntary and community sector. Such a pace of change has implications for the development of relationships that are vital in building effective community engagement.

- Officials felt that it was necessary to have a diverse range of engagement practices, but there was a feeling that the myriad of practices currently in place lacked coherence and that there needed to be a more strategic approach at the local level.

Introduction

This chapter introduces the context for governance and community involvement in Haringey and the five service areas in which the research took place. It highlights the key features of the organisational structures for engagement, thus setting the scene for more in-depth exploration in the chapters to follow.

Haringey – the local area setting

Population structure
Haringey is one of the most deprived boroughs in England (18th most deprived on the national Index of Multiple Deprivation), but there is also significant inequality between the east and west of the borough. Poverty and deprivation is concentrated in the east, while parts of the west are much more wealthy. Haringey is also one of the most ethnically diverse places in the country (London's fourth most diverse borough), which is reflected in the almost 200 languages being spoken and the fact that almost half of all Haringey's pupils speak English as an additional language (CRE, 2007). Over half of the population are from minority ethnic (non-white British) backgrounds, including large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees

concentrated in the east of the borough. From 2000 to 2006, two regeneration programmes funded through the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programme were under way in the east of the borough, although these had finished at the time of fieldwork. There was also an ongoing New Deal for Communities programme in operation in West Green ward (in the east of the borough).[1]

This population structure has important implications for community engagement. Other research has shown that ethnic diversity and population transience present challenges to officials conducting community engagement in finding the right structures in the community with which to engage (Blake *et al*., 2008). There was a feeling among respondents in Haringey that newer communities who had not yet developed a community infrastructure (such as representative organisations) were the least well represented in engagement practices. The significant spatial divide in wealth in Haringey also presents challenges for officials in that there are different capacities for engagement in the west and east of the borough, and tensions for officials in reconciling the different voices expressed.

Politics

Until recently, Haringey Council was controlled by the Labour Party, but the 2006 local elections showed a swing towards the Liberal Democrats in the west of the borough. They now hold 27 seats in the council to Labour's 30. The parliamentary constituency in the west also went to the Liberal Democrats in the 2005 General Election. This changed political composition has had an effect on the wider context shaping community engagement and public participation in Haringey. The challenge to traditional Labour domination has resulted in tensions for the Executive in devolving power to local communities, given the important role in this process of ward councillors, many of whom are now opposition councillors.

The local strategic partnership and local area agreement

The Haringey Strategic Partnership (HSP) comprising key public, private and voluntary sector agencies is responsible for developing the borough's sustainable community strategy and the local area agreement in consultation with borough residents. All of the organisations and service areas featuring in this research have representation in the HSP, including the voluntary and community sector.[2] The HSP has an executive board, chaired by the Leader of Haringey Council, and a range of thematic sub-boards, including well-being; children and young people; safer communities; enterprise; better places; and housing.

Haringey's sustainable community strategy, first launched in 2002, was being reviewed prior to and at the time of our fieldwork in 2007 through a large-scale community consultation. Priorities in the first strategy, such as crime and liveability, service improvement and educational attainment, have been supplemented in the revised strategy with an additional focus on economic opportunity, resident engagement and cohesion, health and well-being, and children and young people. Two of the six priorities of the revised strategy reflect an increased emphasis on community engagement in governance:

- to have people at the heart of change;

- to be people and customer focused.

The strategy also pledges to 'put in place greater opportunities for civic engagement and volunteering, drawing in local people to work together with our elected community leaders to improve Haringey' (HSP, 2007a, p. 26).

The local area agreement, like the sustainable community strategy, also reflects an increasing emphasis on resident engagement, with one of the key themes comprising 'active listening and increasing community participation and cohesion' (HSP, 2007b).

The local authority

Neighbourhood management

In recent years, neighbourhood management has been promoted nationally as a mechanism for empowering local people to manage neighbourhoods at a grass-roots level. Haringey was not one of the national Pathfinder areas but began to introduce neighbourhood management from 2000 in two areas of the borough where SRB programmes were running. After this funding

ended, in 2006, the neighbourhood management structure was rolled out borough-wide. However, there have been some tensions surrounding this process. In the former SRB areas, which are also some of the most deprived areas in the borough, the reduced funding following the ending of the SRB was felt keenly:

> *We were an SRB programme with a number of staff, with lots of budget. Suddenly we have nothing, we have very little. We have £50,000 to go for two wards.*
>
> (R18)[3]

In the west of the borough, where neighbourhood management had been rolled out more recently, there was also some resentment over the lack of dedicated facilities, such as neighbourhood centres, which had been developed in the east with SRB funding, and also concern that the area assembly areas (see below) were too large to function effectively.

The neighbourhood management service is intended to work with local people to improve their neighbourhoods, through identifying local needs, informing policy and changing service delivery. Neighbourhood managers support consultation and community involvement exercises that help identify local needs and then work with a range of service providers to tackle them, as one neighbourhood manager explained:

> *We do lots of joining up, so … somebody brings you a problem. You then find out there's other people involved in this, or other departments have been doing some work, but nobody's actually talking to each other. So we do lots of, sort of, summits … you've got 30 odd people around the table, 'OK, what are we gonna do about this then?'*
>
> (R6)

The relationship between neighbourhood management and other service providers has been difficult at times, described by one member of staff as 'an uphill struggle' (R1), but partnership working is growing.

Box 1 provides examples of the key community engagement practices within neighbourhood management. In the two pilot neighbourhoods

with SRB funding, there had previously been neighbourhood boards in existence, where residents (nominated by residents' associations) sat alongside other stakeholders to decide on SRB spending priorities. However, as this funding had come to an end and with the roll-out of neighbourhood management borough-wide, devolved decision-making boards with resident representation had been jettisoned although area assemblies where residents could voice their concerns remained.

Box 1: Key community engagement practices in neighbourhood management

- Area assemblies – provide an opportunity for residents from a neighbourhood to come together to discuss a range of local concerns with executive and ward councillors.

- Summits and area-based working groups – problem-solving discussions involving multiple stakeholders including residents.

- Outreach and community development work among excluded and marginalised groups in the local area.

- Support for consultation exercises across a range of local authority departments and other services and projects.

Environmental services

In the urban environment directorate, there was a range of different community involvement practices in use, while a core strategic team took an overview and ensured that practices were complementary and appropriate. Environment staff carried out their own forms of engagement with the public, as well as working in partnership with the consultation unit in the local authority and with neighbourhood management. Examples of engagement practice in environmental services are shown in Box 2.

Box 2: Key community engagement practices in environmental services

- One-to-one dialogue with service users through complaints procedures.

- Focus groups to better understand residents' attitudes to and satisfaction with services.

- Involvement in area-based working group pilots (with neighbourhood management) to tackle local environmental problems.

- Staff attending area assemblies.

- Consultation exercises for proposed developments such as controlled parking zones, traffic calming measures, new housing developments.

- Proactive events to engage residents in strategic planning debates.

- Outreach activities, such as door knocking, to encourage greater use of recycling facilities.

- Community volunteers scheme, in which local residents sign up to take a more proactive role in monitoring their local environment.

Housing

The housing case study centred on Homes for Haringey, an arm's length management organisation (ALMO) set up by Haringey Council to manage over 21,000 council-owned and leaseholder homes (around a fifth of Haringey's households) (Haringey Council, 2005). The local authority retains the strategic overview of housing for the borough.

Since its inception, the ALMO has successfully established a range of mechanisms for embedding resident involvement in its governance structures (summarised in Box 3). Alongside this mainstreaming of resident involvement, there is also a resident involvement team, which supports

the ongoing development of engagement practice (for example, through capacity building among residents); retains an overview of engagement activity; and acts as an internal consultancy to ensure that standards of good practice in engagement are maintained.

Box 3: Key community engagement practices in housing

- An executive board that includes six resident representatives, alongside councillors, independent experts and ALMO staff.

- Specialist panels, with resident representatives, which plan policy and practice on specific service areas, such as repairs, tenancy and estate management, communications, finance.

- A residents' consultative forum, steered by a rolling group of residents.

- Engagement structures for 'harder to reach' groups, such as a Somali-speaking group and youth sounding board.

- Open events and forums – for example, resident conferences.

- Consultation through residents' associations.

- Community outreach work with young people, door knocking and other market research.

- An annual survey of residents who are involved in engagement structures to inform improvements.

Children and young people's services

Children and young people's services are located in the Children and Families Directorate. Services range from support for parents with pre-school children, through to youth services and support for teenagers. Recent departmental restructuring has

been shaped by the *Every Child Matters* agenda and policy concerns about the 'voice' of children, young people and parents are paramount. With changes still in their infancy, the service is in the process of developing new structures for community engagement (for main examples, see Box 4). Broadly speaking, forms of engagement are divided into those based around children's services that aim primarily to engage parents and those based around youth services and the engagement of young people. A key structure for the department's community engagement activity is the participation team comprising staff responsible for both young people's and parental engagement.

Box 4: Key community engagement practices in children and young people's services

- Welcome packs outlining services for new households.

- Childcare sufficiency assessment, using questionnaires, focus groups and targeted engagement with 'hard to reach' groups, to ascertain need for childcare provision.

- Resident consultations around school developments.

- One-off events such as conferences and walkabouts, and ongoing dialogue with particular 'identity' communities to address their needs.

- Local partnership boards (which were being established at the time of the fieldwork), to provide an opportunity for parents to shape children's services commissioning.

- Youth challenge events, involving dialogue between young people and officials from different departments.

- Youth forums – used as a regular means of consulting with young people on the

development of youth programmes and strategy.

- Departmental support for the Youth Council, which aims to represent the views of all children and young people in Haringey.

Haringey police

Haringey police were involved in an early stage in the move towards community policing within the Metropolitan Police Service. Hence, with the roll-out of Safer Neighbourhoods across London in 2005, Haringey police felt 'fortunate to be ahead of the game' (R26). Safer Neighbourhood teams in Haringey[4] have taken on considerable responsibility for the engagement of communities, with all team members having contact with the public. They identify policing priorities and direct policing services to meet ward-level needs. In part, community policing activities at the ward level are intended to build a stronger police presence with local residents and to address fears of crime:

> *It was based on the kind of 'broken windows ethos' that had kind of been piloted in America where, if you start fixing the graffiti and the broken windows, the kind of low-level anti-social behaviour, you will actually have an impact on more serious crimes.*
>
> (R26)

The principal structures for public engagement in local policing are listed in Box 5.

Box 5: Key community engagement practices in policing

- Ward consultations on local policing priorities through public meetings and 'Have a Say' days.

- Ward panels, which provide a structure for maintaining accountability to the local community through the involvement

of residents and other stakeholders in deciding and ratifying local policing priorities.

- Two-way dissemination of information about local policing issues through key individual networks (KINs), which comprise community leaders and individual 'well-connected' residents.

- 'Gold groups', which aim to involve community leaders in developing strategies for dealing with high-profile crimes.

- Dialogue with residents at area assemblies.

- Informal police 'surgeries' to encourage communication with less well-represented groups, e.g. young people.

- Community Liaison Officer responsible for dialogue with identity-based communities and involvement in local partnerships.

- The Haringey Community and Police Consultative Group (HCPCG), an independent body chaired by community members, which provides a channel of communication and dialogue with senior police officers.

- A variety of community outreach activities with young people, designed to build better relationships and prevent crime.

Haringey Teaching Primary Care Trust

The Haringey Teaching Primary Care Trust (PCT) has responsibility for the management of local health care in Haringey, including the delivery of some services and the commissioning of services from other organisations. Governance of the organisation operates via the Trust Board, the Professional Executive Committee and the Executive Team. Mechanisms for community engagement at this level include a wider

Professional Executive Committee, comprising a variety of clinicians alongside representatives of relevant voluntary sector organisations, whose discussions inform the Trust Board. The Public–Patient Involvement (PPI) Forum[5] (see below) also has representation on the board. Service managers are responsible for ensuring that appropriate user engagement mechanisms are in place within their services, while the Director of Corporate Affairs and Partnerships has overall responsibility for ensuring that community engagement takes place and sets out its parameters.

Of all the case studies, the PCT had the most dispersed structures for community engagement. This was partly because of a lack of central resources devoted to engagement, which was exacerbated by heavy financial cutbacks in the year prior to our fieldwork (discussed further in Chapter 4). Many engagement practices took place in partnership with other institutions or were 'contracted out' to intermediary organisations. For example, the PPI Forum is managed by a voluntary organisation. Much engagement practice is also undertaken via forums that have been established and are managed by voluntary sector umbrella organisations such as HAVCO (Haringey Association of Voluntary and Community Organisations – see later) and Age Concern. A range of PCT engagement practices are presented in Box 6.

Box 6: Key community engagement practices in health

- Community representation on the PCT board and on the wider Professional Executive Committee.

- PCT and community representation on HSP structures.

- Public–Patient Involvement (PPI) Forum, comprising patient and public representatives, which meets with representatives from the PCT on a six-weekly basis and is invited to participate in specific consultations and events.

- Large-scale public consultations around 'substantial' changes to services, e.g. closure or reorganisation of services.

- Consultation on changes to services and on service strategy development, often carried out through intermediary organisations.

- One-off user surveys to get feedback on specific services and interventions, and ongoing user networks to shape the development of service areas.

- Outreach activities around particular local developments and initiatives.

- PCT staff attending area assemblies.

- Community-informing exercises, where local health statistics are disseminated to local residents.

The voluntary and community sector in Haringey

All of the case study organisations are engaged in varying relationships with the community and voluntary sector in Haringey, and make use of the umbrella organisation, Haringey Association of Voluntary and Community Organisations (HAVCO), as an intermediary to ascertain the views of the community. However, the voluntary sector in Haringey is also in a period of transition. HAVCO was set up in 2003 and, at the time of the fieldwork, was about to start taking on greater responsibility for community engagement in Haringey, as a result of the dissolution of the Haringey Community Empowerment Network (HARCEN).[6]

HAVCO is engaged in partnership working across a wide range of governance structures. HSP structures are the main arena for its input – for example, HAVCO has three representatives on the HSP board and one or two representatives on the majority of the thematic sub-boards (others have independent voluntary sector

representatives). Other areas that HAVCO has been actively involved with in the last few years include:

- convening a health theme group of voluntary sector organisations, which nominates representatives for various PCT boards, and involvement in organising health conferences for wider community consultation;

- participation in the Community Police Consultative Group and partnership working with the police to promote a volunteering project;

- working with Chief Executive Services in Haringey Council to develop the sustainable community strategy;

- involvement with children's services, e.g. through the Safeguarding Children Board.

Given HAVCO's wide range of activities, and the current expansion of its role, a HAVCO respondent placed considerable emphasis on inadequate resources as a constraint on more effective engagement via the voluntary sector. This included resources to support effective participation in governance forums as well as to effectively feed back and to be accountable to the wider voluntary sector, and ultimately to the community in Haringey:

> I think it's really beyond HAVCO's capacity at the moment to engage in so many different things and I spend a lot of time going out for these partnership meetings and I haven't got the time and energy and resources and capacity or support to write up reports of these meetings so as to feed to the sector more effectively.

(R41)

Until recently, Haringey also had a Race Equality Joint Consultative Committee (REJCC) as the main channel via which public bodies engaged with minority ethnic communities. The REJCC aimed to provide minority ethnic groups (through their representatives) to high-level access to

governance, particularly to the council and its executive. However, the REJCC was felt to have a narrow representation and at the time of the fieldwork it had been disbanded, with proposals to replace it with a new body that would be more inclusive of new communities in the borough.

Configurations of engagement structures across the service areas

Very different organisational sizes, structures and contexts for community engagement in governance are evident across the case study organisations and service departments. There were commonalities in the types of engagement practices, and a mix of formality and informality. However, the organisational and historical contexts of the different departments contribute to different *structures* for engagement across the service areas. These differences relate to the level of uniformity and centralisation of engagement practices and the way engagement is organised, either on a geographical basis (e.g. the neighbourhood level) or a thematic basis. Figure 1 shows the five service areas according to these two axes of differentiation.

Policing (within Safer Neighbourhoods) and housing (within Homes for Haringey) are at one end of the spectrum in terms of the centralisation and uniformity of engagement structures. The major shake-up of housing involved in the introduction of the ALMO provided an opportunity for developing new centralised structures for involving residents, such as the Executive Board, the panels and the resident consultative forum. In policing, wider Metropolitan Police support for Safer Neighbourhoods has ensured a uniform structure for engagement across the borough through the ward policing teams and ward panels. In each of these cases, formal structures ensure that resident involvement in decision-making is facilitated. Environmental services, children and young people's services and health all have more diverse and eclectic engagement structures throughout their service areas, with more devolved responsibility for designing and initiating engagement practices (although there are also specialist teams or individuals with a remit to oversee engagement as a whole in environment and in children and young people's services). Health represents the most dispersed structure with few centralised resources for engagement. Neighbourhood management represents a mid-point on the spectrum, with common overarching structures like the area assemblies, as well as myriad local initiatives organised by individual neighbourhood managers or community development staff.

Another axis of differentiation is how the engagement is organised, either geographically or thematically. Most services organised their engagement in both of these ways, but there were differences of emphasis. Neighbourhood management was at one end of the spectrum,

Figure 1: Engagement structures
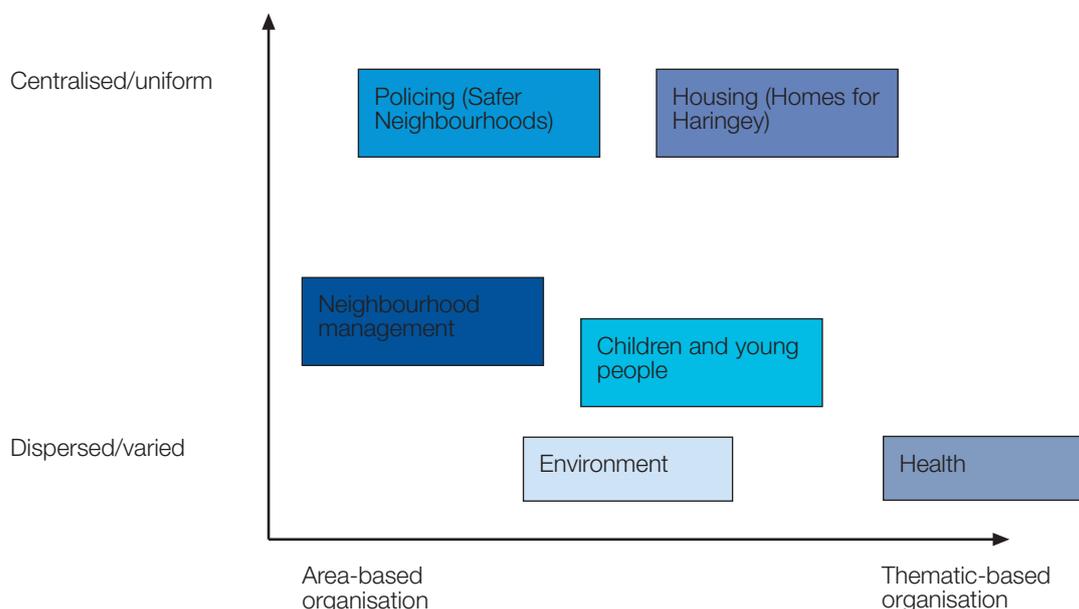
with a remit to organise at a neighbourhood level. Safer Neighbourhoods teams in the police were similar, although there were also mechanisms for engagement in the police on a thematic basis or for engaging communities of interest or identity. Some environmental services were closely linked into the neighbourhood management service and organised on an area basis and others were thematically based. Children and young people's services were not primarily organised on a neighbourhood basis, although the recent introduction of area-based Children's Networks and partnership boards represents an attempt to move in this direction. Housing was organised partly on a geographical (estate) basis, as this was how residents' associations were organised, but it also had centralised thematic structures such as the panels. There was some joint working with neighbourhood management, around resident consultations, but ALMO staff commented that they had to be careful to confine their activity to those residents in council-owned or leaseholder homes, rather than to all residents in a neighbourhood, given their service remit. Finally, health engagement structures were primarily organised on a thematic basis (e.g. by service type), although individual members of staff were sometimes involved in engagement activity with neighbourhood management teams on an ad hoc basis – for example, in community health events and initiatives.

For all the case study organisations featured in this research, the nature of community engagement has been changing, often influenced by national policy agendas. This sometimes means that new arrangements are being introduced just as the old are becoming established, as is the case with the replacement of PPI forums in health with LINks (local involvement networks). Such a pace of change has implications for the development of the kinds of relationships that are vital in building effective community engagement (Barnes *et al.*, 2008). In several of the case studies, there were accounts of the monitoring of progress with community engagement. However, there was also cross-sectoral feeling that the myriad of engagement practices currently in place lacked coherence and that greater attention needed to be paid to joining up, or even rationalising, community engagement practice and developing a strategic approach to community engagement in governance across the borough as a whole.

The context and structures for community engagement in Haringey

3 Meanings of community engagement: exploring public officials' understandings and practices

Summary

- Five main types of community engagement practices described by public officials included: gathering experiences, generating debate, extending choice, devolving decisions and involving the community.

- Officials' stated purposes for carrying out engagement included improving services, contributing to social inclusion, increasing the usage of services, generating trust in public institutions and extending democracy. Generating trust was a particularly important purpose of engagement for officials.

- Officials understood the community to have different roles in engagement, including as: grass-roots experts, representatives of constituencies or communities, individual consumers and challengers or stakeholders.

- Officials felt that it was necessary to have a diverse range of engagement practices to address different purposes and to engage different local communities.

- There were sometimes differences of opinion among participants regarding purposes and roles. This could be between different officials or between officials and the public participants. This had the potential to generate tensions and dissatisfaction.

- Officials expressed some ambivalence about the public's role as challengers and tried to exclude some kinds of challenge. This could also be in tension with the purpose of generating trust, which was sometimes defined as an absence of conflict in relationships with the community.

- Community engagement was predominantly understood by officials as practices that they initiated in order to listen to, debate with or work with the community, rather than about devolving power or control.

Introduction

In this chapter, we explore public officials' understandings of community engagement in governance. An important question is whether the range of structures and mechanisms meets the purposes and goals of community engagement. Previous research has shown that the purposes of engagement are often unclear to those who are designing and implementing engagement, and that this may contribute to confusion and disillusionment on the part of public participants, as well as to an inability to achieve desired outcomes (Chanan, 2003; Barnes *et al*., 2007, 2008). In this chapter, we provide some insights into this issue by exploring:

- the types of community engagement practices identified by officials;

- the purposes of their engagement;

- the participants (which members of the public they thought should be involved);

- their roles (what officials understood the role of these participants to be).

These are identified from officials' interview accounts, in which they were asked to describe in their own words their community engagement practices. The analysis provides a framework for understanding the diversity of community engagement practices, which is drawn on in the remainder of the report.

Talking to officials revealed a variety of ways of understanding the practices, purposes, participants and roles in community engagement. The range of understandings are depicted in the top row of boxes in Figure 2. As can be seen, five different types of community engagement practice are identifed. These are 'ideal types', which are a simplified form of a more complex reality.

The bottom two rows of boxes in Figure 2 show some common examples of how these practices were related to the purposes, participants and roles in engagement. While each of these four elements was related, this was not always straightforward. Some types of engagement practice were felt to be suited to particular purposes, but most served a range of purposes. The purposes of engagement also shaped who was 'invited' to participate, but this was also influenced by the topic area of the engagement (e.g. recycling versus mental health services), the remit of the officials concerned (planning services for a particular neighbourhood or for the whole borough), and practicalities such as pre-existing relationships with particular communities and individuals. In addition, engagement practices often had a range of purposes, both 'officially' in their design and 'unofficially' in terms of what various officials (and other participants) thought their purposes were. In the remainder of the chapter, we examine each of the five types of engagement practice that were identified in turn.

Extending choice

Engagement as extending choice was particularly prominent within environmental services and in housing. Managers in traffic and road safety (environment), for example, described how residents would always be given a *choice* of different traffic calming options, within the overall policy objective of reducing traffic accidents and improving road safety (see Box 7). This type of engagement saw participants as *consumers* who should be able to exercise choice over how their services are delivered. This perception of informed and even demanding consumers was also found among officers in recycling (environment):

> *… we've got the evidence of people writing to us and saying, 'Why haven't I got this? I want this, we want that', you know, so … I think it gives you a good flavour of … who wants what and where.*
>
> (R11)

In Homes for Haringey, officials also spoke of residents who were informed and could exercise choice:
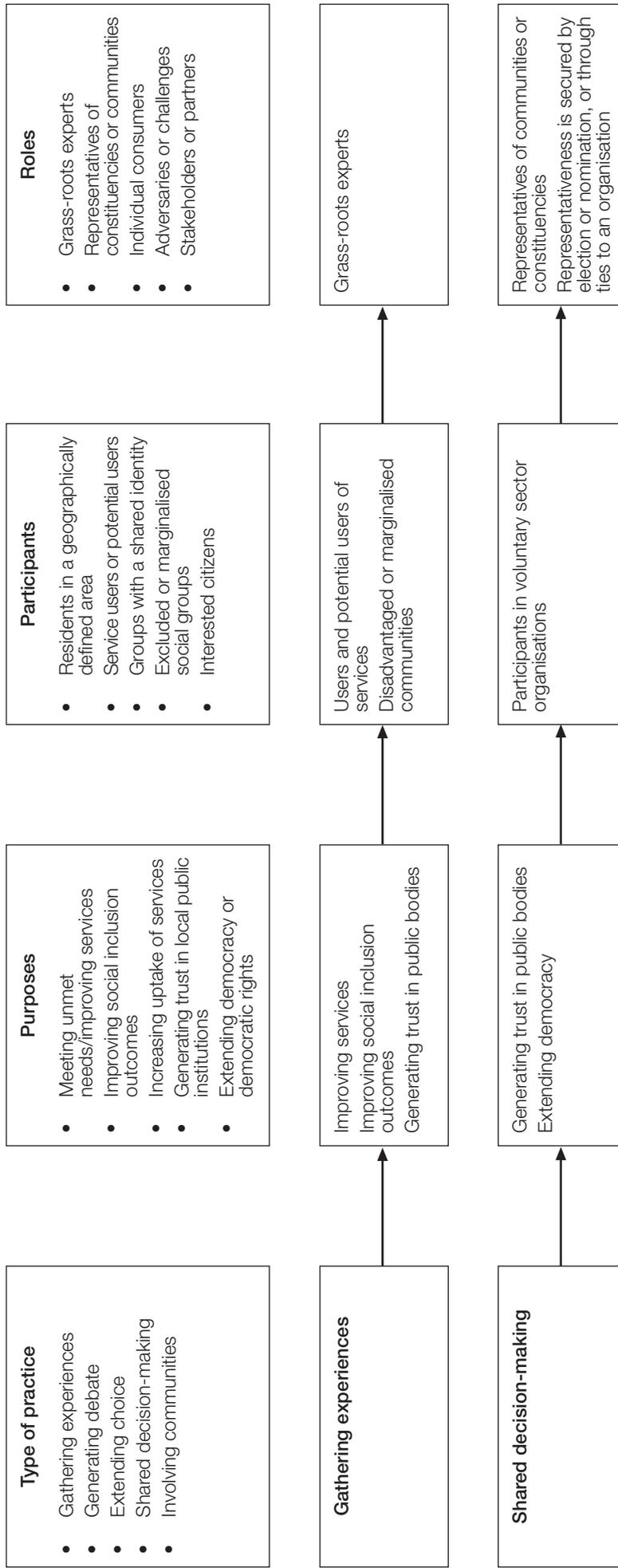
> *I mean, you know, our residents are very, very, very shrewd. Our role is to inform and* [say], *you know, 'You've got option A or option B or option C'.*
>
> (R16)

There was a large range of mechanisms in place to allow individual residents to voice their preferences within Homes for Haringey, including responding to questionnaires or participating in focus groups for one-off consultations, or regular involvement in panels that determined various aspects of housing service delivery.

The purpose of extending choice was usually said to be promoting user satisfaction and increasing the uptake of services. Officials involved in this type of engagement often expressed a strong customer service ethos:

Figure 2: Meanings of community engagement: practices, purposes, participants and roles

Type of practice

- Gathering experiences
- Generating debate
- Extending choice
- Shared decision-making
- Involving communities

Purposes

- Meeting unmet needs/improving services
- Improving social inclusion outcomes
- Increasing uptake of services
- Generating trust in local public institutions
- Extending democracy or democratic rights

Participants

- Residents in a geographically defined area
- Service users or potential users
- Groups with a shared identity
- Excluded or marginalised social groups
- Interested citizens

Roles

- Grass-roots experts
- Representatives of constituencies or communities
- Individual consumers
- Adversaries or challenges
- Stakeholders or partners

Gathering experiences

Improving services
Improving social inclusion outcomes
Generating trust in public bodies

Users and potential users of services
Disadvantaged or marginalised communities

Grass-roots experts

Shared decision-making

Generating trust in public bodies
Extending democracy

Participants in voluntary sector organisations

Representatives of communities or constituencies
Representativeness is secured by election or nomination, or through ties to an organisation

If you're providing a service for your customers, in our case residents, then it's the same as for a business, you've got to provide something that customers want and that they're going to use, and if you don't know what they want or how they want to use a service then you're not going to be providing the best service possible.

(R11)

Engagement as extending choice was most common in operational issues of service delivery, in which a relatively simple choice that could be easily understood and on which people often had strong views was on offer. Controlled parking schemes and refuse collection were obvious examples. Extending choice usually gave a relatively limited and tightly circumscribed range of options that were inherently more suitable for operational issues than for policy or strategic decisions, which require more deliberation, debate and, potentially, challenge. There was a feeling among officials that engagement as extending choice was relatively easy to undertake and was well accepted throughout the local authority.

Box 7: Resident consultation in traffic and road safety

Consultations entailed *extending choice* to residents over whether they would like a traffic or road safety scheme implemented, or the particular type of scheme that they would like to see. The extent of choice offered depended on the objectives of the scheme, which were dictated by national or regional targets (e.g. accident reduction), or by organisational objectives (e.g. ensuring economic vitality, reducing traffic congestion).

The first stage in a consultation involved residents' representatives, for example, residents' associations. This would allow officials to gain an insight into the views of residents and refine their plans accordingly. The second stage involved wider consultation with all residents in an area, through door-to-door distribution of leaflets and questionnaires, adverts and posters, and exhibitions providing

an opportunity for residents to ask questions about the scheme.

The purposes of this type of engagement included generating good relationships with the community and reducing opposition and complaints; extending democratic rights by allowing residents to have a say; legal requirements for statutory consultation attached to certain schemes; and a perception that good-quality consultation was an integral element of good professional practice.

The participants' role is described by officials as 'consumers', expressing their preferences.

Gathering experiences

Listening to citizen experiences of services was one of the principal ways in which community engagement was defined among public officials in the research. The purpose of this type of engagement was usually to alter the design or delivery of services in order to create a better fit with people's everyday experiences. This could require the involvement of *existing* service users who could comment on their experiences of service use, or the involvement of *potential* service users (or those currently excluded) who could say what services they would like to see.

Gathering the views of existing service users

Gathering the views of existing service users was a common type of engagement practice in health. One health manager, when asked about the reason for community engagement, stated:

I mean people that actually use services … will have their own perspective on what sort of services they're getting now, what works about them, what doesn't work, and if you don't involve them in … as you're redesigning, if they're not engaged in that process, then I think the services aren't really ever going to meet the needs of those people.

(R37)

Hence existing service users were engaged as 'experts', with knowledge derived from their direct use of services. In some health services, innovative techniques had been introduced to gather the experiences of users who were traditionally under-represented in engagement or who found it difficult to get their views heard. For example, a peer research group was formed in mental health services where service users carried out research and consultation with other service users. This was felt to be particularly valuable because it enabled participation among those who would be unlikely to come forward in traditional consultation exercises, and because it was felt to encourage more open and honest responses from participants.

Gathering the experiences of service users – defined as all residents living within a given neighbourhood – was also important in policing. Safer Neighbourhoods officers undertook a ward consultation exercise once every six months, which asked local people living within a ward about their experiences of crime. The aim was to provide a clearer picture of patterns of crime in the locality, on the basis of local people's accounts, in order to better target policing activity. Hence residents were engaged on the basis of their grass-roots knowledge of living in a particular neighbourhood and ward consultations attempted to provide as comprehensive a geographical coverage of the ward as possible.

Some health officials also spoke of the usefulness of listening to the experiences of the public as local residents, rather than as health service users *per se*, because this provided a more holistic picture of needs. This potentially allowed unexpected connections to be made across service areas and prompted officials to think 'outside of the box' in terms of service delivery. One example was residents raising cross-cutting issues that service providers needed to work together on, such as the rise in fast food outlets in parts of the borough.

Gathering the views of potential service users
In addition to engaging existing users, it was felt to be necessary to gather the experiences of *potential* users of services. This could necessitate targeting engagement at disadvantaged groups who were under-represented among service users.

This was seen as a way of promoting greater use of services and thus generating better outcomes in terms of social inclusion. To this end, community workers had been appointed in mental health services in order to liaise with minority ethnic communities. In children and young people's services, officials also targeted engagement at marginalised or excluded communities (see Box 8).

Box 8: Dialogue with the Somali Forum: children and young people's services

Service providers met with representatives of the Somali community to *listen to community views and experiences* of children's services. This began with a one-off conference and has developed into a series of regular meetings that entail ongoing dialogue between the community and service providers. A community participation officer facilitates the dialogue and ensures that those responsible for services in the department are aware of the needs that have been expressed.

The purpose is to contribute to policy outcomes of raising educational achievement, and broader goals of social justice and social inclusion. This should occur through altering services to meet the needs expressed as well as by encouraging greater community participation in activities designed to raise achievement. Another purpose is empowerment of the community to be able to express their needs and demands effectively and to take control of the agenda:

… we just had to understand how they [wanted to engage] *and, once we did that, and by approaching the community and using community organisations … they had the ownership.*

(R5)

Somalis were specifically targeted in this engagement because they were identified as an underachieving group in terms of their children's education. It was also recognised

that their voices were not being heard through traditional methods of engagement. Engagement takes place with community representatives through the Somali Forum, an umbrella group aimed at bringing together the diverse range of interests within the local community. A wider range of voices within the Somali community were accessed through the initial conference, which was marketed via community organisations, Somali teachers and a local Somali radio station.

Participants take the role of 'local experts' in this engagement with first-hand knowledge of the experiences of the community in the education system. The community is also perceived as an informed community who wish to make demands on service providers, but who need to be empowered in order to achieve that.

Social inclusion or social justice outcomes often figured strongly as a purpose of this type of engagement. Among respondents in children and young people's services, this type of engagement practice was sometimes expressed in terms of *community empowerment*. Engagement was said to be empowering communities to set the agenda rather than simply responding to an agenda established by local or central government:

> *… what we are aiming to do is to empower parents in communities … developing a shared agenda.*

(R17)

In youth services, too, officers spoke of conducting engagement that empowered young people, allowing them to set agendas that helped to break down stereotypes about young people prevalent in the media. This empowerment discourse of community engagement was less in evidence in the other case study sectors.

Generating debate

A third definition of engagement was *generating debate*. This is similar to gathering experiences but implies a more equal relationship between officials and the community with each side able to suggest solutions. In practice, whether engagement practices were forums for debate, or listening to experiences, or a combination of the two often depended not on the official purpose of the practice but on the informal processes of governance or the unofficial 'rules of the game'. Box 9, for example, shows different participants' understandings of the role of area assemblies.

Box 9: Area assemblies, neighbourhood management

Area assemblies are public meetings, usually chaired by a ward councillor or a neighbourhood manager, with a range of other service providers attending. The council strapline for the area assemblies is 'You talk, we listen', suggesting that they are a forum for officials to *gather experiences* of local residents. Indeed, a range of service providers used area assemblies as a forum for information dissemination or for gathering the views of the public on their services. Neighbourhood management staff, however, stressed that it was important that residents themselves were able to set the agenda at assemblies rather than simply giving feedback in response to service providers' requests:

Other council services and other bodies used to want to piggyback on the assemblies … so they could do their consultations, tick their boxes. But I always thought, 'Well this is the people's meeting, they should actually be determining, as far as possible, what gets discussed'.

(R6)

Some officials saw the area assemblies as a forum for residents to monitor and question the decisions of local politicians:

… its main importance is to give the cabinet members the opportunity to be challenged and [to] *engage* [in discussion] *around the Cabinet and the Executive's priorities … and be challenged and accountable for it.*

(R21)

Given these different understandings of area assemblies, they were felt to serve a range of purposes: to extend democratic accountability and legitimacy by providing a forum for residents to question politicians; to provide a mechanism for local accountability since assemblies discussed local priorities to guide the work programmes of the neighbourhood teams; and to improve services, through providing resident feedback.

Assemblies are open to all residents within a given area. However, there was anxiety expressed among officials about the limited attendance and domination of assemblies by 'the usual suspects' (R6) and 'professional engagers' (R21). There were also concerns expressed about the *representativeness* of those who attended, although there were no attempts for participation to be based on formal representativeness (e.g. through elections or nominations).

The roles of participants were also diverse: as grass-roots experts, feeding back on services; as challengers or adversaries, monitoring and questioning the local authority; and as informed consumers, making demands in accordance with their preferences. The latter was thought to be particularly the case in the more affluent west of the borough.

Generating debate was often said to be for the purpose of extending democratic rights, by allowing people to 'have a say' in forums outside of the formal structures of representative democracy. Linked to this was the idea that these practices provide an opportunity for the public to *hold service providers to account*, as was stated of the Community and Police Consultative Group (CPCG):

[The CPCG] *have a number of public meetings that the Borough Commander goes along, gives a report as to what's been happening policing-wise in the borough, and then anybody can ask him questions about anything to do with policing … the CPCG will hold him to account for achieving or not achieving what he's set out to do.*

(R29)

Another related purpose was a desire to build the legitimacy of public institutions and to generate trust between public officials and the community. However, there was sometimes a tension between these different purposes – holding to account and generating trust. If the engagement mechanism aimed to provide a forum for generating debate, challenge and accountability to the community, this defined participants as *challengers* or *adversaries*, yet the emphasis on 'trust' was sometimes defined by officials as 'public satisfaction' or 'agreement' and an *absence* of conflict. In practice, there was widespread unease among officials about public participants as challengers. This could result in officials employing 'delegitimising strategies' to discredit the contributions of such participants (discussed at greater length in Chapter 5).

Shared decision-making

Shared decision-making gave public participants a formal role in decision-making, usually as a member of a board or panel alongside other stakeholders, such as public officials, politicians and private sector representatives. Examples from the research included the Haringey Strategic Partnership (HSP) and its thematic boards, the majority of which had public representation (in the form of voluntary sector representatives); the Executive Board of Homes for Haringey, which had a number of places for elected resident representatives; and ward panels within Safer Neighbourhoods policing, which comprised residents alongside other stakeholders.

The main purpose of shared decision-making was said to be to extend democratic rights by allowing the community, or its representatives, to decide priorities and to *hold service providers to account*. This was the purpose, for example, of

Safer Neighbourhoods ward panels, as described in Box 10.

There was a strong emphasis among public officials on ensuring the *representativeness* of participants in this type of engagement. Participants were almost always perceived to be granted a 'place at the table' in such structures by virtue of their role as *representatives* of particular constituencies or communities. However, this requirement for representativeness could also lead to numerous tensions and difficulties, with differing ideas expressed about what representativeness was and how it should be achieved or demonstrated (see Maguire and Truscott, 2006).

In some instances, it was said that places on decision-making bodies were – or should be – limited to representatives of voluntary or community organisations, since such individuals could be held accountable to a wider constituency through the other members of their organisations. There were also questions raised, however, about the representativeness of voluntary and community organisations in terms of their 'likeness' to the wider community. One official, for example, felt that HAVCO represented primarily minority ethnic communities and was not fully reflective of the diversity of the voluntary sector in Haringey. Others felt that HAVCO represented only the *organised* voluntary sector and that there should be places allocated to representatives of the wider (unorganised) community. The key concern for HAVCO was that at present there were insufficient resources for it to effectively play a role as representative of, and accountable to, the wider voluntary sector. This echoes the argument of Skidmore *et al*. (2006) that there need to be appropriate structures linking representatives to the wider community they are supposed to be representing, so they can be accountable to them.

Box 10: Safer Neighbourhoods ward panels, police

Ward panels comprised *shared decision-making* structures in which participants agreed the priorities of the Safer Neighbourhoods teams and monitored their work. As one officer stated: 'the sergeants are held to account by the ward panel' (R26). Ward panels also brought together key stakeholders from a variety of different services to work together more effectively on key policing issues facing the neighbourhood.

The main purpose of the ward panels was said to be to provide a mechanism for accountability to the community, in order to extend democratic rights and foster greater legitimacy of the police. A second stated purpose was to provide a forum for 'getting the job done' more effectively, through the networking of various stakeholders, with the goal of contributing to better policing outcomes.

It was felt by one senior police officer that, as a forum for community accountability, ward panels should be representative of the community. However, other officers working with the ward panels stressed that membership was determined by the 'clout' that individuals possessed, which generally limited participation to representatives of organisations rather than individual members of the public:

… the movers and shakers is probably the best way to describe it – of people on the ward. So, what we wanted … were people who could actually have an impact in bringing some solutions to tackling these problems.

(R26)

This had sometimes led to tensions where either individuals or organisations felt that they had earned 'a place at the table' through their activities locally, but had not been invited to participate in the ward panel.

The role of participants was perceived by the police, first, as representatives of particular constituencies in the neighbourhood, through their position in organisations representing residents in the ward. A second perceived role was as local experts and stakeholders who have some influence in the ward. For example, police used the networks of ward panel participants to conduct more effective engagement. However, the comments of one police officer indicated that there was sometimes a difference of perspective between the police and the public about their role on ward panels:

… they very much see it, I think, as … 'We're coming here to see what the police have done about our local problems' … But the idea of them being on ward panels is that they're in a position of some sort of influence over somebody, where they might be able to assist us in various regards. But that's taking a while to sort of filter through to be honest.

(R30)

Involving the community

A final type of community engagement was *involving the community*, either in service delivery or in activities or behaviours oriented towards policy outcomes. While this form of community engagement was not concerned primarily with public involvement in decision-making, it was nonetheless related to governance, either as a necessary addition or precursor to engagement in governance (as in capacity-building activities), or because it used the same mechanisms or structures as engagement in governance. Three forms of involving the community were evident from officials' accounts: capacity building among the community; working with the community as a stakeholder or partner in implementing solutions to problems; and trying to modify the behaviour of individuals in the community in order to better achieve desired policy outcomes. We concentrate on the former two here, as they are more relevant to community engagement in governance.

Capacity building

Capacity building within communities was recognised by most respondents as an important practice underpinning effective community engagement in governance. This activity was undertaken to a degree across the case studies, but its extent was determined by the resources available. Some services, such as neighbourhood management, policing, children and young people's services and housing, had greater resourcing to conduct this type of activity. Indeed, the neighbourhood management service included dedicated community development workers who were tasked with generating community involvement and capacity building within the communities that they served. While these activities had purposes other than engagement in governance (such as building skills, generating social capital and promoting community cohesion), they were also seen as an essential enabler for effective public involvement in governance, particularly among disadvantaged communities.

An example of this was the 'Living Under One Sun' project in one neighbourhood in the east of the borough, which targeted women refugees and asylum seekers from different communities and brought them together through the medium of cooking. The group was used to promote well-being and develop skills for employment among participants, and as a forum where service providers could come and talk to the women about issues they were concerned about. The important point was that the meetings took place in the residents' own space and to their agenda. Likewise, in children's and young people's services, it was felt that community outreach and development work was necessary in order to facilitate effective engagement in governance. The parental outreach team was used as:

a conduit to be able to get to the … communities that are finding our services harder to reach.

(R5)

In Homes for Haringey, the resident involvement teams were tasked with building capacity among residents for engagement in governance – for example, through establishing, developing and supporting residents' associations.

Implementing improvements

Implementing improvements entailed the involvement of community members alongside public officials, and often other partners as well, to tackle local problems. This could be an extension of community involvement in governance, where the role of the public entailed, not just making decisions or contributing their local knowledge to decision-making, but also getting involved in the *implementation* of those decisions. This was seen in a range of service areas, but was particularly prominent in neighbourhood management, policing and housing. Unlike capacity-building activities that targeted hard to reach and marginalised groups, this type of engagement – because it entailed extensive involvement and knowledge of often quite complicated issues – tended to entail the involvement of 'real hardcore activists' (R1) with the requisite time, knowledge and expertise. The role of community participants here was envisaged as *partners* or *stakeholders* alongside other stakeholders in the public and private sectors.

One example of this was resident involvement in thematic panels in Homes for Haringey, where residents were involved in decision-making on operational issues and in implementing service changes. For example, residents on the repairs panel were involved in procurement work for new building contracts, and residents on the communications panel were involved in redesigning the Homes for Haringey brand and redeveloping the residents' magazine. Another example was in the youth service where a group of young people from the Youth Council were involved in managing the allocation of a grant from the Government's Youth Opportunities Fund. Engagement activity in policing also entailed working with the community to implement solutions – for example, through KIN (key individual networks) in each ward. These comprised participants from voluntary and community organisations, faith groups, youth forums, local businesses and local residents and acted as two-way communication channels between the police and the community in order to assist the Safer Neighbourhoods teams in their policing activities.

Tensions between purposes and practices

While there were differences between the case studies in the precise patterns of engagement, all officials felt there to be value in using a diverse range of types of engagement to serve different purposes and to harness the energy and expertise of different constituencies and individuals. Officials were not using engagement methods unquestioningly, but were clearly thinking about the purposes and trying to adopt appropriate techniques. Nonetheless, some ambiguities remained about the purposes of engagement and who should be involved.

Tensions around participants and their roles

The formal involvement of the community in decision-making through positions on boards and panels generated considerable discussion, and sometimes unease among officials, regarding the legitimacy of the participants involved, often revolving around discussions of how to ensure participants' 'representativeness'. As voluntary sector respondents pointed out, better resourcing would go some way to addressing this by allowing participants on decision-making bodies to more effectively act as 'representatives' by feeding back to, and taking views forward from, their broader constituencies. In forums where the role of public participants was perceived to be as stakeholders or partners in implementing solutions, the issue of representativeness did not arise in the same way, because participants 'had a place' on the basis of their skills or expertise. Structures that combined both of these roles – for example, police ward panels – could sometimes result in tensions between the expectations of different participants.

Tensions around purposes

One prominent purpose of community engagement, across the case studies, was to improve relationships between the public body and the community, and to generate *trust*. Trust was felt to be vital for effective engagement to occur and was also seen as an outcome of engagement. In some cases however, particularly when backed up by performance measures around user satisfaction, trust was interpreted by officials as

agreement or as an absence of conflict with the community. This conflicted with another stated purpose of community engagement as being to provide a *challenge* to service providers. Indeed the idea of engagement as presenting a challenge to the public body was much more muted in officials' accounts and there was a certain amount of unease expressed about the public as challengers.

It was also rare for officials to talk about community engagement practice as altering power relationships between the State and the community in the way that is talked about in recent Government rhetoric on community empowerment (CLG, 2008). While some officials talked about engagement as empowering communities to take control of the agenda, this was generally rare. Community engagement was more usually understood and talked about as practices that officials initiated in order to listen to, debate with or work with the community, rather than about devolving power or control.

4 Enablers and constraints I: organisational and contextual factors

Summary

- Five main organisational factors shaped officials' experiences of community engagement: senior management/political support; resources (both staffing and funding for engagement); performance management systems; time-frames; and accountability and organisational culture.

- Resources for community engagement were a critical factor. Both respondents planning services and those carrying out front-line engagement conveyed frustration about the ways in which resource constraints could derail community engagement efforts.

- There were clear contrasts between the case studies in the extent of resources dedicated to community engagement. Within the police, community engagement is one of the principal purposes of the Safer Neighbourhoods structure. Housing (within the ALMO) and children and young people's services also had considerable resources and staff dedicated to engagement. Resources were much more limited in the PCT, particularly in the context of recent financial cutbacks.

- Staffing levels were important; there is a need for both specialist engagement roles and mainstreaming. This seemed to be working well in housing where specialist teams supported the development of resident involvement structures but mainstream managers used these structures to engage directly with residents.

- Performance systems often constrained engagement where they conflicted with demands arising from local communities. This was the case in health, where officials felt that the pressure to meet central government performance targets was diverting attention and resources away from carrying out engagement. Moreover, community demands for local services often conflicted with national priorities or with clinical evidence.

- Short time-frames for community engagement activity and a lack of planning for engagement in policy development sometimes limited the capacity of communities to have influence.

This chapter focuses on the experiences and perceptions of public officials about the organisational and contextual factors that enabled or constrained their role in community engagement. Across the case study organisations, there were recurring themes in the kinds of organisational factors thought to facilitate or constrain community engagement, although these had different effects in the different service areas. The main factors were:

- senior management and/or political support for engagement;

- resources, particularly staffing for community engagement;

- performance management systems;

- time-frames for community engagement;

- accountability and organisational culture.

These dimensions affected the ability both of officials to carry out engagement and of officials or the organisation to act on the outcomes of engagement. Each of these dimensions is explored in turn, with examples from the case study sites.

Senior management and/or political support

Managerial support

The support of senior management was seen as critical in enabling public officials to carry out engagement effectively. First, support 'from the top' for engagement was perceived as having a trickle-down effect whereby it became a priority for different departments and other levels of staff. Second, the support of senior managers was seen as facilitating internal co-operation within the organisation around engagement. Third, by prioritising engagement, the support of senior management helped to ensure that officials were not side-tracked away from engagement by other roles and responsibilities. This was emphasised as important in the police, where the Safer Neighbourhoods programme had received considerable support at a senior level, both within Haringey and within the Metropolitan Police:

> It's up there, Safer Neighbourhoods and community engagement … top of the agenda, with their street crime initiatives and things like that. They're really pushing Safer Neighbourhoods heavily, we're ring-fenced, so they never take us off for going off on this operation, that operation, we're just purely there for Safer Neighbourhoods.
>
> (R31)

Other examples where there was said to be senior 'buy-in' to engagement included in housing, where front-line engagement officers spoke of senior management support facilitating their role and enabling them to challenge mainstream managers if they were less supportive of resident engagement. Similarly, in children and young people's services, an engagement officer spoke of effective support from senior management in the department facilitating his role:

> I think that [engagement] is being taken quite seriously, and I have a very good contact with the director, and issues around the community I think are picked up very quickly.
>
> (R5)

In environmental services, a senior manager described how he acted as a 'champion' for neighbourhood-based working in his department in order to encourage co-operation from other officials.

Where engagement was not 'pushed' from above by senior managers as a priority for the organisation, this led to a more ad hoc approach to engagement. It was very difficult for officials at lower levels to effectively carry out engagement without strategic support, as explained by a manager in the PCT:

> We've had sort of pockets of doing things well … but there's not a consistency about how we do it, I suppose … I think it's about having that drive from a really senior level in the organisation, that 'This is a priority' and 'We're got going to do this'. And I think that if you haven't got that then it's very difficult, you know, at levels below that to really take anything forward.
>
> (R37)

A lack of support from senior management for engagement was related partly to competing demands on organisations/departments, such as resource constraints and performance systems – which are explored further later in the chapter. In the context of the PCT, for example, respondents felt that the financial deficit of the organisation and ongoing cutbacks in recent years were related directly to the limited priority given to engagement at a senior level. Within this context, engagement became a 'luxury add-on' (R37), rather than a priority for the organisation. A health manager with responsibility for engagement noted how this impacted on her ability to conduct engagement effectively:

> I might go to a meeting and say, 'We need a load of people, we need to organise this, this, and this, and I want, you know, a nurse,' etc., then you find that people aren't available, or people that you've been promised don't come,

*or whatever. And then you do wonder how
much support there is.*

(R34)

Political support

Within the local authority, in particular, the *political*
support from members (councillors) was also
perceived to be crucial in constraining or enabling
engagement. For example, a manager in housing
(in the local authority) stressed the overwhelming
importance of members' views:

*… obviously consulting members is ever so
important, I mean nothing's going to happen
if we don't … Working with residents is a
really important issue for us, but … if I was
to put together a housing strategy tomorrow,
I wouldn't do it like that, but say I was … it
would be discussed with the cabinet member,
before it would be discussed with a housing
association, before it would be discussed at an
area assembly, so that gives you some sort of
idea.*

(R24)

In his case, the relevant cabinet member *enabled*
him to prioritise community engagement because
of the member's expectation that resident
consultation would routinely occur.

Another respondent, commenting on
neighbourhood management, also felt that the
support (and involvement) of councillors was
crucial to securing commitment to neighbourhood
working from officers in other departments of the
council. Speaking of one area-based working
group, the respondent asserted:

*… the officers have to go, well they don't have
to go, but they do go … it's been incumbent
on them to go because we've got a political
chair, a councillor chairing that who's very, very
engaged and has been very good about all of
this. Political will has been immense to push
that along. And … that's one of my points I
would say to you, if you haven't got political will
it's very hard.*

(R1)

While, generally, officials felt that there was
support among elected members in Haringey for
community engagement, as described in Chapter
2 this support was also affected by the wider party
political context. In the context of a diminishing
Labour majority, it was felt that the Executive was
more reluctant to 'cede power' to communities
in case this altered the balance of power
between majority and opposition councillors. One
respondent felt that the shelving of a proposal
to introduce resident-led neighbourhood boards
in the roll-out of neighbourhood management
indicated a lack of political appetite for further
devolution of power to residents.

Resources: staffing and funding for engagement

Staffing engagement

Staffing levels were referred to by all respondents
as influencing engagement. In the case of the
Safer Neighbourhoods programme in the police,
it was felt that the responsibility for engagement
was matched with staff time to develop this role.
Several respondents within Safer Neighbourhoods
commented on how an increase in resources
dedicated to community engagement had made
a difference. The priority given to staffing Safer
Neighbourhoods, however, was also felt to have
generated some resentment among other core
police teams in Haringey (particularly in the context
of performance targets, addressed later in the
chapter). One senior manager with responsibility
for Safer Neighbourhoods stated:

*I've almost got more staff on a daily basis on
duty than the whole borough! It has people
saying, 'Well hang on, if you've got some you
can give some to us!' They resent the fact that
they* [Safer Neighbourhoods police] *are … ring-
fenced to their wards, they've got dedicated
responsibilities … outside the borough's
targets, and that causes resentment.*

(R28)

A lack of staff to undertake community
engagement activity inhibited the extent to
which engagement could be carried out and
contributed to the disempowerment of people
and organisations in their attempts to put

the policy agenda around engagement into practice. Within the PCT, respondents referred to limited numbers of staff with a specific remit for community engagement. While there was the expectation that responsibility for engagement was mainstreamed across a range of staff roles, some respondents felt that staff did not always have the skills and abilities, as well as the time, to perform this role. The lack of staff dedicated to community engagement was therefore felt to act as a considerable constraint.

The need for there to be a core team of officials responsible for engagement was also identified by participants in the research workshop. Many participants felt that, while there should be an awareness among staff at all levels of the *principles* of community engagement in public services, not all members of staff should be expected to be involved, because there were particular skills and expertise required. Rather, there should be processes in place to ensure that the *outcomes* of engagement should have an influence on the planning and delivery of services. Equally, however, other respondents placed greater emphasis on the need for engagement skills to be mainstreamed across a range of staff roles and responsibilities. In the case of housing, having a specialist engagement team, as well as embedding engagement in the work of mainstream service managers, was thought to work particularly well (this is explored further in Chapter 6).

Resourcing 'creative' engagement

A lack of resources also restricted the *type* of engagement processes that could be developed by officials. Again, this was a particularly strong theme in the PCT and the frustration that this could cause for managers is evident from the words of one respondent responsible for service commissioning:

> *One of the biggest restraints on me has been, sort of, not that we haven't been willing to do stuff or whatever, but actually we haven't had the resources that would have enabled us to go out there and do something that really attracts people.*
>
> (R35)

An officer in planning (environmental services) also commented that, in order to increase the reach of engagement, it would be necessary to carry out more creative engagement processes over a longer period of time – for example, working with schoolchildren to introduce them to making judgements about the 'quality' of the built environment. However, this would require the investment of considerable resources that are not generally available, other than through specific initiatives with dedicated funding streams.

In children and young people's services, there was a history of outreach work, which acted as a conduit for making contact with communities who were not using services or were 'harder to reach'. However, even within this department, where there were signs that some creative engagement was embedded in practice, there was a feeling that more resources were needed to encourage those currently disengaged to get involved:

> *I think getting out there and doing it and meeting communities is the bit that really matters, so the resources, training, support; and resources to … enable the community to come forward and come to a place like this, and to have crèches, and to have food, and to have material translated and to have publicity …that's what I would like to see.*
>
> (R5)

One response to a lack of a dedicated budget for engagement was to 'piggyback' on the creative engagement processes and resources of other organisations – for example, by making use of the area assemblies or other neighbourhood management activities. This had been pursued successfully in some instances by health staff.

Resource constraints in acting on the outcomes of engagement

There were also resource constraints on the ability of officials and organisations to act on the *outcomes* of engagement. Officials emphasised the tensions between the expectations and demands of communities and the available budgets to meet these demands.

Different criteria were used to influence how resources were allocated by organisations to meet competing demands. One set of criteria

concerned the *costs* of a particular service. Some respondents emphasised that what might be the most 'efficient' use of the resources of the organisation in delivering services did not always match the demands of local residents. For example, recycling officers were aware of resident demand for plastics and cardboard recycling but were unable to fulfil these demands because 'the [cost] implications are too large' (R11).

Another set of criteria concerned the extent to which there was 'evidence' to support the need for a service. This was apparent particularly in health, where managers were juggling community demands against clinical evidence of 'what works' in terms of better health outcomes, in a context of limited resources. A common tension was where communities wanted to keep local services open, but evidence (in terms of health outcomes) showed that it was better to rationalise services:

> *… you might say, 'Well actually, in future, all heart attack patients won't go there, they'll go to a specialised centre'. People will be really worried about that, but that's what the evidence shows: more people survive. So sometimes the tension is between the evidence of what's best in terms of what works to get a better outcome … and what the local community say: 'We want a local service'.*

(R33)

Managing community expectations

The ability to manage these tensions between community demands and available resources was considered critical by officials to prevent a sense among communities that public organisations were unwilling to listen to their views and respond. Hence 'managing the expectations' of communities was emphasised as an important process for successful engagement. Some officials felt it was important to inform residents and service users about the criteria that influenced the allocation of resources to service provision, as a manager in recycling stated:

> *… we always try and provide a really full answer because we think it can help win people round … it helps people try and understand what we're doing and how we're*

doing it, and that there is logic behind our scenarios.

(R11)

There was also sometimes room for officials to think creatively and go some way towards meeting community demands in a less resource-intensive way. For example, in health, in response to local community concerns over the closure of a clinic, the services were transferred to other nearby locations – a local hall, a GP surgery and another clinic – thus allowing the closure of the building to go ahead (so that the land could be sold to finance a new hospital building), but the services remained in place. Another example, in response to public demands for increased GP opening hours, was to offer a Saturday clinic at one GP surgery.

Performance management systems

The performance systems in which officials in the local authority, PCT and police operated were also perceived as enabling or constraining community engagement. This was related both to the extent to which national performance targets emphasised community engagement and to whether national targets conflicted with the demands being voiced by communities.

Constraining performance targets

In the case of the PCT, the pressure to meet performance targets, and to meet these targets under budgetary constraints, was perceived as diverting attention and resources away from carrying out community engagement. It was also noted that there were tensions between local priorities identified through community engagement processes and the national targets by which the performance of the PCT was assessed:

> *Strategically we're so driven by targets, and the targets are driven by overall national targets, that sometimes, even though you go to meetings, you know that you're not going to be able to deliver on some of the issues that people are talking about because it just isn't a national target.*

(R34)

In other cases, too, the priority given by the organisation to its performance targets restricted the ability of officials to respond to local demands. In the case of environmental services, local demand for a business recycling service, for example, did not fit into the performance framework that determined the provision of recycling services, which was oriented towards central government targets for recycling household waste.

Some respondents in the police had also experienced tensions between the Metropolitan Police targets, by which the performance of borough-wide policing was assessed, and the priorities identified at the local ward level. For example, staff from Safer Neighbourhoods teams had been deployed to assist the borough to achieve its annual performance targets for robbery even when this was not a ward priority. Generally, police respondents felt that there was synergy between the performance targets of the organisation as a whole and the views of local communities, and that borough targets did not conflict with their community engagement role. However, there was some concern expressed that there had been a gradually increasing pressure for Safer Neighbourhoods staff to contribute to borough performance targets. It was felt that, in the future, this might increasingly divert police time and resources away from residents' priorities:

> *Now that the sort of honeymoon period is over for Safer Neighbourhoods, I think that we're gonna have more and more responsibility to deal with borough-wide issues.*
>
> (R30)

Enabling performance targets

There were a number of instances where performance systems, or other central government drivers, were facilitative of community engagement. In the case of housing, officials in the ALMO were trying to get a 'two star' rating from the Audit Commission at the time of the fieldwork in order to receive additional funding, and this had acted as a driver for resident engagement. For example, when the ALMO was first set up, it had a 'mock inspection' to see what star rating it would get and this identified a need to ensure the principle of resident involvement was embedded

throughout the whole organisation. As a result of this, the structure of thematic panels with resident representation was developed. The push to get the two star rating had also directly driven resident involvement according to one manager:

> *A lot of our residents will say, you know, 'We must get those two stars, we know that's what we're after, we can't get the money without two stars', and I think they're very supportive.*
>
> (R7)

Some service areas also had performance targets around customer satisfaction that were perceived to facilitate (certain types of) community engagement. For example, in environmental services, where as noted in Chapter 3 a consumer preference approach to engagement was important, an officer talked about holding focus groups with the public to better understand the views behind the department's customer satisfaction ratings.

Similarly, in the police, performance targets around *perceptions of crime* were felt to be a driver for community engagement within Safer Neighbourhoods. A senior manager noted:

> *It's perceptions in relation to crime, that's what I've got to police. And I police that with reassurance, I police that with the engagement, by listening and responding, telling people what we're doing, by addressing their individual issues. If we do that, we keep people engaged, then I think those perception targets … will rise and I think we'll be all right.*
>
> (R28)

In addition to performance targets, central government policies on community involvement had sometimes directly imposed engagement requirements on organisations and services. For example, resident representation on the Executive Board had been a central government requirement imposed on ALMOs. In the PCT, a government target had set the requirement to have a certain number of community development workers, which had led to the recruitment of development workers in mental health to work with the local Turkish and Kurdish communities. In children and young people's services, the government

agenda around *Every Child Matters*, which was driving restructuring in the department, also emphasised engagement as a principal issue. Finally, as discussed in Chapter 2, there had also been greater emphasis placed on resident engagement in *local* political agendas, reflected in both the revised sustainable community strategy for Haringey and the local area agreement, which were thought by officials to be likely drivers of engagement in the future.

A need for community engagement targets?

There were differing perspectives among respondents regarding the extent to which engagement should be integrated within performance systems. On the one hand, a lack of performance targets oriented towards engagement was seen as limiting the extent to which engagement was prioritised by the organisation. On the other hand, there was concern that targets for engagement might negatively affect the *quality* of engagement processes. Targets were often seen as failing to take into account 'the nitty gritty' of carrying out engagement. One respondent referred to the danger of engagement becoming simply a 'tick-box' exercise (R7) if targets were introduced with little concern for whether or not the processes in place were appropriate. In some services, engagement was monitored and evaluated via feedback from residents or service users – for example, in housing, participants involved in any form of engagement are given a questionnaire, which provides a means of assessing how well the engagement structures are working. On the basis of these results, changes, such as introducing resident chairs for panels and increasing the influence of residents in the residents' consultative forum, had been implemented.

Time-frames and planning for community engagement

The time-frames in which officials and their organisations operated were often felt by respondents to be a constraint on engagement. There were sometimes very short time-frames in which staff were expected to engage communities

and obtain their views. A lack of planning for engagement in policy development resulted in it becoming an 'add-on' or 'afterthought' to that process. A respondent in the local authority's consultation unit felt that there was often a lack of understanding of the length of time that consultation involved:

> *One of the problems we've had in the past … is where middle managers haven't had enough time for consultations, it's been more of an afterthought … They don't understand how long consultation takes, they don't understand that you actually have to put feedback into the process and that you have to let people know what you've done as a result.*
>
> (R3)

The consultation unit was attempting to address this by spreading good practice about consultation to the various departments within the council.

The lack of sufficient time given to engagement processes was also perceived as limiting the capacity of communities to exert influence. For example, if engagement came too late in the process of policy-making, the remit of the engagement was necessarily limited:

> *There's no point baking the cake and bringing it to the residents and saying, 'How do you want it iced?' What you really want to be asking them is, 'Are you hungry? What do you want to eat?'*
>
> (R7)

A lack of time dedicated to engagement could also limit influence because there was insufficient time for communities to develop an understanding of relevant systems and policies in order to effectively feed into decision-making.

The time constraints on engagement processes were affected by the time-frames of the performance systems of the organisations; by the deadlines attached to particular policy processes; and by financial constraints, including staff time, on longer-term engagement.

Accountability and organisational culture

Finally, the extent to which engagement with communities was embedded in the culture of organisations and in their accountability structures was important for community engagement.

Some PCT respondents described the culture of the NHS as very 'top-down', with greater accountability to central government than to local communities. For example, a senior manager stated:

> *The imperatives from the Department of Health are the kind of bottom line, … the community engagement is, you know, it can only take us so far, because ultimately our masters are actually the Department of Health and not the community.*

(R33)

It was felt by some respondents in health that there was currently greater accountability to the local authority via the overview and scrutiny function over health than directly to the local community through mechanisms such as the PPI Forum or resident representation on the Executive Board.[1]

In the case of the police in contrast, the establishment of ward panels in Safer Neighbourhoods wards was perceived to facilitate community influence by creating lines of accountability directly to the ward panel, since the teams were required to report to the panel on both how local priorities were identified (in terms of the type of engagement carried out) and how policing teams were meeting those priorities. As noted in the previous chapter, however, the representation of 'ordinary residents' on ward panels was relatively limited, being largely confined to representatives of residents' associations, neighbourhood watch schemes, etc. alongside other service providers. Hence the extent to which this was a mechanism of accountability to the *public*, as opposed to other partner organisations, was a moot point, particularly given that there were no formal mechanisms for the community representatives to feed back to, or report the views of, those they were supposed to represent.

In housing, accountability to residents seemed to work effectively (from the perspective of officials) because the numbers of residents on the decision-making Executive Board were quite large (one-third of places were set aside for residents), enabling the resident representatives to 'push forward the community and resident agenda' (R16).

To sum up, this chapter has illustrated how the effective promotion of community engagement in governance requires positive configurations of a range of organisational factors, including senior management and political support, resources, performance management systems, and appropriate time-frames and accountability mechanisms. These factors were important in all of the case studies, but had different influences in each. At one end of the spectrum, with a more facilitative organisational environment, Safer Neighbourhoods police teams were 'set up for' engagement, with dedicated, ring-fenced staff and accountability mechanisms to the local community through ward panels. At the other end of the spectrum, with a more constraining organisational context, was the PCT, with limited budgets for engagement, very few specialist staff and strong accountability mechanisms to central government. The local authority case study service areas were ranged in between. The scale and nature of engagement that could be undertaken in each sector was quite different as a result of these organisational contexts. However, there were some examples of effective partnership working, (e.g. between health and neighbourhood management) which had the potential for further expansion.

5 Enablers and constraints II: officials' informal practices and processes

Summary

- Public officials identified a variety of informal processes, practices, behaviours and skills that constrained or facilitated engagement. These included making the timing, location and format of engagement forums more accessible; using participatory methods; 'going to where communities are'; effective communication skills; the ability to manage conflict; and 'technical' knowledge of engagement procedures.

- Building relationships of trust with communities was highly valued by officials. Having an ongoing dialogue with the public was thought to be particularly fruitful in this, because it allowed complex issues to be addressed on an ongoing basis; it provided officials with the opportunity to feed back on the results of earlier engagement; and allowed community participants to develop a better understanding of the issues involved in governance.

- While almost all officials were positive about community engagement in principle, more ambivalence and uncertainty was expressed about putting it into practice. Sometimes officials wanted to limit the parameters of engagement to issues that the public could 'easily understand', such as day-to-day operational issues rather than strategy or policy.

- Officials also expressed scepticism about the value of some community participants' views: they were seen as unrepresentative or self-interested. Among some officials there seemed to be an ongoing search for 'the authentic public'.

- In contrast to this, there was also a preference for working with 'informed participants' who could understand policy issues, structures and officials' constraints. There was a danger, however, that this could lead to the exclusion of more 'challenging' constituencies from the governance process.

The previous chapter considered the organisational and contextual enablers and constraints on community engagement in governance. In this chapter, we turn to look at the influence of the informal practices and processes that officials adopted in their engagement practice. Literature on institutional design and governance suggests that it is often informal 'rules in use' – that is, procedures, behaviours, attitudes and skills – themselves often routinised and implicit, which exert an important influence on patterns of public participation in governance (Lowndes and Wilson, 2001; Taylor, 2003; Lowndes et al., 2006; Barnes et al., 2008). These informal practices are important in shaping both the interface between the public body and the community, and what happens to the views expressed by the public and whether they influence policy or practice. In this chapter, we focus primarily on the first of these issues, the interface between officials and the community, while Chapter 6 examines the issue of community influence on policy/practice in more detail. We begin, in the first part of the chapter, by examining the behaviours, processes and practices that officials felt to be valuable in facilitating engagement.

Then, in the second part of the chapter, we turn to look at the attitudes and feelings of the officials themselves towards engagement, and how this could be enabling or constraining for community engagement. This requires us to read officials' accounts 'against the grain' to consider the ways in which their attitudes and approaches might, perhaps unintentionally, be having an influence on the ability of communities to participate.

Enabling behaviours, processes and practices

When and where should engagement take place?

It is recognised in the literature that factors such as the location, timing and format of meetings can have an important effect on who can/does participate in engagement (Lowndes and Wilson, 2001; Skidmore *et al*., 2006; Barnes *et al*., 2008). Officials in the research recognised the importance of this and tried to vary timings and locations to increase accessibility. Public meetings, often held in the evening, were generally felt to be one of the least effective ways of organising engagement, although these were still sometimes used. Area assembly meetings, for example, often took this format, with a correspondingly low turnout. Some assembly chairs had addressed this by varying the timing of meetings, organising themed meetings and combining meetings with 'fun' activities (for example, in one case a tour of the local football ground) to maximise attendance.

Safer Neighbourhoods police teams were also required to hold one public meeting during each ward consultation. While it was recognised that turnout was often poor, it was felt necessary to retain the meetings in order to provide a standard access point for the public to Safer Neighbourhoods teams across the borough. These were supplemented, however, by other mechanisms of consultation such as 'Have a Say' days, which were felt to be more effective because they entailed 'going to where communities are', such as outside schools, supermarkets, transport hubs or places of worship, and hence did not place as much demand on people's time:

… because you are meeting the community on their terms really, you're going to where they are, as opposed to them coming to you.

(R28)

In planning ward consultations, police officers were also sensitive to different uses of space within each ward by different populations and tried to ensure that consultation mechanisms were dispersed across the borough accordingly.

Many officials across the case studies talked about supplementing formal methods of consultation with more informal means of reaching a wider range of participants. For example, resident involvement officers in Homes for Haringey used 'door knocking' as the best way of reaching 'more isolated non-English speakers' (R7). Likewise, police officers spoke of informal engagement by 'chatting to local residents' (R31) as effective in reaching people who did not attend formal meetings.

Neighbourhood management staff, as discussed in Chapter 3, were involved in a range of community development activities, which also provided a point of access for service providers to engage with 'harder to reach' groups and gather their views about local services. Officers across the case studies also spoke of attending the meetings of a range of local groups, from tenants' and residents' associations, to youth groups, to ethnic or faith-based groups. While everyone recognised the importance of 'going to communities' rather than 'expecting communities to come to you', the capacity of officials to carry out this type of activity was clearly constrained by resources, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Interactions in engagement settings

The types of interactions that took place in engagement settings were also considered by officials to be important in facilitating or constraining engagement. This relied heavily on the skills and capacities of the officials who were carrying out engagement.

Communication and interpersonal skills

Communication skills were considered to be critical; the ability to 'interact with the public', to empathise with people and to listen to their views and concerns was emphasised by respondents:

It's actually about having enough people who … can really convey messages and engage, and that people feel that they're being engaged, not just talked at, you know, that there's a dialogue, a two-way dialogue.

(R34)

The ability to manage conflict and disagreements within engagement settings was also considered important. There were examples given of area assembly meetings where interactions had become 'confrontational' (R21) because the meeting had been dominated by one particular constituency. The role of the officer chairing the meeting was felt to be vitally important in managing such conflicts and ensuring that everyone was able to speak.

Creative techniques

It was not just the communication skills of individuals that were important but also using methods of engagement that were more creative and interactive. In the police, this had been achieved through the use of a mapping exercise, which involved residents placing coloured dots on a map to identify where they felt crimes were taking place:

… it's just quite interactive, it gets people chatting, it kind of breaks the ice, rather than that formal, public meeting.

(R26)

Neighbourhood management and health staff had also worked together to convey health information to the community in an accessible way, including designing workshops on the causes of poor health, with practical suggestions for how people could improve their health.

Identities of officials

The ability to effectively communicate and develop relationships with communities was felt by some to be related partly to the characteristics of those carrying out the engagement. For example, the age, gender, ethnicity and language skills of officials were thought to facilitate engagement with communities/individuals who shared similar social identities. Being of Turkish origin and speaking

Turkish was considered by one police respondent to have enabled him to develop better relationships with young Turkish people and to communicate with people in the community who did not speak English. Having relatively young and/or female police staff was also felt to be beneficial in police engagement with young people, because they were felt to be more approachable.

Professional identities were seen as both enabling and constraining engagement in different contexts. In health, the presence of health practitioners (such as doctors and nurses) at public meetings was often seen as creating trust among public participants. However, in other contexts, this was constraining – for example, where there was a lack of trust in health professionals among some users of mental health services. The use of facilitators who were not associated with the health service was seen as an enabler in these cases. Peer engagement, as discussed in Chapter 3, was also used in the mental health field to reduce fear and mistrust. Similarly, in the police, a lack of trust between some sections of the community (such as young people) and the police was felt to inhibit participation in engagement.

Ongoing dialogue

Officials often spoke of engagement practices that generated *ongoing dialogue* between the community and the officials as the most effective for developing relationships of trust with the community. There were a number of reasons why this type of engagement was valued. First, it was recognised that some issues were too big to be resolved in a one-off consultation meeting. Second, ongoing dialogue provided an opportunity for officials to feed back on what had happened to earlier views that had been voiced by the community. This was felt to be crucial in terms of developing greater transparency in engagement and greater trust among the public. As many officials recognised, a key inhibitor of community participation in governance is the feeling among the public that nothing will be done in response to their views:

I think there's some big issues about persuading people to engage with us in a meaningful way and to believe that, to have

a kind of a trust if you like, that what they say will feed back into the services that they're receiving.

(R10)

In response to this, the local authority's consultation unit, as part of its role in encouraging good practice in consultation, was trying to ensure that all departments in the local authority publicised the results of their consultations on the council's website, in order that people could see the results of the consultations and how they were acted upon.

A third reason for valuing ongoing dialogue was because officials felt that this developed a better understanding among the public of the issues that they were engaging on, which was particularly important in complex areas of policy where there were many factors impinging on officials' decisions:

… it is a good thing with local engagement because people see how, sometimes how difficult it is to do things, what the issues are. It's actually partly about seeing that … you've got lots of things that make it hard to deliver.

(R1)

Having informed and knowledgeable participants was seen as crucial by many of the officials in the study, and was particularly emphasised by officials in the PCT who, because of reasons discussed in Chapter 4 (for example, centrally imposed targets and budgetary constraints) often felt that they had less leeway to take on board some of the views expressed by members of the public. Ongoing dialogue was felt to be important in enabling the community to understand the constraints that officials were working within:

I think sometimes that … there can be unrealistic expectations, but then that's why it's so important to engage with people, so that you're having that, you know, you're clear with them about the budget that you might be working in or the constraints that you might be working in.

(R37)

There could sometimes be a tension, however, between, on the one hand, valuing ongoing dialogue with 'informed' participants who can make a constructive contribution to difficult decisions and, on the other hand, providing outlets for more challenging contributions to be made. We return to this later on in the chapter.

Public officials' attitudes, identities and feelings towards engagement

The attitudes, identities and feelings expressed by public officials were also important as enablers or constraints on community engagement, by influencing the extent to which officials got involved in engagement, the types of engagement that they preferred and the extent to which they took the 'results' of engagement on board.

Feelings about engagement
Public officials expressed a range of personal feelings towards community engagement, but were, on the whole, generally positive about this aspect of their work. Personal commitments to community engagement were voiced in different ways, which were also associated with different types of engagement practice. Three main ways can be identified:

- personal identification as a member of, or advocate of, the community;

- commitment to good professional practice in engagement;

- personal enjoyment and sense of satisfaction.

Identification with the community
A strong sense of personal identification either as part of the community or as an advocate of the community was expressed by some officials. This was mostly among those respondents who were involved in direct face-to-face community engagement and/or those who had a background in community development work. Some officials in the youth service, for example, expressed an identity as *advocates* of the young people that they worked with, through trying to ensure that their views were valued by other council departments

and trying to challenge negative stereotypes about young people. A similar identification as an advocate of the community was also expressed by some staff in neighbourhood management. For example, one neighbourhood manager stated:

> *I often think it's a funny role, I mean I'm paid by Haringey Council, but actually I often feel a bit more like a, not exactly like a councillor, cos we're politically neutral, but in terms of being an advocate for my area, my community, you know, the community that I, sort of, try and serve, I feel very much that that is what I do.*
>
> (R6)

Community development workers in neighbourhood management also spoke of working for, or advocating for, the community within the local authority.

This type of commitment to engagement as a *community advocate* was associated with an empowerment discourse, as discussed in Chapter 3, in which it was seen as the role of the official to *empower* communities to become more involved in governance on their own terms, as the following comments from the neighbourhood manager, above, suggest:

> *I've noticed, since I've been working in this area, people who perhaps started off just complaining about things … are sort of like growing in stature, if you like, and they're not taking no for an answer. And if they are told no, they want to know why … In some ways there is more people power.*
>
> (R6)

This type of 'empowerment' might entail community participants exerting more influence over the governance agenda or becoming involved in influencing public bodies in a campaigning role. As noted in Chapter 3, however, the latter was not a common way of understanding public involvement in governance among the public officials we interviewed. More commonly, community involvement was seen in terms of engagement practices that were initiated by officials. We return to this point later in the chapter.

Professionalism

Among other officials, a commitment to engagement was expressed in terms of professionalism and a commitment to carrying out good *quality* community engagement. This was more often expressed by more senior managers and those responsible for ensuring that engagement occurred, rather than those interacting with the public in a front-line way. It was also associated with models of engagement as 'extending consumer choice' or 'gathering local knowledge' (see Chapter 3). For example, in health, professional practices of engagement were emphasised in order to gain 'accurate' information on the views of service users; as one official stated:

> *… what's powerful is the user-level research, because it's undertaken in an evidence-based approach and therefore it's credible, do you know what I mean? It's representative.*
>
> (R36)

In contrast to expressions of personal identification as an advocate of the community, a commitment to professionalism tended to entail the official positioning him/herself as neutral or objective.

Personal satisfaction

Lastly, another group of officials expressed their commitment to engagement in terms of personal enjoyment and satisfaction. Again, this was more commonly heard among those engaged with the community on a day-to-day basis. A sense of personal satisfaction with engagement was expressed by many of the police officers interviewed, some of whom had chosen to work in Safer Neighbourhoods because of the opportunities for interacting with the public. For example, one sergeant leading a Safer Neighbourhoods team stated:

> *I mean I enjoy speaking to people, and I do, you know, I do honestly care what they think, and if they're telling us that, you know, we're getting it wrong, and we should be doing this then I will, you know … I'll take notice of it, but personally I do enjoy that, I'm quite happy.*
>
> (R30)

Another sergeant expressed a sense of satisfaction related to both working with the public and feeling able to 'solve' people's problems:

> *I enjoy it and … it's just nice to see a result. You get a problem, I have time to deal with it properly and you get a result, it's quite nice, it's turned me* [from a] *sort of hard-faced copper, it's, I think it's good, it's nice to see.*
>
> (R31)

Such expressions of personal satisfaction and enjoyment were not associated with a particular type of engagement practice, but with a general willingness to 'get stuck in' to engagement rather than being put off by the challenges raised. This was a common approach among the police officers interviewed.

In contrast to this, in the health field, it was said that there was a reluctance among some staff to participate in engagement processes, such as area assemblies, because of a fear of 'being given a hard time' by local residents, given the anger that cutbacks in local health services had fuelled. This was reflected in the comments of health officials when talking about their feelings about engagement, which revealed a sense of personal enjoyment, tempered with a recognition that the work was also challenging:

> *I think it can be quite frightening – well not frightening, but I mean a bit nerve-racking to start off with. But I think, once people know you and know that you're a reasonably honest broker, then it is actually, it's an enjoyable way to work.*
>
> (R35)

These differences between the attitudes of the police and health respondents reflect different levels of institutional and organisational support for individuals undertaking engagement (as discussed in Chapter 4), as well as different relationships between communities and various statutory bodies, and different organisational cultures. Our point here is that these institutional and contextual factors had an influence on public officials' feelings about engagement, which then had knock-on impacts on their inclination to participate in engagement, which could act as an enabler or a constraint.

Officials' views about the value of community engagement

Public officials' views about community engagement, and the extent to which they valued it, were also important as enablers or constraints. Practically all the officials interviewed in the research felt community engagement to be valuable *in principle* and there was widespread acknowledgement that engaging the community was an important part of the job of officials delivering public services. When respondents were asked whether the current emphasis on community engagement was positive, practically everyone concurred; and a common refrain was that 'you can't argue with it' (R5). Moreover, a range of comments from officials across the service areas suggested that community engagement had become a widely accepted principle of good practice:

> *… any service that involves providing something for residents out there should, as a matter of just simple good practice, have the right sort of arrangements in place* [for engagement]*.*
>
> (R10)

While the principle of community views feeding into service delivery was not in question among respondents, there was, however, more uncertainty and ambivalence expressed about what that meant in practice. A range of views were expressed by officials about the limits to engagement, in terms of when it should be used, and the value that should be placed on community views. These views had the potential to operate as constraints on engagement.

Limiting the scope of engagement

Several respondents felt that, while community participation in governance was important and valuable, this should be limited to certain types of issues or to certain types of engagement that utilised the unique strengths of the community. Some talked about limiting the involvement of the community to issues that were easily understandable and uncomplicated. For example, one senior manager stated:

[The difficulties are] *all around … whether people can make a sensible contribution or not. I mean if you ask somebody about, you know, a detailed piece of policy development, well it's very hard to engage with people about that, particularly if it's predicated on some difficult legislation … It's not sensible to engage people in those sorts of discussions.*

(R10)

The types of issues that were seen as easier to engage on, and that the public could easily come to a view about, were usually operational decisions about day-to-day service delivery, which could be subject to consultation within an 'individual consumer' model of engagement (see Chapter 3).

Other officials expressed the view that it was important to engage the public in more 'difficult' issues of strategic priorities and resource allocation, but recognised that the realities of this were challenging. Senior managers in the PCT, for example, concurred that public engagement in strategic decision-making was important, but felt that the *parameters* of engagement – what the public were able to have a say on – had to be restricted because of the resource constraints that they were under.

One way that officials resolved this tension, as discussed above, was to favour ongoing dialogue with a small group of participants who could develop the requisite skills and expertise to make an *informed contribution*. However, as noted earlier, there was sometimes a danger of nurturing a 'cosy' relationship with 'informed insiders' who were less likely to present challenging views. This point was made by a police officer referring to the different types of responses he received from various community organisations in his ward:

I mean, if we go to my local residents' associations, who are genuinely very supportive of what we're doing and understand the context of what we're trying to do, then it's not particularly challenging, cos they're saying, 'Oh, you're doing a great job,' … but, for example, I went to the Muslim hall round the corner and they're saying, … 'What do you and your team think about if you see a young Muslim with a rucksack?' and those kind of issues … I enjoy that cos it is more challenging.

(R30)

In this police officer's view, one of the ways of addressing this was to ensure that engagement is carried out with a range of different groups and in different forums to provide a potential avenue for more challenging views to be expressed. However, it was also recognised by many police respondents that there was still some way to go for their engagement practices to be reaching the full cross-section of the population. Moreover, while this respondent expressed a sense of enjoying the challenge, other officials were less inclined to step outside of their 'comfort zones' and engage with constituencies who were more challenging, as we explore further below.

Devaluing community views

Another way in which officials expressed scepticism towards engagement in practice was around the value that should be placed on community views. While, as we discussed in Chapter 3, in many circumstances community views were valued as providing access to the unique viewpoint of service users or local residents, in some circumstances they were delegitimised and devalued because they were not deemed to be truly 'representative' or 'authentic' of the community. This mirrors the findings of Maguire and Truscott (2006), which highlighted a variety of tensions in community engagement around who is seen as a legitimate representative of a community and hence qualified to participate in engagement.

One of the ways this was seen was in a reluctance among officials to engage with autonomous community organisations that were outside of the engagement structures established by public bodies, often those that took a campaigning or oppositional stance. Some officials spoke of having to spend time countering the 'misinformation' put out by political campaign groups who were opposed to, for example, controlled parking schemes or local health service closures. Such organisations were often seen as a 'nuisance' by generating additional work for officials. Another example was where officials required autonomous community organisations to fit into the structure of the engagement mechanisms established by public bodies. One official talked about how the thematic board of the HSP that he was involved in had wanted to replace

the three existing representatives from separate voluntary sector organisations with one individual representing all three. In this instance, agreement was not reached – with each organisation arguing: 'we deserve a place at the table in our own right!' (R22) – and the separate organisations retained their places.

One voluntary sector respondent who had participated in HSP structures also argued that their members were subject to undue scrutiny over their 'representativeness' in a way that other stakeholders were not:

> … we were always asked to justify … our contribution: 'When did we consult? Who did we consult? Where did this information come from? Whose opinion is it?' …
>
> (R40)

She went on to say:

> Is it [a] rule [that] only applies to the community? … Because of their professional expertise … nobody would dare ask these questions to them!
>
> (R40)

Such tensions around the representativeness and legitimacy of community participants were particularly common in the context of shared decision-making forums. As discussed in Chapter 3, participants in these structures, mostly from the voluntary sector, had a more explicit remit as a representative of a particular constituency. However, the 'representativeness' and 'legitimacy' of participants in community engagement forums was also often questioned by officials, even if the role of the participants was not specifically as 'representatives'.

Sometimes participants were said to be illegitimate for the following reasons.

- They were politically active:

> … it's really difficult to engage with someone … if they have a political stance that says … 'X is X and never can become Y'.
>
> (R34)

- They were 'single-issue' campaigners or had a 'vested interest':

> … you end up with people who have their own agenda for wanting to be involved in something, rather than perhaps people, you know, regular people at grass-roots level who haven't got a vested interest.
>
> (R37)

- They were too concerned with their own self-interest (often said of wealthier residents):

> … within the west [of the borough] it's so much more of, 'Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!'
>
> (R34)

- They simply had strong views:

> … you tend to … get either end of the spectrum – the people who are very annoyed with you or very happy with you or have a particular thing about it. We are trying to make sure that we let the middle ground get their say as well, the people who don't, who aren't particularly exercised about something.
>
> (R3)

In this respect, a number of officials appeared to be searching for 'the authentic public' or 'regular grass-roots people' (as one official, above, expressed it) who did not have strong views and who were not motivated to participate because of personal interest. Sometimes this resulted in the replacement of one engagement mechanism with another in a fruitless search for more authenticity.

The irony is that, while officials were searching for 'regular', 'disinterested' people, it is recognised in much of the public participation literature that it is precisely personal interest in an issue that motivates many people to participate in governance in the first place (Skidmore et al., 2006; Barnes et al., 2008). There was also a tension between officials' desire, on the one hand, for 'informed participants' who could make a 'sensible contribution' – as discussed earlier – and, on the other hand, for 'the regular grass-roots people' who did not have strong views or interests. This contradiction was not necessarily lost on the officials themselves, some of whom

recognised these tensions as an inevitable part of the complexities of community engagement in practice. To an extent, the type of participants who were preferred by officials depended on the types and purposes of engagement. As discussed in Chapter 3, engagement as gathering the views of the community required the participation of 'authentic' lay community members; while engagement as 'getting things done' required more informed participants. However, things were not this neat and tidy in practice, and many officials expressed anxiety about the balance between 'informed' and 'grass-roots' participants.

Enablers and constraints II: informal practices and processes

6 Community engagement and community influence

Summary

- Public officials found it more difficult to identify whether and how community views were influencing policy and practice than to describe the processes and mechanisms they were using for engagement. Three main themes were identified in discussions of what was shaping community influence: the 'level' of community input; formal decision-making versus informal influencing; and finding the right channels of influence.

- It was felt by many that community influence was currently more effective in operational service delivery issues than on the strategic or policy side. Many officials were struggling with finding effective mechanisms for community engagement in policy.

- While community involvement in formal decision-making is often cited as an example of the devolution of power, many officials felt that this type of participation was, at present, not very effective in terms of facilitating community influence because community participants had little control over the agenda or decisions had already been made elsewhere.

- Shared decision-making structures were felt to work better where there were effective routes for broader community influence to feed into these structures.

- Informal dialogue was valued as a way in which communities could more effectively get their concerns onto the agenda, although it was recognised that there were challenges regarding how far those views were then able to influence policy/practice.

- There were examples of officials acting as advocates or champions of community views within their organisations who were able to ensure that the views of communities were put on to the agenda of senior decision-makers. This was important in ensuring that community views were taken on board.

Introduction

The preceding chapters have mapped out the range of community engagement practices taking place in Haringey, and looked at the factors enabling and constraining community engagement for public officials. In this chapter, we turn to look at the question of community influence. Did all this engagement activity have an impact in terms of policy and practice in Haringey? Were the views expressed taken on board by officials and why (not)? While our research cannot fully answer this question, we present the views of our respondents on the extent of community influence and highlight examples of where the community was thought to have had an influence, as well as some of the challenges and sticking points.

The 'so what?' question: influencing policy and practice

As one of our respondents stated, it is the 'so what?' question that is the most important in assessing the value of community engagement:

> So OK, yeah … you talked to people and you've listened to them. Next, what have you done about it? You know. So what?
>
> (R34)

This was also the issue that officials found most difficult to reflect on. While it was relatively easy for them to think of many examples of different types of community engagement, as described in the preceding chapters, whether they had any influence on policy and practice was less easy to identify. Partly this was because of the complex range of factors that necessarily weigh into decision-making on most issues. It was also partly because there are different levels at which community views may have an influence, ranging from the day-to-day operational level to the broader strategic and policy level. There were three key issues that could be identified from respondents' accounts, across the case studies, in terms of how effectively community views were influencing policy and practice:

- the 'level' of community input;

- formal decision-making versus informal influencing;

- finding the right channels of influence.

The 'level' of community input
Operational v strategic levels

There were a variety of different 'levels' at which community influence could occur. This could range from day-to-day operational issues of how a service is delivered, to strategic plans within service areas, to broader questions of policy direction, priority-setting and resource allocation. A number of respondents said that, in general, it was easier to carry out engagement, and for community influence to be taken on board, with respect to more day-to-day operational issues. For example, one councillor commented:

> *I mean I think there's an understanding that, when you come to sort of do something practical at a local level … that things will work better if local people have some influence and say over 'we'll have three times as many wheelie bins and less trees', or whatever it happens to be, and aren't thrown by that. I think the policy side of things is more difficult.*
>
> (R4)

Officials thought that it was easier for community participants to understand these types of operational issues because they were closer to their day-to-day experiences and therefore people were more likely to *want* to engage. They were also more likely to be able to make an informed contribution – as discussed in the last chapter. At the same time, it was also apparent in some service areas that engagement on operational issues had taken precedence over engagement on strategic or policy issues and that structures for the latter were still in development or were bedding down. This was particularly the case in the departments that had been recently restructured at the time of fieldwork.

Both of these factors were in evidence in housing where the division of responsibilities between Homes for Haringey (management of the council housing stock) and the local authority (strategic overview of housing provision) had only recently taken place. Here, resident involvement had been more successfully embedded on the operational side. An officer in Homes for Haringey noted that residents liked engagement that had a clearly defined function with demonstrable outcomes in which they could see their influence. It had proved more difficult to encourage residents to become involved in a more strategic role. A manager in a new housing strategy team in the local authority also noted that, while there had been some examples of successful one-off consultations on policies with residents, the team was in the process of trying to establish mechanisms for residents to feed their views into policy on an *ongoing* basis.

Similarly, in the youth service, which had recently become part of the restructured children and young people's services, it was said that listening to and taking on board the views of young people had now become embedded in the day-to-day work of the youth service, through engagement with the youth forums, but that this was not yet happening systematically for strategic planning in the service. There were plans for this to become embedded in the future. The youth service was also trying to put in place mechanisms to ensure that the views of young people fed into plans and strategies right across the department, including areas where this had traditionally not been the case, such as in social care services.

This was similarly the case in a variety of other service areas where there had been successful one-off consultations on strategies and policy documents, but officials were still searching for the right mechanisms to ensure that this happened systematically on an ongoing basis. One of the challenges was to integrate community input at different levels into the work of departments. For example, while all service areas had community input into the broader strategic direction of their work through the thematic boards of the Haringey Strategic Partnership, the challenge was said to be joining that up at different levels. Instances where this was said to be working well, with mechanisms for community engagement at different levels integrated together and affecting the service area as a whole, were said to be in parks (see Box 11) and in mental health services (see Box 12).

Box 11: Joining up levels of engagement – Friends of Parks groups

In Parks,[1] a Friends Forum, which comprised members from the different Friends of Parks groups across the borough, was involved in the Better Places thematic sub-board of the HSP and, hence, in determining the overall strategic direction of the borough on environmental issues. They were also involved in commenting on and feeding into the Parks department's strategy; and in monitoring the work programme for the implementation of this strategy. Hence their involvement was both in strategic and operational issues.

In terms of *outcomes*, the Friends of Parks groups have been instrumental in contributing to the eight Green Flags the department has achieved for the quality of open spaces in the borough, primarily through their contribution to developing park management plans and monitoring the associated work programmes.

The Friends of Parks groups were autonomous from the local authority, but the department had been involved in developing and nurturing the groups in order to ensure that they

were more representative and better able to engage in strategic decision-making. Hence the department valued and worked with these existing community organisations to make them more representative and more effective, rather than engaging in a search for 'representativeness' and 'authenticity', as described in Chapter 5. As one respondent described it:

Well there are those that see Friends groups as a glass half empty, i.e. those that, you know, are interested and engaged … obviously not representative of the full catchment around a local park. The reality is they are the ones that actually have come forward and taken interest … Our approach is, we see it certainly as a glass half full.

(R22)

It was also recognised that, because the Friends groups were not fully representative of the park's catchment areas, major developments and programmes of work would entail consultation among a wider range of residents.

Box 12: Joining up levels of engagement – mental health services

In mental health services, there were a range of mechanisms for users to feed into both the detail of service delivery and the broader strategic direction of the services. At the 'top' level, there is a consultation sub-group of the Mental Health Partnership Board, which discusses any changes to services on an ongoing basis. Users set the agenda and chair the group. The consultation sub-group has membership on the Board, which makes recommendations to the Executive, and also on the PPI Forum for mental health, to which issues can be taken for wider discussion and consultation.

Below this are a range of other mechanisms for a wider group of users to feed into strategic

and operational decisions on services. In order to more effectively gather the views of users who might not participate in formal consultations, a peer research group was formed. The group has carried out research on the views of users of low/medium support services and mental health day services. More recently, there has been a Mental Health User Network established to widen participation to a larger group of users. The Network is co-ordinated by an external consultant whose role is to facilitate engagement and to capacity-build so that users can engage in governance more effectively. The outcomes of user engagement have informed the service's new day care strategy and the tendering of new low/medium support services.

In addition to these mechanisms, two community development workers had recently been appointed to work with minority ethnic communities who were not felt to be effectively accessing services, in order to more fully understand their service needs.

Geographical levels

Community engagement in governance at different *geographical* levels was also said to be a challenge to integrate. For instance there had not yet been a mechanism developed in Haringey for linking the local views expressed by the community at area assemblies into the borough-wide sustainable community strategy developed by the HSP:

Haringey Strategic Partnership, which is supposed to be a strategic body … can't deliver the community strategy without working with local people … And I think that it would be a good way of working to feed in local experience and knowledge from the neighbourhoods [area assemblies] *to inform the priorities of the HSP, so you have a much more virtuous circle.*

(R1)

Within the police, there was also a disjuncture between the mechanisms for community input at the local neighbourhood level and at the borough level. At the neighbourhood level, priorities were determined by ward panels (with resident representation) using information gathered through ward consultations. However, at the borough level, policing priorities were said to be determined primarily by 'top-down' targets established by the Metropolitan Police. These were subject to consultation through groups like the Community and Police Consultative Group (see Chapters 2 and 3) but were not primarily driven from the bottom up. Recently, there had been an initiative to bring together the chairs of each neighbourhood ward panel in order to develop an overarching priority for the borough, the policing of which would be able to draw on police resources outside of Safer Neighbourhoods. This represented an attempt to start to 'knit together' 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' priorities at the borough level.

Formal decision-making or informal influencing?

It has been suggested in the literature on public participation that the involvement of community personnel on decision-making bodies has entailed a greater shift towards participatory governance and potentially a greater devolution of power to communities. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, there were a variety of shared decision-making structures with community involvement in the case studies. These presented community participants with a formal role in decision-making. However, mirroring the findings of previous research (see, for example, Maguire and Truscott, 2006), some respondents felt that the influence of participants on some of these structures, particularly those associated with the HSP, was limited, either because community participants had little control over the agenda and/or because decisions had already been tacitly, if not formally, agreed before reaching the board. This was argued by one voluntary sector respondent:

The simple question I asked was, 'Who sets the agenda of these partnership boards?' … so I said to the [chair], *'Will you tell me who sets the agenda?' and he goes, 'Oh, I get the*

*agenda, I don't know who sets the agenda!'
… Of all these partnerships … by the time it's
reached the committee it's already agreed
… Every report goes to* [management teams]
*and to the Labour Group … and then there's
executive meetings on top. And none of these
executive meetings have any community reps
on it.*

(R40)

A similar sentiment was expressed by some officials too. One respondent, for example, felt that community participants on the Older People's Partnership Board, a sub-group of the HSP, had relatively little influence over decisions taken:

*It's a bit tokenistic in a way … a lot of the times
we're going to them with things that we've
already done; we're, sort of, presenting them
with a fait accompli. And, actually, then there's
not very much influence that they can have.*

(R37)

The official went on to talk about the differences between the partnership board and an Older People's Forum. The latter was a mechanism for *dialogue* rather than *decision-making*, but was felt to be more challenging because the community participants set the agenda:

*It's their agenda … so it's about issues that are
particularly relevant to them.*

(R37)

While the partnership board gave the community participants formal decision-making power, the agenda was set by the public bodies. In contrast, the agenda of the Older People's Forum was controlled by the forum members and hence provided a space for older people to raise issues that they thought were important, rather than those that the PCT or local authority thought were important. It was said that different issues were raised in this forum – for example, cross-cutting issues that required joined-up working across health, social care, housing and transport services. However, because the community participants did not have decision-making power, it was then up to the official concerned to ensure

that the information gained was translated into change in practice. The respondent commented that, although the views expressed in the forum influenced the writing of strategy documents, the joint working between the different service departments that was implied by the older people's views was not yet happening. This challenge, of ensuring that information flows through the right channels in the organisation to exert an influence, is addressed further in the next section of this chapter.

Shared decision-making structures were felt to work best when they were underpinned by, and effectively joined up with, other engagement mechanisms that allowed a wider cross-section of community views to influence the agenda. For example, this seemed to be the case in mental health services, as described above; in policing, where public views through 'Have a Say' days were presented to the ward panel, who then decided on policing priorities; and in Homes for Haringey, where a variety of engagement mechanisms fed into the board discussions, including the views of the resident consultative forum chaired by local residents.

Finding channels of influence

A final theme emerging from the discussions of community influence was finding the right channel in organisations for community views to have an influence. Part of this depended on *who* in the public body was involved in the engagement. If it was specialist engagement staff, this relied on those staff members being able to ensure that the views from the engagement were put onto the agenda of those responsible for decision-making. This entailed officials acting as 'brokers' or 'advocates' for community views. Two examples where this was thought to be working well were in Homes for Haringey (Box 13) and in children's services (Box 14) where there were felt to be effective mechanisms linking engagement and mainstream decision-making processes.

Box 13: Linking community engagement to decision-making – Homes for Haringey

While Homes for Haringey had a specialist resident involvement team, the team had also been involved in trying to 'embed' resident involvement throughout the organisation by encouraging the involvement of 'mainstream' staff. One example was that the panels for specific service areas, with resident involvement, were chaired by senior managers from the relevant service departments.

The role of the involvement officers was to capacity build among residents so that they could get more effectively involved in governance. For example, officers were involved in establishing, developing and supporting residents' associations, but the day-to-day work of consulting and working with residents' associations was undertaken by 'mainstream' tenancy management staff. This was felt to be effective in 'embedding involvement' (R7) throughout the organisation:

Initially, involvement of residents was nearly always seen by most people as the preserve of the resident involvement team … but we really tried to change that culture and to make people responsible.

(R7)

The resident involvement team also retained an internal consultancy role to ensure that standards of good practice in involvement and consultation were maintained.

Box 14: Linking community engagement to decision-making – children's services

In children's services, participation staff had been involved in initiating an ongoing dialogue with disadvantaged communities who were either not accessing services or had poor outcomes (see Chapter 3). It was the role of the participation officer to ensure that the issues raised by the community in such forums were put onto the agenda of the appropriate decision-makers in the department so their views were heard and acted upon. This was achieved by the participation officer raising agenda items at the leadership team meeting for the directorate:

I would help to put an agenda item onto our leadership team meeting … so that the whole of the service really would be aware of that, and I would then make a recommendation of how to move forward … So we have a way into second- and third-tier management and those divisional heads and those people who are delivering the services.

(R5)

The role of the officer in this situation was as an 'advocate' or 'broker' for the community within the directorate:

I think you have to press and press, and that's my job to make it happen, and sometimes it happens really quickly and sometimes it doesn't.

(R5)

In a large and complex organisation like the PCT, with a range of 'top-down' pressures dictating policy and subject to a rapidly changing policy agenda, finding the right channel of influence was recognised to be more of a challenge. One manager stated:

… it's incredibly difficult to, you know, even if ideas are coming up and coming through to community engagement, there needs to be

Community engagement and community influence

a window of opportunity to get them heard, if you like … From a community's perspective … I can imagine there would be quite a lot of frustration about, 'Well how do you get your issue on the agenda?' It's not a target, it's not performance, or it's not [part] of a big strategic development. I'm not quite so sure how that would come through.

(R38)

Having ongoing dialogue with communities through engagement forums in which the community shapes the agenda – as suggested earlier – is clearly one step in the right direction, although again this relies on the appropriate officials attending, or those attending being able to then *channel* the information appropriately. It was also noted that having lead commissioners for particular service areas (e.g. children's services) was useful in having a clearly identifiable individual responsible for taking community views forward. As one respondent pointed out, that role requires quite specific skills, which might be different from those that are necessary for someone carrying out face-to-face engagement:

… the challenge is kind of working corporately to spot the opportunities, and … to actually get them into a form that they are able to be presented. So that, you know, the idea of turning things into business cases … So it's that kind of brokering role, that takes a lot of capacity and resource to turn it into a business case that would be able to go in anywhere.

(R38)

In neighbourhood working (in both the police, through Safer Neighbourhoods, and the local authority, through neighbourhood management) officials also took on a brokering role in order to ensure that community views were acted upon. Part of the role of both neighbourhood managers and sergeants in Safer Neighbourhoods teams was to bring together a range of service providers to address issues that would otherwise 'fall through the gaps' of the different services. Once again, this role as a broker was recognised to require specific skills of officials, as seen in the comments of one respondent about neighbourhood managers:

One of the key things is that ability to bring people together, to try and build relationships … and push things through.

(R1)

Sergeants in Safer Neighbourhoods police teams also talked about acting as brokers who championed community views and ensured that they were addressed by the appropriate service providers. One officer spoke of how he had been able to tackle issues that had had a marked impact on the improvement of daily life for local residents, such as low-level anti-social behaviour, which would otherwise have been unaddressed:

… you know, cops in cars have got other things to do and they don't want to be making phone calls and arranging meetings, stuff like that … It's low-level problems that may not have been touched before, because it's in that sort of 'too difficult' box. One PC, one community officer can't deal with that, they need a little team.

(R31)

We have suggested in this chapter that community *engagement* does not automatically translate into community *influence*. Three key issues that were important in shaping whether or not community views were influential have been identified.

- Community input is facilitated at different levels and stages in the policy process – for example, into both strategic and operational issues, on an ongoing rather than ad hoc basis.

- Formally devolved or shared decision-making is supplemented by other engagement mechanisms that provide more opportunity for the community to shape the agenda at earlier stages in the decision-making process, to avoid it becoming a 'rubber-stamping' exercise.

- Officials carrying out community engagement or other champions can effectively channel the views expressed by the community within their organisation to ensure that they have an impact on decision-making.

7 Conclusions

In this chapter, we draw together the material from previous chapters into key themes arising from the research, and offer some implications for policy and practice.

Rationalising engagement structures

There was a diverse and complex array of structures and practices for community involvement in evidence across the five case study areas in Haringey, some of which were cross-sectoral (e.g. bringing together health and local authority services) and some of which were specific to departments or units within departments. The various mechanisms and structures also had different geographical remits and targeted differently defined communities. Adding another layer of complexity was a context of ongoing organisational change. A number of the service areas were undergoing, or had recently undergone, restructuring, and the voluntary and community sector in Haringey was undergoing reorganisation too. Other researchers have noted that the multiplicity of governance structures can cause confusion among the public (Skidmore *et al*., 2006; Barnes *et al*., 2008). This research suggests that they also sap the energies of public officials, who have insufficient time to engage in so many structures. While officials valued a diversity of engagement structures to suit different purposes and to engage different communities, there was also a pervasive feeling that there were too many structures with no overall local co-ordination. There appeared to be a deficit of strategic leadership on engagement in Haringey.

Clarifying purposes, participants and roles

Officials recognised that different mechanisms and practices for engagement were suitable for different purposes and different communities. A range of purposes for carrying out engagement were expressed, including: improving services, improving social inclusion, increasing the use of services, generating trust in local institutions and enhancing democracy. This mirrors the range of purposes of community engagement that have been embedded in government policies over recent years, although there was little emphasis on community *empowerment* by local officials, a rhetoric that has increasingly taken centre stage in recent central government guidance and initiatives on community engagement. Officials also defined different roles for public participants in engagement: as 'grass-roots experts' with local knowledge of services or neighbourhoods; as representatives of constituencies or communities; as challengers; as individual consumers expressing preferences; or as stakeholders alongside a range of other agencies. There was, however, sometimes a lack of clarity and/or a difference of opinion about purposes and roles, both among officials and between officials and community participants, which had the potential to generate tensions and dissatisfaction. In the structures described, it was the officials who were almost always the initiators of the practices and had the power to define the purposes and roles of engagement. There was little evidence of officials allowing community participants to enter into this discussion about what their purposes and roles might be.

Formal versus informal engagement

While community involvement in formal decision-making – for example, by sitting on boards – is often cited as an example of participatory governance, many officials felt that this type of participation was not currently very effective in terms of facilitating community influence, particularly in the context of the structures of the Haringey Strategic Partnership. It was felt that community participants often had little control over the agenda or that decisions had already

been made elsewhere. Shared decision-making structures were felt to work better where there were effective routes for broader community influence to feed into these structures (for example, in the police, where ward consultations fed into the deliberations of ward panels and, in housing, where a broad array of resident involvement structures fed into the board's decision-making). Informal dialogue was valued as a way in which communities could more effectively express their own concerns, although there were some obstacles identified with regard to how far those views were then able to influence policy and practice. Some officials were acting as *advocates* or *champions* of community views within their organisations and played a key role in putting the views of communities onto the agenda of senior decision-makers. This was felt to be important in ensuring that community views were taken on board.

Importance of resources

Almost all officials in the study spoke about the importance of organisational resources, such as the amount of time available, staffing (such as a dedicated staff member or unit with expertise on engagement) and support from senior management and/or politicians as important enablers or constraints on the ability of public officials to prioritise engagement and translate it into policy, planning or delivery. This organisational context was vitally important in providing the support that enabled officials to spend time and resources on developing engagement practices, and on monitoring and improving them over time. This was reflected in this research in the evident contrast between the Safer Neighbourhoods teams in the police, who were set up for and resourced for community engagement as part of their mainstream responsibilities, and service managers in the PCT, who were responsible for ensuring that community views fed into policies but who had few dedicated staff or resources for this.

Mainstreaming?
Officials felt that both specialist staff with expertise in engagement *and* embedding engagement responsibilities across mainstream staff in the organisation were important, although the balance

needed to be struck in different ways in different organisational contexts. Where there were fewer resources for engagement – for example, in health – engagement was conducted in large part through utilising intermediary organisations or working in partnership with others who had greater resources (for example, local authority neighbourhood management teams). This could be very effective and there was considerable scope to expand this way of working. However, where there were too few staff with time and space to focus on community engagement, this was felt to be detrimental.

Performance incentives?
Despite the attempt of central government to remove centrally imposed performance frameworks and orient local governance partners towards locally determined priorities, pressures to meet countervailing targets were a strong constraint on acting on the outcomes of engagement (as well as inhibiting involvement in engagement) in the PCT. Here, the centrally imposed performance targets, in a context of budget cuts, were widely perceived to have made community engagement a 'luxury' that could not be afforded – at least at the time of the fieldwork. Despite some examples of very effective engagement practices in particular areas of health (for example, in mental health), there was a strong message from health officials that 'top-down' priorities for PCTs set by central government were limiting the impact of engagement.[1] Without reducing engagement to a 'tick-box' exercise, the incorporation of (meaningful) performance measures for conducting and acting on engagement was considered to be crucial in ensuring that engagement was taken on board by officials across the case studies.

Informal practices and processes

The informal practices, processes and behaviours of officials played a role in facilitating or disabling effective community engagement. Enabling practices included making the timing, location and format of engagement forums more accessible; using participatory methods; 'going to where communities are'; effective communication skills; the ability to manage conflict; and 'technical'

knowledge of engagement procedures. This suggests the importance of interpersonal relationships in effective community engagement. Building relationships of trust with communities was highly valued by officials and was seen as one of the most important purposes of engagement. Having an *ongoing dialogue* with the public was thought to be particularly fruitful in this, because it allowed complex issues to be addressed on an ongoing basis; it provided officials with the opportunity to feed back on the results of earlier engagement; and allowed community participants to develop a better understanding of the issues involved in governance.

While a variety of enabling practices had been implemented by officials in order to widen participation in engagement – for example, by going to where communities are present, either in public spaces (such as police 'Have a Say' days outside supermarkets or schools) or through interacting with people in community-based settings – it was recognised that this was an ongoing challenge given the diversity within Haringey's population. New communities who did not have a developed community infrastructure through which officials could channel engagement were said to be often excluded from engagement and there were also concerns expressed about the absence of young people's voices in much engagement practice.

Officials' attitudes and views

Previous research has suggested that public officials may be posing barriers to the effectiveness of community influence in the governance of public services (e.g. Maguire and Truscott, 2006). This research suggests that the picture is quite complex. Public officials themselves are a diverse group who are positioned differently within their organisations with differential amounts of power and influence. Some officials – particularly (but not exclusively) staff carrying out 'front-line', face-to-face engagement – acted as community advocates or champions within their organisations. Mainstream senior managers, on the other hand, were in the position of balancing community views against other priorities within prescribed budgets and for meeting performance targets.

While there was some diversity in attitudes,

and nearly every respondent could identify other colleagues who were less positive about engagement, there was a broad consensus among officials across organisations and at different management levels that engaging the community about public services was 'a good thing'. The debates and tensions between officials were about the scope of community influence, its purpose and how to effectively facilitate engagement. Some felt that engagement in operational issues of service delivery was appropriate but not engagement in matters that were more technical and/or strategic.

There were also various ways in which the *value* of community participants' contributions was downplayed by officials. This included questioning the 'representativeness' or 'authenticity' of participants ('the usual suspects', 'those who shout the loudest', 'those with an axe to grind'). There was also a contradiction between officials seeking 'the authentic public' with whom to engage, alongside an anxiety about engaging participants who did not understand the complexity of the issues or the constraints that officials were working within. The latter resulted in a preference for 'good engagers' or 'informed insiders'.

Together, this cluster of implicit understandings among officials about who were the 'right' participants to engage with could result in a disinclination among some officials to 'step outside their comfort zones' and engage with organisations and individuals that were more *challenging*. This was reinforced by an overwhelming concern among many officials with generating 'better relationships with the public'. These routine understandings of officials could operate to exclude certain voices and issues from shaping the agenda of local public services. The challenge, as Barnes *et al*. (2008) point out, is to ensure that there are a range of engagement mechanisms and practices, including those where a more diverse range of views and potentially more challenging views, might be heard and, crucially, acted upon.

Community empowerment?

Contrary to much recent government policy rhetoric about 'passing power into the hands of local communities' (CLG, 2008a, p.12), this is not a simple and straightforward task. The issue of

whether current community engagement practices are resulting in community empowerment is a complex one, with power relations operating both between and within public bodies and communities. This research showed that public officials could deploy practices of power – such as behaviours that excluded community participants – but at the same time often felt constrained themselves to act in the interests of 'the community'. The officials interviewed were also themselves at different positions in their organisations with differential ability to influence decision-making – from front-line staff, to community engagement officers, to middle and senior managers. Some officials took on the role of advocates or champions of community views within their organisations, although they were sometimes cautious about their abilities to 'push' these community views through within their organisation. Senior managers also spoke of feeling relatively powerless in the face of either political interests that did not support the devolution of power and influence to communities (in the local authority), or in the face of central government policies and targets that overrode community influence, as in the case of health.

As well as officials, individuals in 'the community' are also differentially empowered. Officials spoke of differences within communities regarding who was able to articulate their interests and have them heard most effectively. In particular, there was recognition of stark differences in the capacities of residents in the east and the west of the borough to express their views – given very different socio-economic profiles. It was also recognised that newer communities who had not yet developed a community infrastructure with which officials could easily engage were more marginalised from community engagement practices and less able to express their views. In the light of this, one of the roles of public officials in engagement necessarily is to balance the different – and sometimes conflicting – demands of different communities or constituencies. Hence the devolution of power to residents and citizens is a complex and multi-layered process.

Discussions with officials about the extent to which communities had influenced policy and practice, and/or the extent to which community involvement in governance had changed

outcomes for communities, suggested a picture in which residents or service users were having a real and important influence in some areas and in some types of issues, primarily local and operational service delivery issues. These can be very important in influencing the quality of life of residents. However, the picture seems to be one of more limited impact on determining the broader agenda in many policy areas.[2] There are a host of reasons for this, including (but not limited to):

- who in the community is able or 'invited' to engage and whose voices are heard within engagement practices;

- how these voices are then balanced against other demands and by whom;

- the wider context of central government policy, which sets the broader context within which local public institutions and officials are expected to operate.

The potential for community engagement to make a difference clearly exists, with new spaces opening up for diverse voices, but this opportunity is not currently being fully realised. A remaining challenge for public officials is to envision and enact community engagement in ways that would allow the inclusion of more diverse and potentially challenging views at earlier stages in the policy-making process where there is greater scope for strategic influence.

Policy and practice implications

Drawing on the findings from the research, we finish by presenting some implications for policy and practice. Respondents in the research concurred that there was value in utilising a diverse range of types of engagement to serve different purposes and to engage different constituencies and individuals. Different combinations of engagement practices are also appropriate to different local area contexts, in light of local circumstances and local priorities, and to different organisational settings. It would be inappropriate therefore to present specific recommendations on the types of engagement structures and practices that are the most effective. The implications

instead offer some reflections on how the process of developing effective engagement – and how public officials might be better supported in conducting and acting on community engagement – might be best realised. The implications are presented as suggestions for consideration relevant to a range of stakeholders, including public bodies delivering local services (eg local authorities, police, PCTs), local area partnerships (eg LSPs) and their member organisations, national government (eg Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG)), local governance advisory bodies (Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA), the Local Government Association (LGA)), researchers and research funding bodies.

Organisational level

Mapping of responsibilities, skills and incentives

A mapping exercise within public bodies (or individual departments) could be undertaken to identify across all levels of staff *responsibilities, skills* and *performance incentives* for community engagement. This could include examination of responsibilities for carrying out community engagement and responsibilities for ensuring that community views feed into the different stages of service planning and commissioning (including both operational and strategic levels). This could enable the identification of any current gaps in either the skills or the incentives for engagement within organisations.

The balance between having specialist engagement staff and/or engagement responsibilities taken by mainstream staff will need to be struck differently in different organisational contexts. One possible approach for organisations is to mainstream the responsibility to take account of community views, while identifying and appropriately resourcing those staff with specific community engagement functions. Specialist community engagement personnel can include those carrying out frontline engagement (interacting with the community); senior staff responsible for ensuring the coherence and quality of engagement within the organisation/ department; and staff who champion community demands and ensure that they are taken on board.

Performance incentives

In contexts where there are competing demands on staff time, community engagement is unlikely to be prioritised by individuals unless it is clearly built into staff performance frameworks. This must be done in a meaningful way to avoid turning engagement into a 'tick box exercise'. There is scope for shared learning across organisations on how to do this most effectively.

Training and learning events

A mapping of responsibilities and skill sets for engagement could facilitate the development of organisational training strategies and promote continuing professional development and accreditation to enhance the skill base on community engagement. This would need to take account of the diversity of skills involved in engagement, including:

- skills in communication, participatory techniques and managing conflicts for 'frontline' engagers;

- skills in designing effective engagement structures and practices for staff responsible for ensuring the quality and coherence of engagement; and

- skills in brokering agreements among different parties for individuals championing community demands within departments.

Greater provision of learning events on community engagement (training events as well as more open discussion forums) would be helpful to identify, develop and embed best practice. Such events need to be targeted both at officials in particular roles, to provide space for open and honest discussion of challenges faced and ways of working through these, as well as events which bring together officials and community participants to facilitate learning across sectors and to work collaboratively to develop better practice on engagement. Such collaborative practice could contribute to challenging stereotypes and assumptions operating within specific organisational cultures. Shared learning events across organisational boundaries (eg between the statutory and third sector) have been shown to be

helpful in breaking down negative assumptions and misconceptions on each side (for example, I&DeA's Partnership Improvement Programme (I&DeA, 2006)). More research would be useful to identify the elements of learning initiatives that can facilitate the questioning of pre-existing assumptions, rather than reinforcing entrenched (and habitual) positions.

It is particularly important in such collaborative learning events to address the range of potential purposes of community involvement and the possible roles to be taken by the various participants involved (both community participants, officials and others). It is essential that such issues can be openly aired and debated to avoid confusion and misconceptions about purposes, participants and their roles in engagement practice. The issue of community *representatives:* when and where representativeness is important, and what its various forms can take, would be particularly helpful to help counter longstanding exclusionary assumptions operating among some officials.

Championing engagement

The research showed that some officials acted as champions of community engagement or community views within their organisations and departments helping to ensure that community issues got onto the agenda of decision-makers or brokering agreements between different parties in the interests of communities. There is scope to expand and perhaps formalise the role of engagement/participation champions within organisations, tapping into and maximising the enthusiasm and commitment that exist among many public officials, while providing the individuals concerned with appropriate support and reward. Champions across organisations could engage in networking to share experiences of what works effectively at the local level.

There is also a corresponding and overwhelming need for community engagement to be actively championed at a senior level within organisations, as staff lower down the hierarchy take their lead from senior staff. Within local authorities, this also includes elected members playing a championing role. Where there is support from senior staff and/or politicians, managers and

frontline staff reported feeling more enabled to undertake or act on community engagement.

Local area level

Developing local engagement and participation strategies

A range of research has shown that there is often a bewildering array of engagement structures which saps energies and causes confusion. There is a greater need for local coherence and, in some cases, rationalisation of existing structures and practices. Recent statutory guidance (CLG, 2008b) places the responsibility for overseeing and co-ordinating community consultation and engagement activities at the local level with LSPs. LSPs should therefore be encouraged to develop strategic plans for community engagement in governance at a local level. Development work for this could include mapping the existing range of governance structures at the local level, in order both to disseminate information on the structures currently in existence – for the benefit of communities, officials, councillors and other stakeholders who have to navigate these structures – and to generate ideas about ways to alter structures in order to ensure greater overall coherence. This would help to identify any gaps in current engagement practice as well as the considerable overlap that undoubtedly exists, thus enabling strategies that better rationalise existing resources for engagement.

A key feature of local engagement strategies should be the development of greater clarity on the goals and purposes of community engagement at the local level. Individual engagement processes will usually have a range of purposes, but identifying the key purposes, and developing relevant outcome measures, could play an important role in building greater coherence to community engagement locally. It could also provide a foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of the engagement strategy over time.

Engagement strategies are best developed at the local level and will necessarily vary according to local area context. However this research suggests some key areas of concern that will need to be considered:

- How best to share resources for engagement more effectively across organisations (eg through partnership working), so that the considerable disparities in resources and staffing for engagement that are inevitable across organisations and departments are not translated into differential opportunities for community input into services.

- Identifying where there are opportunities for rationalising and merging engagement structures (to minimise any unnecessary duplication), and, conversely, where separate structures need to be preserved. Any rationalising of structures should proceed with caution because the success of engagement practices often depend upon the quality of the relationships that have been painstakingly established between different participants.

- Effective community engagement, especially of disadvantaged and marginalised communities, requires an extensive input of time and resources. Community capacity building and development to support wider and more inclusive engagement in governance, as well as the development of effective communication and accountability mechanisms between third sector representatives and the wider community, need to be appropriately resourced for the local strategy to be effective.

- Ensuring that there are effective linkages between any community engagement mechanisms in existence at the neighbourhood level and at the borough-wide level, for feeding community views into the strategic direction and priorities of local areas, so that the two inform one another.

Local centres of participation expertise

Establishing a discrete grouping within the LSP responsible for developing the local community engagement strategy could also create a local centre of expertise on community engagement. Linking in to the work of the Regional Empowerment Partnerships, it could disseminate experience and good practice locally on engagement, particularly on creative ways

of tacking more difficult issues such as effective community input in policy and strategy and the engagement of disadvantaged/marginalised groups.

Continual improvement and community scrutiny

To encourage continual improvement in engagement practices, local strategies need to be kept under regular review to identify what is working and what is not, and how things could be improved. Such reviews could involve a range of stakeholders including community participants. This could facilitate a more critical appraisal of local engagement processes to ensure that they are reflecting the full range of divergent voices locally and are focused on more challenging outcomes as well as 'easy wins'.

Such regular reviews could also be supplemented by periodic local enquiry and scrutiny processes to address any concerns about particular engagement structures or services. The Government has already given councillors the power to require overview and scrutiny committees to consider issues of local concern, and is encouraging greater public involvement in local scrutiny reviews. Structures and practices for community involvement in governance could be one area that residents or councillors are encouraged to bring before overview and scrutiny committees.

National level

Recognition of complexity

A clearer recognition from central government of the complexities and challenges inherent in listening and responding to the views of *all* sections of the community would be welcome. It is important not to convey the message that 'empowering' the community is a straightforward process and that taking community views seriously will be harmonious and conflict-free, given the diversity of communities and profound inequalities in power and resources between them. If the government is serious about community empowerment, this requires the investment of considerable resources.

Resourcing engagement

The current Government's emphasis on devolving power to communities is giving an important steer to local authorities and other local stakeholders about the importance of community involvement in governance. However this also needs to be matched by appropriate resourcing. In the light of the winding up of central government funding for Community Empowerment Networks, greater priority needs to be given to ensuring that community development and outreach work is adequately resourced and prioritised at the local level to develop an effective community voice.

Performance frameworks

Considerable work has been done by Government on streamlining and devolving performance frameworks to the local area level and reducing national targets. However on the ground officials are still experiencing conflicts. In this research, this was particularly the case within the Primary Care Trust. Structures for devolving accountability to the local level are still in development in the NHS and these developments require careful monitoring and evaluation to ensure that they bring the required changes in local community influence over health services.

The new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process that will come on stream in 2009 will include evaluation of the quality of public engagement at the local level. This assessment process could involve a review of the LSP's role in co-ordinating, developing and improving the local framework for public engagement to ensure that engagement has local coherence and is effective. If regular local reviews are being carried out of the LSP strategy on engagement this will provide an effective means to feed into the CAA. Ensuring that a diverse range of voices of individuals and communities are able to feed into engagement processes and have say on local services should be a key assessment criteria.

Notes

Chapter 1

1   ALMOs are not-for-profit housing management companies that are 100 per cent controlled by a local authority.

2   For more information on the research methods, see the Appendix.

Chapter 2

1   This did not form a focus for the research, and engagement practices in this programme are not addressed in the report. Lawless (2006) provides an overview of community engagement practices in New Deal for Communities programmes nationally.

2   While public officials who were interviewed participated in the thematic boards of the HSP, this was not a specific focus of the research and officials' involvement in the HSP was not investigated in detail. Maguire and Truscott's (2006) study focused on community participation in local strategic partnerships in some detail.

3   Respondents have been assigned a unique identifier to preserve anonymity, from R1 to R42.

4   Each of the 19 ward-level teams consists of six members: one sergeant, two police officers and three police community support officers (PCSOs). Three inspectors share responsibility for the 19 teams.

5   At the time of the research, PPI forums were about to be replaced by local involvement networks (LINks) (driven by central government guidance), which are aimed at securing wider involvement than had been achieved with the PPI forums, partly through developing more 'virtual' engagement through the internet.

6   HARCEN, established through the Government's Community Empowerment Fund, formerly had the main community engagement brief in Haringey. HAVCO and HARCEN have had a difficult relationship, with some viewing the two organisations as having at least in part the same raison d'etre.

Chapter 4

1   There have been a number of recent changes designed to strengthen the local accountability of the NHS. This has included giving councils the power to review and scrutinise local health services; putting a legal duty on NHS organisations to involve local people in decisions about services; and introducing local involvement networks in place of PPI forums. The recent consultation on the NHS Constitution (DH, 2008) also encourages PCTs to experiment with how they take account of local views in their decision-making, including by creating membership systems similar to those for foundation hospitals (see McIver, 2006). These changes had yet to filter into local changes in community input into governance in the PCT in Haringey. As stated previously, LINks, for example, had not yet been introduced at the time of the fieldwork.

Chapter 6

1   Parks, part of the leisure services department, was formerly in the Urban Environment Directorate but in a recent restructuring had moved to Adult and Community Services.

Chapter 7

1   As noted earlier, some recent changes designed to enhance local accountability of PCTs, such as the establishment of LINks, were yet to take effect at the time of the research.

2   Local area agreements provide an avenue for this to occur more systematically, but were in the early stages of development at the time of this research. The extent to which LAAs are

facilitating the development of divergent local policy agendas remains unclear.

Appendix

1   Using early interview respondents to identify subsequent candidates for interview.

2   In two instances, respondents requested that the interviews were not recorded and research notes were made instead. Where only research notes were made, the data was used for background purposes and is not reported on. Further, respondents were given the opportunity to say things 'off the record'; where this is the case, this data is also not reported on.

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Appendix
Research methods

Research design

The research design entailed a qualitative case study of community engagement within the London Borough of Haringey. In adopting a case study approach, the research aimed to highlight the importance of different layers of context on community engagement in governance, including:

- national policy agenda;

- local policy agenda (as agreed through the LSP and the Sustainable Communities Strategy);

- organisational context;

- working practices and assumptions at different tiers of the organisation (e.g. middle managers versus community workers).

In order to explore these different layers of context, the research focused on the experiences of public officials across three large public sector bodies: the local authority; police; and a primary care trust. And within these organisations across five key service areas:

- children and young people's services;

- environmental services;

- housing;

- health;

- policing.

The research took place between January and December 2007 and involved five stages:

1 key informant interviews;

2. interviews with public officials;

3. preliminary analysis;

4. public officials' workshop;

5. further analysis and writing.

Interviews

The main phase of fieldwork involved semi-structured interviews, which took place in two stages. The first stage entailed interviews with key informants that were intended to:

- collect background information on organisational context and community engagement mechanisms;

- ascertain how the responsibilities for community engagement are structured and distributed within the organisation/unit;

- explore attitudes towards community engagement among different stakeholders;

- explore stakeholder perceptions of the role of public officials in community engagement.

Key informants included: senior managers in the five service areas; councillors; voluntary sector representatives; local authority neighbourhood management staff; and senior local authority managers with responsibility for community engagement policy.

The second stage involved interviews with public officials in the five service areas. The primary focus was on managers with responsibility for ensuring that community engagement occurred. We took advice from the key informants and others on who were the most appropriate individuals to interview and this varied across organisations and departments. In some instances interviewees were themselves involved in community engagement practices, while in other instances they were responsible for ensuring that engagement occurred and for incorporating the views ascertained into policy and practice. Some individuals were part of specialist community engagement teams, or had this as their primary remit, while others were mainstream staff. We also

interviewed a smaller number of staff involved in community engagement in a front-line capacity.

The interviews with public officials explored:

- their experiences of community engagement processes – which practices were used and why; what were their strengths and weaknesses;

- their experiences and perceptions of the extent to which community views were taken on board in the planning and delivery of services;

- how they felt about community engagement;

- what they thought worked well and what could be improved;

- what were the barriers and constraints, at different levels – the local area context, the organisational context, the departmental context and in terms of individuals' practices.

The aim of the interviews was not to provide a comprehensive coverage of engagement in each service area, but to ascertain the views and experiences of a range of staff with responsibility for different aspects of community engagement, but with a principal focus on managers. In addition, the 'snowball technique'[1] facilitated the selection of respondents who had a connection to others already interviewed as the result of either a direct working relationship or involvement in partnership work. This produced a more coherent sample of individuals who had a range of interconnections. Table A1 shows the range of staff interviewed.

Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour-and-a-half and, for the most part,[2] were recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

Analysis and workshop

Transcripts were imported into *Nvivo 7* (a qualitative data analysis program), where they were coded in relation to emerging themes. Case study summaries of each of the service areas were also made.

This preliminary analysis formed the basis of a feedback workshop for public officials that took place in September 2007. Fifteen participants attended from across the service areas. Workshop discussion focused around the different practices of community engagement, why they were used and their strengths and weaknesses; and the constraints and enablers of community engagement in governance. Workshop discussions were written up and the views expressed informed the next stage of the analysis and the report writing.

Table A1: Respondents

	Public officials			Other respondents	Total
	Senior manager	Middle manager	Non-managerial staff		
Health	6	1	–		
Policing	1	5	1		
Housing	1	3	1		
Children and young people	1	4	1		
Environment	4	1	1		
Other local authority	2	2	2		
Councillors				2	
Voluntary sector				3	
Total					**42**

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About the authors

Kathryn Ray is a Senior Research Fellow at the Policy Studies Institute. Her research interests include low-paid workers and labour market disadvantage, and community relations, cohesion and engagement. She is co-editor of *Gender Divisions and Working Time in the New Economy* (Edward Elgar, 2006), and co-author of *Social Cohesion in Diverse Communities* (JRF, 2007).

Maria Hudson is also a Senior Research Fellow at the Policy Studies Institute. Her current areas of research interest are labour market disadvanatage and inequalities, and immigration and inclusion.

Verity Campbell-Barr is a Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Plymouth whose research interests include the mixed economy of childcare, the role of childcare in supporting employment, and local governance.

Isabel Shutes is a Research Officer at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (University of Oxford), and previously at the Policy Studies Institute, whose research interests include public service reforms, migration and welfare inequalities.