



Service Quality



Participation



Finance



Management



Structure

## LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT RESEARCH PROGRAMME



# Newsletter 1999-2000

## Introduction

Welcome to the 1999/2000 Local and Regional Government Research Programme Annual Newsletter. The Programme contributes information for policy development and evaluation on

the major elements of local and regional government such as participation, service quality and delivery, finance, management and structure. The programme has continued to expand since its start in 1988/89. The budget for 1999/2000 is £1,150,000.

This Newsletter provides details of new projects to be commissioned in 1999/2000 by the Local and Regional Government Research Unit and updates on current projects and recent research findings.

We are keen to generate interest amongst research contractors and welcome expressions of interest both from those who have worked for us in the past and those who are new to the programme. If you wish us to consider you when drawing up shortlists for invitation to tender, please complete and return the attached form to us at the address below **as soon as possible**.

We are continually updating our mailing list for the Newsletter and other research communication. If you wish to remain on this list, please complete and return the relevant sections of the form, even if you do not wish to be considered for invitation to tender.

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### Contacting the Research Unit

If you are interested in being considered for invitation to tender for this year's projects or would like to receive future copies of the Newsletter, or other research communication, please return your form to:

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### New projects for 1999/2000 include

1. Measuring the impact of the local government modernisation agenda;
2. Process costs of local plans and strategies;
3. Information technology and communications use in joined-up delivery of services and other contexts;
4. Beacon councils preliminary research activity;
5. Commonwealth Local Government Forum;
6. Youth participation in local government;
7. Evaluation of the Better Value pilot programme;
8. The accounting framework for Best Value;
9. Prudential indicators for regulating LA capital expenditure;
10. Non-statutory scheme for debt provision;
11. The attitudes and perspectives of local authority members and officers on the Revenue Grant Distribution system;
12. Comparative lessons from approaches and developments in Revenue Grant Distribution in other countries;
13. Strengths and weaknesses of existing and potentially new data sources for use in Grant Distribution calculations;
14. An examination of unanswered questions and conflicting results from research on the Area Cost Adjustment;
15. Costs or demands on services influencing expenditure in rural or sparsely populated areas;
16. Updating the base year used in Grant Distribution calculations;
17. Review of research and literature on regional governance.

### Local and Regional Government Internet Site

This Newsletter and the attached form are available on the DETR local and regional government internet site at: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk>

This web site contains comprehensive information on a range of local and regional government issues including research, finance, structure and sponsorship as well as the latest consultation papers.

To receive notification of recent updates to the Local and Regional Government Internet site please e-mail: [direct2lg@dial.pipex.com](mailto:direct2lg@dial.pipex.com)

This service is free and is available to anyone interested in local and regional government in England.

You can e-mail members of the Local and Regional Government Research Unit at: [firstname\\_surname@detr.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:firstname_surname@detr.gsi.gov.uk)

# Section 1:

## New Projects for 1999/2000

If you would like to express an interest in tendering for any of these projects, please return the attached form to the address listed on page 1 as soon as possible.

Potential contractors should be aware that the tendering and contracting process is extremely competitive. This Newsletter is sent to a large number of organisations, and projects often receive many expressions of interest from potential contractors. You will appreciate that to minimise abortive work, only a small proportion of these are invited to tender.

### Governance in General

#### 1. Measuring the impact of the local government

**modernisation agenda:** Given the wide-ranging nature of changes that will be required of local authorities as part of the modernising agenda, it will be important to measure, at least in broad terms, whether and to what extent they are being delivered both in terms of objectives set and actual achievements. As a first step, it is essential that baselines are put in place. This is something which can draw upon work commissioned right across the local government research community. For example, baseline data are currently being collected as follows:

<b>Public participation</b>	– DETR (DeMontfort/Strathclyde project), LGA/LGMB;
<b>Citizens attitudes</b>	– British Social Attitudes Survey 1997, People's Panel, MORI surveys;
<b>Internal decision-making</b>	– LGA/LGMB (DeMontfort/Strathclyde);
<b>Business attitudes</b>	– DETR (project in 1998/99 programme);
<b>Best Value</b>	– LGA/LGMB (Best Value and Quality initiatives databases, Best Value Network), DETR (Warwick Business School).
<b>Characteristics of councillors</b>	– LGMB (recently published data), JRF (research being carried out by University of Edinburgh), DETR (recently published research on employed councillors).
<b>Voting/electoral arrangements</b>	– LGA/LGMB (recently published data collected by MORI), DETR (British Social Attitudes Survey 1997, project in 1998/99 programme).

These are some illustrations. Further baseline data are being/could be collected on pilots/zones, members allowances, community leadership (scrutiny arrangements), innovation, time spent in council meetings, statutory powers and non-statutory duties etc.

This project, which could be jointly commissioned with the LGA/IDA, would be intended to review: the full nature and extent of baseline data being collected; the feasibility of synthesising these baseline data e.g. on an LA type or thematic basis, and/or creating a database (easily accessible to all organisations) containing these data; where significant gaps exist in the baseline and how these could be most cost-effectively filled; and, how results from the baseline could be most easily up-dated and disseminated. The project would be carried out in two stages. The first stage would involve a feasibility exercise and, subject to its recommendations, a main stage would then be carried out.

2. **Process costs of local plans and strategies:** This project would aim to examine and attempt to quantify the process costs associated with the design and delivery of all of the local strategic, service-based and thematic statutory and non-statutory plans that local authorities are currently expected to produce. Given the substantial growth in the number, nature and extent of plans and strategy statements, it is becoming increasingly important to assess the potential process cost of this matrix of plans and initiatives at the local level. Issues might include:

- Identifying the form and extent of both direct and indirect costs, and the opportunity costs of committed resources – the 'what form?' of process costs;
- Mapping the burden and impact of process costs – the 'who pays?' and 'how much?' of process costs;
- Assessing the direct and indirect benefits which accrue from pursuing competitive, cross-cutting and inter-organisational approaches to policy, both in quantitative terms and also in qualitative assessments of the changes afforded by such approaches – the 'for what?' of process costs.

This work will dovetail with research the Department is commissioning on better co-ordination of area-based initiatives, such as Employment Action Zones, Health Action Zones and Education Action Zones which will also be looking at process costs associated with such schemes.

#### 3. Information technology and communications – uses in joined-up delivery of services and other contexts:

There is significant interest within central and local government in the possibilities of harnessing all forms of information technology to provide joined-up service delivery and other benefits to citizens. The potential for local government to exploit ITC in general for information sharing, improving public service delivery and offering affordable and accessible services to all citizens is considerable. There is, however, relatively little published research which attempts to bring together good practice guidance and lessons on the positive benefits and potential pitfalls of information and communications technology in service delivery and other contexts. For example: effective approaches to tackling social exclusion may necessitate significant information sharing between public bodies dealing with specific neighbourhoods or groups; problems associated with information and communications technology in the public sphere may have to be addressed – forms such as the Internet may be both a source of social exclusion as well as a potential pathway for inclusion and, ITC can provide for enhanced information sharing between elected representatives, community organisations and citizens.

This research could also cover the contribution ITC can make to democratic renewal and to supporting innovative arrangements for voting.

This project would aim to examine published and unpublished literature and research on the uses and possibilities of ITC for local service delivery and access to information in contexts as wide-ranging as the best value pilots to mapping of deprivation and local touch screen services in libraries and community locations. Depending upon the outcome, it would then select case-studies for more detailed investigation. It may also be possible to cover some specific international examples of the uses of ITC in deprived areas of cities.

**4. The Beacon Council Preliminary Research Activity:** *Expressions of interest are not required for this project.*

Seven different organisations have been commissioned to carry out research on the seven service and cross-cutting services areas for which beacon status will be awarded in the first phase of the scheme, these are:

1. **Community Safety:** preventing local shopping & town centre crime & disorder (*Safe Neighbourhoods Unit*);
2. **Education:** helping to raise standards by tackling school failure (*Centre for the Evaluation of Public Policy and Practice, Brunel University*);
3. **Housing:** improving housing maintenance (*INLOGOV*);
4. **Modernising Planning:** streamlining planning decisions for business (*Halcrow Fox*);
5. **Modern Service Delivery:** improving housing & council tax benefit administration (*Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University*);
6. **Social Services:** helping care leavers (*Centre for Housing Policy and Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York*);
7. **Sustainable Development:** getting rid of waste (*AEA Technology*).

The research will inform the selection process amongst the applications for beacon status on each of these themes, in order to identify excellent performance, innovation and best practice from which others can learn. The selection panel will receive a set of summarised baseline statements/papers on the key issues, standard local authority performance, innovation and best practice in each of these areas. The research is being jointly commissioned by the IDA.

*For further details, please contact Natalia Chivite-Matthews on 0171 890 4026.*

## Democratic Renewal and Participation

**5. Commonwealth Local Government Forum:** The Department will be a contributory funder in a research project being set up by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum to examine key local government reform experiences and identify best practice in Commonwealth countries, including South Africa, India, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Australia. Issues investigated would be new institutional arrangements for central/local relations e.g. elected mayors; the development of a community leadership role; public/private partnership and co-operation with developmental non-governmental

organisations; and, the effectiveness of local democracy and voter participation.

**6. Youth participation in local government:** Building upon DETR research published this year on involving citizens in local government and the recently published IDA project on community perspectives of participation, more in-depth investigation is needed on engaging excluded groups such as young people. A project looking at specific schemes developed by local authorities to increase participation and involvement by these groups and leading to good practice guidance may be useful. In particular, the Children's Rights Office, Local Government Information Unit and the National

Children's Bureau have plans to carry out a detailed and robust study of local authority approaches to involving young people in local government. The Department will become a joint contributor towards the funding of this study which plans to build upon the LGIU's publication 'Hear, Hear', through in depth investigation of 16 projects in up to ten case-study authorities.

## Service Delivery

**7. Evaluation of the Better Value pilot programme:** Shortly after the Best Value pilots programme was established in December 1997, the Better Value Development Programme was set up, which includes 16 authorities which were given special exemptions from the 1988 CCT regulations plus 6 subscriber participant authorities. Warwick Business School have been supporting the first year of the Programme through a series of workshops based around the approaches being developed by the Better Value pilots to Best Value. Essentially, these workshops have been inward-looking in terms of exchange and learning and there is growing demand for broader sharing of the experience gained from the BVDP. Since the Programme has been designed for two years, the opportunity exists, in the second year, to incorporate a stronger emphasis on research and stronger feedback links into the Best Value Pilots Programme. The Department will co-fund this more substantial second phase of the research along with other organisations and it is recommended that this opportunity is taken up.

**8. The accounting framework for Best Value:** The modernising of the accounting framework is an essential element in the overall Best Value framework, since it is this which will ensure that comparisons between local authorities and the financial based information included in local performance plans is expressed on a 'like for like' basis. However, as a recently published CIPFA consultation document makes clear, there are several key areas of local authority accounting that will require research and analysis before a commonly accepted way ahead can be determined. When the consultation period comes to a close at the end of April, a significant amount of detailed work will be required over the following six months to produce a modernised accounting framework which is capable of implementation by local authorities from 1 April 2000. While CIPFA will continue to provide voluntary and direct employee time on the project, it will not be possible for CIPFA to resource the research programme without securing some additional financial resources. The Department is invited to co-fund

## Local Authority Finance

### 9. Prudential Indicators for Regulating Local Authorities'

#### Capital Expenditure:

*Expressions of interest are not required for this project.*

The Government is investigating the feasibility of reducing the number of detailed controls on local authorities' capital expenditure. Behind reduced controls, a system of indicators will

be required to reflect the ability of a local authority to finance capital expenditure in the long term. PricewaterhouseCoopers have been commissioned to investigate the feasibility of constructing prudential indicators based on known characteristics of local authorities which will act to restrain authorities from undertaking capital expenditure which could lead to unsustainable financial positions, whilst giving more scope for discretion as to the amounts of revenue budgets spent on servicing capital.

*For further details, please contact David Purdy on 0171 890 4122.*

### 10. Non-statutory Scheme for Debt Provision:

*Expressions of interest are not required for this project.*

In the White Paper *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People* (July 1998), the Government undertook to consider the possible replacement of Minimum Revenue Provision with a less formal but prudentially sound scheme of provision for debt repayment. PricewaterhouseCoopers have been commissioned to: draft a non-statutory code of practice defining a sound and prudent basis on which local authorities should be expected to make annual provision from revenue for repaying debts and meeting liabilities under "credit arrangements"; to prepare informal guidance to accompany the code; to undertake case studies of the effects of the code on a number of local authorities; and

to report to the Department on the specific results and the general implications of the new arrangements.

*For further details, please contact David Purdy on 0171 890 4122.*

### Review of the Revenue Grant Distribution system

Within **Strand One** of the Review of the Revenue Grant Distribution system, there is a need for research on the following:

11. **The attitudes and perspectives of local authority members and officers on the Revenue Grant Distribution system.** In particular, a nationally representative structured opinion survey on the objectives of grant distribution backed up by detailed, in-depth qualitative investigation of these concepts, and where they conflict;

12. **Comparative lessons from approaches and developments in Revenue Grant Distribution in other countries.** This review of literature and research on international systems of local government finance would need to be highly focussed on key issues and yield lessons that could be potentially applied in the English context. It should identify case-studies that could be followed up in greater detail;

13. **Strengths and weaknesses of existing and potentially new datasources for use in Grant Distribution calculations,** including those arising from Best Value. The research should inform concerns about data coverage and quality.

Within **Strand Two**, there is a need for a number of research projects as follows:

14. A desk-based project which attempts to examine in detail some of the **conflicting findings that have emerged from different pieces of research commissioned in recent years on options for the Area Cost Adjustment**. This would also examine gaps in coverage of issues and any key unanswered questions;

15. A project looking at potential additional **costs or demands on services which influence expenditure in rural or sparsely populated areas**;

16. **A project looking at how best to update the base year used in calculations underlying Grant Distribution.**

## Regional Governance

17. **Review of research and literature on regional governance:** As part of the development of policy in relation to regional governance for England, a review is needed of all relevant (published and unpublished) research and literature on regional/sub-national systems of governance, both in this country and internationally. The review would be intended to draw out key lessons for regional governance in England, including examining issues such as:

- the constitutional status of regional government;
- the distribution of functions between the regional tier and other tiers of government and how that is embodied in statute;
- the relationships of accountability between the regional tier and other tiers of government;
- the financial autonomy of the regional tier; and,
- the electoral systems that are used at the regional level.

Then, going beyond this descriptive analysis:

- tensions and benefits associated with particular relationships and systems;
- problems encountered in the evolution of regional systems and how these have been addressed;
- problems encountered with existing administrative boundaries;
- competition for roles and partnership amongst tiers of government;
- public perceptions and awareness of regional government and its functions.

The project could encompass studies carried out up to ten or fifteen years ago and thinkpieces/options appraisals as well as research based upon empirical observation of regional systems. It could also examine research and literature on non-European as well as European countries.

## Section 2: Guidance for Potential Contractors

*This section gives general guidance on the way contractors are selected for research projects.*

### Expressions of Interest

Expressions of interest are very welcome, but they do not guarantee inclusion on the short list for invitation to tender. The information that contractors provide on the enclosed form will be used in drawing up a shortlist, usually of between 3-6 names depending on the nature of the project and extent of expertise amongst potential contractors.

### Invitations to Tender

Formal invitations to tender will include:

- the specification of the project outlining the objectives, relevant details and what contractors are expected to provide in the tender;
- the standard contract conditions;
- the date for receipt of tenders;
- the expected timing for the announcement of the award;
- a guide to preparing research reports and summaries.

Four weeks is the usual period for submitting tenders, although for urgent projects that period may be shortened.

### Tender Documents and their Assessments

A tender assessment panel will examine the tenders. The panel will look at the appropriateness, quality and cost of contractors' proposals, and they will take into account:

- understanding of the issues being addressed;
- familiarity with previous relevant research;
- the experience of the research team;
- the proposed costs.

Interviews may be held to assist with this assessment. Normally these will involve the tenderer making a short presentation and discussing the proposals more fully, including responding to the questions of the interviewing panel.

### Awarding of Contracts

The assessment of tenders normally results in the selection of a preferred tender, although the Department is not bound to accept any tender. All tenderers are informed of the outcome. The successful tenderer then agrees a programme of work with the Department for inclusion in the formal contract.

local demands and aspirations.

## Evaluation System

An evaluation system has been designed in consultation with previously-used contractors and the Programme's policy customers. All new projects within the Local and Regional Government Research Programme are evaluated on completion.

The purpose of the evaluation system is to improve the workings of the programme, by informing future research and enabling the process to run more smoothly and effectively in future. It will also provide contractors with formal comments from the Department on their satisfaction with both the management of the research and the quality of the outputs and will give contractors the opportunity to offer feedback to the Department. Involvement within the evaluation process will be a contractual requirement.

## Publications Guidance

Most projects involve the publication of a full report and stand alone summary. We have produced for contractors a guide to preparing research reports and summaries. The guidance clarifies different dissemination strategies and the audience for local government research. The main stages of the publication process are outlined, and the core requirements of a report or summary defined. We would welcome feedback from those of you who have received the guidance on how it can be improved.

There may be an opportunity for producing further publications by contractors although this is not a contractual requirement. If you have the capacity to publish reports and would like to do so, please indicate this on the form enclosed.

## Section 3: Summary of Current and Recently Completed Projects

*This section describes the current and most recent research that has been funded under the programme. For studies underway at the moment, reports are likely to be published during the course of 1999/2000.*

## Research on the delivery and quality of local services

### Best Value Pilot Scheme Evaluation

The Government intends to place a new duty of Best Value upon all local authorities from 1st April 2000. The new approach is currently being piloted among 37 English and 3 Welsh local, police and fire authorities. The Department has commissioned a team based in the Local Government Centre at Warwick University's Business School to evaluate the pilot programme. The aims of the project are to monitor and evaluate experience in developing Best Value as part of the pilot scheme and to identify successful approaches to delivering good quality and affordable services in line with

There are four key elements to the evaluation: first, to support the work of a Panel advising the Minister on the selection of the authorities to participate in the pilot programme (October-December 1997); second, to establish baseline conditions in each pilot and the measures by which progress can be assessed (January-June 1998); third, to monitor the implementation of Best Value in the pilot authorities (April 1998-April 2000); fourth, to provide an overall evaluation of the final outcomes of the pilot programme (April-September 2000).

The experience of the pilot authorities will be taken into account in shaping the way Best Value will apply in practice. It is also vital that the lessons from the pilot programme are communicated as widely as possible. To this end the Warwick research team has produced a series of thematic good practice papers on aspects of the Best Value process, including:

- effective service review & delivery;
- competition, benchmarking & performance networks;
- involving users and the community;
- partnership & stakeholder perspectives of Best Value;
- using accreditation & quality assurance networks;
- developing performance indicators.

Copies of these papers, which were published in February 1999, are available on the Department's local government web site ([www.local.detr.gov.uk](http://www.local.detr.gov.uk)). The interim report, based on the analysis of the implementation of Best Value amongst the pilots, will be published in Autumn 1999.

*For further details about this project, please contact Wendy Russell Barter on 0171 890 4124.*

### **Lessons Learnt from Intervention**

In advance of introducing the Best Value regime in local government, the Department has commissioned KPMG Consulting to undertake a study on lessons learnt from examples of intervention in cases of failing performance in a range of settings. The study, which will be completed in the summer of 1999, is being carried out in the context of the Government's Local Government Bill, currently (mid-May) awaiting Lords report and Third Reading, which places a duty

on local authorities to secure Best Value across all of their functions. The Best Value regime will provide for the Government to intervene in cases where local authorities fail to remedy performance shortcomings in their delivery of services to the public, and the research will help inform Government policy on the exercise of the Secretary of State's powers of intervention under Best Value. The main objective of the research is to draw together practical lessons, by assessing the purposes, processes and forms of intervention, and determine which forms of intervention and regulation are most appropriate and effective in different circumstances.

*For further details about this project, please contact Joe Biskupski on 0171 890 4125.*

### **Local Authority Involvement in Partnerships**

Improving the quality of local services, and the efficiency and economy with which they are delivered, is a key objective of the Government's plans to modernise local government. Local authorities working with others is one way of achieving this, and the Government is keen to encourage partnership working as an option for local government service delivery within the Best Value framework.

In this context, the Department has commissioned Newchurch & Company to carry out a study to assess the nature and extent of local authority involvement in partnerships. This project was set up to feed into the policy-making process by obtaining an up-to-date picture of the nature and extent of local authorities' involvement in partnerships with the private, voluntary and community sectors, and the impact of such arrangements on service delivery. This objective is being met through four elements: a review of existing information on all forms of service delivery local authority partnerships; a postal survey of all local authorities and a sample of their partners; an evaluation of the six pilot partnership networks and a three-year evaluation of case studies of local authority partnerships.

Currently (May 1999), the postal survey and the literature review are nearing completion, and the baseline evaluation of the pilot partnership networks is underway. Selection of the partnership case studies will be undertaken later in the spring.

*For further details about this project, please contact Joe Biskupski on 0171 890 4125.*

### **White Collar Service Provision in Response to CCT**

Work is coming to an end on a study being undertaken by Newchurch & Company to investigate and monitor changes in white collar service provision in response to CCT. The study has followed a sample of London boroughs, metropolitan authorities and non-reorganised shire authorities as they prepare for competition, and their initial experience of any contracts let. The study will draw out good practice in exposing services to competition, and the final report will consider how the challenges of CCT, such as specifying and costing services, feed into the Best Value debate. It is anticipated that this report will be available by the summer of 1999.

*For further details, please contact Paul McCafferty on 0171 890 4103.*

## **Research on Local Authority Powers and Duties**

### **Law relating to the functions of local government**

The Faculty of Law at the University of Birmingham is undertaking a review of the law relating to the functions of local government. This has three main objectives: a desk-based review of the current state of the statute book as it affects the general powers, the community leadership and service planning functions of local authorities, and any existing powers bearing on social, economic and environmental well-being; an investigation of the empirical basis for debates

surrounding constraints on councils; and the drawing together of practical lessons and guidance on the legislative framework for local government that can be applied in the context of work on the new duty of well-being and the enabling legislation for beacon councils. It is intended that a report will be available by July of this year.

*For further details, please contact Paul McCafferty on 0171 890 4103.*

### **Local Authority Use of their Section 137 Power**

Research was undertaken by York Consulting which examined the use by local authorities of Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972. The study was commissioned in the context of developing a new duty for local authorities "to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of their areas". The findings, published in March 1999, show that 92% of authorities have made use of s137 (1996/97). There was a general view amongst authorities that s137 is of limited importance, given the scale of the expenditure limit relative to their total expenditure, and the even smaller scale of their actual spending. Many authorities indicated that their power under s137 is "irrelevant" to the key issues which they face. This reflects the specific powers that authorities have been given, especially in relation to economic development. There was, nevertheless a strong view amongst authorities that their power under s137 does provide essential flexibility, and subject to the definition of the proposed new duty, should be retained.

*For further details about this project, please contact Joe Biskupski on 0171 890 4125.*

### **The Use of Section 137 by Parish Councils**

The findings of a study looking at the extent and purpose to which local (parish and town) councils use their power under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 were published by the Department in November 1998. The research was instigated in response to a recommendation made by the House of Commons Environment Select Committee which called on the Government to review Section 137. The study, which was undertaken by Aston Business School, found that s137 is being used by an increasing number of local councils, and that the current arrangements were generally seen as satisfactory by the vast majority of local councils. However, the findings do show that the current expenditure limit on s137 is a severe constraint for a small number of councils. The findings are being considered by the Department with a view to reviewing s137.

*For further details about this project, please contact Joe Biskupski on 0171 890 4125.*

## **Research on Participation in Local Democracy**

### **Enhancing Public Participation in Local Government**

The aim of this study was to: provide an up-to-date picture of the nature and scope of participation in local government; to investigate the views of local authorities and their citizens;

and, develop guidance on the selection, implementation and evaluation of public participation initiatives. The research, undertaken by De Montfort and Strathclyde Universities, involved the collection of detailed information on approaches taken by local authorities to enhance public participation in their decision-making and service delivery. Case studies and focus groups addressed what local authorities want, and indeed, what people want from their local authorities.

Key findings from the research, published in September 1998, are:

- local authorities already use a wide range of consultative and participative techniques but more 'traditional' forms (such as public meetings and consultation documents) dominate. Service satisfaction surveys and complaints suggestion schemes are used in almost all councils;
- choice of methods is generally on an ad hoc basis and any strategies which exist are informal or depend on key individuals;
- there is a trend towards more innovative methods of participation/consultation by local authorities, albeit from a low level of usage;
- the majority of participative or consultative methods are used to consider service delivery rather than corporate issues;
- there is a high level of collaboration with other agencies. Some inter-agency working may be the result of certain funding regimes;
- evaluation of participation is non-existent or informal. This is mostly due to resource constraints and/or timing.

Guidance, informed by the research, was published in October 1989. It is designed to help both members and officers think through which approach to public participation would be most appropriate locally. A commitment to a systematic and strategic approach to participation requires:

- **Improved Comprehension:** establish fitness for purpose, monitor and evaluate;
- **Better Communication:** communicate the commitment to participation within and beyond the authority;
- **Developing Capacity:** provide support and skills to those involved, encourage 'non-joiners' ;
- **Strengthening Connections:** Participation must make an impact on the decision-making of the authority. It is central to the executive, scrutiny and representative roles of councillors. Participation also needs to be built into partnerships.

*For further details, please contact David Purdy on 0171 890 4122.*

### **The Influence of Voting and Electoral Procedures**

A joint research team of Maxwell Stamp PLC and the LGC Elections Centre at the University of Plymouth have been commissioned to research the influence of voting and electoral procedures on turnout at local elections. The project has four key stages: the first stage investigates (through a postal survey) current local authority initiatives and practices to

enhance electoral registration and participation; the second stage will analyse the impact of these authority-based initiatives and a range of structural, socio-economic and political variables on voter turnout; the third stage will involve case studies in a sample of authorities in which the level of turnout deviates most significantly from that estimated by the model. The final component of the study is to place the national and local election experience within an international context. A report should be published late in 1999.

*For further details, please contact David Purdy on 0171 890 4122.*

### **Citizens' Attitudes and Knowledge of Local Government Finance**

SCPR are undertaking research on citizens' attitudes and knowledge of local government. In order for local authorities to promote public participation in local decision-making, both in terms of governance and finance issues, much is still to be learnt about citizens' attitudes, understanding and

knowledge of local government finance issues, and the ways in which authorities can encourage more public participation. The first objective of the research will be to gather and analyse baseline information on citizens' knowledge and attitudes towards local government and local government finance as well as their experience of consultations and information received by their council. This quantitative information will be complemented by qualitative data in order to produce good and bad practice guidance for authorities on how to present and disseminate information on local government finance and how to carry out consultations with citizens. A third objective is to set the findings within the wider context of the 'Modern Local Government: In touch with the people' White Paper and Best Value. The project is due to be completed by the end of June 1999.

*For further details, please contact Natalia Chivite-Matthews on 0171 890 4026.*

### **Research on Cross-cutting Issues**

Early in 1998 the Department commissioned two separate research teams to carry out research to consider the problems faced by central and local government in tackling cross-cutting issues such as social exclusion, disaffected youth, and sustainable development. The two studies drew together, through case studies, interviews and literature reviews, any generally applicable lessons emerging from joint working in tackling cross-cutting issues with the aim of providing information to guide central government policy formation, initiatives and programmes, and local partnerships and cooperation. The two main research reports were published in January 1999:

#### **Cross-cutting Issues Affecting Local Government**

The report *Cross-cutting Issues Affecting Local Government* by a joint team of the Office for Public Management and the University of the West of England, Bristol concentrates on how approaches to cross-cutting working and issues are developed through looking at authority-wide, locality-based studies. It examines how centrally and locally generated policies/spending/initiatives for each of the cross-cutting issues

considered are being put into effect across all aspects of the authority's work (both internally and in partnership with other agencies). The report uses a 'whole system' approach derived from studies of organisational behaviour, consider the behaviour of 'players' in terms of the influence of drivers and counter-drivers. Nine 'system elements' are identified. Effective policy implementation requires effectiveness within each element of the system and effective links between them. Failure in any single linkage is likely to cause a blockage along other lines, slow the system down, or produce unexpected side effects.

#### **Cross-cutting Issues in Public Policy and Public Service**

The report *Cross-cutting Issues in Public Policy and Public Service* by the University of Birmingham School of Public Policy concentrates on how approaches to cross-cutting working and issues are developed through looking at specific initiatives or policy areas such as waste management, Health Action Zones, young people leaving local authority care, partnerships for youth and citizen development skills. The report suggests that the kind of delivery regimes sometimes established in the past, while apparently more efficient, sometimes resulted in greater overall cost because problems and their costs were dumped on third parties. Whilst the study justifies criticism of the public policy system in past years, it also draws out some of the positive examples from this new 'emergent' policy period such as broad objectives set nationally and development plans devised locally.

*For further detail on these projects, please contact David Purdy on 0171 890 4122.*

### **Research on Innovation within Local Government**

#### **Evaluation of New Forms of Political Management**

INLOGOV at the University of Birmingham School of Public Policy have recently been jointly commissioned the Department and the IDA (formerly part of the LGMB) to evaluate and comment upon developments in the political management arrangements within a study group of local authorities which have started to change their political management structures and processes. The key purpose of the research is to develop a practical evaluation framework which can be used for the assessment and evaluation of new forms of political management. The research is expected to report before the end of 1999.

*For further details, please contact David Purdy on 0171 890 4122.*

#### **Innovation and Best Practice within Local Government**

INLOGOV at the University of Birmingham are undertaking research on innovation and best practice within local government. The research will look into possible triggers to innovation, its process and how best innovations might be sustained and replicated more widely. The methodology will consist of a survey of local authorities and in-depth case

studies. The main areas of inquiry are: to develop a working definition of innovation that will assist in identifying innovative authorities; to investigate the forms that innovation can take in local government, and the way they are generated; to examine how the behavioural, cultural, and structural (internal) conditions and environmental (external) conditions interact to produce successful innovations at each stage of the innovation process; to establish how a positive circle can be encouraged; to develop proposals whereby successful innovation can be sustained and developed; to identify the circumstances which discourage innovation, and to suggest ways in which these can be avoided; and, to examine how innovation might best be disseminated to other local authorities and internally. A report will be published late in the autumn 1999.

*For further details, please contact Natalia Chivite-Matthews on 0171 890 4026.*

### **International Experimentation in Local Government**

*Project currently unlet – expressions of interest invited.*

This research project would aim to draw together lessons learnt and findings from all of the various kinds of experimentation in local government powers and duties carried out in other countries. For example, 'free commune' experiments that have existed in Scandinavian countries for several years. These experiments have been monitored and have been the subject of evaluations within these countries. The project would involve a review of published and unpublished literature generated within this country and within the experimenting countries themselves. It would also involve some case-study visits and interviews with researchers and officials. The project would contribute to policy development on a new duty of economic, social and environmental well-being that is being proposed for local government.

*For further details, please contact Joe Biskupski on 0171 890 4125.*

## **Research on Local Authorities' Relationships with the Business Community and Private Sector Funders**

### **The Relationship between Local Authorities and Private Funders**

FB Consultancy was jointly commissioned by the Department and the LGMB to carry out research to gauge the attitudes of local authorities towards private sector funders (PSFs) and the private finance community as well as the extent of expertise in local authorities and possible training needs. The research fieldwork involved a questionnaire survey of all local authorities. A report was published by the LGMB in October 1989.

The report established that a majority of local authorities have at least explored the opportunities for alternative forms of finance or to negotiate funding. Contact has generally been through intermediaries such as accountants, solicitors and specialist brokers, largely because LAs feel ill-equipped to negotiate.

Although building relationships with the private sector funding community was considered costly in terms of time

and staff resources, local authorities felt this investment would prove valuable over the long term and result in improvements to the services delivered. However, some smaller authorities expressed feelings of exclusion, due to their lack of resources and skills to develop relationships with PSFs, but also the perception that their finance requirements would be of little or no interest to funders.

*For further details, please contact David Purdy on 0171 890 4122.*

## **Banks' Attitudes to Local Government**

FB Consultancy was jointly commissioned by the Department and the British Bankers' Association to carry out a small survey

of banks' attitudes to local authorities. This complements the earlier research on the attitudes of local authorities. The research explored the nature of banks' experience to date, identified barriers to successful working relationships (and the means to overcome them) and determined the level of banks' appetite to do business with LAs, particularly PFI funding. This report was published by the BBA in December 1989.

The research reveals there is a core of banks doing business with LAs and that over two-thirds of respondents have received new approaches from LAs in the last year. There is an anticipation that PFI funding will be the main expansion area in the future in relation to LA business. Banks are generally better prepared than local authorities with regard to strategic market development. Banks with LA funding policies in place felt more comfortable overall with their knowledge levels relating to LAs and how they operate.

The skills needed by LAs, as identified by banks, are similar to those recognised by LAs themselves: understanding the market; preparation and negotiation of funding deals and technical project management skills.

*For further details, please contact David Purdy on 0171 890 4122.*

## **The Attitudes of Business towards Local Government Finance**

York Consulting has been commissioned to carry out research on the attitudes of business towards local government finance. The White Paper proposes to give councils some direct responsibility for local tax decisions affecting the business community. Before allowing councils a measure of control over business rates, however, they will be expected to demonstrate that they have effective arrangements for involving local businesses in their tax and spending decisions. The research is divided in four main sections: a survey of local authorities to look at current links that authorities have with businesses; a survey of English businesses to assess their knowledge and attitudes towards local government; case study work in several local authorities in order to identify current practice, its strengths and weaknesses for guidance; and, international literature review to review businesses involvement in other countries. It is anticipated that this report will be available by the autumn 1999.

*For further details, please contact Natalia Chivite-Matthews on 0171 890 4026.*

## **Research on Local Authority Finance – Standard Spending Assessments**

Several studies have been completed which examine aspects of Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) methodology. These include a project which looked at the potential application of the statistical technique of multi-level modelling in the calculation of SSAs for local authorities in England, and a project which examined the advantages and disadvantages

of using non-expenditure measures of need in SSA regression analysis and how well such information can capture the relative need to spend between local authorities. These projects were undertaken by Dr Leslie Hepple of Bristol University and Professor Glen Bramley of Heriot-Watt University respectively and reported in the spring of 1998.

In addition, Dr Ian Preston of University College, London and Dr Kevin Denny of University College, Dublin examined the application and reliability of fixed effects modelling in the calculation of Area Cost Adjustment (ACA) factors. This is essentially a statistical method which uses panel datasets where the same set of individuals is sampled at regular intervals – in this case, the New Earnings Survey – to produce alternative regression co-efficients to cross-sectional datasets. The research was completed in the autumn of 1998.

*For further details about these projects, please contact Joe Biskupski on 0171 890 4125.*

## **Research on Local Authority Finance – the development of the Capital Finance System**

### **Process Evaluation of the Capital Challenge Pilot Scheme**

*Project currently unlet – expressions of interest invited.*

By May 1998 successful Capital Challenge authorities will be into the final year of their three-year programme. A process evaluation might seek to establish: how well local authorities were delivering their plans; what problems had typically occurred; whether partnerships were working as promised; whether private sector leverage was being delivered; how useful was the "capital strategy" proving – had it been forgotten or was it now part of the council's framework for decision-making? To what extent had the constraints imposed by Capital Challenge – annual funding to an agreed profile and "capital" only – proved a barrier to effective investment?

What has been the role and effectiveness of GOs in encouraging partnerships to achieve a corporate strategy towards their delivery plans, and has this led to greater emphasis on cross-cutting issues and working in local government? How far had GO concerns/predictions about bids proved correct? How did individual GOs differ in their ongoing approach to schemes; how far did they take an interest; what difference did this make to the operation/delivery of schemes? The research would follow on from the previous York Consulting study. A final phase of research evaluating the programme as a whole might start in Summer 2000.

### **Measuring Performance in the Management of Local Authority Property**

DTZ Pinda Consulting have been commissioned to carry out a project on measuring performance in the management of local authority property, relating primarily to non-school and non-housing assets. The objectives are to obtain, through a postal survey, information on the current forms and methods of asset management (including performance indicators), highlight good practice in asset management, through case studies, and develop guidance for local authorities, parallel to DFEE guidance, in designing and operating asset management plans.

There will also be recommendations for a central framework of universal and comparable measures of performance.

The report and guidance are expected this Summer.

*For further details, please contact David Purdy on 0171 890 4122.*

### **Measurement of Relative Need for Capital Expenditure**

PricewaterhouseCoopers have been commissioned to carry out research looking at local authorities' relative need for capital expenditure. The research relates to the move, as proposed in the local government White Paper, to a 'single pot' for capital resources rather than separate service-specific 'pots' under the current system. The project will assess the appropriateness of a cross-service 'needs' indicator, the range of options, and their potential impact on the distribution of funding among authorities. Consideration will be given to how far the indicator might reflect relative capacity to raise resources locally and the impact of applying the Welsh (single pot) formula to English authorities. A report will be published in late summer 1999.

*For further details, please contact David Purdy on 0171 890 4122.*

## **Research on Other Issues**

### **Review of the Local Government Research Programme**

This project involved an independent review of the Local Government Research Programme covering the years 1994/95-1997/98 inclusive. The review, which was carried out by William Solesbury & Associates, sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme in meeting its objectives and to make recommendations for the broad scope, scale and implementation of the programme for 1998-2003.

The programme, as a whole, received a clean bill of health from the evaluators. The broad conclusion of the review was that the research commissioned during 1994-98 was of good quality, made a unique and important contribution to policy, was efficiently managed and represented good value for money. The review, nevertheless, recommends that a broader range of methodologies might have been used, including secondary data analysis and collaboration with others and there could have been greater awareness and use of others' research. The key recommendation of the review is that the policy agenda arising from the 1998 White Paper on Local Government provides a strong rationale and set of objectives for a research programme contribution to future local government policy.

*For further details, please contact Paul McCafferty on 0171 890 4103.*

## **Section 4: Local and Regional Government Research Programme – News**

### **British Social Attitudes Survey 1998**

The Local and Regional Government Research Unit has funded a set of questions in the British Social Attitudes

Survey. The survey, which is undertaken annually by Social and Community Planning Research, is designed to monitor and explain trends in public opinion towards a range of social, economic and political issues.

The Department's questions focus on two key areas: how might civic participation in local government be improved, and how might local government be encouraged to deliver Best Value in the provision of services.

Interest in those areas stems from the Government's desire to modernise local democratic government. One element of this is the desire for democratic renewal: how can local government engage with and more effectively lead their local communities? The DETR consultation paper, *Modernising Local Government: Local democracy and community leadership* considers what needs to be done in a number of areas: modernising electoral arrangements, community involvement, council working and community leadership. The BSA questions reflect a particular interest in the potential of a range of possible reforms. These include directly elected mayors, weekend voting, annual election, voter registration, use of citizens' juries, deliberative polling and focus groups as well as community participation plans.

Data from the survey have been made available to the Department, and is currently undergoing secondary analysis. The BSA Sixteenth Report, containing the findings of the 1998 Survey will be published at the end of 1999.

For further details about this project, please contact Natalia Chivite-Matthews on 0171 890 4026.

### **Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Programme on Democracy and Participation**

ESRC has agreed to fund a five year programme of research on democracy and participation.

This programme will examine citizen participation in voluntary activity in Britain, and addresses a number of key concerns about the state of democracy and participation at the present time. The aim of the research is to inform the debates surrounding the ambitious programme of constitutional reform and policy innovation undertaken by the government. The core questions for the research are:

- Is there a crisis of participation and democratic legitimacy in Britain?
- Why do some people participate when others do not?
- What are the effects of a changing environment, particularly constitutional and political changes, on participation?
- What are the links between participation, governance and democratic accountability?
- What participation is taking place?

The programme involves a series of linked studies looking at different aspects of democracy and participation. It will examine citizen participation in the institutions of state such as in elections, local government and Quangos, as well as participation in non-state institutions such as political parties, interest groups, and campaigning and protest groups of various types. The centre piece of the programme will be a large scale survey of citizen participation and citizen attitudes to democracy and the state, in effect

a citizenship audit. It is anticipated that the programme will also include some evaluation of experiments in local democracy by local authorities.

### **Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Programme on Devolution and UK Constitutional Change Research Programme**

ESRC are considering setting up a major research programme on Scottish and Welsh devolution (incorporating issues surrounding English regional government). Themes for the programme include: *Constitutional matters and Governance* – powers and operation of new institutions, relations between devolved bodies, Westminster and Dublin and relations with Brussels; *Political issues* – impact on citizens and existing elites, differing electoral systems, impact on structure, attitudes, practices of all social partners; *Public policy and Economic and Social issues* – policy development in new bodies, policy innovation, role of media and relationship to national cultures; and, *Intergovernmental relations* – new arrangements. Whilst this programme is being decided upon, ESRC have also commissioned a number of short-term, small-scale projects covering aspects of the first twelve months of devolution and institutional change, such as the ongoing process of the creation, formulation and mechanics of the Parliament/Assembly.

### **Local Authority Research Council Initiative**

ESRC are also part of a wider Local Authority Research Council Initiative (LARCI), comprising the five research councils and the LGA, IDA and SOLACE. The key reasons for setting up the initiative are:

- to make sure research outputs from programmes get to the right people in local authorities;
- to identify priorities and opportunities for research;
- to explore further opportunities for longer-term data collection.

More details about LARCI can be obtained from:

#### **Local Government Association**

Mr Roger Sykes, Tel: 0171-664-3267, Fax: 0171-664-3210  
E-mail: roger.sykes@lga.gov.uk  
Website: <http://www.lga.gov.uk>

#### **Economic and Social Research Council**

Ms Kathy Ham, Tel: 01793-413032, Fax: 01793-413130  
E-mail: kathy.ham@esrc.ac.uk  
Website: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk>

### **Local and Regional Government Research Programme Mid-year consultative meeting**

To start the Department's 1999/2000 local and regional government research programme planning cycle a mid-year consultative meeting was held in Autumn 1998. The meeting was attended by representatives from local government organisations, local authorities, academic institutions and non-governmental bodies. Copies of the notes of this meeting are available on request from the local and regional government research unit.

The mid-year review meeting is a useful opportunity for the local and regional government research community to discuss priorities and areas of common interest. Indeed, several of the ideas for projects in this year's programme

came from that meeting. In view of this, it is proposed that the meeting for starting the planning cycle for the 2000/2001 programme should involve a much broader discussion of research issues and outputs as well as specific plans for research programmes. We propose to set up a larger conference event at which researchers, policy-makers and practitioners will be invited to present and discuss the latest findings and key issues for local and regional government. Attendance will be by invitation.

is by invitation.

### **People's Panel**

The Government has set up a new panel of 5,000 people, which is being consulted, via surveys and other methods, about attitudes to public services. It will generate ideas on how services can be improved. The Panel is a world first at national level, and forms an important part of the wider programme to modernise Government and make services more responsive to users. Any government department, Next Steps agency, NDPB, or publicly funded body, local authority, or association representing these organisations wanting to examine public views of service delivery can use the Panel. More information can be obtained from the Cabinet Office on (Tel. 0171 270 6274/6308, Fax. 0171 270 6327, E-mail: [tsingleton@cabinetoffice.gsi.net](mailto:tsingleton@cabinetoffice.gsi.net)).

There have been two sets of questions so far with a local government interest. Firstly, respondent's general satisfaction and information awareness in relation to public services, including the local council, council housing, refuse collection and local secondary schools. Secondly, questions on issues surrounding democratic renewal. More information can be found on the People's Panel Website at [www.servicefirst.gov.uk/panel.htm](http://www.servicefirst.gov.uk/panel.htm).

### **DETR/Joseph Rowntree Foundation Lunchtime Seminars**

Over the last three years, a series of lunchtime seminars have been held jointly by the Department and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Invited speakers present findings from JRF funded and non-JRF funded research on key topics relevant to local government policies. The seminars are targeted at officials, from within the Department and other organisations, and offer them the chance to hear and discuss with researchers a wider range of research than the Department itself can find.

Last year's seminars covered the following areas: *community governance*, with Professor John Stewart looking at JRF research on the implications of local government moving to embrace the role of community governance; *cross-cutting issues*, by Professor Murray Stewart, who talked about research undertaken for the DETR by the University of the West of England, Bristol and the Office for Public Management; *the 'representativeness' of councillors*, with Alice Brown talking about JRF research which focused on the social unrepresentativeness of councillors and Professor Ken Young speaking about his research for the DETR on the impact on councillors and their employers on the arrangements for *releasing people for council duties*.

Topics for this year's seminars, which are to take place in conjunction with the JRF and the Local Government Association, are yet to be agreed. Attendance at the seminars



