Designing citizen-centred governance

Marian Barnes, Chris Skelcher, Hanne Beirens, Robert Dalziel,
Stephen Jeffares and Lynne Wilson

Citizen-centred governance involves new ways of enabling local people, working with statutory and other agencies, to decide how public services can improve their quality of life. This study examined the relationship between new governance structures and the engagement of citizens, service users and the voluntary and community sectors, with the aim of identifying lessons for policy and practice. The report covers:

- the changing governance of communities;

- understanding the new governance;

- designing citizen-centred governance;

- learning from diversity;

- strengthening citizen-centred governance.

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List of abbreviations

ABI   Area-based initiative

CPPIH   Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health

CSP   Community safety partnership

CYPSP   Children and young people's strategic partnership

EP   Environment partnership

FE   Further education

HA   Health authority

HAZ   Health action zone

HP   Health partnership

IAB   Interim advisory board

LAA   Local area agreement

LINk   Local involvement network

LPSB   Local public service board

LSP   Local strategic partnership

NDC   New Deal for Communities

NHS   National Health Service

NRF   Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

PCT   Primary care trust

PPI   Patient and public involvement

RSL   Registered social landlord

SEP   Skills and economic regeneration partnership

SRB   Single Regeneration Budget

SSLP   Sure Start local programme

WAB   Ward advisory board

1 The changing governance of communities

Introduction

This report deals with one of the fundamental challenges for the governance of communities – how to create flexible and effective organisations for delivering public services that also reflect the values of local democracy. We call this 'citizen-centred governance'. Citizen-centred governance involves new ways of enabling local people, working together, to decide how their needs will be met and how public services can improve their quality of life.

There has been widespread experimentation in new forms of governance during the past decade, particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Partnerships, regeneration boards and other structures have been established.

Many of these initiatives are about citizen-centred governance. They have created opportunities for local people and service users to shape policy choices, decide on services and allocate resources. They provide an alternative to traditional methods of government through local authorities, although councils themselves are often the main players in creating these forums.

To explore the different ways in which new systems of governance have been designed to enable more participative decision-making, we undertook new research into the operation of a Sure Start/children's centre, a community-based housing association, a local strategic partnership (LSP) and an NHS foundation trust. We also returned to a range of governance structures that we had researched previously and undertook new interviews in order to understand how they had changed over time, and the implications for citizen and user involvement. Finally, we commissioned short reports from leading researchers involved in national evaluations of new governance arrangements.

In this chapter, we describe how governance has changed over the last decade and the particular implications such changes have for disadvantaged neighbourhoods. We show that the development of citizen-centred governance has a considerable potential to enable new ways of engaging people in decisions that affect their lives and those of their neighbourhoods.

Chapter 2 shows how the emergence of partnerships and other special-purpose bodies has affected the governance of cities and communities. We analyse how these changes in local governance affect one local authority area – Birmingham. This reveals that the city is now governed through a large number of special-purpose bodies, creating a patchwork across the city.

In Chapter 3, we focus on four case studies in the Birmingham and West Midlands area. We analyse a Sure Start partnership, a community-led housing association, an LSP and an NHS foundation trust. These show how new forms of governance have evolved over time and the effects of this on citizen and user engagement.

Chapter 4 takes a wider perspective and reports on the state-of-knowledge papers we commissioned from leading experts in the field. We synthesise their findings on the picture across ten different governance structures.

Chapter 5 draws out the findings of the analysis and develops a series of recommendations for enhancing the citizen-centred governance of local communities and public services, especially in areas of disadvantage.

The challenge of change

Citizen-centred governance has particular relevance for individuals and communities living in areas of disadvantage, and for those managers and policy-makers committed to tackling poverty, social exclusion and inequality. Many new policy initiatives have been targeted at these areas over the past decade. They offer new ways for citizens and users to engage in shaping and deciding local public policy, but also create a complex governance landscape of statutory agencies, partnerships, boards and other structures. This places significant additional demands on individuals and groups.

A key feature of these new governance structures has been the engagement of citizens, users and voluntary and community sector organisations in consultation arenas and as part of the decision-making process (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Newman *et al.*, 2004). Citizens and users often have places on the board or management committee, alongside public and private sector representatives. In some cases, there is a public electoral process to select representatives from the community at large or individual constituencies. Examples include resident directors for New Deal for Community boards, and governors for the NHS foundation trusts that are now being established.

These initiatives have created new opportunities for citizen-centred governance of local communities and public services. The traditional local authority mechanisms through which people can contribute their knowledge and be represented are now supplemented by a variety of additional arenas – regeneration partnerships, community-led social housing companies, neighbourhood forums, thematic groups linked to LSPs and so on.

Such changes in local governance offer the prospect for a more vibrant local democracy. However, they have also created a patchwork of governance arrangements in our cities and communities where 'who does what' is even less clear than it was in the past. The new forms of governance also often do not have a formal legal status. They are frequently what is known as an 'unincorporated association' – a partnership of different public, private and voluntary and community sector organisations whose finances and contracts are managed through an 'accountable body' – usually a local authority or primary care trust (PCT), or, occasionally, a major voluntary sector agency.

The great advantage of unincorporated associations is that they have considerable flexibility over the way in which they organise themselves. This means that they can respond to the wishes of citizens and users, and create new ways of involving them in decision-making. There is the potential to give citizens and users greater say over how the organisations that serve them undertake their task, reinforcing the values of localism.

The disadvantage is that they generally have much lower levels of transparency than local authorities and other statutory bodies, and it is harder for the public to hold them to account (Skelcher *et al.*, 2004; Audit Commission, 2005). This also applies to many of the new forms of governance that *are* legally constituted – for example, regeneration bodies that are constituted as companies limited by guarantee.

The consequence is that the democratic standards we expect of elected government at national and local level – accountability, transparency, checks and balances between decision-makers and managers, rules to ensure high standards of conduct, access to information – do not necessarily apply to the new forms of governance. This can make the process of public participation more complex, demanding and frustrating for those who give up their time to contribute, or who wish to challenge the decisions of the organisation (Barnes *et al.*, 2003).

Nevertheless, these new ways of working have opened up opportunities for involvement in decision-making. It is estimated that there are approximately 75,000 board places on sub-national public policy partnerships in the UK in comparison with

23,000 elected local government councillors (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002). This is one indicator of the significance of these new forms of governance.

For all the talk of putting communities first, there is a danger that the complexity of local governance will fragment and dilute the public voice, and that important lessons will not be transferred. This project offers the opportunity to establish the extent, form and impact of public engagement in new forms of governance, and to establish good-practice lessons to guide future developments.

Local knowledge or local representation: what's the role of citizens and users?

There is still considerable uncertainty about the role of citizens and users in citizen-centred governance.

- Are they there as individuals to provide their views and expertise as people who live in a community, have particular needs or interests, or use specific public services?

- Or are they there to represent a wider community, and to speak for and be accountable to this constituency?

A key task for those designing and managing citizen-centred governance, and a challenge for citizens and users who are involved, is to establish the balance between these roles and how they play in at different points. For example, if residents or service users are on a management committee or board, are they there principally as individual experts or as community representatives? Other JRF studies have pointed to the problem of people from the voluntary and community sector believing they were nominated as individuals but then being expected to speak for their sector (Maguire and Truscott, 2007).

The way in which their role is defined – whether it is by those individuals themselves, the rest of the management committee or the wider community – can enhance or limit effective engagement in local governance. Is their role about *local knowledge* or *local representation*?

Local knowledge

The idea of *local knowledge* is that citizens and users have expertise to contribute to the formulation of policy, and the design and delivery of services. Traditionally, expertise was regarded as something that was restricted to professionals who used their training and skills to advise politicians. Now, it is recognised that these are not the only experts. Participation in governance focuses attention on the distinctive knowledge that citizens and users can legitimately offer to decision-making, complementing professional knowledge.

Local knowledge is about citizens and users contributing knowledge based on their own experience. Local knowledge offers an understanding of what is important and how things work in a particular neighbourhood or service. Citizens bring knowledge of the issues, needs and priorities in a local community. For example, users have detailed insights into individual services and the way in which a series of services do or do not join up to meet specific needs. These specific insights contrast with professional knowledge that is more concerned with general ideas of how things should be done.

From a local knowledge perspective, engagement in governance involves creating understandings through open, informal and deliberative relationships between citizens and professionals, managers and politicians. It is assumed that this process will benefit all parties. Deliberative forums, citizens' juries and community conferences are ways of bringing together individuals from a range of relevant publics to discuss and debate their needs and possible policy options. It can also involve citizens in conducting their own research.

Local representation

Local representation emphasises how participation in governance can make decision-making more democratic. Engagement in governance is about 'representing' the views of particular local constituencies into the decision-making process through formal mechanisms such as partnership or management boards.

The expectation is that such representatives are able to speak for a particular group or constituency and this will give greater legitimacy to the decisions taken. They are also in a position to ensure greater accountability to key stakeholders. Considerable attention is given to who takes part in terms of the extent to which they can legitimately be seen to 'represent' those they speak for (Maguire and Truscott, 2007).

The intended benefits and outcomes are enhanced legitimacy of the governance institution and the society at large, for example through increasing social capital, social cohesion and trust in government. Although participants may also gain benefits, for example confidence and skills in large meetings, this is not the primary goal. In the context of a plural and diverse society, the creation of ways through which a variety of positions can be represented in governance structures can enhance the quality of local democracy.

Analysing citizen-centred governance

The governance changes that affect British cities and communities have proceeded with little public debate. Yet they can be considered an experiment in developing citizen-centred governance – enabling people to work collectively to shape public services to meet their needs.

This is a major change in the way communities are governed. In the next chapter, we analyse the impact of these changes on one city – Birmingham.

2 Understanding the new governance

New Labour, new governance

There has been considerable experimentation with new forms of governance since New Labour was elected in 1997. The aim has been to design ways of governing that are more appropriate to the complexity of public policy problems and the diversity of local communities than either the hierarchical welfare state institutions introduced in the 1950s, or the market-based models used during the 1980s and 1990s.

The main characteristics of the local governance of public services under New Labour have been the following.

- A focus on issue- and locality-based approaches, with local partnerships across agencies providing a means of developing shared solutions to interconnected policy problems.

- An emphasis on engaging service users, residents, citizens and other stakeholders in the process of governance.

- A renewed focus on consumer choice and a desire to diversify the governance of service delivery to enhance this.

- The central specification of policy objectives and outcome targets to which local partnerships must respond. Linked to this has been an emphasis on performance management, evidence-driven policy-making and evaluation.

- The development of multi-level governance, in which activity at the local level shapes and is shaped by government at regional, national and European levels.

This approach has been implemented in different ways, in response to government priorities and local preferences. For example, community engagement has had a higher priority in very locally based initiatives designed to address problems of social exclusion, such as New Deal for Communities (NDC) and Sure Start, than it has in initiatives intended to provide a strategic vision for the area and to align individual agency programmes to enable delivery, such as LSPs.

Time-limited area-based initiatives (ABIs) such as health action zones (HAZ), Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) partnerships and education action zones have been used in many cases. These target specific areas in order to deliver specific policy objectives. In some cases, these were tightly defined neighbourhoods; in others (e.g. HAZ), they could be large areas cutting across and combining local authority boundaries.

New ways of working were developed within such initiatives, in particular collaborative approaches involving agencies from the statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors. These were intended to demonstrate the value of partnership working. In addition, there was a desire to mainstream such approaches so that they became the normal method through which public governance and service delivery was undertaken.

These developments in citizen-centred governance have been affected by the speed of other policy changes in the last decade. For example, HAZ were effectively submerged by policy change within the NHS and local government (Barnes *et al.*, 2005). However, the length of time required to deliver outcome objectives such as improved health and community well-being has also been recognised in the long timescales – sometimes up to ten years – attached to partnership initiatives such as New Deal for Communities, Sure Start and the Children's Fund.

The nature of the partnership arrangements that have emerged in the wake of this shift in thinking about public policy and governance has been diverse – to the extent that some commentators have suggested that it is not possible to define what 'partnership' is (Powell and Glendinning, 2002). They may comprise:

- bilateral or multilateral relationships;

- operating at very different levels of policy-making or service delivery;

- motivated by a voluntary coming together in recognition of shared aims and interests in order to bid for resources not available to single organisations, or resulting from a central government requirement to collaborate.

Often, some form of partnership board will be established as the key decision-making body. In larger and multi-purpose partnerships, the board may establish a number of sub-boards or working groups with delegated responsibilities. In contexts where public or user involvement is prioritised, such involvement may take place at this level rather than at the level of the partnership board. However, the local authority or PCT will often still be a key player, supporting the development and progress of the partnership through seconded staff and managerial and political support, and acting as the accountable body through which financial and legal transactions are undertaken.

Only some of the new forms of governance are defined as partnerships. Others are free-standing legal entities. For example, NHS foundation trusts and community-led social housing companies (see Chapter 4) offer new ways of governing public services with innovative forms of citizen and user involvement.

Mapping the patchwork of governance: the case of Birmingham

In order to see what these new forms of governance look like in practice we mapped their impact on one area – the City of Birmingham. Owing to the multiplicity of governance arrangements, we concentrated on giving an illustrative picture. This reflects the main governance bodies and also gives a cross-section of different types and policy areas (Table 1). Many of these comprise different levels of decision-making within them – for example, at city, neighbourhood and sectoral level. The result is a wide-ranging, complex system of governance.

Table 1 Illustrative mapping of governance arrangements within City of Birmingham

Governance body	No.	Area	Focus
Birmingham City Council	1	Whole city	Local public services
District committees	10	Parliamentary constituencies	Local public services
Ward committees	40	Local authority wards	Local public services
Birmingham Strategic Partnership	1	Whole city	Strategic vision for the city
District strategic partnerships	10	Parliamentary constituencies	Strategic vision for districts
NHS primary care trusts	3	One-third of city each	Primary health care
Community safety partnership	1	Whole city	Crime reduction and community safety
Learning and Skills Council	1	Whole city and beyond	Training and further education
Connexions	1	Whole city and beyond	Young people's employment and training
West Midlands Police	1	Operational command units across city	Policing
Business Link	1	Whole city and beyond	Business development support
Single Regeneration Budget partnership	1	North-west Birmingham	Regeneration
New Deal for Communities	2	Two areas within city	Regeneration
Regeneration zone	2	Two areas within city	Strategic regeneration investment
Excellence in Cities	51	All Birmingham secondary schools	Improving educational achievements
Sure Start, children's centres and early years centres	21	South-west, east and north Birmingham	Children, parents and communities
Registered social landlords	Several	Across city	Housing and community renewal
Eastside partnership	1	City centre	Technology- and education-led regeneration
Sports action zone	1	Within city	Sports-led education
A38 technology corridor	1	South-west from Birmingham city centre and beyond	Encouraging high technology
Urban living: housing market renewal pathfinders	1	North-west Birmingham and beyond	Improving housing markets
Enterprising Communities	1	South-east Birmingham	Regeneration
Neighbourhood Renewal Fund	1	City council ward and district committees	Regeneration
Birmingham neighbourhood forums	70	Substantial coverage of city, based on self-defined neighbourhoods	Neighbourhood advocacy

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Table 1 Illustrative mapping of governance arrangements within City of Birmingham (Continued)

Governance body	No.	Area	Focus
Community networks	20	Parliamentary constituencies plus special interest networks	Community advocacy
Children's Fund	7	Seven areas within city	Children, parents and communities
NHS foundation trusts	2	Catchments across city and beyond	Acute health care
Further education college corporations	8	Catchments across city and beyond	Further education
Primary school governing bodies	267	Catchment areas within city	Primary education
Secondary school governing bodies	114	Catchment areas within city	Secondary education

These initiatives have developed largely in isolation from one another. They often originate in central government policy, fed through different ministries to the local level. Although LSPs provide a co-ordinating mechanism, the system of governance in Birmingham and other cities and counties remains very complex, and without an overall design or effective oversight of the changes that are made, as we discuss further in Chapter 5.

The pattern we find in Birmingham is not unique to this city. How cities and communities are governed, and who governs them, is seldom transparent and often highly complex (Robinson and Shaw, *et al.*, 2000). While, on the one hand, central government calls for increased transparency and accountability of elected local authorities, on the other hand, it is stimulating the creation of a dense web of new governance forms that lack many of the basic democratic safeguards of local councils (Skelcher *et al.*, 2005).

Our mapping demonstrates the complex geography of governance within Birmingham.

- Some bodies cover the whole city – e.g. the City Council and the LSP.

- Others have coterminous areas within the city boundary – e.g. the three PCTs.

- Many are focused on small neighbourhoods within the city – e.g. the SRB, NDC and Sure Start partnerships

- Some areas of the city have many levels of governance (especially areas of disadvantage) while others have few.

- A few overlap the city boundary – e.g. Connexions and the housing renewal pathfinder.

A typical inner-city neighbourhood will have:

- a number of overlapping regeneration or neighbourhood renewal projects;

- together with Children's Fund and Sure Start projects;

- all working alongside district and ward committees of the city council, a district strategic partnership of public, private and voluntary and community sector stakeholders, community networks and a neighbourhood forum;

- within the mainstream agencies of the city council, PCT, police and other bodies;

- and a city-wide LSP shaping overall regeneration policy;

- parents will be involved in governing bodies for primary and secondary schools, and may wish to stand for further education (FE) college governing boards;

- while citizens and patients may be members of the NHS foundation trust for the area.

We can understand this complexity by looking at disadvantaged areas served by NDC projects. The Aston Pride NDC was established in 2001 and is intended to run until 2011. It covers an area from the city centre north-east to the M6 motorway. This area takes in five neighbourhood forums and includes local service delivery arms of the local authority, police, fire service, NHS, community and voluntary sectors, schools and colleges, Jobcentre, the local community and the business sector. The NDC seeks to work with all these agencies.

These bodies create new opportunities for involvement. Alongside a wide range of involvement activities, citizens and users are involved in some of the decision-making boards. For example, one NDC in Birmingham has 32 board members, including twelve elected residents and eleven community partners.

The analysis shows that residents and groups in disadvantaged areas are likely to have more formal opportunities to be involved in shaping and deciding public policy for their neighbourhood. However, they will also experience more demands to become involved and face a much more complex governance landscape. As the NDC experience has demonstrated, community capacity-building is necessary to support people's engagement in such contexts.

The dynamics of the new governance

This picture changes over time. Governance arrangements are reorganised in response to national policy changes and local political factors. So, no sooner do citizens and users get to know one form of governance than it is changed or transformed into another. This again particularly affects people living in disadvantaged areas. City Challenge is replaced by SRB, is replaced by Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and so on.

This process of constant change and the impact on citizens and users is demonstrated through two small case studies (Boxes 1 and 2). These are based on initial data collection in the period 2000–02, as part of previous research, and revisits to the sites in 2006 in order to understand what had happened since. Our analysis uses the ideas of local knowledge and local representation (see Chapter 1).

Box 1 The ward advisory board

The local authority had created ward committees of local councillors as a focus for local decision-making. In parallel, there were non-statutory ward advisory boards (WABs) of the ward councillors, local community groups and public service organisations.

At our first visit in 2001, the WABs were designed on the principle of local knowledge, to include a range of local views and opinions on matters affecting different communities and groups in the ward. This was intended to inform the WAB's recommendations to the ward committees on the allocation of the £80,000 per annum Community Chest.

We examined the process in one ward. In 2001, the ward committee had a majority of Labour Party members and a WAB containing a large and diverse range of community organisations, including older people's groups, residents' groups, church groups, youth groups and others. The WAB also included the chairs of four neighbourhood forums, voluntarily created community-based arenas for discussing more localised issues.

Becoming a member of the WAB was a very informal process. There were no selection criteria other than residence in the ward and no election procedure. People who showed an interest in the WAB became members. Local advertising, contact with council officials and other WAB members, and sometimes the prospect of gaining funding for their organisation or community activity encouraged citizens to join the WAB.

When we revisited the case study in 2006, a number of changes had taken place. Membership had been formalised and comprised the ward councillors and the chair of each neighbourhood forum. This gave greater emphasis to the principle of local representation. The neighbourhood forums, to which the original wider membership of the WAB now had to relate, undertook the local knowledge role.

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This change in membership was stimulated partly by an increase in the Community Chest from £80,000 to £300,000 per annum, as a result of NRF status, and partly by a higher degree of party political contest within the ward. Consequently, the ward councillors became more sensitive to the political impact of the WAB's recommendations.

These changes provoked considerable local opposition. Citizens complained that the local representation model was not adequate. Neighbourhood forums did not cover the whole ward, disenfranchising people and groups in the two large neighbourhoods without direct representation on the WAB.

Box 2 The Youth Forum

A regeneration initiative was located in an inner-city area. Young people in the area were aware that resources for regeneration had been gained in part because of the disadvantage young people faced. However, they had little involvement in the regeneration partnership's governance and were unable to contribute their local knowledge on issues affecting their constituency or to influence spending decisions.

At our first visit in 2002, a Youth Forum comprising Pakistani Muslim young people had been established by a local young man in order to get them involved in sports and other activities, and to support them in representing their interests to official bodies. Separately, the council's Youth Service ran a youth project in the locality. The two groups agreed that a conference on young people's issues should be held later in the year, organised by young people themselves with the assistance of the Youth Service.

The council's youth workers created a conference planning group. Youth Forum members were involved, alongside young people from other communities. Meetings were held at council premises and chaired by youth workers.

The Youth Service decided that the planning meeting should be divided into two parts: one section for the young people themselves to plan the conference; and another for youth workers to develop a drug survey. It was anticipated that the youth workers would oversee the survey design, while the young people would advise on its administration, and the results would form a central feature of the conference.

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Youth Forum members became frustrated because they felt that they were not being sufficiently acknowledged. Forum members claimed a particular legitimacy to speak on behalf of the young people in the area because of their local knowledge and the demonstrable commitment that they had made to their support. Youth workers appealed to the idea of 'representativeness' to support wider involvement, and were reluctant to give the Forum a higher status than other groups. Eventually the Youth Forum representatives walked out. They continued to try to organise a youth conference, but struggled to secure funding without the backing of the Youth Service.

Although the initial purpose of the youth conference was to access the local knowledge of young people in the area, the Youth Service adopted an 'educative' stance in relation to Youth Forum members. This appeared to prioritise informing them about official procedures and encouraging them to express their claims in ways that would not threaten local officials. Thus both groups drew on the ideas of local representation and local knowledge, but applied these in different ways because they sought rather different objectives from participation.

When we revisited in 2006, we found that there were no ongoing initiatives to engage young people in the area. The official view was that the Youth Service had successfully responded to what young people wanted. Indeed, the young man who had been the initiator of the Youth Forum was now working for the Youth Service. In other words, the local knowledge requirements for informed policy-making had been fulfilled and there was no continuing motivation to secure local representation.

The two cases illustrate a number of features.

- The ideas of local knowledge and local representation can be used to analyse how governance operates, and therefore inform its design.

- The formal structures of governance are subject to change. In the first case, the WAB continued to exist, but its membership and purpose were changed. In the second case, the Youth Forum was discontinued.

- Changes to governance structures take place often without any clear process of ratification, or even a wider public debate about the value of the existing structure and proposed changes.

- Changes to the structures of governance affect the ability and motivation of individuals and groups to engage, and may positively disadvantage some.

- The consequence of this is that the democratic quality of local governance can be enhanced or reduced.

These case studies reveal that governance consists of both formal structures and informal processes.

- The formal structures consist of such things as management committees, reporting procedures, financial regulation and consultation requirements.

- The informal processes are the way in which people involved in governance put these into place, adapt them and create new ways of doing things. A typical example is that consultation meetings may be organised at times and locations that minimise, or promote, attendance.

- An important aspect of the informal 'rules of the game' is the way in which debate is conducted. Some contributions can be ruled 'out of order' because of the way in which they are expressed.

Making sense of the new governance

We have identified a number of different forms that new governance arrangements take and we have identified what can be a confusing diversity in such forms within one city. The small case studies also illustrate the dynamic nature of governance and the effects that changes can have on public engagement. We also show that we need to understand both the formal structures and the informal day-to-day practices of those involved in governance.

In the next chapter, we explore how these relationships between governance design and engagement have played out through detailed case studies in four different governance structures in Birmingham and the wider West Midlands. Our initial view was that the first two case studies are governance structures that emphasised local knowledge, while the other two focused on local representation. However, as we studied these, it became clear that both principles are evident, although to different degrees, in each case.

3 Designing citizen-centred governance

Surfacing governance choices

Designing citizen-centred governance involves, among other things, a judgement about the extent to which *local knowledge* or *local representation* should be the main design principle.

When designing for local knowledge, it is important to recognise that processes should allow different perspectives to be surfaced in ways that enable people to learn from others and gain a better understanding of the issues they are facing. This involves identifying the different individuals and groups likely to have a perspective on the policy issue and ensuring that they can participate. The aim of the governance process is to enable a constructive dialogue informed by these multiple perspectives.

On the other hand, designing for local representation involves creating processes to select individuals who directly represent the interests or views of specific neighbourhoods, social groups or service users. These individuals speak on behalf of others and so accountability also becomes important. This focuses attention on the means by which people can be 'chosen' (elected or selected) to act as representatives and on the mechanisms through which they can give and be held to account.

The choice is not about one or the other, but where the emphasis should lie and what this implies for the design of citizen-centred governance. Emphasising local representation leads to a different form of governance than when local knowledge has the priority.

Public managers and others involved in designing governance seldom think explicitly about whether they are trying to engage people to enhance democratic decision-making via broadening representation and deepening accountability, or improve decision-making through accessing a wider range of understanding about the issues being addressed. This lack of clarity can cause confusion and lead attempts at citizen-centred governance to be less effective.

We analysed the design of four different governance structures – a Sure Start local partnership; a community-led housing association with a broad social and economic development role; an LSP; and an NHS foundation trust hospital (Table 2). We undertook interviews with managers, board members and citizens involved in these governance structures, and reviewed documents and websites. We concluded from our initial analysis of these organisations that the Sure Start partnership and community-led housing association emphasised local knowledge but had elements of local representation, while the LSP and NHS foundation trust were based predominantly on local representation.

Table 2 Comparison of citizen-centred governance in case studies

Governance body	Sure Start	Community housing association	Local strategic partnership	Foundation hospital
Purpose and scale	Education and welfare-related services for young children and their families in suburban mixed-tenure area	Inner-city 1960s' council estate, recently transferred to housing association, which has demolished and rebuilt property and undertakes wider community, social and economic provision	Multi-agency partnership overseeing economic, social and physical regeneration of urban area comprising several towns	Hospital services for large urban population
Governance form	Independent unincorporated association with local authority as accountable body, changing to company limited by guarantee and later integrated into local authority	Registered social landlord regulated by Housing Corporation. Board of elected tenant directors, independent appointed directors and executive directors	Unincorporated association whose board is composed of civic, business and community leaders	Public benefit corporation, with considerable autonomy within NHS subject to corporate, financial and service regulation. Board of independent appointed non-executive directors and executive directors
Source of governance design	Government guidance and standard 'unincorporated association' form of partnership, adapted through local experience; local decision to reconstitute as company limited by guarantee, another standard legal form for partnerships	Standard model within social housing sector, developed in discussion with tenants and stakeholders	Developed locally and later influenced by central government guidance and requirements, especially linked to Neighbourhood Renewal Fund status	Existing NHS board structure plus ideas from member-controlled mutual organisations

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Table 2 Comparison of citizen-centred governance in case studies (Continued)

Governance body	Sure Start	Community housing association	Local strategic partnership	Foundation hospital
Governance orientation	Local knowledge, with limited local representation. Parents were recruited to the board, which then sought to operate in a way that accessed their local knowledge. Engagement is both a purpose of the initiative and a way of undertaking governance	Local knowledge, with local representation. Community-elected tenant representatives, independent members and staff members. Board draws heavily on local knowledge of tenants and community groups	Local representation, but varies across the governance design. Limited local representation on the LSP board, but greater representation and local knowledge through various area-based forums	Local representation outside the board, through formal and largely consultative role of governors elected by the membership or nominated by the board; local knowledge through separate public and patient participation arrangements
Evolution of governance	Increased formality of governance in response to changing role of organisation, policy change and wider involvement of citizens/users. Emphasis has been on how to adapt formal processes to enable inclusion	Flexibility to alter process and style of meetings to facilitate tenant participation and communications	Has changed to meet challenges arising from regeneration and community involvement initiatives. Much evolution is a response to new government legislation and policies	None as yet

Valuing local knowledge and meeting specific needs – Sure Start local partnership

Introduction

Our first example is a local case study of a national initiative. Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs) were introduced in 1999 to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. They were located in some of the most deprived areas of the country and aimed to promote child, family and community development through cross-agency activity and new service development.

Programmes were deliberately located outside local authorities and were based on individual partnerships that could choose whether to be incorporated in not-for-profit companies or to become management boards for the SSLP. Parental involvement in the governance arrangements was expected, and programmes were also expected to implement other ways of engaging children, families and communities.

It is hard to draw a firm line between parental involvement in governance arrangements and broader parental engagement in projects and services developed as part of the programmes. Parents and carers have been involved in some aspect of the management in the vast majority of programmes, and the majority of partnerships included parent representatives (see Chapter 4).

The local Sure Start partnership

In our case study, in common with many other Sure Start initiatives, the programme built on already existing activity. In this instance, there was a local Children and Families' Centre that had a very successful track record in engaging parents. The centre was invited to be the lead partner for the Sure Start project.

When the Sure Start programme was launched, the governance of the initiative was initially the responsibility of an interim advisory board (IAB), with the local authority retaining financial accountability. The IAB included representatives from the Children and Families' Centre, social services and health agencies, and parents and other stakeholders in the community.

Membership

Membership of the IAB was of three types.

1. Based on service delivery – representatives of those delivering the programme.

2. Based on accountability – the health authority (HA) as the 'accountable body' and local authority councillors as local elected representatives.

3. Based on local knowledge and experience – parental involvement from the local communities to 'ground' the programme.

Eight places were reserved for parents. Most of the parents who put themselves up for election for the board were already involved in the previous project, but many had to be encouraged to put themselves forward. During the early days of Sure Start, three resigned, citing pressure of other commitments and feeling unable to contribute to the work of the board.

Developing parental involvement

The creation of Sure Start fundamentally affected the identity of the programme in the eyes of parents who were involved. The governance changes led to parents being anxious that they were losing control of their centre and that 'men in suits' would take over. The chair of the IAB described this process:

> People were concerned that 'their centre' would disappear. It felt like that because there were people who had come on the management committee representing partner agencies and they happened to be men and women in suits.

They were also concerned that the area was being publicly identified as a 'poor area'. A health manager commented:

> The initiative becoming 'Sure Start' changed something fundamentally for local people. Although there is a lot of poverty, unemployment, teenage pregnancies, etc. in the area, people do not want to see their area described like this in the local press, characterised as 'the poor'. And who would?

The nature of the IAB meetings gradually changed. Early on, parents rarely spoke (and sometimes apologised for doing so), exchanges were dominated by a small number of experienced participants, and the atmosphere was rather formal. One parent commented:

> It's a little daunting at first, because you sit round this table with all these professional people and you think 'I'm just a mother!' After the first couple of meetings *[that nervousness]* was dispelled and now I think nothing of actually giving any input. I will say if there is something I don't understand … And I think the other parents that are on the board as well, we have all grown together. I think we were all quite nervous and used to stick together … Now, when I go to a meeting, I could be sitting next to a councillor or professional and it doesn't faze me.

However, great effort was made to change the nature of meetings to ensure participation and to facilitate exchanges. Parents exhibited growing confidence, and their input demonstrated the value of local and experiential knowledge in the contributions they made. For example, parents were able to use their knowledge of the importance of the toy library to ensure that ways would be found to keep this open during the summer when the host school was closed.

This experience of seeking ways to ensure that parental input went beyond a representative presence within the IAB and that their involvement ensured an effective contribution of local knowledge to the programme was considered likely to survive the shift from the IAB structure to the company limited by guarantee. The chair said:

> It doesn't matter if it is a management committee, or a board, that structure of itself is not an important thing. It is about me and others working together so they see themselves as valued and see their opinions as being valued.

A range of methods was adopted to ensure that governance processes were not overly formal, and those aspects of governance that would be likely to 'turn off' parents were dealt with elsewhere. For example, a sub-committee was set up to deal with financial planning and business management issues. This could be interpreted as excluding parents from decision-making about such matters. But, in combination with other ways of ensuring engagement, this enabled parents to draw on their local knowledge and to contribute on issues that were important to them. A more formal representative role might have undermined their willingness and capacity to take part.

Further changes to governance

After two years of running first the Children and Families' Centre and then the Sure Start through management committees, it was agreed to establish a company limited by guarantee to continue to manage the Sure Start programme. The composition of the new board is 50 per cent parents, 30 per cent partner organisations and 20 per cent independent members appointed for their skill or knowledge.

The chair of the board viewed this decision as the outcome of a gradual process during which parents involved in the centre and the newer group of professionals involved in Sure Start got to know each other and established ways of working together. As the quote above illustrates, she saw the informal ways of working as much more important than the formal structure.

However the structures – whether it was the IAB or the centre's management arrangements – provided the mechanisms that enabled these relationships to develop and mature. For example, the new Sure Start company did away with some of the formality of the IAB and reclaimed the informality of the centre's management meetings. A member commented:

> At the centre's management committee we sat around on comfortable chairs in a circle and some people sat on the floor. And we chatted, but we got the business done. The Sure Start board took place at a large table with loads of paper.
>
> So *[with the new company]* we compromised. We sit round in a circle, we still have a lot of papers, but we don't have tables. We sit in comfortable chairs. It is a more relaxed feel.
>
> So what the meeting looks like is actually at the heart of governance.

Managing major issues

The positive experience of working together was put to the test when reductions in the Sure Start budget meant that the board had to consider ways of reducing its expenditure. These issues were difficult for parent representatives on the board to engage with. A small finance committee was created in order to deal with these issues. Its membership was from the professional representatives with experience of budget management.

However, there is a pre-meeting between the board's chair and parent and resident members a few days before each board meeting to enable an initial discussion of the papers and to clarify the financial issues. In addition, the intention is that the papers are presented in a way that is comprehensible and enables people both to question them and to make a credible decision:

> We try to keep the board papers quite tight. We challenge those writing the reports to put them on one side of A4. It feels thinner and more manageable to read. We encourage bullet points rather than long paragraphs. Just the key things are put there. And we encourage managers to come up with the good news.

Now the new company has been established, two key issues remain for parent and citizen engagement. The first is the challenge of enabling parents and residents to become engaged in the initiative and gradually develop to become board members. This has been a priority for the new board, but it is seeing success:

> Convincing parents that they can come to a Sure Start meeting was a challenge once. Convincing them to go to a training programme was a challenge once. Convincing them to become a board member is a challenge – so we meet that challenge.

The board's chair sees that success as in large part due to the project workers: 'It is the workers on the ground – not the board – that are working on that confidence'.

The second issue is that the Sure Start programme is coming to an end. It is expected that the work it has been doing will be incorporated within the remit of children's centres, managed by local authorities. While parental involvement remains a commitment, it is not yet clear how this will be enabled in practice.

Box 3 Sure Start – lessons for practice

- The programme built on an existing and highly participative project.

- Involvement of relevant citizens and users' groups was at the heart of the programme from the start.

- The style of meetings was designed with users in mind, avoiding the formality of public sector boards.

- Emphasis on short reports written to the point.

(Continued)

- Pre-meetings for parent and resident board members to enable them to develop their understanding of the issues in the papers.

- The governance design enabled effective contribution of local knowledge and also a good level of local representation.

- The role of project workers is the key to building parental and resident involvement that will gradually lead to them becoming board members.

- Commitment by local managers working closely with users helped the initiative manage the transformation in governance to a company limited by guarantee.

Local knowledge, representation and neighbourhood renewal: the community-led housing association

Introduction

Until recently, this area close to a city centre contained council-owned tower blocks and maisonettes developed in the 1960s and 1970s. It is an area with a history of poor services, concerns about community safety and housing in need of reinvestment. The area has now been regenerated, a process led by the Community Housing Association – a community-led social housing provider.

In the late 1990s, high-profile protests by residents about poor housing quality and local services combined with the City Council's concern about how repairs and regeneration were to be funded. The City Council recognised that, if it could establish a partnership with residents, it could bid for estate regeneration monies from the Estates Renewal Challenge Fund. However, the council had to deal with the problems caused by a long history of difficult tenant and landlord relations. An independent participant in the process commented that the solution to this problem placed tenants at the heart of the emerging governance arrangements:

> There was mistrust of the council and a need to persuade sceptical tenants with the engagement of tenants' organisations. Tenants were crucial in putting together the business plan.

A senior manager from the City Council reinforced the importance of understanding the way local people defined the problems that needed addressing, i.e. the importance of accessing local knowledge:

> Public engagement was important from day 1. In 1996, tenants petitioned the council. Working groups were established to work with residents, the police and others to improve the area. That process involved massive consultation to see what problems there were and to find solutions. In the early days it was all fairly acrimonious. It was 'the suits' from the council. Breaking down barriers was important, convincing people we would do what they wanted.

A partnership arrangement was eventually agreed and a bid compiled. Then, in 1998, a majority of residents living in the area voted to transfer 2,800 council-owned houses to a new social housing organisation – the Community Housing Association. All residents in the area became members of the Community Housing Association. The organisation received £83 million in government grants and private sector funding to help regenerate the area. From the outset, the intention was to obtain the views of residents and use them to decide priorities for action to improve neighbourhoods.

The governance model

The Community Housing Association is a not-for-profit housing association and charitable company limited by guarantee, registered with the Housing Corporation. There is also a non-charitable, unregistered subsidiary organisation that manages environmental work in the area.

The association has offices in the city centre and a local estate office. It is currently responsible for over 1,000 refurbished and new properties, mainly blocks of flats and maisonettes.

The Community Housing Association aspires to create a safe and socially inclusive community that has high levels of resident involvement in decisions. The governance model engages with both local representation and local knowledge. Local representation is reflected in the formal board structures and resident election of some directors. Local knowledge informs the design of participation structures around the board.

Membership

At the time the Community Housing Association was created, residents established a steering group and worked with councillors and various professionals to tackle strategic and day-to-day housing and neighbourhood management issues. It was necessary to find ways to work together to manage the different estates in the area and complete a range of land, property and planning deals. This involved a close partnership between tenants and the Community Housing Association's professional staff. A board member commented:

> This is an organisation strongly influenced by tenants but there is also a strong professional element of influence from the council.

Training and support for residents interested in the work of the board led to a sense that they became 'empowered', as a senior manager observed:

> People on the board, generally, have been on residents' groups or working groups … People start to feel empowered, then they come onto the board. It is about an introduction to the way the board works. It sounds easy saying 'Come onto this committee or board', but it can be daunting for people. We have sent people on training, on getting their voice heard, chairing meetings. It is about getting confidence, feeling comfortable in a board role.

Residents have the largest block of seats on the board, with seven places, but not an overall majority. This reflects the way in which a strong orientation to local representation in the governance design emerged as people became more confident about the role they could play. The other nine seats are distributed to five independent directors, three council representatives and one co-opted member.

There was much in-depth deliberation over the composition of the board and the balance between resident, councillor and independent representation. A participant in the process commented:

> We had a debate and decided we were about having residents in control … *[seven rather than five on the board]* … We had a debate with the Housing Corporation who thought we should not have more than one-third tenants on the board but eventually we got an agreement in our favour. The Housing Corporation was concerned about the skills of independent members that tenants would be less likely to possess.

The resident members on the board serve for three years, with elections staggered to maintain some continuity of membership. The council members on the board are nominated by the City Council and can be either councillors or officers. A councillor and board member highlighted the importance of a representative structure, but also indicated the way in which different meanings of 'representation' influenced perceptions of the legitimacy of the board composition:

> The board is representative, with a tenant, councillor and independents structure. It is also structured for tenants. *[The aim]* is to bring in tenants' representatives from different areas *[in the estate]* and also help to take care of leaseholders. The board does comprise a geographical spread *[of tenants' representatives]* to match the spread of properties. It is representative concerning gender and ethnicity. There are independents with particular skills, to make the board as effective as possible.

A tenant board member felt the configuration of seats on the board suited the needs of the organisation and had helped to ensure it was successful:

> The residents on the board *[rotate]* – they are there for a period of three years. This is a key point regarding the success of the board. We did have problems in the early days with attendance *[at board meetings]*. Some people were not really able to join in. The council nominates the councillors and independents are chosen or selected after advertising. They are selected by a panel with residents on it.

The board meets six times a year and undertakes detailed work through its committees. In addition to holding scheduled meetings, the board can convene up to four extra meetings each year to consider particular matters, review performance, or discuss strategy. A member commented:

> The demands on board members or directors as they are now called have changed. There was much planning activity and major decisions to begin with, then things moved onto estate management activities. Keeping the focus on strategic issues rather than managing the ship is difficult sometimes for tenants who want to be in the bowels of the ship.

However, it has been necessary to change some structures of the board and the way it operates to cope with the demands of an increased workload and pressure to deal with estate business. A senior manager described how meetings have changed:

> It was clear we could not get through the business, so we moved to
> bimonthly meetings and away-days (for example, to go through the
> business plan), a refinement brought in to consider bigger issues. People
> are happier now.

To some extent, local representation spreads beyond the board. A panel of residents and board members meets eight times a year to approve applications for grants up to £3,000 awarded to various local organisations and community groups. In 2006, the panel introduced a 'micro-grant', which was intended as a 'start-up' grant (of not more than £300) for individuals or unconstituted groups that wanted to set up a project of benefit to the local community.

Community involvement

The organisation has invested in the creation of various resident involvement opportunities. These reflect the principles of local knowledge. The idea is to engage residents in contributing their own local knowledge and ideas to the debate about the future development of the area and the nature of existing services and housing provision. The intention is to ensure residents are able to have influence over housing and neighbourhood policies. There are also four residents' associations and a neighbourhood forum.

The board meets in public and undertakes a number of other activities to inform residents and tenants of its work. A board member observed:

> Board meetings are open to the public but there are hardly ever any
> observers. There is a view meetings might become difficult to manage
> if too many people did turn up. They are not discouraged from attending
> but they are not actively encouraged either … Board meetings are not
> well advertised … There is a newsletter, bimonthly, delivered to every
> house. Tenants pay a pound to be members of the Community Housing
> Association. The AGM is open to members and about 40 to 50 people
> attend.

Governance in a changing context

The area is undergoing significant change in terms of both its physical character and the socio-economic profile of residents. There may also be issues in the future concerning board membership and changing patterns of tenure in the area. A manager observed:

> There is the changing profile of areas and stakeholders who were representative at the beginning. What happens later when there is a more mixed tenure? What new stakeholders are brought into the game?

A response has been to develop new arenas for engagement around local issues that indicate the need to renew access to local knowledge. A residents' conference launched this campaign:

> Getting people involved is about concentrating on themes rather than just getting involved in the Community Housing Association *per se*. For example, we are involved in encouraging tenants with the 'Respect' agenda, we do a lot of work on public art, getting residents' inputs … We fund a residents' researchers group, working with the local university.

In addition, a service review group that includes residents has been created. This meets on a regular basis with staff and other partners to scrutinise performance and the delivery of different housing and neighbourhood services. Other groups meet to monitor particular services, including rent collection, the collection of arrears and work to prevent or reduce crime.

Box 4 Community Housing Association – lessons for practice

- Mechanisms to gain access to local knowledge were important at the start of the process and it was necessary to renew these as the area underwent change.

- Putting the community at the heart of the governance design process enables questions of representation to be resolved in a way that emphasises local concerns.

- The number of different types of board member is important.

- There may be tension between formal representation on a board and the diversity of resident views.

(Continued)

- It is important to reflect on who is considered to learn about whose ways of working. There is a need to ensure that assumptions are not made about levels of knowledge and that these issues are regularly reviewed because of the rapidly changing policy and governance context.

- Governance arrangements may be set up with one community in mind, but the community can change. It is important that the governance structure is reviewed regularly with this issue in mind.

Representation from different sectors, linking strategy with services – the local strategic partnership

Introduction

An LSP is a non-statutory multi-agency body coterminous with a local authority boundary. The aim of the LSP is to bring together at the local level different public, private, and voluntary and community sector organisations. It is based largely on a local representation model of governance, although local knowledge principles are incorporated to some extent.

At the time of writing, the role of the LSP is to plan and oversee the delivery of co-ordinated activities and resource allocations in order to improve the well-being of the community, using the local area agreement (LAA) and sustainable community strategy as core mechanisms. The duty to co-operate introduced by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) gives greater weight to LAAs in this respect. In the most disadvantaged local authorities (including our case study), the LSP is also responsible for developing a local neighbourhood renewal strategy and allocating Neighbourhood Renewal Funds. The Community Empowerment Fund was designed specifically to promote community involvement in LSPs in these areas, although the Community Empowerment Fund no longer exists as a discrete resource.[1]

The governance model

The challenge has been to create a governance arrangement that will facilitate collaboration at a strategic level between a wide range of different interests. This needs to enable the creation of a shared vision, collective decision-making and mutual agreement on delivery in relation to sustainable economic and social regeneration, and improved infrastructure and public services in an area.

There is no central prescription on the governance design for LSPs, although there is some official guidance (DCLG, 2001). However, its core members are public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations. Government strongly encourages the involvement of councillors and effective engagement with communities.

The LSP's governance structure has five main elements (Table 3). Local representation is the predominant mode, with some elements of local knowledge. The governance of the LSP has evolved in response to local conditions. There was a long history of partnership working and community involvement in the area, and the LSP built on this – especially in relation to community involvement in the town boards and thematic groups. At the same time, there were new initiatives related to the economic revitalisation of the sub-region within which the local authority was located, and the LSP design was changing to also accommodate this more strategic agenda.

Table 3 LSP governance structure

Element	Membership	Role	Principles
Stakeholder conference	Representatives from local community and voluntary organisations, public service agencies and business	Debating the needs of the area and its communities; shaping LSP strategy; debating LSP performance	Local knowledge, with local representation
LSP board (executive group)	Civic, public sector, business and voluntary and community sector leaders	Overall strategy and performance, securing commitment of partners	Local representation
Local public service board	Senior managers from key public service organisations plus voluntary sector representative and LSP board chair	Negotiating and delivering the LAA; oversight of delivery; LSP performance monitoring	Local representation
Thematic partnerships	Public sector, business and voluntary and community sector representatives with an interest in each theme	Co-ordinated delivery of actions and outcomes to improve the quality of life for residents and businesses within each theme	Local representation, with local knowledge
Town boards	Public sector, business and voluntary and community sector representatives from each town	Local service improvement and co-ordination for local citizens and stakeholders in towns and neighbourhoods, with specific targeting of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and communities	Local representation, with local knowledge

The development of new partnership structures and functions has resulted in changes to the membership of the LSP board, and there are a wider number of community and voluntary sector organisation representatives involved. The 'representative' function of these individuals is compensated to some degree by the annual stakeholder conference, which has a greater emphasis on local knowledge.

Stakeholder conference

The stakeholder conference offers the greatest emphasis on local knowledge. This is an annual one-day conference of stakeholders that discusses the partnership performance report and an annual 'state of the area' report. In 2006, this was attended by over 200 people from a wide range of faith, community and voluntary organisations, alongside representatives from public and business bodies. The conference, which has been held for a number of years, reflects the idea of local knowledge. It provides a major opportunity for local people and organisations to debate the state of their community, offer insights from their own knowledge, and highlight priorities and ideas for the future.

LSP board

The LSP board members come from the public, private, and voluntary and community sectors (see Box 5). The leader and chief executive of the local authority, and the chairs and chief executives of the PCTs are always members, but otherwise it is generally left to the discretion of the member organisations to decide who to nominate. Membership is not time-limited and the nominated individual can be changed as his or her organisation desires.

Box 5 LSP board membership

Public

- Local authority (leader and chief executive plus cabinet members ex-officio)

- PCTs (chair and chief executive)

- Fire service

- Regional development agency

- Connexions

- Employment Service

- Government Office

- Police

- Learning and Skills Council

- LSP director

- FE colleges

- The five thematic partnerships

- Urban regeneration company

- New Deal for Communities partnership

- Sub-regional partnership of local authorities

- Groundwork

- Regeneration partnership

- Jobcentre Plus

Business

- Chamber of Commerce and Business Link

- Traders' association

- Developer

- Housing association

- Private sector business representatives (up to five)

(Continued)

Voluntary and community

- Council for Voluntary Organisations

- Ethnic Minorities Forum

- Race Equality Council

- Youth representatives (from Youth Parliament)

- Community empowerment network (up to six)

- Community arts centre

The membership is predominantly from the public sector, and recently it has been agreed that members of the local authority's cabinet can also attend on an ex-officio basis. However, there have been moves to strengthen representation from the other sectors. The private sector at large can nominate five representatives, the community empowerment network can nominate six representatives, and Youth Parliament can nominate two.

This structure reflects a local representation model in which there is no direct involvement of citizens, users or their organisations. Instead, umbrella voluntary and community organisations act as 'representatives' of the wider community. This role presents them with some difficulties because of the diverse nature of the voluntary and community sector, co-ordination mechanisms that are under-resourced and often informal, and the desire of individual organisations to be seen as independent (European Institute for Urban Affairs *et al.*, 2006).

The LSP chair and vice chair are appointed every two years. It is possible to appoint the chair for a further two-year term but, after that, they are required to stand down for a period of at least two years. Initially, the local authority leader chaired the LSP board. The current chair is a leading local business figure.

The partnership board meets four times a year. Its role is to provide leadership and maintain a co-ordinated and resolute vision for the future of the area. The aim is to monitor progress on the achievement of the sustainable community strategy and its strategic objectives. The annual partnership improvement plan is used to review priorities with regard to governance, vision and strategy.

LSP executive group

At the heart of the LSP is the executive group. This comprises senior managers from key public sector bodies and the partnership leads from the five thematic boards, including one voluntary and community sector representative and the LSP board chair (who is a business sector representative). The executive group has recently reformed as a local public service board (LPSB), and has a key role in negotiating and overseeing the delivery of the LAA. Its membership has been revised to include all major public agencies with resources relevant to the LAA, but retaining a voluntary sector representative. The LPSB delegates objectives to the thematic partnerships and monitors the allocation of partner resources to achieve organisational and partnership objectives. This gives a greater focus to decision-making in the LSP.

However, it is clear that the LPSB requires some elements of local knowledge to be included in the governance design in order for it to function. Interviewees recognise that the flow of information and intelligence from communities and neighbourhoods upwards to the LPSB will help to determine how proficient it is at identifying their priorities for action to improve an area or local services. A senior partnership manager commented: 'There are good connections with the community but they are not that sustainable or sophisticated'.

Thematic partnerships

There are five thematic partnerships. The children and young people's strategic partnership (CYPSP) and the health partnership (HP) focus on the health and well-being of young people and adults, respectively. The community safety partnership (CSP) focuses on the reduction and prevention of crime and anti-social behaviour, and the skills and economic regeneration partnership (SEP) focuses on creating a sustainable economy. The environment partnership (EP) focuses on creating a sustainable environment for people to live in.

Each of these partnerships is intended to provide the leadership and guidance needed to ensure the effective targeting of resources to address the different partnership themes and achieve partnership programme objectives.

The town boards

Town boards exist in each of the towns covered by the local authority. It is here that local representation becomes more widely defined and local knowledge also comes into the design.

The town boards are accountable to the local authority and the LSP partnership board. Their job is to influence partnership members and others to provide evidence that shows what they are doing to tackle different economic and social issues in their town.

However, there may be scope to reduce the number of town committees and other local bodies to improve the efficiency of town boards and facilitate the creation of robust town-based commissioning practice – with the local commissioning of services through GP practices, schools and children's centres, for example:

> We are trying to rationalise at the town level. It is too complicated at the moment, though including communities is important.

The aim is to achieve at the local level co-ordinated development and regeneration that involves the community in decision-making processes to decide priorities for action to improve communities and neighbourhoods.

Community involvement

There is a history of constructive partnership working between the various partners, which provides a useful foundation on which to build links that are even more substantial with different community-based organisations and representatives. A long-term participant in the LSP commented:

> There is a strong history of partnership working. We were one of the first LSPs to get off the ground, even before it was a government requirement.

The LSP has, for example, used Community Empowerment Funds to support the work of agencies striving to improve community engagement and involvement in the area:

> There was work with agencies and people to get an impression of what cohesion means, getting a picture of reality, there was a degree of hope. For example, there is the Yemeni Association that is now working with other minority community groups. A report called *Everyone Together* was produced; it contained praise for some of the work going on.

However, there is a concentration of involvement from the well-established or more mainstream sections of the voluntary and community sectors. The Local Intelligence Project is helping communities to gather local intelligence and the community empowerment network encourages more community and neighbourhood organisations and representatives to get involved in the LSP.

Conclusion

The LSP has built on well-established relations developed with a range of public, private, community and voluntary sector organisations and their representatives. The structure shows that local representation and local knowledge principles come into play in different ways.

At the LSP board level, there is an emphasis on local representation. The level of representation of community- and neighbourhood-based organisations on the LSP board has recently increased as a result of a review of the LSP. However, along with other LSPs, there is a problem with enabling the appropriate level of representation. This is because the model of representation that is used is sectoral and organisational. Consequently, citizen and user voices are mediated through several levels of voluntary and community sector organisations, and then have to compete for legitimacy around a table dominated by governmental and business organisations.

Box 6 LSP – lessons for practice

- Care needs to be taken to ensure that the principles of local representation are included in the design of multi-sector strategic partnerships. This may require giving additional weight to voluntary and community sector representatives' views.

- In addition, voluntary and community sector capacity needs to be enhanced to enable effective mechanisms for local representation within the voluntary and community sector system. In other words, the governance design of LSPs also has to consider the governance design of the sectoral structures.

- The inclusion of local knowledge principles in the design of the strategic partnership may increase the opportunities for the partnership to have a 'reality check' in relation to the likely delivery and consequences of its decisions.

- It is important that the efficiency drivers at strategic partnership level do not result in governance designs that focus on local knowledge being undervalued. It takes time and commitment to enable people to contribute their insights into the issues affecting local communities and public services.

- Governance design is prone to be skewed in favour of a dominant culture or set of core values.

- The distribution of power among board members will impact on their ability to get their views and concerns onto relevant agendas and be taken seriously.

- Governance needs to be about continually challenging assumptions and the way things are done.

Patient, public and staff representation: increasing local accountability – the NHS foundation trust

Introduction

Our case study NHS foundation trust provides acute hospital services to a large urban population, including significant areas of disadvantage. Its governance design, like those of other NHS foundation trusts, was intended to strengthen local accountability for health services and provide an alternative to centralised ministerial control. A foundation trust is a new form of public organisation called a 'public benefit corporation'. It is based on a traditional NHS board arrangement to which is grafted

a membership structure. The membership arrangements were inspired by those used in the co-operative movement and by mutual societies (Department of Health, 2002), and are intended to enable local people, patients and other stakeholders to be represented in decision-making and accountability.

Foundation trust membership

The key elements of the governance structure reflect the idea of local representation (see Box 7). The trust had some 50,000 members at April 2006 and expected this to increase to 75,000 by giving new patients automatic membership. The number of members is important as a sign of the trust's legitimacy. One governor commented:

> If you've got a large number of members, then this certainly increases the sense of legitimacy you have as a foundation trust in engaging with the communities, and this goes back to the purpose of foundation trusts.

Box 7 Local representation in NHS foundation trust governance

Local representation

- The foundation trust has three membership constituencies – public, patient and staff members.

- Public and patient members are recruited by advertisement; in addition, all new patients are given membership, although they may opt out. All staff (including volunteers and contractors) are automatically members.

- Each constituency elects governors to represent them.

- Additional governors are nominated by the foundation trust's key stakeholders.

- The governors meet in a consultative council. This has specific duties concerned with appointing the foundations trust's chair, non-executive directors, chief executive and auditors, and commenting on the annual report and accounts and plans of the board of directors.

- The board of executive and non-executive directors is responsible for the operational and strategic management of the trust.

(Continued)

- Regulators oversee their performance in achieving health and governance/ financial targets within national frameworks set by the Secretary of State and the NHS board.

Local knowledge

- Patients' views on the services of the foundation trust are (at the time of writing) accessed through public and patient participation forums.

The governors

NHS foundation trusts are one of the few local public organisations, other than local authorities, whose constituents directly elect representatives.[2] The electoral process also supports the local legitimacy of the foundation trust. Twenty-four of the 33 governors are elected, 17 by the public constituency, five by staff and two by patients. Key stakeholders, including the local authority, primary care trust and the university, nominate the other governors.

Data for the first election (April 2005) shows that there was considerable competition for election as a public governor, averaging three candidates per seat. Twenty-seven candidates stood for the two patient governor seats. The level of turnout was commensurate with local elections in the area. The newness of the body may have influenced competition and turnout, although a casual vacancy for a public governor in 2006 involved six candidates for one seat, with turnout similar to 2005.

Public governor positions tend to attract people with some previous professional or voluntary involvement with the NHS. Of the 33 public governors, at least four are current medical practitioners or people formerly employed in the NHS, two were members of community health councils, and four have been voluntarily involved with the NHS.[3]

The governors collectively form the governors' consultative council, which meets three times a year and is chaired by the chair of the foundation trust's board of directors. The consultative council has a number of statutory powers, including appointing the foundation trust's chair, non-executive directors, chief executive and auditors, and commenting on the annual report and accounts and plans of the board of directors (Department of Health, 2006a).

An analysis of consultative council minutes shows that meetings principally consist of reports from the board of directors, followed by questions and discussion. These are mainly items of strategic significance for the trust. Recent meetings have dealt with:

- annual accounts and auditor's report;

- developments concerned with absorbing a neighbouring hospital into the trust;

- infection control procedures;

- reports from the remuneration and appointments committees;

- car parking.

Governors raise relatively few items outside these major issues. Those noted in the minutes for the first 18 months are:

- delay in hospital transport to collect a patient;

- whether more could be done to involve governors in 'grass-roots' issues and to assist communication with constituents;

- raising awareness of a national organisation's promotion of neonatal screening.

A governor confirmed this view of the consultative council:

> It's more ceremonial. Its powers are few and far between. The main powers are the appointment of the chair of the board and remuneration of the chair and non-executive directors. It has taken these powers seriously.

> But, beyond these specific areas, our role is to be consulted. The chair of the trust board will brief us on what the board has been discussing. He will invite questions from us. We are there to comment and ask questions. We are not as powerful as an overview and scrutiny committee.

However, governors thought that their views were taken seriously. Another commented:

> [The chair] takes the governors seriously. He takes a lot of time chairing the meetings, orchestrating the directors. He doesn't foreshorten discussion.

Although governors are there as representatives, they find there is no channel through which to communicate with their constituents. Public meetings have not yet been held. Public information about governors on most foundation trusts' websites is much more limited than that for local authority councillors – for example, home addresses and phone numbers are not provided, and initial email contact is through a member of foundation trust staff.

Stakeholder governors also operate in the absence of a clear brief from their nominating organisations. One commented:

> My employers asked if I would be a governor. I said I would. But after this no one comes back and says 'can you give us a report on what the foundation trust is doing?' You're left to your own devices. I'm not accountable to anyone.

Without a channel of communication, governors can only react to the board of director's agenda or raise issues from a personal perspective. It is likely that the absence of a link may weaken the position of governors at the next election, since (unlike local authority councillors) they will not be able to show a relationship between constituents' demands and their own actions.

The board of directors

The board is responsible for exercising the functions of the foundation trust. It consists of the trust's executive directors, non-executive directors and a non-executive chair. Governors are not members of the board. Consequently, the foundation trust model creates a separation between management (by the board of directors) and representation (by the governors).

This means that the elected governors are publicly accountable for the trust's performance without having the responsibility to go alongside this. The board has the responsibility for performance, but no accountability to the local community. Governors, then, are part of the local representation model – but without any real mechanism for acting as representatives. They, and the wider membership, offer the trust local legitimacy but have limited influence on decision-making.

Patient and public involvement

Patient and public involvement is undertaken by the trust separately from its governor and membership structures. Like all NHS bodies, the trust has a legal duty to consult with patients, carers and the public. This trust has a number of internal patient advisory groups and panels, including those on disability, black and minority ethnic matters, quality and patient information.

In addition, when our fieldwork was undertaken, there were three patient and public involvement forums within the trust's area, overseen by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health. Patient and public involvement (PPI) forums are patient- and public-led bodies whose role includes:

- obtaining views from local communities about health services and making recommendations and reports;

- making reports and recommendations on the range and day-to-day delivery of health services;

- influencing the design of and access to NHS services;

- providing advice and information to patients and their carers about services.

The involvement mechanisms are intended to generate local knowledge, bringing the views of the public at large and of particular communities into the trust's decision-making. Consequently, they fulfil one of the functions that governors at present are poorly resourced to undertake. However, these will change following the implementation of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, which abolishes PPI forums in favour of local involvement networks (LINks). One of the intentions of LINks is that they will enable broader public involvement in health and social care issues that go beyond the remit of any one provider agency – i.e. they will also be concerned with social care issues that are the responsibility of local government. This again illustrates the dynamic nature of governance of local public services.

Increasing local accountability in health?

The foundation trust model has introduced a distinct change in NHS governance. It has reintroduced the idea of local accountability into a service that had a history of upward accountability to the Secretary of State. It re-engages with the pre-1948 traditions of locally accountable hospitals while continuing to sustain a separation between local government and the NHS.

The governance design is based on the idea of local representation. However, the practice of local representation is limited. Governors operate in a reactive mode in relation to the trust's board, and their ability to initiate is constrained by their limited links with constituents and the imbalance in the separation of powers between governors and the board. Constitutionally, this separation of powers is weighted firmly in favour of the trust board. Governors provide some measure of local accountability for the board, but face the problem of themselves being accountable through election for the performance of the trust over which they have limited influence.

The most recent Department of Health guide to foundation trusts talks the language of local representation, but obscures the constitutional problems:

> *NHS Foundation Trusts are democratic.* Local people and staff directly elect representatives to serve on the Board of Governors. The Board of Governors works with the Board of Directors – responsible for day-to-day running of the Trust – to ensure that the NHS Foundation Trust acts in a way that is consistent with its terms of authorisation. In this way, the Board of Governors plays a role in helping to set the overall direction of the organisation. (Department of Health, 2006b, emphasis in the original)

The foundation trust model was placed on top of an existing set of arrangements for patient and public involvement through PPI forums, which themselves are about to undergo change. Consequently, there is a split between local representation and local governance. This weakens the authority and contribution of governors, since the PPI structures provide a channel for issues that might otherwise be part of the governors' role, and thus enable them to demonstrate how they have served the community when they stand for re-election. It is not clear whether having these two routes strengthens or dilutes the public and patient voice in the trust's management.

Box 8 NHS foundation trust – lessons for practice

- Governance design needs to ensure that it considers local representation and local knowledge in parallel to produce a system that is effective in both roles.

- Differences in the scope of decision-making responsibility in the local representation and local knowledge designs may generate tensions and affect public motivations for involvement.

- Governance design involves constitutional issues. It is important that accountability, influence and responsibility are interrelated. Accountability without responsibility or influence is a recipe for disillusionment and the loss of legitimacy.

- People elected to represent communities need to have ways of connecting with their constituents. Otherwise, they have little legitimacy or capacity to represent people's views.

- It is unclear whether elected governors see their role as representing other local people or presenting their own views or professional concerns.

Making choices, understanding implications

The four case studies show how the principles of local knowledge and local representation are applied in different ways. The Sure Start and registered social landlord (RSL) cases combined both principles in their governance arrangements, although with an emphasis on local knowledge about the services in question. Sure Start provided opportunities for parents to move from contributing insights into services and needs (local knowledge) to making a direct contribution to determining the organisation's wider policies and programmes. However, it is unclear whether they were able to act as representatives of other local parents or be accountable to them (local representation). The RSL again offered opportunities for service-based participation as well as board membership. On the other hand, the LSP and NHS foundation trusts were constituted much more on the basis of local representation, with participants apparently being expected to speak for others and being concerned with wider policy questions.

The cases reveal a number of lessons for the design of governance to enable citizen and user involvement. They also illustrate that the whole system of local governance is in flux, subject to changes due to local circumstances as well as external events.

In the next chapter, we look more widely at ten forms of local governance and identify the lessons that can be drawn about the formal structures of new systems of governance, the way in which these structures are implemented in practice, and how these relate to the motivation and capacity of people to be involved.

4 Learning from diversity

Introduction

In this chapter, we consider what we can learn about the practice of citizen-centred governance on the basis of evidence from evaluations of a range of recent initiatives. We commissioned teams of leading researchers to write state-of-knowledge papers on ten different forms of citizen-centred governance (Table 4).

First, we consider the design of governance and draw attention to the differences between the formal rules that create the institution and the day-to-day practices of people involved in governance. We then consider what the evidence says about the motivation of people to become involved. Quotes are taken from the state-of-knowledge papers unless otherwise indicated.

The nature and content of these papers are influenced by the different research or other databases on which they draw. Thus it is not possible to provide a comprehensive analysis across all case studies. For example, there are no evaluations of PPI forums or NHS foundation trust boards and thus it is not possible to offer any observations of the way in which different forums or boards have interpreted or reinterpreted their remits in the light of the principles of 'local knowledge' or 'local representation'.

Table 4 State-of-knowledge papers

Topic	Description of governance initiative	Authors
New Deal for Communities	Area-based long-term (ten-year) regeneration initiative in 39 small neighbourhoods with high levels of disadvantage. Wide-ranging brief and considerable discretion over budget.	Paul Lawless, Sheffield Hallam University
Neighbourhood management	Variety of approaches, including 35 nationally sponsored Pathfinders, to devolve problem identification and delivery of solutions through close working between residents, public services and elected councillors.	Geoff White, SQW Ltd
Local strategic partnerships	Forum through which the leadership of the public, business and voluntary and community sectors in each local authority area develop and co-ordinate strategic initiatives and, in NRF areas, develop and deliver the neighbourhood renewal strategy. Role now being enhanced through LAAs and other initiatives.	Mike Geddes, Warwick Business School
Comprehensive-based neighbourhood governance through RSLs	Major community regeneration initiatives led by registered social landlords (RSLs – formerly, housing associations), in which the RSL plays a major role in the overall governance of the community.	David Mullins and Mike Smith, University of Birmingham
Sure Start local programmes	Partnerships in 500+ small localities to improve life chances of young children by promoting child, family and community development through cross-agency and interprofessional development of existing and new services. Governance changes as services become integrated into local authority children's centres in context of Every Child Matters policy.	Jane Tunstill and Debra Allnock, National Evaluation of Sure Start
Health: patient and public involvement forums and foundation hospitals	*PPI forums*: bodies created to monitor health, and health services, from patient perspective in each NHS and PCT area, and to promote involvement in health decision-making. These are being superceded by local involvement networks. *Foundation hospitals*: hospitals achieving quality standards that are permitted greater degree of self-government, and 'membership' composed of patients, partner organisations and staff. Intended to become the standard model of governance.	Shirley McIver, University of Birmingham
Children's Fund	Multi-agency strategic partnership to address issues of social exclusion focusing on children aged 5–13. National coverage across all top-tier local authorities. Now mainstreaming activities in light of Every Child Matters policy and local authority responsibilities for children's services.	Hanne Beirens, National Evaluation of Children's Fund

(Continued)

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Table 4 State-of-knowledge papers (Continued)

Topic	Description of governance initiative	Authors
School governance	Analysis of the role of school governing bodies in the governance of schools. School governing bodies, with their 400,000 volunteer citizens, are one of the most extensive initiatives through which people can become involved in governance of their communities.	Stewart Ranson, Warwick University
Children's Fund and schooling	Perspective on the way in which governance initiatives relate to the norms of self-governance that children and young people are expected to adopt, and that extend beyond the school itself.	Nick Peim, University of Birmingham

Governance designs

Here we consider how formal constitutional arrangements and scope of authority, plus the informal ways of working that develop within these new forms of governance, impact on public engagement within them.

Legal status

The new structures of local governance have a diversity of legal forms. They include:

- unincorporated associations (e.g. most LSPs);

- companies limited by guarantee (e.g. some New Deal for Communities);

- charities (e.g. some Sure Start local programmes);

- industrial and provident society (e.g. some community-led social housing providers);

- public benefit corporation (e.g. all NHS foundation trusts);

- statutory bodies (e.g. all local authorities and primary care trusts).

In most cases, new governance structures are 'unincorporated associations' (see Chapter 1). These are not legal entities. In other words, they do not have the legal authority to enter into contracts, or hold or spend money. Unincorporated associations have the advantage of flexibility, but with formal accountability remaining with the 'accountable body' – often the local authority (as in the case of many Children's Fund partnerships) or the PCT (for some Sure Start local programmes). Even LSPs, one of the most substantial of these new governance entities in terms of sphere of influence and overall remit, are not statutory bodies and the accountability of partner agencies remains a matter of ambiguity. However, there are now moves at national level to place a duty to co-operate on public agencies.

The dynamic nature of local governance means that the legal status of individual bodies may not be permanent. For example, Sure Start local programmes were originally deliberately placed outside the local authority because of claims that statutory agencies had failed to deliver the type of services considered necessary to ensure effective support for young children and families in difficult circumstances.

But, after several years, it was decided that their work would be taken into children's centres run by the local authority. As we show in the case study in Chapter 3, one Sure Start had commenced as an unincorporated association, become a company limited by guarantee and is now heading towards incorporation into the local authority's governance. This is not an uncommon degree of change.

Membership

'Who is to be a member?' is one of the central issues in the design of governance. Related to this is the issue of *how* people become members. Often membership is defined in general terms by central government, though usually with local discretion about how that might be achieved. Thus the Children and Young People's Unit, the central government unit with initial responsibility for the Children's Fund, said:

> We are not being prescriptive about which methods are used but the participation of children and young people is a requirement. (Children and Young People's Unit, 2001, p. 59)

The central government unit responsible for Sure Start local programmes specified board membership to consist of:

- the key relevant statutory agencies – i.e. education, social services and health;

- existing local 'coalitions', including early years development and childcare partnerships, CYPSPs, LSPs, health improvement partnership, early excellence centres and neighbourhood nurseries;

- the voluntary sector;

- the private sector;

- parents.

However, precise membership is determined locally. Parents/carers have contributed to some aspect of management in over 95 per cent of programmes, and the majority of partnership boards have included parent representatives. None has had more than three parent/carer representatives.

The average size of an NDC board is 22 members. There is an expectation that they will include statutory, voluntary and community membership, but no precise

specification of the balance between them. By 2004, local residents constituted a majority on 24 of the 39 NDC boards and comprised less than 30 per cent of members on only three boards. Some form of local election had been used to select community representatives in 34 cases. A few elected community representatives became the focus of attention for specific area or ethnic groups, but most have operated as generic members of the board.

PPI forums (an initiative that is soon to be ended) comprise service users and citizens, not representatives of either statutory or voluntary agencies. However, membership is not determined by reference to any perceived or expected role in relation to representing local groups. Those interested in becoming PPI forum members applied to and were appointed by regional offices of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH). They were selected on the following criteria:

- time to devote to the task;

- a keen interest in health and social care;

- understanding of the health needs of the local community;

- enthusiastic about making a difference to improve the health and well-being of the local community;

- an appreciation that people come from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities, and that all have a right to be involved in decisions affecting their health and well-being;

- are able to work as part of a team;

- will conduct themselves responsibly and sensitively.

RSLs (also known as housing associations) are different again. Because these have not been created as a result of government policy, they have discretion over determining their membership and vary substantially in size and composition. For example, the RSL discussed by Mullins and Smith has eight elected resident members on a board of 15. The other board places include one member from the board of the RSL's parent organisation (who is also a tenant), three city councillors, a retired judge and members from local service providers including the police, education action zone and employment. There is also a place for the primary care trust.

In the case of LSPs, the level at which the partnership operates is considered to mean that 'citizen' participation comes through voluntary or community sector groups and organisations, rather than directly. This appears to generate particular expectations about the extent to which such groups can be understood to be 'representative' and accountable.

Terms of reference

The terms of reference of these bodies and the limitations on the powers that can be exercised by participants are often locally negotiated, in some cases through discussion with citizens and users. For example, in the case of the Children's Fund:

> The importance of providing clear parameters and guidelines about what children and young people are able to influence was recognised in order to avoid potential disappointment if their views could not be acted upon. Board members from one partnership suggested that by enabling children and young people to define the extent of responsibility that they were comfortable with, agreement on the level of their responsibility could be reached.

These local partnerships often diversified the settings in which contributions to decision-making could be made in order to maximise involvement. For example, children (and indeed parents) were rarely members of Children's Fund partnership boards, but were often involved in reaching decisions about services at an operational level.

In a number of cases, formal protocols or agreements were developed in order to clarify the nature of the expected input and involvement of both user/ citizen participant and partner agencies. For example, in some Children's Fund partnerships, participation workers created a participation charter. In the context of neighbourhood management, the use of service-level agreements or other formal arrangements was considered helpful in securing the commitment of partner agencies, while one of the findings from research into NDCs was that there is a need for protocols to define how 'the community' should be involved.

Such formal protocols existed from the start for PPI forums. Forums were given a number of powers:

- to enter and inspect premises owned by NHS trusts, PCTs, local authorities and premises that provide other NHS services such as GPs, dental services, ophthalmic services and pharmacy services;

- to enter and inspect their trust's premises;

- to refer matters to local authority overview and scrutiny committees, which have the power to scrutinise health services in their area, and to other bodies;

- to receive information requested from NHS organisations within 20 working days.

They were also required to co-operate with each other, keep annual accounts and produce an annual report. Forum members were bound by a duty of confidentiality. This formal statement of powers and duties was obviously insufficient to ensure the perceived efficacy of their operation, but, unlike the case of the Children's Fund, in this instance such powers were predetermined and imposed, and not the result either of negotiation or learning from experiences.

Scope of responsibilities

There are huge differences in the scope of responsibilities exercised by these different governance entities. School governors have a remit for school improvement, and the boards of NHS foundation trusts have a similarly focused role in relation to NHS targets. These are narrow remits in comparison with the overarching role of LSPs. NDCs have broad areas of policy responsibility encompassing issues of employment, health and community safety within very small geographical areas. Children's Fund partnership boards have broad responsibilities to achieve policy outcomes in relation to the prevention of social exclusion – but only in relation to children between the ages of 5 and 13.

One consequence of the broad role of LSPs is that citizen input occurs indirectly via the organised voluntary and community sector, and such participants are expected to be able to adopt a strategic perspective in making their contributions. In contrast, NDCs, RSLs and SSLPs are focused on much smaller geographical areas, and those who become engaged in these initiatives may adopt a much narrower focus and be considered to be self-interested since they are the intended beneficiaries of these initiatives:

> NDCs are designed to focus on local, not strategic, considerations. As a result some partnerships initially tended to adopt a rather isolationist approach. This has eased. But, in the early days of the programme, community representatives in particular were often inclined to the view that 'it's our money and we're going to spend it'.

A similar point can be made about an RSL that had emerged out of long-standing experiences of involvement in local governance in the context of a housing action trust. Here, there was a strong sense of ways of working that were locally determined and rather inward-looking:

> The nature of governance is also affected by a default position of 'for, by and with our community', so that there is a tendency to be inward-looking. This may be challenged and the involvement of the local authority, health authority and police service, for example, are clearly connected widely throughout the city and beyond. But the community has the feel of an estate that has come through a tough patch and is used to (and quite likes) looking after itself.

'How we do things here'

It is not long before any discussion of the formal governance processes and structures starts to require an understanding of how this is applied, adapted, negotiated or possibly even ignored as these new governance entities begin to develop their own norms and rules. For example, the RSL example above illustrates the way in which particular local histories and circumstances shape local cultures of participation and help contribute to what might be regarded as both strengths (in this instance, long-standing experiences of taking responsibility for local decision-making) and weaknesses (a tendency to isolationism).

The particularity of 'how we do things here' means that defining a governance structure as a Children's Fund partnership, an NDC board, or a Sure Start board does not define the way in which this operates, nor does it enable us to link 'good practice' to any particular form or type of entity. For example, in his paper, Ranson identified distinctive types of school governing bodies: deliberative forums, sounding boards, executive boards or corporate boards, which each implied different roles for the parent members of such bodies as well as for the way in which they operated.

Another conclusion from the state-of-knowledge papers reviewed here is that, whatever the formal constitution of such new entities, there is a need to develop a range of informal approaches, appropriate to the particular local context, to encourage people unfamiliar with formal governance processes to get involved. Such outreach activities and adaptations of the formal procedural rules are evident in the context of Sure Start, the Children's Fund, RSLs, neighbourhood management and NDC.

There is also evidence of different views about the value, to user/citizen participants and to the entity itself, of trying to ensure direct participation in formal structures. A manager in a Children's Fund partnership commented:

> Sometimes we're trying to fit children into adult structures for our benefit. What are we trying to achieve by kind of shoehorning children into what is in fact an adult structure?

Thus a minority of Children's Fund boards sought ways of making such formal processes accessible – for example, by banning jargon and using a system of yellow cards to be held up when anyone could not understand what was being said, or adopting informal seating arrangements and making drawing materials available to children for use during meetings. Most decided that effective involvement would be better achieved in other contexts.

Similarly, only a minority of Sure Start partnerships succeeded in securing robust parental involvement at board level:

> More commonly, the picture was of moderate involvement where parents attended board meetings and were involved in some aspects of management but not in others. Parents might be involved in recruitment, in planning service provision, or administrative activity related to the board.

> Most of these parents were satisfied with their level of involvement. However, at the same time, it was in programmes with precisely such involvement levels that tensions could appear between parents and professionals on the board. In some cases, there appeared to be, on the one hand, encouragement to parents to contribute, but, on the other hand, a certain 'line' that some professionals preferred parents not to cross.

Styles of communication

The research reviewed here and other work on public participation (Barnes *et al.*, 2007) has shown the effect of different styles of communication on deliberation within officially constituted forums. In some NDCs, public sector agencies withdrew from board membership because of discomfort or lack of comprehension on the part of statutory representatives of the positions being adopted by community members. In some instances, there were claims of verbal abuse, but more generally this can be understood as resulting from a lack of common language with which to debate issues. Consequently, one of the requirements for sustaining effective relationships within boards is the existence of conflict-resolution procedures.

There are similar experiences of difficulties resulting from different styles of contribution in board meetings in LSPs. This was usually expressed in terms of the 'confrontational' stance adopted by voluntary and community sector representatives. Distinctions were drawn between the voluntary and community sector in terms of the extent to which they were considered to have made a good contribution to the partnership, but responses to this question tended to be more positive in LSPs in neighbourhood renewal areas, suggesting that the availability of capacity-building programmes from the NRF might have had some impact.

Both these examples suggest an assumption that ways of doing business within statutory agencies are the norms to which new forms of governance should aspire. The experience of some Children's Fund partnerships suggests aspirations for inclusion also require a preparedness to explore different ways of going about the task of decision-making. But this experience also illustrates that this can be both time-consuming and challenging. And it can leave citizen participants feeling marginalised even though they are formally part of the process. This experience was reported in the context of some SSLPs:

> There was a pervasive trend across programmes for parents, while being in theory included in programme planning, in reality to experience their actual involvement as 'token'. Such parents tended to feel intimidated by the board's professional manner and the 'jargon that is used'. Some of them felt their involvement was time consuming and, in spite of the crèche facilities provided, there were no real incentives to come to board meetings. 'The professionals are paid to be there but we aren't.'

The implication is that both public officials and elected members need to be prepared to do things differently if they are to work with users and citizens to enable them to really feel part of the process (Lowndes *et al.*, 2006; Skidmore *et al.*, 2006).

Forms of engagement

User and citizen participants can be engaged and become more influential in other ways than via board membership. This could be in the context of specific decision-making processes such as children's participation in decisions about Children's Fund service commissioning, or parental participation in SSLP thematic groups. SSLPs also devised new ways of engaging local people in the partnership and parent forums. Different programmes adopted a system of neighbourhood representatives, or a quota system, whereby representation was 'allotted' on the basis of identities such as fatherhood, ethnicity or single parenthood. Formal surveys were used to obtain input, and social events were used to enable ongoing community consultation.

In other cases, broader community development type initiatives that aimed to generate diverse opportunities for engagement were adopted. RSLs have used a combination of newsletters, themed days to bring people together to discuss particular topics, training events, specialist forums (e.g. a youth forum), community engagement in evaluation and road shows to enable a broad range of local people to take part in ways and on topics that made sense to them.

How intermediaries affect engagement

Much of what has been said about the capacity of formal governance entities to enable effective contributions from users and citizens refers to the role of what we have called 'intermediaries' – people who have the skills to facilitate the process of enabling engagement by diverse participants. In some cases such people were in formal roles designed specifically for this purpose. For example, parent link worker roles were adopted to target parental engagement in management in the context of Sure Start, and were deemed by many to be a key vehicle for the implementation of participation at strategic level. At the same time, there was a danger that such workers could result in others feeling they had no responsibility for ensuring involvement.

Experiences of neighbourhood management support this. To be effective, dedicated workers focusing on community engagement need the support of their employing agencies, reinforced by recognition by means such as career progression and performance management systems. Continuity of personnel is also essential in order to build the relationships necessary to sustain engagement over time and changing governance structures.

Citizen and user motivation

The state-of-knowledge papers address participation in the context of formal processes of governance, rather then in social movements, autonomous community or user groups and other forms of political action. In this context, the evidence suggests that the motivations of participants are affected substantially by the nature and extent of investment in capacity-building that is made by these new governance entities, and the degree to which this enables trusting relationships to be developed. But, beyond this, a range of factors are associated with the extent to which these new forms of governance are able to engage a diverse range of participants, achieve positive outcomes and contribute to an enhancement of democratic practices.

Investment in capacity-building

Investing time and resources to build the capacity, both of different publics to take part in governance processes and of those organisations, workers and elected members seeking such involvement, is essential.

So far, there is little evidence of training for those interested in becoming governors of NHS foundation trusts and little indication that such trusts are prepared for what this will involve:

> Making these issues understandable to a wide range of people, providing information that will help them weigh up the different options and organising involvement processes that allow people to take part will take skilled people with time and resources at their disposal. Success also depends on a sophisticated model of representation that can incorporate the views of those sections of society normally disenfranchised.

> More importantly it will require a process that can manage conflicts between different sections of society and different membership constituencies. There is no evidence that NHS foundation trusts are prepared for this or that they are training governors to involve their constituencies.

In other cases, there is a greater investment and commitment. For example, NDCs have set up institutions and provided practical support with a view to building community and neighbourhood groups; some have supported festivals and community development schemes to boost community awareness and confidence;

and opportunities for volunteering for local unemployed people have built skills. Neighbourhood management schemes, for example, have provided spaces for people to meet, seedcorn funding, skill development learning opportunities, and shadowing and mentoring schemes for participants. SSLPs have provided, not only practical support (childcare, transport costs, etc. to enable parents to take part), but also confidence-building activities, group work, training, induction and team-building events.

Whatever the methods used, there is much emphasis on the need for long-term work of this kind and the recognition that results will not be immediate. There is less information about capacity-building focusing on the various partner agencies and organisations involved, although the need for this is recognised, sometimes couched in terms of 'culture change'. For example, over recent years, the community empowerment networks were considered to have played an important role in supporting the voluntary and community sector to engage with LSPs, but:

> It is evident that many in the sector perceive LSPs as being dominated by the local authority. This means therefore that, on the one hand, its relationship with the local authority is crucial for the sector and, on the other, significant progress towards equal partnership is unlikely without a change in the council's culture and receptiveness.

Preparedness on the part of statutory organisations to recognise *their* need to learn and change their ways of working alongside the provision of sustained support for user and citizen participants is more likely to build the trust necessary to sustain their motivation and interest.

Why take part in governance?

It is always likely to be a minority of both users and citizens who want to play an active part in governance. But precise motivations do vary (Barnes *et al.*, 2007). We need to understand both the nature and dynamics of factors that affect how and why people get involved. Related to this is also the nature of the input they make.

The NDC experience demonstrates the importance of the extent to which trust is built with local people. There has been an increase in trust in NDCs related to feelings that the NDC had improved the local area:

There was a 10 percentage point increase in trust in local NDCs between 2002 and 2004. By 2004 local people had greater trust in their local NDC than they had for either their local authority or local schools. This is an impressive achievement. There is plausible argument that rising levels of trust may have longer-term implications in that this should help:

- Enhance levels of bonding and bridging social capital, potentially leading residents in NDCs to become more confident, outward looking, and resilient.

- Retain residents in the neighbourhood.

- Boost the resource base through which to sustain neighbourhood level improvements after NDC funding ceases in about 2010.

- Provide a greater pool from which to draw a willing and skilled group of people to help govern these localities both during the last years of the NDC experiment but also thereafter.

In neighbourhood management schemes, supporting the development of community groups has increased the pool from which active participants can be drawn. And flexibility of governance arrangements enables it to accommodate the cycles of engagement and dips in capacity occasioned by the departure of key people.

In the Children's Fund partnerships, workers suggested that children are rarely likely to want to take part in strategic-level governance processes while, in RSLs, resident priorities are often wider than housing management. In other words, people want to become engaged on their own terms.

Research explored the motivations of parents who became school governors:

Our questions explored the extent to which members saw their reasons for participation as an opportunity to pursue their own interests ('support my child', 13 per cent), or recognised more general responsibilities ('support the school', 54 per cent; 'give something back to the community', 29 per cent). Interview data suggest that many board members have been 'encouraged' by school heads/principals to volunteer in the first instance, but also suggest that volunteering can have an educative effect as members progress from initial preoccupation with their own child to growing understanding of and commitment to the needs of the institution and the wider community. Often, on ceasing to be parent board members, they transfer to other categories of nominated membership.

There may be 'core' and 'peripheral' memberships, with core members taking on more roles for longer periods, and others having a much more transient commitment.

This reflection of the importance of building not only skills but also commitment among a pool of actual and potential participants in governance offers a rather different perspective from the more typical bemoaning of the reappearance of 'usual suspects' in different contexts. The analyses considered here do not argue that it should always be the same people who are engaged, but do suggest that there is considerable value in enabling those who have developed skills and experience in one context to be able to use these in others. In relation to RSLs:

> In this community [served by the RSL] there are now more opportunities for engagement as a result of the institutional environment within the estate following on from Housing Action Trust activity and the pressure placed upon the HAT by residents. This experience has propelled many individual members into senior decision-making positions – many of whom are used to telling their story and promoting the area on the national stage.

> So the evolving governance context has drawn upon a significant resource of latent capacity within the estate to be part of the institutional make-up of the estate but also to create opportunities for community voice to be articulated – not only through decision-making board activity, but through groups and forums and involvement in the arts and education and sport and so on.

A study of the relationship between community participation in governance and social capital also concluded that, rather than constantly seeking to increase the numbers of people taking part, the objectives should be to build trust in the participation process and to create strong accountability relationships between participants and non-participants (Skidmore *et al.,* 2006).

In the case of voluntary and community sector input to LSPs, the issue is not one of personal motivation because participants are involved in order to represent the sector. More relevant in this context is the extent to which participation in an LSP is seen to be a valuable commitment of time and resources in the face of other demands and priorities. Recognition of the distinctive contribution that can be made by the sector is one factor affecting this, alongside the nature of the relationships referred to above.

The significance of scale?

The scale of governance initiatives affects their contribution to building motivated engagement. Between 1986 and 1988, over 400,000 citizens joined reformed school governing bodies and boards across the UK. One potential advantage of PPI forums was their large numbers and the fact that they were linked together at national level. In contrast, there are far fewer NDCs. However, NDCs have demonstrated their potential to build a pool of skilled and willing participants, and neighbourhood management schemes have demonstrated the potential of adopting a wide variety of methods for engaging people for enlarging the resource base for participation. We can suggest that engagement is likely to increase over time as opportunities expand, but only if participants can see positive results from their involvement.

Diversity of methods, diversity of engagement

The range of methods available by which people can make contributions to processes of governance affects the range of people who actually get involved. PPI forums, NHS foundation trusts and school governing boards are probably the most limited in terms of methods for engagement. One of the criticisms of PPI forums has been that they failed to reflect the diversity of their local populations, and similar questions are being posed about NHS foundation trust boards. Some school governing bodies have connected with their disadvantaged communities while others have not, and the under-representation of women, people from minority ethnic communities and disadvantaged classes is of continuing concern. While there are advantages to schools of being able to access the social and cultural capital of parents who are also senior executives in public and private sector organisations:

> Some of these schools now acknowledge that until they become community active to reach out to the excluded their improvement is likely to remain blocked. They understand that they will not become effective institutions until they become civic institutions, developing the social and cultural conditions for learning as well as the organisational qualities of strategic leadership, scrutiny and accountability.

Initiatives such as Sure Start and NDC are focused on disadvantaged areas and populations, and thus 'reaching out to the excluded' is a core aspect of their purpose. NDCs have undertaken community development work designed specifically to engage different groups, including minority ethnic communities, and have recognised the need for different approaches to be used with different target groups. The Sure Start evaluation indicated that parental representation on boards does tend to reflect

the ethnic composition of local populations, suggesting that outreach work has enabled diverse groups to become engaged. Neighbourhood management initiatives have enabled people to become engaged via credit unions, fuel poverty projects, festival, sports and cultural activities, as well as via consultations on specific topics and via community and resident groups. And RSLs have similarly experimented with a wide range of ways of engaging people. One worker said of their attempts at engagement:

> … we no longer see engagement as turning up at a meeting or being consulted. We use a lot of cultural work to do engagement. For example, banners were designed by residents to line a route through the area depicting diverse communities from the area. This is now a regular feature renewed each year and is a focus for communities involved in its regeneration.

Roles and accountabilities of community participants

Such methods may be effective at enabling a wide range of people to take part in these new governance entities, but they do not directly address issues of formal decision-making and of accountability – both of public bodies to their publics and of citizen participants to their constituencies. Nor is it clear that approaches that are at least intended to enable greater accountability can do so. Thus, while opening up NHS foundation trusts to create patient and public membership is intended to enable greater accountability to the local population, there is little evidence, so far at least, of how that is being achieved (see Chapter 3). Similarly PPI forums are no more democratically accountable than were the community health councils they replaced.

In LSPs, there is a tension between establishing mechanisms that enable voluntary and community sector participants to be accountable to their constituencies and seeking to ensure a 'common voice' for the disparate interest groups within the sector:

> One key lesson is that enabling participation in governance requires recognition of the sector's distinctiveness as well as an investment of time and resources.

Both NDC and neighbourhood management experiences highlight the importance of developing and maintaining clear and open systems of communication to enable accountability, and the neighbourhood management report suggests that accountability is enhanced where there is a long and varied tradition of

community group activity in the area. The closeness of community-led RSLs to their 'communities of use' is considered to mean that accountability issues are less problematic than in larger organisations. Thus, although the informal mechanisms for engagement adopted by initiatives such as these are not designed specifically in order to enable representatives to give account to local people, their role in keeping open lines of communication does appear to go some way to serve this purpose.

In SSLPs there are very different experiences of parents in such contexts:

> Where the programme culture around parent engagement was 'robust', parental experiences were, overall, more positive than parents in 'less active' programmes. These parents felt very strongly that their voice was heard and that they were treated as equal members of the board. Parents also felt they were seen to be, and were, treated as professionals in their role within the programme. For example, some parents saw themselves as working part time (although unpaid), in their capacity as board members.

This observation focuses on the role that lay participants can play within boards, rather than on any expectation that they act as accountable representatives to constituencies beyond the board.

Conclusion

This analysis of the national evidence on ten governance forms shows that designers need to understand the motivations, experiences and impact on the lives of those to whom they are addressed. In particular, there is a link between improving services and the motivation to become engaged. In relation to neighbourhood management, for example:

> If neighbourhood working is to be effective, it must reach the range of people and communities located in the area in order to understand their needs and engage them in the process of identifying and delivering opportunities by which the needs can be met.

The Sure Start experience shows that there is a fine line between engagement in governance and access to services. And thus access to services can be a start to engagement in governance. It is here that local knowledge approaches may be most beneficial and create a route for people into local representation.

The NDC example also shows the link between delivery and support for the governance form. Doing well in meeting local needs and expectations can enhance people's motivation to become involved in the more complex processes of local governance.

These examples highlight the very different ways in which people may come to take part. They may be elected, appointed, invited, or encouraged via community development activities. These recruitment methods suggest very different expectations about the extent to which citizens might act as 'representatives' of any particular constituency, although the language of representation is common. There is considerable variation in the extent to which precise roles or responsibilities are defined – either for citizen or agency participants in these new governance processes.

Direct reference to the importance of 'local knowledge' is rare, although it is implicit in much of the work to engage with groups who might be expected to contribute a rather different perspective from that of public officials (including children and young people). Their presence within governance forums is assumed to assist in reaching good decisions, and Ranson in particular highlights this in his discussion of school governing bodies. He concludes that schools that fail to connect with their disadvantaged communities are unable to deliver improvements for pupils from those communities. The consequence is a lack of effective and sustainable involvement in governance.

Thus, although there is a tension between delivery and engagement (identified, for example, in the context of the Children's Fund), there is also an important connection between the two. And, since many of these new forms of governance need to achieve changes in ways of working, policies and service delivery within partner agencies, the extent to which they are able to impact on these agencies also affects levels of engagement.

In the next chapter, we draw out a number of recommendations for those involved in governance design and operations in order to make the most of the opportunities that are available.

5 Strengthening citizen-centred governance

Dilemmas of local governance

The landscape of local governance has changed considerably over the past decade. There have been many experiments based on the idea of citizen-centred governance, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Our research points to four dilemmas that need to be resolved if citizen-centred governance is to make a greater impact on neighbourhoods and services.

- *New opportunities, but greater confusion:* new forms of governance create different ways for citizens and service users to become involved and to shape services, but at the same time there is more complexity and confusion about who does what.

- *More flexibility, but less transparency:* the old bureaucratic ways of providing public services are being changed and made more responsive to local needs, but this has reduced transparency of decision-making and accountability.

- *Making a difference, but depending on others:* citizen-centred governance can make a positive difference to individuals and communities, but often depends on convincing mainstream agencies to make changes in their policies or ways of working to achieve sustainable outcomes.

- *Experimenting with governance, but maintaining oversight:* widespread experimentation with governance designs has a value in developing good practice, but there is also a need for some oversight to enable lessons to be learnt and the overall governance of the community to be effective.

How can these dilemmas be resolved? There is no quick fix. The dilemmas need to be debated and solutions constructed in the particular circumstances of individual neighbourhoods and services. This requires an informed dialogue between all partners.

This concluding chapter explores approaches that can assist policy and practice in developing citizen-centred governance. We illustrate these ideas with examples from our case studies and from outside the UK.

New opportunities, but greater confusion

The large bureaucracies of local government and the NHS have been transformed through the creation of a wide range of smaller single-purpose bodies and partnerships. These changes have opened up new opportunities for citizen and user engagement on a wide range of issues. Communities are now much more closely involved in contributing to the governance of local public services. 'Community empowerment' is linked to the need to encourage more people to get involved in public service – by standing as a local councillor or taking on new roles such as foundation trust governors (DCLG, 2007).

However, these changes have resulted in a patchwork of different agencies, partnerships, trusts, regeneration boards and other governance structures operating across Britain's cities and neighbourhoods, as our analysis of Birmingham shows. Areas of disadvantage have more than their fair share of these governance structures, each making demands on citizens and users to become involved. This creates a confusing picture for local people, service users, councillors and public managers themselves.

The managers who are responsible for designing citizen-centred governance are expected to put into practice complex democratic principles such as 'participation', 'representation' and 'accountability'. This is seldom part of their professional training. Limited awareness of the issues involved in constitutional design and a reluctance or inability to negotiate roles of all participants can create confusion and demotivate citizens and users from becoming involved. Changing structures can leave people disoriented, unable to comprehend the new arrangements and with different roles or expectations placed on them.

Finding a way through the complexity

The ideas of 'local representation' and 'local knowledge' are at the heart of our research. They provide a useful way of distinguishing different purposes for citizen participation in local governance. Each has different implications for governance design, and our case study of the Sure Start local programme shows that there is the potential to design governance in ways that enable people to take advantage of either opportunity.

However, we are not convinced that people involved in designing governance arrangements are clear enough about the meanings and implications of these two design principles. This leads to confusion and less than effective governance.

Local representation

In our research, we identify at least two meanings of 'local representation' that are seldom made explicit (Table 5).

Table 5 Local representation – implications for governance design

	Meaning	Implications for understanding of decision-making	Design challenges
Local representation 1	An individual selected to speak on behalf of a defined local constituency	Decision-making is a competitive process between representatives	Systems for public selection and scrutiny
Local representation 2	An individual selected to speak on behalf of a group whose identity they share	Decision-making is a competitive process between representatives	Define the groups to be involved, secure involvement from those prepared and able to speak on behalf of these groups, and design processes that enable diverse participants to take part

The first meaning comes from representative democracy and is illustrated in the NHS foundation trust case study. It refers to a situation where an individual is elected to speak on behalf of (i.e. to represent) a defined local constituency. The representative does not have to share the characteristics of other members of that constituency, but is expected to take steps to find out about the views, interests and wishes of constituency members and to give account of their actions to them. This confers legitimacy to their contributions.

The governance design challenge is to enable representatives to be selected and their subsequent performance to be exposed to public judgement. Elections are a commonly used method. People are willing to stand for election, at least in the early days of the new governance structure, as the NHS foundation trust case study illustrates, as well as the experience of New Deal for Communities.

However, the example of school governing boards shows that it is not always easy to have enough candidates to enable competition, or even fill all available places. There is no easy solution to this problem. Designers need to ensure that they do not place undue demands on representatives and that there is effective support for them to undertake their role.

The second meaning of local representation is often used when discussing participation by citizens or users. In the LSP case study, the thematic groups were organised partly on the basis of different identities. The assumption is that different groups (often defined by reference to identities such as a particular ethnic group, women, disabled people) need to be present within a decision-making forum. A representative thus needs to share the characteristics of the wider group that they represent, and this is the source of their legitimacy to speak.

This way of thinking about representation assumes that the selected characteristic (gender, ethnicity, sexuality, health or disability status, etc.) is the most important aspect on which to base representation in relation to the issues being considered. Here the governance design challenge is to define the groups to be involved, secure involvement from those prepared and able to speak from these perspectives, and design processes that enable diverse participants to take part. But it is also clear that you cannot assume shared identities and/or interests based on these characteristics. And, often, separate spaces are needed in which positions can be explored prior to entering into dialogue with public officials. Thus, not only does this require a willingness on the part of workers in the governance structure to listen to and engage in dialogue with diverse representatives, it may also be important to support spaces in which they can meet among themselves to explore and articulate the different perspectives they want to bring to decision-making.

Local knowledge

From the local knowledge perspective, legitimacy to contribute to governance comes from access to knowledge relevant to the decision-making process, not from acting or speaking on behalf of a particular constituency. Such knowledge may come from the experience of living in a particular locality (as in the LSP case study, town boards) or being a parent (as in the Sure Start case study). People's legitimacy in the governance process relates to the authenticity and value of the understandings that arise from such experiences, not from being elected or nominated.

Thus decision-making is about sharing information and deliberating on the basis of this in order to reach a better understanding of needs and priorities. The assumption is that processes can be designed to enable people to reach the best decision for the whole group. This contrasts with local representation, where decision-making is often based on the view that representatives have to compete and that benefits for one constituency will be at the expense of others.

There are two governance design challenges when working from a local knowledge perspective. The first challenge is to access local knowledge. The formal meetings held by public organisations are often not the best forums to enable this process. It requires the use of community conferences, arts events, participatory action research and other methods that start from where people are and engage them in a productive and enjoyable experience.

The second design challenge is to create a forum within which there can be open deliberation and preparedness on the part of participants (including agencies) to change their minds on the basis of discussion and reasoning. This requires designers to understand how to facilitate a diverse group so that it can reach and sustain agreement on the way in which it is going to address and respond to policy problems.

How does this relate to the role of agencies?

It is important to consider how each of these principles affects the roles and expectations of people 'representing' agencies – and especially managers and professionals from the government bodies. Are they there to speak on behalf of and be accountable to their organisations, or to contribute their 'specialist' or 'expert' knowledge? Some bodies like New Deal for Community and school governing boards combine elected community or group representatives with agency representatives and other partners. This presents a design challenge that is often ignored. The challenge is to establish how the different sources of authority are to be reconciled and how specialist and professional knowledge is to be judged against local knowledge.

More flexibility, less transparency

Citizen-centred governance operates in ways that are quite different from local authorities. They have much greater flexibility to organise in response to local circumstances and to change as necessary, as the Sure Start and LSP case studies illustrate. This creates the potential to be much more responsive to citizen and user demands, and to engage them in new and innovative ways.

The benefits of flexibility have a cost. These new forms of governance are not expected to meet the high standards of transparency imposed on local government. Boards are seldom elected. In partnerships, it is difficult to understand who is paying for what, and who ultimately is responsible for delivery. Services are well publicised, but governance remains opaque.

At the same time, the role of councillors – a key channel for citizens to influence public services – is also undergoing change. Councillors are being encouraged to give more emphasis to their role as community champions, identifying local issues and working with citizens, the council and others to achieve solutions. Yet the new forms of governance often operate at arm's length from elected politicians. Councillors are seldom members of the boards or management committees of the new governance structures, and their presence in new participatory forums can look like old-fashioned council interference (Skelcher, 2007).

Using community conferences to design and review governance structures

There is a powerful case for governance structures to be designed bottom-up, with strong involvement by citizens and service users. In this way, local people and those using services can create a design in which the balance between flexibility and transparency reflects their values. The City Council of Los Angeles used this approach when it decided to invite communities to design their own neighbourhood councils (Box 9).

Box 9 Designing neighbourhood governance in Los Angeles

Neighbourhood councils operate throughout the City of Los Angeles as a bottom-up form of governance. They initially had an advisory role, but are now taking on a wider set of powers.

The City Charter (the council's constitution) left the method for defining neighbourhoods open. The City Council invited people to come forward with their own proposals.

Neighbourhood councils are groups of people who, once certified by the Board of Neighbourhood Commissioners, elect or select their own leaders, determine their own agendas and set their own boundaries. The goal is to make them as independent as possible from city government so that they will have the influence and power to affect city-wide and local decision-making.

The certification process involves the City Council agreeing that the applicants: know their proposed boundaries; have conducted widespread consultation with their stakeholders; and have created operational rules, an organisational structure and a system for financial accountability.

(Continued)

Through the electronic early notification system, neighbourhood councils receive information about issues and projects that will be considered by the City Council or Mayor and that affect their neighbourhood. In this way, they have a reasonable amount of time to understand, discuss and develop positions before final decisions are made.

Financial and other support is made available through the City Council's Department of Neighbourhood Empowerment.

Source: http://www.ncrcla.org/

Another possibility is to build on the annual community conferences held by many LSPs. These conferences focus on the 'state of the area' and the shaping of policy for the future. They could also be used to review governance designs in the area and provide a grass-roots perspective on 'what works'. Such conferences are an opportunity to link governance design with objectives and achievements in terms of delivery. They enable accountability to be maintained through dialogue and can be designed as a means of accessing local knowledge.

Constitutional rights in practice

Enshrining a right to participate can deliver transparency and stimulate engagement by linking key public policy decisions to the outcomes of public participation. This is evident in the case of Brazil's health councils (Box 10).

Box 10 Health councils in Brazil

Health councils were established by the Brazilian Government as part of the move to make health a right of all citizens. Rights to citizen participation in health governance were linked to principles of universality and equity of health-care provision. Health councils operate at municipal, local and unit level, and there are currently more than 5,500 councils involving some 100,000 citizens.

Health councils are composed of 50 per cent citizens, 25 per cent workers and 25 per cent administrators. They thus combine a majority position for citizen representatives with the formal right of representation of workers,

(Continued)

and distinguish worker representation from professional/service provider representation. Municipal health councils have a right of veto over the budget – if this is not approved, the state government does not transfer funds to the municipal government.

Research has indicated the relationship between the existence of civil society organisations and popular movements with an interest in health, managers committed to broadening social participation and the range of social groups represented within these councils (Coelho, 2007). Formal rights of participation and a clear remit help ensure lively engagement. Meetings are open to the public and budget meetings can attract a large attendance. Rules of engagement are typical of trade union style meetings with time-limited input from participants and evidence of caucusing both within and outside the formal meeting space. In such contexts, the format is one that can limit deliberation and emphasise representation over local knowledge. Nevertheless, the substance of contributions draws on diverse knowledge/experience – for example, that of indigenous groups.

Developing guidance for citizen-centred governance

Public managers are not necessarily experts in the constitutional issues involved in governance design. There is value in guidance setting out the basic principles of democratic design and illustrating the different ways in which these can be put into practice. A consortium of bodies concerned with local governance and democracy, such as Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Local Government Association, Communities and Local Government and the National Council of Voluntary Organisations, might sponsor this guidance.[1] The specific expertise of the Guide Neighbourhoods initiative and social enterprises could be utilised to support this initiative.

Local infrastructure organisations working with the voluntary and community sector offer an additional resource, and may be able to develop pools of community-based consultants who have been involved in governance activities and who could advise on design. This would need to be properly rewarded, in line with the practice in the mental health and disability fields where service users and disabled people are increasingly paid for their expertise in advising local government, the NHS and others.

Making a difference, but depending on others

The new forms of citizen-centred governance described in this report do make a difference. They involve committed public managers, voluntary and community sector partners, and other stakeholders. They often have budgets that can be spent improving the well-being of communities and service users. The Sure Start and community-led housing association cases discussed in this report show how these new forms of governance can be innovative in developing new forms of service delivery and public engagement.

However, they also operate alongside mainstream bodies such as the local authority, NHS boards, the police, and central government departments and agencies. Formal accountability usually remains with such bodies.

As a result, the potential for citizen-centred governance to make a real difference to people's lives depends on the extent to which mainstream service deliverers can be persuaded to do things differently. Ultimately, the test is whether new forms of governance enable citizens and users to influence mainstream agencies – a point brought home by the experience of the neighbourhood management pilots discussed in Chapter 4.[2]

Defining local performance

The governance initiatives we have researched are not only about 'deepening democracy'. At their core is a mission to improve service delivery and outcomes, especially for individuals, families and groups in disadvantaged areas. So the shift to more participative forms of governance has taken place alongside a shift towards outcome-driven policy-making.

At the same time, there is a move from national to locally defined performance targets. Citizen-centred governance can make a contribution by directing the efforts of government and other stakeholders to issues that matter most for citizens or service users.

This means that there is a greater potential than in the past for local initiatives to influence mainstream agencies. Making a real difference to people's lives and to community well-being at grass-roots level becomes more important to agencies as national targets and performance systems are reduced.

Agreeing roles and expectations of all participants

Discussing and agreeing roles and expectations is an important part of the relationship between citizen-centred governance and mainstream public agencies. Our research indicates a wide range of actual and potential roles for participants in these new forms of governance. However, these are seldom made explicit or debated.

Within governance structures, there are different expectations about citizen/user participants than about those representing statutory bodies or other organisations. Some people's contributions are valued more highly than others because of the organisation or group they represent. This can result in inequitable or unreasonable expectations – for example, about the capacity of voluntary and community sector representatives to 'speak on behalf of' a diverse constituency when this is not expected of, for instance, an NHS manager in relation to representing the local health economy.

We are not suggesting that roles and responsibilities should be defined and imposed centrally and should be fixed. We *are* suggesting that good practice requires open discussion of such issues, and for agreement to be reached in relation to both 'official' and 'citizen' roles within such forums.

Experimenting with governance, but maintaining oversight

It is important that experimentation with citizen-centred governance continues. The problems facing people and communities in areas of disadvantage require governance bodies to facilitate local knowledge in order to enhance service design and delivery, and local representation in order to enable people's voices to have authority in decision-making.

The state-of-knowledge papers we commissioned provide some evidence that redesigning governance can enhance service delivery. Many of the new forms of governance are fundamentally about delivering service outcomes; the governance structure provides a mechanism for stimulating service quality and enabling local (and sometimes national) accountability. Service delivery also provides a route for people to become engaged and, over time, to participate more fully in the work of the organisation.

However, the effective governance of towns, cities and counties requires some oversight of the changing pattern of institutions. This oversight is also important in order to learn lessons and to assure transparency and good governance. We think that local authorities should consider establishing:

- a governance register of all bodies undertaking public functions or roles in their area, linked to

- local governance commissions in each area, based on extending the role of a council's overview and scrutiny committee to investigate the activities of NHS and other public bodies.

A governance register

We think it is important that citizens are able to access information on the various governance bodies operating in their area. These bodies affect their lives, and citizens should have a right to basic information on them.

At central government level, *Public Bodies* provides a register for quangos sponsored by departments and devolved administrations throughout the UK. It is available on the internet and as a publication, which is updated annually.[3] However, the picture at local level is much more complex and changeable. Consequently, we think the best option is local registers maintained by each local authority. There are already some examples. Staffordshire County Council has a partnerships register,[4] and Nottingham CVS maintains a directory of regeneration partnerships.[5] A template for a local governance register is provided in Box 11.

Box 11 Illustrative contents of local governance register

For each governance body operating in the locality:

1. name of body;

2. website;

3. geographical area covered (map to be provided);

4. purpose of body;

5. period of operation (for time-limited bodies);

6. contact details (name of contact person, address, email, phone);

7. budget;

8. names and contact details of members of governing board;

9. name and contact details of chief executive/senior manager.

Local governance commissions linked to overview and scrutiny committees

A number of local authorities are now establishing overview and scrutiny committees whose remit is to maintain an oversight of partnership creation and performance (Box 12). We think that this is a valuable model on which to build and could be extended to cover other governance bodies operating in each locality. This would reflect the local authority's duties for health scrutiny and the proposal that this should be extended to cover other public sector bodies in the area.

> **Box 12 Local authority oversight of partnerships – Staffordshire County Council**
>
> Staffordshire County Council has a Partnership Scrutiny and Performance Panel whose role is to review, scrutinise and monitor the performance of the council in relation to its use of partnerships to achieve its service and policy priorities, objectives and performance targets.
>
> The Partnerships Scrutiny and Performance Panel has three roles:
>
> - evaluating the County Council's input to a specific partnership and assessing the benefits delivered;
>
> - county councillors and representatives from partner organisations scrutinise the delivery of the local area agreement (LAA) and performance of key partnerships on a quarterly basis;
>
> - monitoring the delivery of the Community Safety agenda.
>
> Partnerships are requested to complete a Partnership Approval and Evaluation Form, which is considered by the Panel and, if agreed, is entered into the Register of Partnerships.
>
> Source: www.staffordshire.gov.uk

We propose that each local authority should create an overview and scrutiny committee to act as a local governance commission. This draws on the experience in the US with city charter commissions whose role is to review and recommend changes to the constitutions of city governments (see Box 13). Partnerships and other local governance bodies are part of the constitutional arrangements for the governance of a locality, and we think that it is right that the relevant local authority should have the duty to examine their role, the way in which they engage citizens and users, and their interactions with other bodies.

Box 13 City charter commissions – the Los Angeles experience

Los Angeles City Council, along with many other city governments in the US, has used specially appointed commissions to review its governance and that of other bodies operating in its area. In the late 1990s, a commission was appointed to review its City Charter and make changes that would bring city governance up to date.

Since 1999, the Neighborhood Council Review Commission – an independent group of 29 volunteers appointed by the Mayor and City Council – has been reviewing Los Angeles's system of neighbourhood councils and making recommendations for improvement (see also Box 9).

More recently, the city established a Joint Commission with the separately elected Board of Education responsible for running the city's education service. The Joint Commission is a body organised for a one-year term to explore issues on school district governance to improve academic achievement, better engage parents, more efficiently use resources and make the district more accountable. Commissions involve people who are not elected politicians and have professional staff to undertake analysis.

The role of the local governance commission in each area would be to hold hearings and make recommendations prior to introduction of new governance initiatives, significant reorganisation of existing governance structures or policy changes that might lead to governance impacts. The commissions should also review and make recommendations regarding existing governance arrangements. Hearings could be initiated at the request of affected publics, the governance body or the local authority. Each local government commission should identify any key findings or good-practice examples and circulate these to commissions in other areas. It would report to full council, the body in question and the wider public.

When considering individual governance structures, commissions should adopt the principle of proportionality in relation to standards of governance, as recommended by the Audit Commission. Its report *Governing Partnerships* recognises that the varying sizes and functions of such bodies mean that a 'one size fits all' approach to governance is not appropriate. However the Independent Commission for Good Governance in Public Services provides a Good Governance Standard for Public Services (Box 14) that is generally applicable (Independent Commission for Good Governance in Public Services, 2004; Skelcher *et al.*, 2004; Audit Commission, 2005).

> **Box 14 Principles of good governance**
>
> 1. Good governance means focusing on the organisation's purpose and on outcomes for citizens and service users.
>
> 2. Good governance means performing effectively in clearly defined functions and roles.
>
> 3. Good governance means promoting values for the whole organisation and demonstrating the values of good governance through behaviour.
>
> 4. Good governance means taking informed, transparent decisions and managing risk.
>
> 5. Good governance means developing the capacity and capability of the governing body to be effective.
>
> 6. Good governance means engaging stakeholders and making accountability real.
>
> Source: *Good Governance Standard for Public Service* (Independent Commission for Good Governance in Public Services, 2004)

Conclusion and recommendations

In summary our recommendations are as follows.

1. Guidance needs to be provided to enable greater clarity about the differences between 'local knowledge' and 'local representation', and their implications for governance design. Both principles are relevant to citizen-centred governance, but carry different expectations for those citizens and service users who take part in local governance. A consortium of bodies concerned with local governance and democracy might sponsor such guidance. Local infrastructure organisations working with the community and voluntary sector could also advise on design.

2. Similar clarity is needed in relation to the role of agency 'representatives' within partnerships, and the expectations and responsibilities of such representatives should be made clear as part of any work to agree appropriate design.

3. There is a powerful case for governance structures to be designed bottom-up, with strong involvement by citizens and service users. In this way, local people and those using services can create a design in which the balance between

flexibility and transparency reflects their values as well as being appropriate to the remit of the governance entity.

4. The value of new forms of governance will be related, in part, to their capacity to improve service delivery and outcomes, in particular for those who are most disadvantaged. The shift from national to locally defined performance indicators offers greater potential for local initiatives to influence mainstream agendas. To achieve this will require the establishment of more effective links between new governance entities and agencies holding decision-making powers.

5. It is important that the experimentation with citizen-centred governance continues, but it is also important to enable stability that can allow the growth of effective working relationships and learning about how practices can be sustained and developed.

6. Effective governance requires some oversight of the changing pattern of institutions to ensure both learning and transparency. Local authorities should consider establishing a governance register of all bodies undertaking public functions or roles in their area linked to local governance commissions in each area. This should be based on an extension of the role of councils' overview and scrutiny committees.

Big steps have been taken to create a more flexible and inclusive system of local governance. But this system is also complex and subject to differences in the level of transparency. It is also subject to regular change – in both the formal structures and day-to-day practices of governance.

Greater clarity about whether citizen and user engagement is principally for local knowledge or local representation will be an important feature of any informed approach to governance design and reform. But this requires that local governance as a whole – and not just the local authority and NHS bodies – should adopt principles of democratic and transparent governance. This chapter sets out the steps to achieve this and points the way towards enabling public engagement through improved design.

Notes

Chapter 3

1. The recent JRF report *Active Governance: The Value Added by Community Involvement in Governance through Local Strategic Partnerships* (Maguire and Truscott, 2007) provides a detailed discussion of the role of LSPs.

2. The other local public organisations to which representatives are directly elected by the public are school governing boards and New Deal for Community boards.

3. Available biographical data does not enable all governors to be reviewed for health-related expertise.

Chapter 5

1. See, for example, www.governancehub.org.uk/.

2. See National Evaluation of Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders, www.neighbourhood.gov.uk.

3. www.civilservice.gov.uk/other/agencies.

4. www.staffordshire.gov.uk.

5. www.nottinghamcvs.co.uk.

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